

CREATING KILLERS: THE NAZIFICATION OF THE BLACK SEA GERMANS AND
THE HOLOCAUST IN SOUTHERN UKRAINE, 1941-1944

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ABSTRACT

ERIC CONRAD STEINHART: Creating Killers: The Nazification of the Black Sea Germans and the Holocaust in Southern Ukraine, 1941-1944
(Under the direction of Christopher R. Browning)

Transnistria, a multiethnic region along southern Ukraine's Black Sea coast that Germany ceded to Romania, was an epicenter of the Holocaust in the conquered Soviet Union. This dissertation explores the role of the area's ethnically German or *Volksdeutsche* minority in the Holocaust. The region's ethnic Germans, the so-called Black Sea Germans, were the largest Germanophone population to come under Nazi control in the conquered Soviet Union. To secure local German-speakers as the demographic foundation for the future German domination of southern Ukraine, the SS (*Schutzstaffel*) deployed a special unit to administer the area's ethnic Germans. Almost immediately, the region's ethnic multiplicity hampered the SS's efforts to identify suitable ethnic Germans to mobilize for the Nazi cause. German officials responded to this ethnic ambiguity by establishing a mercurial occupation regime that undercut Romanian authority by rewarding cooperative local residents with comparatively lavish material rewards and brutalizing allegedly recalcitrant area denizens. In the midst of the SS's Nazification project in the region, Romanian deportation of Jews into rural Transnistria threatened to spread epidemic disease to the region's ethnic Germans. Local SS commanders deployed the region's ethnic German militia forces, the only personnel at their disposal, to murder the Jewish deportees in one of the Holocaust's most intense episodes. Despite having had historically good relations with their Jewish neighbors, local ethnic Germans responded to situational pressures that Nazi rule

created—not least of which was the opportunity to clarify their ethnic status in SS eyes by taking part in the Holocaust—and murdered Jews with enthusiasm.

This dissertation analyzes the constellation of motivations that moved a group of murderers to participate in some of the Holocaust's most brutal crimes. Based heavily on the example of German killers, scholars have long rejected postwar apologist claims of coercion and highlighted individual agency to explain why perpetrators participate in genocide. While this insight remains key to understanding perpetrator behavior, my research demonstrates that, within the context of war and a violent occupation, the Nazi regime could bring forceful situational pressures to bear on prospective killers that provided it with powerful leverage to encourage them to murder.

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INTRODUCTION

During the Second World War, German authorities and their local helpers killed some two and a half million Jews in the occupied Soviet Union.¹ The large swath of Soviet territory that Germany and its allies occupied from the Baltic to Black Sea was not simply the crucible of the Holocaust, but it was also a region of singular importance to Nazi ambitions. Guided by the belief that territorial expansion in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union was the only way to provide the agricultural base needed to secure the Third Reich's global dominance, the Nazi regime attempted to remove supposedly racially undesirable Jews and Slavs and to gain permanent control of the region by settling it with Germans. Wartime German authorities regarded Soviet Jewry as the most inferior of the region's numerous allegedly inferior peoples and as the Soviet state's puppeteers. They were therefore the first group that the Nazis targeted. Future German designs, however, were far more expansive. After winning the war against the Soviet Union, Nazi planners envisioned settling their new empire's breadbasket with Germans, whose militarized, agricultural settlements would dot the countryside and cement lasting economic autarky. In this brave new National Socialist world, local Slavs would remain as laborers until German industry could supplant them with agricultural machinery. Then, they too would share the grim fate of their Jewish neighbors. For the Nazi regime, the destruction of Soviet Jewry was the opening gambit in a broader

¹ This figure reflects the number of victims in the pre-1939 borders of the Soviet Union and territories that it annexed between 1939 and 1941. Yitzhak Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 525.

planned genocidal demographic revolution in conquered Soviet territory.²

Over the course of the Second World War, Nazi authorities had to content themselves with a more modest pilot program of demographic engineering. Absent the excess population in the Reich or the resources to begin settling Germans in the conquered Soviet Union—particularly after the conflict expanded into a global war against the United States in December 1941—the Nazi regime sought to develop a German population bulwark in the area to secure lasting claims to Soviet territory. In lieu of more grandiose plans, the Third Reich decided to marshal the territory's ethnic Germans or *Volksdeutschen* (hereafter Volksdeutsche) as the demographic basis for permanent control of the region. The largest population of Soviet ethnic Germans to come under the control of the Third Reich was the so-called Black Sea Germans (*Schwartzmeerdeutschen*), 130,000 Volksdeutsche in southern Ukraine's Odessa oblast' (region).³ Between the arrival of German forces in fall 1941 and the German evacuation of all Volksdeutsche from the region in early 1944, this group became the focus of Nazi efforts to marshal Volksdeutsche as a demographic toehold on conquered Soviet territory. Although limited by the scarce resources available for non-military missions in the occupied Soviet Union, local German administrators launched an intensive and brutal Nazification program to mobilize area Volksdeutsche for the National Socialist cause. When unanticipated situational factors moved area German authorities to enlist the help of local Volksdeutsche in the mass shooting of Jews, the region's ethnic Germans responded by fielding some of the most heavily implicated Holocaust perpetrators. This dissertation

² Gerhard L. Weinberg, *Visions of Victory: The Hopes of Eight World War II Leaders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 32-33.

³ German Police Decodes Nr 2 Traffic: 19.2.43, March 1, 1943, British National Archives [Hereafter BNA], HW 16, Piece 37, Part 1, 5. Stabbefehl Nr. 101, April 10, 1943, Bundesarchiv Berlin [Hereafter BB], R 59/67, 105.

explores Nazi Volksdeutsche policy in southern Ukraine and analyzes the participation of area ethnic Germans in the Holocaust.

Nazi planners were by no means the first to conceive of German-speaking minorities as the demographic foundation for German territorial expansion in the area. Prior to the First World War, Pan-German thinkers—many of them members of German-speaking minorities—regarded the Volksdeutsche of Eastern Europe and the Russian Empire as a potential aid to Germany's land grab in the East.⁴ At the twilight of the First World War, temporary German military hegemony in the occupied territories of the former Russian Empire permitted area German commanders to advance German influence there by undergirding local Volksdeutsche.⁵ Germany's defeat in 1918 increased the importance of German-speaking minorities in East Central and Eastern Europe as a vehicle for projecting German power in the region. With the postwar reallocation of the German Empire's eastern periphery to Poland and the disintegration of Austro-Hungary, German-speakers, formerly dominant members of Germanophone empires, became minority populations in newly formed states. Succoring ethnic German minorities abroad was no longer a matter of supporting future territorial expansion deep into the Russian steppe, but of maintaining a demographic claim to land that many Germans regarded as part of the German state's historical borders. To this end, the Weimar Republic underpinned these minorities financially and flexed its diplomatic muscle to secure their linguistic and cultural autonomy.⁶

⁴ Ingeborg Fleischhauer, *Die Deutschen im Zarenreich: Zwei Jahrhunderte deutsche-russische Kulturgemeinschaft* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1986), 393.

⁵ Ibid., 583-585.

⁶ John Hidden, "The Weimar Republic and the Problem of Auslandsdeutsche," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 12, no. 2 (1977), 273-289.

State support for ethnic German minorities continued after the Nazi seizure of power in 1933. As in the Weimar Republic, the new Nazi regime sought to employ Volksdeutsche communities as a demographic basis upon which to reverse Germany's territorial losses after the First World War. In contrast to efforts during the Weimar Republic, however, the Nazi regime centralized ethnic German affairs under the aegis of the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle* (Ethnic German Liaison Office) or VoMi, a Nazi party organ that later functioned as part of the German state. This move not only coordinated the cacophony of state and private actors working on behalf of Volksdeutsche during the Weimar Republic, but it also communicated a unified National Socialist message to German minorities abroad. During the mid-1930s, Heinrich Himmler's SS (*Schutzstaffel*, Protection Squadron) populated the VoMi, making it effectively an SS agency by the eve of the Second World War.⁷ Adolf Hitler's appointment of Himmler as *Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums* (Reich Commissar for the Strengthening of Germandom) in October 1939 cemented Volksdeutsche affairs squarely within the SS's domain.⁸

During the late 1930s and early 1940s, the Third Reich used ethnic German minorities abroad as a tool for Hitler's foreign policy. In 1938, Hitler employed trumped up accusations of assaults against ethnic Germans as a pretext for annexing the Sudetenland and ultimately occupying the rest of Czechoslovakia. The following September, alleged mistreatment of ethnic Germans in Poland constituted a key Nazi justification for invading

⁷ Valdis O. Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries: The Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle and the German National Minorities of Europe, 1933-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 64-66.

⁸ On the Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums see Robert L. Koehl, *RKFDV: German Resettlement and Population Policy, 1939-1945: A History of the Reich Commission for the Strengthening of Germandom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957). Markus Leniger, *Nationalsozialistische "Volkstumsarbeit" und Umsiedlungspolitik 1933-1945: von der Minderheitenbetreuung zur Siedlerauslese* (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2006).

that country. While the presence of Volksdeutsche minorities in Czechoslovakia and Poland facilitated Hitler's foreign policy aims, ethnic German populations elsewhere in Eastern Europe presented a diplomatic stumbling block, particularly in areas that the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact had designed as part of the Soviet Union's sphere of influence. Hitler ordered Himmler and the VoMi to relocate Volksdeutsche from the Baltic, Volhynia, Bessarabia, and northern Bukovina to German-occupied Poland. There, rather than impeding the Third Reich's immediate foreign policy aims, Eastern European Volksdeutsche could contribute what the Nazis regarded as valuable biological material to secure the German domination of Eastern Europe.⁹

With the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, the Nazi regime reversed its short-lived policy of relocating Volksdeutsche from the Soviet sphere of influence. Now at war with the Soviet Union, and at least initially confident of a speedy victory over the Red Army, the VoMi took charge of the country's remaining Volksdeutsche, whom Soviet authorities had not permitted to relocate to German-controlled territory prior to the invasion. Himmler dispatched *Sonderkommando R* (Special Command R[ussia]), a special VoMi unit to succor and mobilize ethnic Germans in conquered Soviet territory as the demographic seeds of the region's future Germanization. Removed from the VoMi's normal chain of command at its genesis and subordinated directly to the Office of Reichsführer SS, *Sonderkommando R* functioned as Himmler's back pocket Volksdeutsche affairs unit in the occupied Soviet Union. Its orders were to operate in both the German-occupied Soviet Union and, perhaps more importantly, in territory along the Black Sea that the Third Reich had granted to its Romanian allies. To secure Romanian participation in the invasion of the

⁹ Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, 157-179.

Soviet Union, Hitler promised his counterpart, Ion Antonescu, a Romanian occupation zone between the Dniester and Bug Rivers in southwestern Ukraine—so-called Transnistria. While this territory proved an irresistible prize for Antonescu, whose country went to war alongside the Germans, it also placed the largest population of Volksdeutsche in the occupied Soviet Union under the control of a foreign power. Like other hardcore Nazi ideologues, Himmler feared that the Black Sea Germans would languish under Romanian rule, and directed Sonderkommando R to deploy to the region.

In Romanian-occupied Transnistria, the SS had unique latitude to begin the long-term Germanization of conquered Soviet territory. Unlike in the German-occupied Soviet Union, where Himmler's subordinates confronted powerful German organizations, such as the military and Civil Administration, whose representatives often did not cooperate with the SS, in Transnistria Sonderkommando R had to contend with the Third Reich's Romanian allies. Owing to high-level agreements between the SS and their Romanian counterparts, which ceded responsibility for ethnic German affairs in the region to Sonderkommando R, and the willingness of area SS officers to run roughshod over local Romanian occupation officials, the SS carved out unique autonomy in Transnistria. Nowhere else in German-dominated Europe did the SS have such unfettered freedom to mobilize local German-speakers as a vanguard of future German settlement. Examining Sonderkommando R's Volksdeutsche project in Transnistria provides an exceptional window into embryonic Nazi plans for the German-occupied Soviet Union.

Spread thinly across Romanian-occupied southern Ukraine, Sonderkommando R's personnel undertook the daunting task of molding a group of German-speakers with limited historical interactions with Germany into a Nazi demographic bulwark in conquered Soviet

territory. In anticipation of the agricultural Germanophone settlements that were to become the basis for Nazi rule in the East, the SS sought to establish a dominant economic position for local Volksdeutsche communities by securing their privileged access to the region's agricultural resources and providing them with property stolen from murdered Jews. To cement their adherence to the National Socialist cause, Sonderkommando R unfurled an impressive propaganda enterprise that emphasized winning "the hearts and minds" of Transnistria's Volksdeutsche youth.

Without establishing the boundaries of "Germanness" in the region, however, these heady designs were for naught. Creating what the Nazi regime hoped would become the bastions of Germandom in the conquered Soviet Union required Sonderkommando R's personnel to identify which local residents belonged to the *Volksgemeinschaft*, the Nazi racial community. This component of the SS's mission in Transnistria proved particularly problematic. Despite extensive institutional experience identifying and relocating ethnic Germans across Eastern Europe prior to 1941, the VoMi had been unable to operationalize a definition for a category as ambiguous as ethnic identity. Local circumstances exacerbated this handicap. As a German-speaking population with circumscribed historical contacts to Germany and few opportunities to demonstrate an affinity for the National Socialist agenda prior to the war—a metric that the VoMi had employed earlier in Eastern Europe to gauge "Germanness"—the Black Sea Germans defied even the SS's haphazard ethnic categorization measures. The Black Sea Germans' interwar history made them, in SS eyes, particularly problematic. The VoMi feared that decades of "Judeo-Bolshevik" rule had corroded the racial purity and political reliability of would-be local ethnic Germans. This left Sonderkommando R's personnel ruling a population that they regarded as simultaneously

particularly suspicious and difficult to classify. Local ethnic Germans profited from their ambiguous status by manipulating the amorphous category's boundaries to their own advantage and often to secure the protection and material privileges that Volksdeutsche standing granted to their Ukrainian and sometimes Jewish friends and relatives. When Sonderkommando R's personnel discovered that their efforts to identify local ethnic Germans had failed, they launched a violent campaign against area residents whose racial backgrounds, political orientations, or behavior the SS regarded as unworthy of the planned Nazi racial community in the conquered Soviet Union.

In the midst of the SS's efforts to mobilize the Black Sea Germans as the foundations for Nazi rule in occupied Soviet territory, unanticipated situational factors moved local VoMi commanders to enlist Volksdeutsche assistance in the mass murder of Jews in Transnistria. During fall 1941, the Antonescu regime deported Jews from territories that it had acquired during the course of Operation Barbarossa to a series of camps and ghettos near Odessa and along the Bug River's right bank. Cognizant that the appalling sanitary conditions in which Romanian authorities housed their Jewish captives threatened to precipitate a typhus epidemic that could spread to local Volksdeutsche communities, Sonderkommando R acceded to Romanian requests to assist in murdering Jewish prisoners near the Bug River in mid-December 1941. Without other personnel in the region, the SS deployed its ethnic German militia (*Volksdeutsche Selbstschutz*) units—formations that German authorities had conceived to defend against Romanian banditry—to carry out mass shooting operations in which tens of thousands of Jews perished. Initially, Sonderkommando R regarded its foray into mass murder as a temporary detour from its central mission to underpin local Volksdeutsche. Romanian authorities, however, recognized that, if pressed,

Sonderkommando R and its ethnic German militiamen could lend invaluable assistance to solving their Jewish “problem.” When occupation officials in German-occupied Ukraine refused to permit their Romanian counterparts to deport Jews across the Bug River and into German-controlled territory, the Romanian government resolved to send its Jewish prisoners to villages at the heart of Sonderkommando R’s Volksdeutsche population project in northeastern Transnistria. Confronted with the renewed threat of racial “contamination” and epidemic disease, Sonderkommando R fielded its ethnic German militiamen in a series of mass shooting operations that lasted until spring 1942, when German diplomatic pressure and the increasing scarcity of victims ended the unit’s major participation in the Holocaust. Exploring the involvement of Sonderkommando R’s militia in the mass murder of Jews permits this study to recover an understudied episode of the Holocaust and to examine the motivations of the most significant group of ethnic German perpetrators in the occupied Soviet Union.

Historiography

This dissertation makes two primary contributions to the history of the Second World War and the Holocaust. First, it sheds light on a previously overlooked aspect of Nazi rule in the occupied Soviet Union. The German conquest of the Soviet Union has been the subject of considerable historical research since the 1950s. The Cold War left an indelible imprint on this early wave of scholarship. In preparation for a potential conventional war against the Soviet Union, during the late 1940s and early 1950s the American military took an interest in the behavior of Soviet residents under foreign rule and commissioned substantial research on the topic.¹⁰ In the early 1950s, Alexander Dallin, then a young émigré scholar, prepared a

¹⁰ Alexander Dallin, *Reactions to the German Occupation of Soviet Russia* (Maxwell Air Force Base,

RAND corporation report on the Romanian occupation zone in southern Ukraine, which remains the standard English-language work on the topic.¹¹ Using captured German records, published Soviet sources, and interviews with former Soviet citizens that he conducted on behalf of Harvard University, in 1957 Dallin published his detailed survey of the German occupation of the Soviet Union, *German Rule in Russia, 1941-1945: A Study of Occupation Policy*.¹² Three years later, Gerald Reitlinger's *The House Built on Sand* revisited the topic and underscored how the Third Reich's iron fist alienated a local population that stood ready to oppose Soviet power.¹³ Reitlinger and particularly Dallin's virtually encyclopedic overviews set the standard for a field of historical inquiry that, due to archival restrictions in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, employed wartime German records captured by Allied forces in 1945.¹⁴

Beginning in the early 1990s, research on the German occupation of the Soviet Union underwent two paradigm shifts. The first was archival. Following the collapse of Soviet-backed communist regimes in Eastern Europe during 1989 and the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, scholars gained access to new documentation related to the German occupation of the Soviet Union during the Second World War. This material included not

AL: Air University, Human Resources Research Institute, 1952).

¹¹ Alexander Dallin, *Odessa, 1941-1944: A Case Study of Soviet Territory under Foreign Rule* 2nd edition, (Iași: Center for Romanian Studies, 1998). Using Romanian and former Soviet archival records, Vladimir Solonari is currently preparing a monograph on Romanian occupation policy in Transnistria.

¹² Alexander Dallin, *German Rule in the Occupied Soviet Union, 1941-1945: A Study of Occupation Policies* (London: Macmillan, 1957).

¹³ Gerald Reitlinger, *The House Built on Sand: The Conflicts of German Policy in Russia, 1939-1945* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1960).

¹⁴ For an example of research on the German occupation of the Soviet Union using captured German records see Timothy Patrick Mulligan, *The Politics of Illusion and Empire: German Occupation Policy in the Soviet Union, 1942-1943* (New York: Praeger, 1988).

only wartime German documents that the Red Army had captured on its march to Berlin, but also records related to often extensive postwar Soviet investigations of wartime events in the country's western borderlands. These newly accessible documents have permitted researchers to study this period in previously unfathomable detail. Second, using these records historians raised and answered new questions about the German occupation and the Holocaust in the Soviet Union. Early scholarship on the history of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union employed records that the Einsatzgruppen produced.¹⁵ These self-serving reports did little to flesh out the role of other German units or the local population in the mass murder of Jews. Access to local German records that Soviet forces captured at the war's end and postwar testimonies that German and Soviet investigators gathered increased scholarly awareness of German and non-German participation in the Holocaust.¹⁶ Furthermore, new attention to Nazi demographic and economic planning related to conquered Soviet territory has placed the history of the Holocaust in the region in a broader context.¹⁷ Thanks to these developments historians approaching the war in the East and the German occupation there have begun to integrate more systematically the mass murder of Jews and Nazi policy toward Slavs into their narratives.¹⁸

¹⁵ See, for example, Yitzhak Arad et al., eds, *The Einsatzgruppen Reports: Selections from the Dispatches of the Nazi Death Squads' Campaign against the Jews, July 1941-January 1943* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1989).

¹⁶ Philip Friedman's early work on Ukrainian participation in the Holocaust is a notable exception. Philip Friedman, "Ukrainian-Jewish Relations during the Nazi Occupation," *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science*, 12 (1958), 259-296.

¹⁷ See, for example, Götz Aly and Susanne Heim, *Vordenker der Vernichtung: Auschwitz und die deutschen Pläne für eine neue europäische Ordnung* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1991).

¹⁸ Military historians of the Second World War in the Soviet Union have become increasingly sensitive to the Holocaust in the region. See, for example, Geoffrey P. Megargee, *War of Annihilation: Combat and Genocide on the Eastern Front, 1941* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

In keeping with these twin developments, the past generation of research has yielded a rich, if still somewhat geographically spotty treatment of German-occupied territory within the Soviet Union's pre-1939 boundaries.¹⁹ Exquisitely researched monographs by historians, such as Bernhard Chiari, Christian Gerlach, and Babette Quinkert, have sketched the contours of the German occupation of Belarus and highlighted topics including everyday life under German rule, the Third Reich's efforts at economic exploitation, and the role of German propaganda.²⁰ Similarly, excellent scholarship on German-occupied Ukraine by historians such as Omer Bartov, Karel Berkhoff, Kate Brown, John-Paul Himka, Dieter Pohl, Alexander Prusin, and Thomas Sandkühler has provided a much more detailed portrait of everyday life under the occupation and the Holocaust.²¹ The German occupation of territory that is today located in the Russian Federation has been the subject of significantly less

¹⁹ See the recent translation and republication of the *Unknown Black Book*. Joshua Rubenstein and Ilya Altman, eds., *The Unknown Black Book: The Holocaust in the German-Occupied Soviet Territories* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008).

²⁰ Bernhard Chiari, *Alltag hinter der Front: Besatzung, Kollaboration und Widerstand in Weissrussland 1941-1944* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1998); Christian Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde: Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weißrußland 1941 bis 1944* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1999); Babette Quinkert, *Propaganda und Terror in Weissrussland 1941-1944: die deutsche "geistige" Kriegführung gegen Zivilbevölkerung und Partisanen* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2009).

²¹ Omer Bartov is preparing a monographical study of the East Galician town of Buczacz prior to, during, and after the Holocaust. For a preliminary essay on the topic see Omer Bartov, "Interethnic Relations in the Holocaust as Seen Through Postwar Testimonies: Buczacz, East Galicia, 1941-1944," in *Lessons and Legacies XIII: From Generation to Generation*, ed Doris L. Bergen, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2008), 101-124; Karel Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine under Nazi Rule* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Kate Brown, *A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). John-Paul Himka is currently working on a study of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army in western Ukraine. For his preliminary work on the topic, see John-Paul Himka, "The Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and the Holocaust," (presented at the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies Annual Convention, Boston, M.A., 2009). Dieter Pohl, *Nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung in Ostgalizien 1941-1944: Organisation und Durchführung eines staatlichen Massenverbrechens* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1996); Alexander V. Prusin, "A Community of Violence: The Sipo/SD and its Role in the Nazi Terror System in Generalbezirk Kiev," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 21, no. 1, (2007), 1-30. Thomas Sandkühler, "Endlösung" in Galizien: der Judenmord in Ostpolen und die Rettungsinitiativen von Berthold Beitz, 1941-1944 (Bonn: Dietz, 1996). Also see Ray Brandon and Wendy Lower, eds., *The Shoah in Ukraine: History, Testimony, Memorialization* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008).

academic research. Owing to the continuing inaccessibility of German and Soviet records related to the war—many of which remain closed in the repositories of the current state security apparatus—Russian scholars have produced the bulk of recent scholarly research on the topic.²² Despite the fact that much detailed work remains to be done, scholars have attempted to provide synthetic overviews that address the German occupation of the Soviet Union, either as one episode in the region’s *longue durée* or very narrowly focused on the Holocaust.²³ Within the past decade, scholarship on the German occupation and the Holocaust in the Soviet Union has developed into a mature, yet dynamic field.

This study dialogues most closely with Wendy Lower’s pathblazing research on the German occupation and the Holocaust in Ukraine.²⁴ Empirically focused on central Ukraine’s Zhytomyr region, Lower explores how local German administrators implemented the Nazi regime’s expansionist and genocidal aims in the occupied Soviet Union. Casting the German occupation of Ukraine as a “colonial” enterprise, Lower probes the Third Reich’s multifaceted efforts to create the demographic foundations for *Lebensraum*.²⁵ She examines both the mass murder of the region’s Jews by German forces and their local gentile helpers and German efforts to create Hegewald, a Volksdeutsche settlement that anticipated Nazi

²² A handful of Russian scholars have received access to the archives of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation. See, for example, B.N. Kovalev, *Natsistskaia okkupatsiia i kollaboratsionizm v Rossii 1941-1944* (Moscow: Tranzitkniga, 2004).

²³ Timothy Snyder’s research has attempted to contextualize the Holocaust within the region’s broader history of interethnic violence. Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569-1999* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003); Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010). Yitzhak Arad’s recent synthesis work seeks to provide an overview of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union. Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*.

²⁴ Wendy Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

²⁵ David Furber and Wendy Lower, “Colonialism and Genocide in Nazi-Occupied Poland and Ukraine,” in *Empire, Colony, Genocide: Conquest, Occupation, and Subaltern Resistance in World History*, ed. Dirk Moses, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 372-400.

plans for the region. Lower argues convincingly that whereas German administrators cooperated to murder Jews, the multiplicity of competing area military, civil and SS authorities hamstrung Nazi attempts to underpin local Volksdeutsche.

Despite the fact that Transnistria's large ethnic German population was an epicenter for Nazi Volksdeutsche projects and a primary killing field for Jews in the occupied Soviet Union, historians have only touched on Sonderkommando R's activities in the region. Historians focused on Transnistria's occupation and the Holocaust there have understandably concentrated on Romanian authorities and to a lesser extent local Ukrainians in the region.²⁶ Most specialized scholarship on the area has either implicitly or explicitly glossed over Sonderkommando R's Volksdeutsche project and its involvement in the Holocaust in southern Ukraine because the topic appeared peripheral to the region's wartime history. Insofar as scholars have probed the institutional history of the Ethnic German Liaison Office and of southern Ukraine's Volksdeutsche communities, Sonderkommando R's wartime activities remain understudied.²⁷ Although frequently of high quality, much of this research dates from the 1970s and early 1980s, when key German and Soviet records about the unit remained inaccessible to scholars. With the exception of pioneering preliminary recent research on Sonderkommando R by Andrej Angrick and Frank Görlich, the unit's activities in

²⁶ Radu Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania: The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies Under the Antonescu Regime, 1940-44* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000); Jean Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-42: The Romanian Mass Murder Campaigns* Trans. Karen Gold, 3 vol., (Tel Aviv: The Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center, 2003); Dennis Deletant, "The Ghetto Experience in Golta, Transnistria, 1942-1944," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 18, no. 1 (2004), 1-26; Dennis Deletant, "Transnistria and the Romanian Solution to the 'Jewish Problem,'" in *The Shoah in Ukraine: History, Testimony, Memorialization*, eds. Ray Brandon and Wendy Lower, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 156-189.

²⁷ Meir Buchsweiler, *Volksdeutsche in der Ukraine am Vorabend und Beginn des Zweiten Weltkriegs-- ein Fall doppelter Loyalität?* trans. Ruth Achlama (Tel-Aviv: Schriftenreihe des Instituts für Deutsche Geschichte, Universität Tel-Aviv, 1984); Ingeborg Fleischhauer, *Das Dritte Reich und die Deutschen in der Sowjetunion*, (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1983); Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*. Lumans's monograph was based on his 1979 dissertation.

Transnistria and its involvement in the Holocaust are poorly understood.²⁸ By examining Sonderkommando R's mission in Romanian-occupied territory, this study recovers a little explored dimension to the German occupation and Holocaust in the Soviet Union.

Second, drawing on recent research on Volksdeutsche in the Third Reich, this dissertation seeks to advance research on Holocaust perpetrators. Since the end of the Second World War, scholars have grappled with the question of what motivated Nazi Germany's killers. Originally the bailiwick of social scientific research, this vein of scholarship has developed progressively more nuanced explanations for perpetrator behavior. Whereas in the late 1940s researchers grappled with the issue of whether or not the Third Reich's murderers were clinically insane or at least psychologically abnormal,²⁹ by the 1960s and 1970s scholars developed more nuanced explanations involving universal interpersonal dynamics, such as the pressure to obey authority and role adaptation.³⁰ Within the past

²⁸ Andrej Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord: Die Einsatzgruppe D in der südlichen Sowjetunion 1941-1943* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2003), 254-294; Frank Görlich, "Volkstumspropaganda und Antisemitismus in der Wochenzeitung 'Der Deutsche in Transnistrien' 1942-1944," in *Holocaust an der Peripherie: Judenpolitik und Judenmord in Rumänien und Transnistrien 1940-1944*, eds. Wolfgang Benz and Brigitte Mihok, (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2009), 95-110.

²⁹ Initial examinations of German perpetrators began with psychiatric and psychological examinations of the defendants at the International Military Tribunal at Nürnberg in 1945. Douglas McGlashan Kelley, *22 Cells in Nuremberg: A Psychiatrist Examines the Nazi Criminals* (New York: Greenberg, 1947). G.M. Gilbert, *Nuremberg Diary* (New York: Farrar, Straus, 1947); G.M. Gilbert, *The Psychology of Dictatorship: Based on an Examination of the Leaders of Nazi Germany* (New York: Ronald Press Co., 1950). Also see Theodor W. Adorno, et. al., *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper, 1950).

³⁰ During the 1960s, social scientific research, led by Raul Hilberg and Hannah Arendt, suggested that broader social structures, rather than individual clinical abnormality, motivated Holocaust perpetrators. Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 3rd edition, 3 vols., (New Haven: CT: Yale University Press, 2003); Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking University Press, 1963). This pioneering research prompted experimental social psychologists to probe the issue. Stanley Milgram and Philip Zimbardo led early research in this avenue. Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974); Craig Haney, Curtis Banks, and Philip Zimbardo. "Interpersonal Dynamics in a Simulated Prison." *International Journal of Criminology and Penology* 1 (1973): 69-97; Zimbardo has recently published a book-length treatment of his now-famous Stanford Prison experiment. Philip Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2008). Social scientists have now synthesized much of this earlier research. See Fred E. Katz. *Ordinary People and Extraordinary Evil: A Report on the Beguilings of Evil* (Albany, NY:

generation, much of the significant work on German Holocaust perpetrators has been based on historical research on specific military,³¹ police,³² and SS units³³ that the Nazi regime charged with implementing genocide. Following Christopher R. Browning's seminal study of Reserve Order Police Battalion 101's involvement in the Holocaust, this body of research has developed a variegated constellation of ideological, cultural, situational, and dispositional factors that moved perpetrators to carry out the Holocaust.³⁴

Despite the noteworthy contributions of this avenue of inquiry, it has focused almost

State University of New York Press, 1993); Leonard S. Newman and Ralph Erber, eds., *Understanding Genocide: The Social Psychology of the Holocaust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); James Waller, *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

³¹ Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front, 1941-45: German Troops and the Barbarisation of Warfare* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986); Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Thomas Kühne, *Kameradschaft: die Soldaten des nationalsozialistischen Krieges und das 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006); Waitman Beorn, "Negotiating Murder: A Panzer Signal Company and the Destruction of the Jews of Peregruznoe, 1942," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 23, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 185-213.

³² On the Gestapo see Robert Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society: Enforcing Racial Policy 1935-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); Eric A. Johnson, *Nazi Terror: The Gestapo, Jews, and Ordinary Germans* (New York: Basic Books, 2000). On the Order Police, see Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, 2nd edition (New York: HarperPerennial, 1998); Daniel J. Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996); Edward Westerman, *Hitler's Police Battalions: Enforcing Racial War in the East* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2005). Harold Welzer draws many of his examples from Order Police Battalion 45. Harold Welzer, *Täter: Wie aus ganz normalen Menschen Massenmörder werden* (Frankfurt: S. Fischer Verlag, 2005).

³³ On the Einsatzgruppen see Andrej Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord; Helmut Krausnik, Hitlers Einsatzgruppen: die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges 1938-1942* (Stuttgart: Deutscher Verlags-Anstalt, 1985); Ralf Ogorreck, *Die Einsatzgruppen und die "Genesis der Endlösung"* (Berlin: Metropol, 1996); Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm, *Die Einsatzgruppe A der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD 1941/42* (Frankfurt: P. Lang, 1996). On the Reichssicherheitshauptamt (Reich Security Main Office) see Yaacov Lozowick, *Hitler's Bureaucrats: The Nazi Security Police and the Banality of Evil*, Trans. Haim Watzman, (London: Continuum, 2002); Hans Safrian, *Die Eichmann-Männer* (Vienna: Europaverlag, 1993); Michael Wildt, *Generation des Unbedingten: das Führungskorps des Reichssicherheitshauptamtes* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2002). On concentration camp guards see Tom Segev, *Soldiers of Evil: The Commandants of the Nazi Concentration Camps* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1987); Karin Orth, *Die Konzentrationslager-SS: sozialstrukturelle Analysen und biographische Studien*, (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2000).

³⁴ Christopher R. Browning, "Ideology, Culture, Situation, and Disposition. Holocaust Perpetrators and the Group Dynamics of Mass Killing," in *NS-Gewaltherrschaft: Beiträge zur historischen Forschung und jurischen Aufarbeitung*, eds. Alfred Gottwaldt, et al., (Berlin: Edition Heinrich, 2005), 66-76.

exclusively on German perpetrators. The expansion of research on the Holocaust in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, however, has underscored the extent to which non-Germans provided crucial manpower for the Third Reich's campaign against the area's Jews.³⁵ Not only did non-German perpetrators perform different (and usually subordinate) roles in the killing process, but, as is becoming increasingly apparent from emerging research, many of the models that scholars have offered to explain the behavior of German perpetrators are poorly calibrated to understand the participation of their non-German counterparts. Prewar anti-Semitism, for example, functioned very differently in Ukraine than in Germany. While recent research on the Holocaust in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union has identified new perpetrator groups, it has yet to revise explanations for their participation in the Holocaust. Insofar as scholars have ventured into this area, they have focused on Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union's historically high level of anti-Semitism and robbery as important motivational factors for local participation in the Holocaust.³⁶ Instead, this branch of research has focused

³⁵ Christoph Dieckmann, *Kooperation und Verbrechen: Formen der "Kollaboration" im östlichen Europa 1939-1945*, vol. 19, Beiträge zur Geschichte des Nationalsozialismus (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003). Focusing on the complicity of the predominantly Slavic local police in Belarus and Ukraine, for example, Bernhard Chiari, Martin Dean, and Dieter Pohl have examined the crucial contribution of non-German Holocaust perpetrators in the Soviet Union. Chiari, *Alltag hinter der Front*; Martin Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941-44* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000); Dieter Pohl, "Ukrainische Hilfskräfte beim Mord an den Juden," in *Die Täter der Shoah: fanatische Nationalsozialisten oder ganz normale Deutsche?*, ed. Gerhard Paul, (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2002), 205-24. Likewise, Wendy Lower's work on the Ukrainian province of Zhytomyr, which focuses on German occupation officials, acknowledges the important role that non-Germans played in bringing about the Holocaust in the Soviet Union. Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building*, 75. On Russia, see Kovalev, *Natsistskaia okkupatsiia i kollaboratsionizm v Rossii*.

³⁶ In examining Eastern European Holocaust perpetrators, historians have sketched two preliminary explanations for the involvement of Eastern Europeans. First, as Karel Berkhoff and Amir Weiner note, the region's indigenous anti-Semitism was a crucial engine for driving the Holocaust at the grassroots level. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*; Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001). Similarly, in his case study of the Holocaust in Jedwabne, Poland, Jan Gross points to the primary importance of local anti-Semitism in the decisions of Poles to murder their Jewish neighbors. Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001). Second, as historians, such as Chiari, Dean, Diekmann, and Ioanid argue, Eastern Europeans perpetrated Holocaust crimes as a result of

on reconstructing the history of previously little studied episodes of genocide. This is especially true of the growing, but still modest research on Volksdeutsche perpetrators in the German-occupied Soviet Union.³⁷

This study both explores the role of Transnistria's Volksdeutsche in the mass murder of Jews and examines their motivations for perpetrating some of the Holocaust's most brutal crimes. Such an undertaking has two dimensions. On the one hand, it necessitates adapting universal explanations that scholars have developed to understand the behavior of other groups of Holocaust perpetrators to the local circumstances in which area Volksdeutsche took part in the mass murder of Jews. On the other hand, it requires exploring the exceptional status of Volksdeutsche in the Nazi worldview and its relationship to ethnic German participation in the Holocaust. Doris Bergen's scholarship on ethnic Germans in the Third Reich provides an invaluable point of departure. Bergen's ongoing research highlights not only the importance of Volksdeutsche to the Third Reich's immediate foreign policy needs and future territorial fantasies, but also it emphasizes the degree to which the Nazi regime constructed and then continuously adapted the boundaries of "Germanness."³⁸ As Bergen

self-interest, either by simply robbing their victims, or by attempting to curry favor with German occupation officials. Chiari, *Alltag Hinter der Front*; Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust*; Dieckmann, *Kooperation und Verbrechen*; Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*.

³⁷ Martin Dean, "Soviet Ethnic Germans and the Holocaust in the Reich Commissariat Ukraine, 1941-1944," in *The Shoah in Ukraine: History, Testimony, Memorialization*, eds. Ray Brandon and Wendy Lower (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 248-271; Wendy Lower, "Hitler's 'Garden of Eden' in Ukraine: Nazi Colonialism, Volksdeutsche, and the Holocaust, 1941-44," in *Gray Zones: Ambiguity and Compromise in the Holocaust and Its Aftermath*, ed. Jonathan Petropoulos and John K. Roth, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 185-204.

³⁸ Doris L. Bergen, "The Nazi Concept of 'Volksdeutsche' and the Exacerbation of antisemitism in Eastern Europe, 1939-45," *Journal of Contemporary History* 29, no. 4 (1994): 569-582; Doris L. Bergen, "The 'Volksdeutschen' of Eastern Europe, World War II, and the Holocaust: Constructed Ethnicity, Real Genocide," *Yearbook of European Studies* 13 (1999): 70-93; Doris L. Bergen, "The Volksdeutsche of Eastern Europe and the Collapse of the Nazi Empire, 1944-1945," in *The Impact of Nazism: New Perspectives on the Third Reich and Its Legacy*, eds. Alan E. Steinweis and Daniel E. Rogers, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 101-128.

notes, the Third Reich was unable to develop a litmus test for a category as amorphous as ethnic identity and ultimately relied on the *Gestalt* of local German officials to determine whether or not an individual deserved membership in the Nazi racial community. In this highly fluid environment, prospective ethnic Germans could clarify their membership in the *Volksgemeinschaft* and secure its material privileges through their own actions. This dissertation argues that the capacity for Transnistria's local residents to use their participation in the Holocaust to demonstrate their "Germanness" to Sonderkommando R's staff constituted a key way in which the Nazi regime secured local assistance in the mass murder of Jews.

Sources

Despite the scale of Sonderkommando R's operations in Transnistria and the significance of the unit's efforts to marshal local Volksdeutsche to murder Jews, previous scholarship on these topics has largely overlooked this episode of the German occupation and the Holocaust in the Soviet Union because key documents related to the subject were inaccessible. Wartime German records captured by Allied forces in 1945 contained only skeletal references to Sonderkommando R's activities in Transnistria and virtually no indication that it had led area ethnic Germans in mass shooting campaigns against Jews in the area. This sanitized documentary record was not accidental. Prior to withdrawing from Transnistria in March 1944, Sonderkommando R's personnel burned their unit's most incriminating sources. Allied air raids and advancing Soviet forces destroyed what little documentation Sonderkommando R had been able to evacuate to Germany and German-occupied Poland during the war's final months.³⁹ Any historian who approached the topic

³⁹ Aussage von V. S., April 14, 1965, BAL, B162/2305. Aussage von G. B., December 13, 1966, BAL,

prior to the early 1990s would have confronted a body of historical material that consisted of little more than SS personnel files and Volksdeutsche immigration documents prepared by the *Einwandererzentrale* (EWZ or Immigration Main Office) and copies of staff orders that Sonderkommando R's command post in Transnistria circulated to the VoMi's headquarters in Berlin.

This study has profited enormously from access to archives that have opened to researchers during the past decade. These newly available collections include both documents that Transnistria's Romanian and German occupiers created during the war and the records of massive investigations into Sonderkommando R's crimes that Soviet and later West German authorities pursued from 1944 until 1999. Two newly accessible sources provide valuable caches of wartime documents related to Sonderkommando R's activities in Transnistria. First, the recently declassified records of the British Radio Code and Cypher School contain decrypted wartime German police radio traffic that British signals intelligence gathered during the Second World War.⁴⁰ These intercepts include the text of more than 1,000 messages that Sonderkommando R sent or received while on station in Transnistria. Second, records from the Odessa oblast' archive, which are available on microfilm at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, contain a large quantity of often fragmentary wartime German and Romanian records. This collection preserves a significant amount of correspondence between Sonderkommando R and Transnistria's Romanian civil and military administrators and details their bilateral wartime relations.

Most importantly, Sonderkommando R's activities were the focus of intense

B162/2307, 332.

⁴⁰ On wartime British signals intelligence and the Holocaust, see Richard Breitman, *Official Secrets: What the Nazis Planned, What the British and Americans Knew* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998).

investigation by Soviet and West German authorities. Soviet probes into Sonderkommando R's crimes began immediately after the German and Romanian withdrawal from southern Ukraine. In mid-1944, the Soviet Extraordinary State Commission for Ascertaining and Investigating Crimes Perpetrated by the German-Fascist Invaders and their Accomplices (*Chrezvychainaia gosudarstvennaia komissiia po ustanovleniiu i rassledovaniuu zlodeianii nemetsko-fashistskikh zakhvatchikov i ikh soobshchnikov*) interviewed local residents about Sonderkommando R and its involvement in mass murder in the region. Later that year, Soviet counterintelligence or SMERSH (*Smert' Shpionam*, Death to Spies) interrogated captured SS officers, who had served in Sonderkommando R. By 1945, Soviet authorities had a clear, if still general understanding of the crimes that Sonderkommando R and its local Volksdeutsche helpers had committed in occupied southern Ukraine. Information garnered from these inquiries served as the foundation for a series of secret NKVD (*Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del*, People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) trials of former area residents, many of whom the Red Army had captured as members of the German military at the war's end and transported to penal camps in Central Asia. Although some convicted ethnic Germans faced immediate execution, after 1956 Soviet authorities generally released suspected local perpetrators to live in special settlements, such as those around Karaganda in the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic.

In the early 1960s, shortly after the creation of the Central Office of the State Justice Administration for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes (*Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen zur Aufklärung nationalsozialistischer Verbrechen*) in Ludwigsburg, the Federal Republic of Germany's primary investigative office for Nazi-era crimes, West German prosecutors launched an investigation into Sonderkommando R's

wartime deployment to Transnistria.⁴¹ The West German investigation, which quickly spun off into a number of smaller cases, suffered from many of the documentary limitations that confronted historians until very recently. Absent virtually any reference to Sonderkommando R's activities in the region in German-held archival records and initially ignorant of earlier Soviet inquiries, West German prosecutors and police investigators gathered testimony from Sonderkommando R's surviving German personnel and from former Volksdeutsche, who had relocated to West Germany after the war. Over the course of these investigations, police in the Federal Republic of Germany conducted 224 interviews with surviving members of Sonderkommando R and their immediate family members and 490 interviews with former local residents. Initially focused on SS violence against local ethnic Germans in Transnistria, West German authorities began preparing a case against Sonderkommando R for spearheading the Holocaust in the region.

During the mid-1960s, shortly after West German authorities began their investigation, the Soviet KGB (*Komitet gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti* or Committee for State Security) reopened an inquiry into Sonderkommando R's crimes. Why the KGB opted to revisit proceedings that Soviet authorities had concluded a decade earlier is unclear. Definitive answers to this question may be found in the KGB's internal records, which are housed in the archives of its successor organizations, the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (FSB or *Federal'naia sluzhba bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii*) and Security Service of Ukraine (SBU or *Sluzhba Bezpeky Ukrainy*). As these repositories are

⁴¹ It is unclear when these records became available to researchers. Although specialists knew of their existence, German authorities blocked previous requests for access because the materials related to an open investigation. Yad Vashem requested copies to some of the records during the 1970s. H. R. an die Zentralestelle Dortmund, March 27, 1976, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2402, 84. Buchsweiler requested access independently during the mid-1980s. M. B. and die Zentralestelle Dortmund, November 2, 1985, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2402, 238. German prosecutors in Dortmund granted neither request.

inaccessible to American researchers, it is possible only to speculate about what motivated this renewed Soviet interest in Sonderkommando R's crimes. The fact, however, that this second round of postwar Soviet investigations into Sonderkommando R coincided so closely with parallel West German probes suggests that Soviet intelligence caught wind of new West German interest and responded by reopening a long-dead case. Perhaps anticipating that the results of their inquiries would be used to embarrass or prod West Germany into a more thorough investigation in the midst of the Cold War, Soviet authorities pursued detailed probes into the crimes of local residents who had taken part in Sonderkommando R's mass shooting campaigns. In contrast to cases that their predecessors concluded fifteen years earlier, during the mid-1960s the KGB gathered exhaustive testimony from witnesses and suspected perpetrators and exhumed mass graves for forensic analysis. At the conclusion of their investigation, which resulted in a number of convictions and executions, Soviet authorities telegraphed their results to West German investigators by publishing newspaper articles about the trials in the Russian and German-language Soviet press.⁴²

By the time that West German prosecutors discovered parallel Soviet inquiries into Sonderkommando R and its local helpers, Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* had thawed bilateral relations to the point where limited collaboration in this inquiry became conceivable. West German investigators contacted Soviet authorities to gain access to the records of these investigations.⁴³ In a tortuous bout of diplomatic gymnastics, West German prosecutors obtained some key Soviet investigative documentation and at least vague promises of further

⁴² "Izmenniki rodiny rasstreliany," *Krasnaia zvezda*, August 28, 1966, 6. E. Petrus, "Massenmörder am Pranger," *Neues Leben*, September 6, 1967, 3-4.

⁴³ Leiter der Zentralstelle im Lande Nordrhein-Westfalen für die Bearbeitung von nationalsozialistischen Massenverbrechen bei der Staatsanwaltschaft Dortmund an dem Generalstaatsanwalt der UdSSR, April 28, 1974, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2784, 22-23.

assistance.⁴⁴ This exceptional opportunity for cooperation became moot when, on the eve of issuing an indictment against Sonderkommando R's surviving senior leaders, West German courts declared the suspects physically unfit for trial. The local prosecutor's office (*Staatsanwaltschaft*) in Dortmund, which had inherited the case from Ludwigsburg, deemed further investigation fruitless and ended more than a decade of inquiry into Sonderkommando R's crimes.⁴⁵ It is unclear if the decision to close the case was done on purely practical grounds or if the rumored past Nazi affiliations and continued sympathies of senior prosecutors in the office influenced their decision to end the probe.

Perhaps reflecting a generational shift in the Dortmund prosecutor's office, German state attorneys resurrected their investigation into Sonderkommando R in 1994, following an informational request from the Canadian Department of Justice.⁴⁶ In the case's reincarnation, German investigators focused their inquiry on Transnistria's local residents, whom Sonderkommando R deployed to murder Jews. German prosecutors traveled to Ukraine, where they duplicated large quantities of Soviet investigative records, and conducted interviews with surviving erstwhile ethnic Germans living in the Federal Republic.⁴⁷ While this second wave of postwar German investigations yielded new details about

⁴⁴ Der Botschaft der Bundesrepublik Deutschland an das Auswärtige Amt Bonn, December 17, 1973, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2784, 37.

⁴⁵ Verfügung / Der Leiter der Zentralstelle im Lande Nordrhein-Westfalen für die Bearbeitung von nationalsozialistischen Massenverbrechen bei der Staatsanwaltschaft Dortmund, March 27, 1976, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2402, 68-77.

⁴⁶ Department of Justice Canada, Crimes Against Humanity and War Crimes Section to the Zentralestelle Ludwigsburg, May 26, 1994, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2809, 1. Verfügung, June 6, 1996, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2809, 72-77.

⁴⁷ Verfügung / Der Leiter der Zentralstelle im Lande Nordrhein-Westfalen für die Bearbeitung von nationalsozialistischen Massenverbrechen bei der Staatsanwaltschaft Dortmund, December 27, 1999, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2887, 97.

Sonderkommando R and its local collaborators' involvement in the Holocaust in southern Ukraine, prosecutors were unable to uncover evidence that met the lofty legal burdens of convicting an aging group of suspects of first-degree murder (*Mord*) in German courts. In 1999, prosecutors in Dortmund ended the investigation of Sonderkommando R's local helpers and with it a nearly forty-year criminal investigation in the Federal Republic.⁴⁸

While this study draws on a large and diverse collection of wartime records, the testimony that Soviet and West German authorities recorded from suspected perpetrators, their neighbors, and a handful of survivors constitutes the most significant source of information about Sonderkommando R's mission in Transnistria. Employing these testimonies as historical evidence presents two methodological challenges—one related to the use of testimony in general and the second posed by the nature of Soviet investigative practice. First, using testimony taken years and sometimes decades after an event conflicts with orthodox historical methodology, which suggests that the closer a record was created to an event, the more faithfully it recorded the reality of what occurred. Using captured wartime German records as their primary source, scholars of the Holocaust initially followed this approach.⁴⁹ More recently, however, historians have begun to employ postwar testimony to reconstruct wartime events. The reasons for this trend are twofold. On the one hand, new sources have become available. Beginning in the 1970s, scholars began obtaining access to West German investigative records and the rich collection of interview transcripts that they

⁴⁸ Ibid., 2.

⁴⁹ Raul Hilberg and Saul Friedländer's magisterial comprehensive treatments of the Holocaust do not, for example, employ testimony to recover wartime events. Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*; Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Persecution, 1933-1939* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1998); Saul Friedländer, *The Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939-1945* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008).

contained. In the past couple of decades, a mammoth collection of interviews with Holocaust survivors conducted by institutions, such as the Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Yad Vashem, and Yale University, have become accessible to researchers. On the other hand, scholars have grown increasingly sensitive to the fact that records produced by the Nazi security apparatus were not as objective as they had first appeared. Records that German perpetrators created often refracted complex events through the Nazi racial worldview's narrow lenses. German documents, moreover, only partially recorded the experiences of non-Germans in the Holocaust. Postwar testimony, despite the methodological difficulties involved in using it, often provides the only source of information to address an array of topics that historians have started to raise about the Holocaust.

Although a number of historians have used postwar testimony to reconstruct wartime events related to the Holocaust, perhaps no scholar has employed them as systematically in historical research on this period as Christopher R. Browning. His recent study *Remembering Survival: Inside a Nazi Slave-Labor Camp* turns some conventional historical wisdom about testimony on its head and offers a methodology for using it as a historical source.⁵⁰ Browning argues convincingly that in some instances the quality of historical information in postwar testimony benefits from the passage of time. He demonstrates that survivor testimony given in the decades after the war frequently either wittingly or unwittingly omitted memories that were either too painful or socially uncomfortable to discuss, such as sexual violence and revenge killings among prisoners. Browning contends

⁵⁰ Christopher R. Browning, *Remembering Survival: Inside a Nazi Slave-Labor Camp* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2010).

that it was only beginning in the 1990s that survivor testimony broached these previously taboo subjects. His findings challenge the methodological principle that chronological proximity to an event increases the accuracy of the historical information contained in the testimony.

While Browning acknowledges the potential difficulties in employing postwar testimony as a source for reconstructing wartime events, he presents a simple, yet compelling methodological approach to using this material. As he did in his study *Ordinary Men*, in his most recent research Browning assembled a “critical mass of testimonies that can be tested against one another.”⁵¹ Using this “critical mass of testimony,” Browning submits that “some reasonable judgments about plausibility can be made about various individual memories based on the overall credibility of the survivor’s testimony, the vividness and detail of the particular events being recalled, the absence of contradiction with other plausible narratives, and . . . the highly subjective intuition of the individual historian that gradually develops from prolonged immersion in the materials.”⁵² Put simply, Browning submits that access to a large cache of testimonies permits the historian to distinguish between historically valuable information and accounts that, either intentionally or unintentionally, do not reflect the historical reality accurately. Drawing on a mass of postwar testimony that investigators assembled about Sonderkommando R and the Holocaust in Transnistria, this dissertation applies Browning’s general methodological approach.

Using testimony that Soviet authorities gathered constitutes a second and perhaps more severe methodological challenge to this study. The Soviet Union (and its satellite

⁵¹ Ibid., 8.

⁵² Ibid., 9.

states) had a long history of staging politically motivated show trials in which coerced (and often tortured) defendants testified to having committed imaginary crimes. The Great Purges of the late 1930s, fictionalized by Arthur Koestler's novel *Darkness at Noon*, cast a shadow on any testimony that Soviet security forces recorded.⁵³ Scholars are therefore right to treat the factual material that these testimonies contain with the utmost caution and to raise questions about the extent to which Soviet political interests and the mindset and habits of the individual investigators shaped the information contained in these records.

Aware of the methodological challenges that Soviet investigative material presents, a handful of scholars have begun to use these records to analyze previously understudied dimensions of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union.⁵⁴ As this type of inquiry remains in its infancy, historians who use these materials have focused on studying Soviet judicial proceedings, rather than reflecting on how these records can be used to study wartime events.⁵⁵ Jan Gross's study *Neighbors* provides the most germane methodological discussion for using these types of sources. Gross bases his study largely on testimony that Polish security forces gathered in the late 1940s, the height of Stalinist rule in the country. Acknowledging the potential pitfalls of using the material as an historical source to reconstruct what happened during the war, not least of which was the fact that investigating officials tortured many of the witnesses and defendants to obtain statements, Gross contends

⁵³ Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon*, trans. Daphne Hardy, (London: J. Cape, 1940).

⁵⁴ See, for example, Prusin, "A Community of Violence;" Jared McBride, "Eyewitness to an Occupation: Collaboration and the Holocaust in Olevs'k, Zhytomyr Region," (presented at the workshop Bringing the Past into the Present: Missing Narratives of the Holocaust in Ukraine, Washington, D.C.: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2009); Himka, "The Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and the Holocaust."

⁵⁵ Tanja Penter, "Collaboration on Trial: New Source Material on Soviet Postwar Trials against Collaborators," *Slavic Review* 64, no. 4 (2005): 782-790; Alexander Victor Prusin, "'Fascist Criminals to the Gallows!': The Holocaust and Soviet War Crimes Trials, December 1945-February 1946," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 17, no. 1 (2003): 1-30.

that the specific circumstances of the investigation make the historical information contained in its records reliable. Gross submits that because “the matter was handled as a routine case,” authorities did not manipulate the evidence to serve an ulterior political motive.⁵⁶ Gross concludes that “for the very reason that this was by no means a political trial, materials produced during the investigation can serve us well in our reconstruction of what actually took place.”⁵⁷

Gross’s assertion that discerning the aims of investigators is key to determining the quality of historical information contained in the records is a useful starting point for evaluating how to treat testimony that Soviet authorities gathered. As interview transcripts are the only accessible sources related to the inquiries, ascertaining whether or not Soviet investigators manipulated or fabricated statements to serve the Soviet regime’s political agenda depends on inferring their intent from the testimony that they recorded. To be sure, each of the major groupings of Soviet testimony reflect, to varying degrees, the Soviet regime’s desire both to probe German activities in occupied territory and to identify local residents who cooperated with the invaders. To this end, strong circumstantial evidence suggests that Soviet authorities subjected interviewees to sleep deprivation and physical abuse to obtain information from uncooperative suspects. While these interrogation techniques are unlikely to meet the burdens of most judicial systems, there is no evidence that Soviet authorities manipulated evidence for political gain.

It is important to distinguish between the testimony that Soviet investigators recorded about Sonderkommando R and its crimes during the 1940s and 1960s. Wartime materials,

⁵⁶ Gross, *Neighbors*, 13.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

which SMERSH or the Extraordinary State Commission produced, remained secret because they had counterintelligence applications and threatened to expose the degree to which local residents had collaborated with occupying forces. Similarly, the special cases that the NKVD tried in clandestine courts in late 1940s remained sealed because public evidence of massive local complicity in German-led crimes was embarrassing. During the 1960s, when strong circumstantial evidence suggests that the KGB responded to an ongoing West German inquiry by reopening an old case, a different dynamic appears to have been at play. Perhaps cognizant that their findings would be shared with West German authorities and that, to remain convincing, interview records would need to maintain the appearance of due process, Soviet investigators went to great lengths to gather meticulously accurate evidence. The inquiry was a massive undertaking. Over the course of a months-long investigation, the KGB transported witnesses from Central Asia to southern Ukraine, interviewed key suspects dozens of times, recorded thousands of pages of testimony and conducted onsite pathological analysis. Investigators also recorded absurdly implausible claims of ignorance about wartime events that many defendants made. Had the KGB simply wanted a signed confession to make quick political hay, then there would have been no reason to concoct such an elaborate investigation. A careful analysis of available Soviet testimony strongly suggests that the Soviet security apparatus recorded evidence that it judged to capture historical reality. While, like all sources, Soviet investigative records concerning the crimes of Sonderkommando R and its local helpers should be read critically for information that, given the preponderance of the evidence, appears inaccurate, it would be an error simply to disqualify these sources from consideration.

The scale and diversity of sources available to reconstruct Sonderkommando R's

mission to Transnistria and area Volksdeutsche complicity in the Holocaust present a unique methodological opportunity to assess the quality of historical information in Soviet testimony. Not only is there a large, if fragmentary body of wartime records that can be used to corroborate postwar statements, but the West German investigation into Sonderkommando R and later its indigenous assistants constitutes an exceptional parallel set of records. In few if any other instances did German investigators possess the language skills or unfettered access to former local residents to conduct a detailed investigation into the Holocaust in the occupied Soviet Union at the grassroots level. Postwar investigations into this subject constitute a rare instance in which two very different states probed the same microhistorical events and one in which historians can compare the content of each record group. That interview transcripts recorded decades and thousands of kilometers apart provide remarkably consistent historical information speaks to the empirical weight of these testimonies.

Place and Personal Names

For scholars writing about historical events in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, assigning place names is a perpetually problematic undertaking. Given the region's ethnic and linguistic multiplicity, most places have an array of names. Choosing one designation over another inevitably threatens to insert researchers into partisan struggles over which ethnic group is entitled to a particular piece of territory. With the exception of places, such as Odessa, which have common English spellings, all places names are given using the names that local German-speakers and later the SS assigned to them. This is done to recreate and convey the historical landscape as it existed at that time. During the war, the violent population schemas that German officials enacted remade much of the region's demographic landscape. The SS's removal of local Volksdeutsche and the Soviet regime's refusal to

permit German-speakers to return to southern Ukraine after the war meant that many of these Germanized settlements existed for only a brief historical moment. Using wartime names reflects this historical reality. For the reader's convenience and geographical precision, if possible the contemporary Ukrainian-language place name is given in the first instance.

This study renders all personal names as they appeared during the war. The one notable exception is names that appear exclusively in archival collections accessed in the Federal Republic of Germany. According to the conditions of access that German law imposes on scholarly users, the personal details, including names of living private individuals, may not be published. In accordance with established practice in this field, personal names that do not appear elsewhere in the public record are anonymized.

Chapter organization

This study is organized into eight thematic chapters that are arranged in rough chronological sequence. Chapter 1 reconstructs the historical trajectory of southern Ukraine's Black Sea German communities from their establishment during the early nineteenth century to Sonderkommando R's arrival in the fall of 1941. A once privileged minority, the Black Sea Germans experienced decades of decline under Soviet rule before the summer of 1941, when the retreating Red Army attempted to deport ethnic German men and advancing German and Romanian forces targeted the region's Volksdeutsche communities for harsh but selective violence. This experience illustrated to local ethnic Germans that life as they had known it in the Soviet Union had come to an end and that while German rule provided new possibilities, area Volksdeutsche would need to learn to navigate the Nazi regime's new expectations or face potentially lethal consequences.

Chapter 2 analyzes the men and women who staffed Sonderkommando R and set

Volksdeutsche policy in the region. A highly eclectic unit, it drew its personnel from an array of sources, including professional *völkisch* activists, recently resettled Volksdeutsche, Nazi party “old fighters,” members the National Socialist Motor Corps (*Nationalsozialistische Kraftfahrkorps*), and German Red Cross nurses. Despite its myriad cleavages, Sonderkommando R functioned because many of its personnel had forged bonds by participating together in earlier Volksdeutsche “resettlement” campaigns in Eastern Europe and because the high proportion of women assigned to the unit provided an opportunity to pursue romantic relationships and build group cohesion in the field.

Chapters 3 through 5 explore Sonderkommando R’s attempts to mobilize Transnistria’s Volksdeutsche as the demographic vanguard of Nazi plans for the occupied Soviet Union. The third chapter probes Sonderkommando R’s efforts to ferret out real and largely imagined enemies of National Socialism in the region’s ethnic German communities. The unit’s discovery that earlier German sweeps through the area had failed to kill a handful of local Jews and members of “mixed race” families led its personnel to question the reliability of local Volksdeutsche, who had hidden these individuals from the SS. Sonderkommando R responded by ratcheting up violence against suspected Volksdeutsche “communists” and eventually local residents, whom the SS deemed to be unfit for the Nazi racial community on behavior grounds.

Chapter 4 analyzes VoMi attempts to pry local Volksdeutsche, historically a deeply religious people, from their attachment to Christianity. Conscious of the fact that the Church offered area ethnic Germans an alternative to National Socialism, the unit squelched the religious freedom that many local residents had hoped for by suppressing the Catholic Church and providing them with heavily Nazified Protestant clergy.

The fifth chapter reconstructs Sonderkommando R's projects to organize Transnistria's Volksdeutsche in anticipation of the militarized agricultural German settlements that the Third Reich planned to establish in the conquered Soviet Union. This undertaking entailed carving out an autonomous sphere of influence in Romanian-occupied territory by launching a low-level armed conflict with local Romanian forces and pursuing a brutal policy of ethnic cleansing to create homogenous Volksdeutsche communities, where none had existed previously. The VoMi succored these Volksdeutsche settlements by providing them with privileged access to the region's scarce economic assets and to massive quantities of stolen Jewish property imported from Poland. Sonderkommando R complemented this economic policy with a concerted, if ultimately incomplete propaganda and education campaign to secure local Volksdeutsche adherence to the National Socialist cause.

Chapter 6 turns its attention away from rural Transnistria and to Odessa, the region's cosmopolitan *entrepôt*. There, Sonderkommando R's personnel confronted the exceptional challenge of identifying and mobilizing Volksdeutsche in one of the Soviet Union's most ethnically diverse cities. Confounded by this local reality, the unit's staff ceded control of the ethnic classification process to their indigenous female subordinates. When these local women sabotaged the SS's efforts to find area Volksdeutsche, the unit's personnel responded by murdering suspected ethnic German "imposters." This chapter underscores the tenuousness of the category of "Germanness" in southern Ukraine and the degree to which the SS was prepared to use violence to clarify this reality.

The study's final chapters analyze Volksdeutsche involvement in the Holocaust in Transnistria. Chapter 7 reconstructs the specific circumstances in which Sonderkommando R

and its local Volksdeutsche helpers participated in the Holocaust in southern Ukraine during the winter of 1941-42. The chapter explores how, in the midst of a long-term shoving match between Romanian and German authorities over which power was responsible for murdering the region's Jews, Transnistria's Romanian administrators used the SS's fear of epidemic disease to enlist Sonderkommando R's assistance in mass shooting operations. It also discusses how Sonderkommando R deployed local Volksdeutsche militiamen in killings that not only expanded in scale and complexity, but also anticipated techniques later employed at extermination centers in occupied Poland.

The dissertation's final chapter examines why area Volksdeutsche participated in mass murder. It begins with an institutional history of Transnistria's ethnic German militia, the organization from which Sonderkommando R drew its killers. Using a prosopography of militiamen from the most heavily involved ethnic German militia unit, it then constructs a collective biography of the region's most prominent Volksdeutsche perpetrators. Finally, using as a case study one militia unit's initial killing deployment, it analyzes the specific situational dynamics at play while these perpetrators carried out the Holocaust. It concludes that, more so than other factors, situational pressures created by Sonderkommando R's rule in Transnistria moved local Volksdeutsche to participate in genocide.

CHAPTER I: FROM PRIVILEGED TO PERSECUTED: THE BLACK SEA GERMANS, 1800-1941

At the outset of the West German criminal investigation into Sonderkommando R in 1961, the lead investigator in Ludwigsburg, State Attorney (*Staatsanwalt*) Schuster, wrote to the Bavarian State Office of Criminal Investigation (*Bayrische Landeskriminalamt*) to request its assistance in interviewing witnesses and potential suspects. Schuster warned his colleagues that “I have been told that, because of their difficult fate, the Russian Germans are very distrustful and close-lipped. It will therefore perhaps require some effort to get them to speak.”⁵⁸ As perceptive investigators like Schuster realized, the complex century and a half history of the Black Sea Germans and their historical interactions with Germany shaped their responses not only to postwar investigators, but also to National Socialist rule. This chapter unpacks this historical baggage by tracing the development of the Black Sea Germans from the establishment of their communities during the nineteenth century to Sonderkommando R’s arrival in Transnistria during the fall of 1941.

Through territorial expansion and concerted efforts to recruit settlers from central Europe, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the House of Romanov acquired a substantial number of German-speaking subjects. Invited by the tsarist regime during and after the Napoleonic Wars to settle territory that it had acquired recently from the Ottoman

⁵⁸ Staatsanwalt Schuster an das Bayrische Landeskriminalamt, November 27, 1961, BAL, B162/2290, 36.

Empire, the Black Sea Germans were the final major group of Germanophone subjects to arrive in the Empire. During much of the nineteenth century, they prospered in agriculture and maintained comparatively circumscribed connections to their ancestors' erstwhile homeland. Beginning at the end of the nineteenth century, however, their privileged socio-economic position began to erode in the wake of domestic political unrest in the Russian Empire. While the region's German-speakers initially weathered these obstacles relatively unscathed, repressive tsarist measures at the beginning of the First World War marked the beginning of a multi-generational decline. The 1917 Russian Revolution, the Russian Civil War, and Soviet rule constituted an unmitigated disaster for the Black Sea Germans that culminated in widespread expropriation, famine, arrest, and deportation. Targeted by Soviet authorities first as class enemies and then as an ethnically suspect minority, the Black Sea Germans suffered mightily in the years leading up to 1941.

The opening months of the Second World War in southern Ukraine—a portion of the conflict that has received comparatively little scholarly attention—constituted the most violent period of the Black Sea Germans' unarguably violent recent history. During the summer of 1941, both retreating Soviet and advancing German forces targeted local Volksdeutsche communities. The lessons that local Volksdeutsche drew from these brutal encounters, however, were very different. Soviet violence, which the Red Army and NKVD directed against virtually all ethnic Germans, underscored to area Volksdeutsche that their prospects under Soviet rule were increasingly grim. By the fall of 1941, the Black Sea Germans realized that a return of Soviet power would mean their wholesale deportation to the Soviet interior and the destruction of their communities. German violence, by contrast, was far more selective and focused on local Jews, the members of "mixed race" families, and

area residents whom other locals had denounced as “communists.” While the public nature of this violence shocked area Volksdeutsche, it highlighted to local ethnic Germans that their prospects under German rule were more positive, provided that they could navigate their new overlords’ expectations.

Prosperity and Change: German-Speakers in the Russian Empire, 1721-1905

The Russian Empire was home to two primary groups of German-speakers. The first was the Baltic Germans (*Baltendeutsche*), who inhabited the provinces of Estland, Kurland, and Livland in what is present-day Estonia and Latvia.⁵⁹ The 1721 Treaty of Nystadt, with which Peter I ended the Great Northern War against Sweden, not only incorporated the three provinces into the Russian Empire, but also established the local Germanophone nobility, which descended from the Teutonic Knights who had conquered the region in the thirteenth century, as his feudal vassals. In exchange for their fealty, Peter I granted the local aristocracy extensive cultural privileges, including confessional freedom and a German Lutheran university in Dorpat (Tartu), as well as internal political autonomy.⁶⁰ Peter I’s decision to ennoble all foreign officers in imperial service was a tremendous catalyst for securing Baltic German participation and advancement in the Russian state service until the regime’s demise in 1917. Throughout much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Baltic German nobility and urban bourgeoisie used their intimate relationship with the tsarist autocracy to secure an economically privileged position vis-à-vis local Balts, who constituted the majority of the region’s population. This ethnic and socio-economic differentiation

⁵⁹ Traders from central Europe first appeared in Kievan Rus’ in the ninth century. The Baltic Germans, however, were the first numerically sizable group of German-speakers to come under control of the Russian autocracy. Fleischhauer, *Die Deutschen im Zarenreich*, 19-21.

⁶⁰ Ingeborg Fleischhauer, “The Nationalities Policy of the Tsars Reconsidered--The Case of the Russian Germans,” *Journal of Modern History* 53, no. 1, (1981), D1074.

precipitated the emergence of Baltic nationalism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During the 1905 Russian Revolution, the increasingly antagonistic relationship between Baltic Germans and Balts fueled interethnic and class violence. Following the disillusion of the Russian Empire in the wake of the 1917 Russian Revolution, the nascent states of Latvia and Estonia eliminated the political and much of the economic power of their countries' ethnically German minorities.

State-sponsored settlers, who arrived in the Russian interior in three waves, constituted the second and historically distinctly more parvenu group of ethnic Germans in the Russian Empire. The first of these new arrivals were ethnic Germans, who settled along the Volga River primarily near Saratov. In keeping with Habsburg enlightened absolutists, who recruited Germans to settle the Banat and the Bačka regions of what is now Serbia, Catherine II enlisted German-speakers to populate the vast Russian steppe.⁶¹ Catherine II's December 1762 and July 1763 Manifestos solicited Germans, who wanted either to escape the poverty of German-speaking central Europe after the end of the Seven Years War or to avoid compulsory military service in the Prussian army.⁶² The generous offer that the tsarist autocracy circulated throughout central Europe included a thirty-year freedom from taxation, local self-government, a perpetual military service exemption, and thirty *desiatina* (approximately 108 acres) of free land.⁶³ Using local recruitment agents and Catherine II's home state of Anhalt-Zerbst as a staging area, the autocracy established 102 German

⁶¹ Fleischhauer, *Die Deutschen im Zarenreich*, 97.

⁶² Ibid., 98. Jean-François Bourret, *Les Allemands de la Volga: histoire culturelle d'une minorité, 1763-1941* (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1986), 32-34.

⁶³ Fleischhauer, *Die Deutschen im Zarenreich*, 100.

settlements along the Volga between 1765 and 1770.⁶⁴ By 1788 the Volga Germans (*Wolgadeutsche*) numbered some 31,000, a figure that increased tenfold by the 1897 tsarist census.⁶⁵

The Russian Empire's territorial expansion at the end of the eighteenth century provided the tsarist regime with new opportunities to recruit German-speaking settlers. Following the Peace of Jassy, which ended the Second Russo-Turkish War in 1791, the Russian Empire acquired previously Ottoman territory near the Black Sea, so-called New Russia. To settle the Empire's newly-acquired borderlands between the Dniester and Bug Rivers, Catherine II launched a second and more ambitious bid to attract Germans to the Russian Empire. The autocracy set aside more than 555,000 *desiatina* (approximately two million acres) of land open for settlement in the new provinces of Ekaterinoslav and Cherson as well as on the Crimea. Catherine II's new immigration policy coincided with Frederick Wilhelm II's 1786 accession to the Prussian throne, and a subsequent decrease in official tolerance for religious minorities in that country.⁶⁶ The result was that Mennonite religious refugees comprised a disproportionate number of the German-speaking settlers who arrived in the region at the end of the eighteenth century.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Catherine II's grandson, Alexander I, launched the tsarist regime's third and final attempt to recruit German settlers to the Russian Empire. He took a personal interest in the Empire's internal development and passed no less

⁶⁴ Bourret, *Les Allemands de la Volga*, 24-32. Fleischhauer, *Die Deutschen im Zarenreich*, 102-103.

⁶⁵ Bourret, *Les Allemands de la Volga*, 44.

⁶⁶ Fleischhauer, *Die Deutschen im Zarenreich*, 112-13.

than 123 edicts concerning immigration.⁶⁷ Alexander I's February 1804 Edict, in particular, encouraged German settlement by permitting potential immigrants significant latitude in choosing their destinations within Russia.⁶⁸ Building on Catherine II's efforts, Alexander I increased the geographic area slated for German settlement to include parts of Bessarabia. Despite the fact that tsarist officials recruited a variety of settlers from central and southeastern Europe, Alexander I and his officials favored Germans for their agricultural skills.⁶⁹ After the end of the Napoleonic Wars, for example, the *ancien régime* offered twice as much land to German settlers as it did to their Balkan counterparts.⁷⁰ As a result of increasing state incentives and the turbulence of central Europe during the Napoleonic period, the demographic pattern of German settlers changed. Because of crop failures in southern Germany, a large number of Catholics, primarily from Württemberg, relocated to New Russia. Similarly, a second major group of largely Lutheran settlers emigrated from West Prussia, Brandenburg, Mecklenburg and Pomerania.⁷¹ During the first decades of the nineteenth century, the fluid central European political situation and solicitous tsarist immigration policy created a uniquely diverse German settler community.⁷²

The so-called Black Sea Germans were among the largest of these groups. Living in noncontiguous settlements that dotted the region outside of Odessa, they inhabited largely

⁶⁷ Detlef Brandes, *Von den Zaren adoptiert: Die deutschen Kolonisten und die Balkansiedler in Neurußland und Bessarabien 1751-1914* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1993), 467.

⁶⁸ Fleischhauer, *Die Deutschen im Zarenreich*, 157-59.

⁶⁹ Ute Schmidt, *Die Deutschen aus Bessarabien: Eine Minderheit aus Südosteuropa (1814 bis heute)* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2004), 66.

⁷⁰ Brandes, *Von den Zaren adoptiert*, 47, 81.

⁷¹ Schmidt, *Die Deutschen aus Bessarabien*, 52-53.

⁷² Brandes, *Von den Zaren adoptiert*, 456.

ethnically homogeneous Germanophone villages throughout the nineteenth century.⁷³ These settlements were typically segregated by confession, with Protestant and Catholic settlers residing in separate communities. New Russia's German settlers prospered in agriculture. In contrast to the Volga Germans, who had relocated to the Russian interior several decades earlier, and largely adopted Russian farming practices, the Black Sea Germans introduced central European agricultural techniques to the Russian Empire's southwestern frontier. Not only did the Black Sea Germans farm individual homesteads, but they also employed technological innovations, such as crop rotation and steel plows, which were previously unknown in the region.⁷⁴ The result was that the Black Sea Germans economically outperformed their non-German neighbors. On the eve of the 1917 Russian Revolution, Ukraine's German-speakers owned and farmed between 40,000 and 45,000 square kilometers—an area approximately one and a half times the size of the state of Maryland.⁷⁵ In the countryside surrounding Odessa ethnic Germans, who comprised seven percent of property owners at the beginning of the twentieth century, owned approximately 60 percent of the land.⁷⁶ Prior to the Russian Revolution, the Black Sea Germans were Ukraine's prosperous peasants par excellence.

⁷³ Ibid., 111.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 471

⁷⁵ According to the 1897 census, more than half of the Russian Empire's Germanophone population worked in agriculture, and by 1914, German-speakers farmed over thirty-five million acres of land—equivalent to 43 percent of the arable land in the German Empire. Fleischhauer, *Das Dritte Reich und die Deutschen in der Sowjetunion*, 12. Throughout the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, the overwhelming majority of Russian ethnic Germans were rural. Polian argues that of the 1.4 million Soviet ethnic Germans prior to the Second World War, only 20 percent lived in urban areas. Pavel Polian, *Against Their Will: The History and Geography of Forced Migrations in the USSR*, trans. Anna Yastrzhembaska (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004), 126.

⁷⁶ Buchsweiler, *Volksdeutsche in der Ukraine*, 121.

The comparative economic success of New Russia's German-speakers during the nineteenth century had important implications for their historical interactions with area Jews. Although ironic, given their descendants' involvement in the Holocaust, during the nineteenth century the Black Sea Germans were among the primary agents of the Russian Empire's experimental efforts to establish Jews as subsistence farmers in the Pale of Settlement. In 1808, Alexander I established the Aid Committee for Foreigners in Odessa, which was charged with overseeing New Russia's non-Russian inhabitants.⁷⁷ The Aid Committee was not only responsible for local Germans, but also authorized to supervise the sizable local Jewish population that the autocracy acquired through its westward territorial expansion into what became the southern-most tip of the Pale of Settlement.⁷⁸ Tsarist administrators on the Aid Committee were so impressed with the Black Sea Germans' apparent agricultural acumen that they decided to employ area ethnic Germans as "model farmers" for local Jews beginning in 1847. Over the next five years, the Aid Committee's incentives encouraged dozens of German farmers and their families to relocate to New Russia's two dozen Jewish experimental settlements. By 1858, an imperial survey of twenty predominately Jewish villages revealed that the local population also included 450 ethnic Germans.⁷⁹ In contrast to the participation of local ethnic Germans in the Holocaust during the Second World War, during the first half of the nineteenth century Russian authorities had identified their ancestors as a population that was uniquely suited to assist Jews.

⁷⁷ Fleischhauer, *Die Deutschen im Zarenreich*, 172; Schmidt, *Die Deutschen aus Bessarabien*, 54; Brandes, *Von den Zaren adoptiert*, 467.

⁷⁸ Benjamin Nathans notes that Jews comprised some 12 percent of the Pale of Settlement's population. Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 4.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 467.

Despite the comparatively intimate relations between southern Ukraine's ethnic Germans and Jews, contact between area German-speakers and Ukrainians were far less positive.⁸⁰ Whereas Black Sea Germans interacted and intermarried with Jews both in the countryside and in Odessa, the region's cosmopolitan center, there was comparatively little intermarriage between local Volksdeutsche and Ukrainians.⁸¹ In fact, many Ukrainians often conflated Jews and ethnic Germans. Because of state privileges for German-speakers and Jews' legal monopoly on alcohol sales, Ukrainians regarded both groups as economic exploiters. These tensions periodically came to a head during Ukrainian-led anti-Jewish pogroms, in which the assailants also menaced area Germans.⁸² New Russia's German-speakers existed in a periodically tense interethnic *milieu* in which ethnic and economic antagonisms reinforced one another.

Following the Russian Empire's ignoble defeat during the Crimea War in 1855, the Russian autocracy pursued an aggressive program of social and economic reforms designed to modernize and rehabilitate the Empire. Prior to his assassination in 1881, Alexander II enacted an array of reforms that abolished serfdom, established institutions for local self-

⁸⁰ Fleischhauer, "The Nationalities Policy of the Tsars Reconsidered--the Case of the Russian Germans," D1086; Fleischhauer, *Die Deutschen im Zarenreich*, 291. Interestingly, Nazi *Ostforscher* who hailed from southern Ukraine, such as Karl Liebbrandt, highlighted the ethnic homogeneity of the Black Sea communities in an effort to encourage the regime to bolster the then embattled settlements. See Georg Liebbrandt, *Die Gemeindeberichte von 1848 der deutschen Siedlungen am Schwarzen Meer*, ed. Georg Liebbrandt, vol. 5, *Quellen zur Erforschung des Deutschtums in Osteuropa* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel Verlag, 1941), xviii. Also see Eric J. Schmaltz and Samuel Sinner, "The Nazi Ethnographic Research of Georg Leibbrandt and Karl Stumpp in Ukraine, and Its North American Legacy," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 14, no. 1 (2000).

⁸¹ Brandes, *Von den Zaren adoptiert*, 459-61; Schmidt, *Die Deutschen aus Bessarabien*, 81-82. During the nineteenth century, Odessa was one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the Empire with a thriving, highly-assimilated Jewish community. See Steven J. Zipperstein, *The Jews of Odessa: A Cultural History, 1794-1881* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985); Fleischhauer, *Die Deutschen im Zarenreich*, 132-33.

⁸² Brandes, *Von den Zaren adoptiert*, 464.

government, and codified the Empire's legal and administrative structure.⁸³ Two of these reforms had important implications for the special legal status of German-speakers in southern Ukraine. First, in 1871, imperial authorities eliminated the special administrative structure under which they had governed ethnic German settlements and rescinded their taxation exemptions. As area German-speakers legally became part of the peasantry, Russian administrators invited them to participate in local government by joining recently formed *zemstva* (a representative form of local government). Second, as part of the autocracy's military reforms, in 1874 Alexander II ordered universal male conscription.⁸⁴ Alexander II's policies in the latter half of the nineteenth century rescinded many of the privileges that had attracted German-speakers to southern Ukraine several generations earlier.

The impact of these reforms on local ethnic Germans was mixed. On the one hand, obligatory military service contradicted an important religious tenet for the region's sizable Mennonite population. Although some Mennonites, who had the financial means to emigrate again, relocated primarily to North America, the majority of their co-religionists were able to reach an accommodation with the autocracy, whereby conscientious objectors could fulfill their obligation by serving as non-combatants.⁸⁵ For local Protestants and Catholics, these new service requirements proved less problematic. On the other hand, participation in local *zemstva* permitted New Russia's Germans to engage with their Slavic neighbors in local

⁸³ On these reforms see W. Bruce Lincoln, *The Great Reforms: Autocracy, Bureaucracy and the Politics of Change in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1990).

⁸⁴ Fleischhauer, "The Nationalities Policy of the Tsars Reconsidered--the Case of the Russian Germans," D1087; Schmidt, *Die Deutschen aus Bessarabien*, 49-50. Bourret, *Les Allemands de la Volga*, 62.

⁸⁵ Michael Schippan and Sonja Striegnitz, *Wolgadeutsche: Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1992), 104.

government in a way in which they had not done previously.⁸⁶ Because a landowner's authority within the zemstva depended on the size of his landholdings, the wealthy maintained an unequal say in area affairs. By dint of the fact that German colonists were historically more prosperous than their non-German neighbors, they typically exerted disproportionate influence in local politics.⁸⁷ While New Russia's Germans lost many of their *de jure* privileges vis-à-vis the autocracy, the new structure of local government ensured that many of their *de facto* privileges remained until the early twentieth century.

Throughout much of the nineteenth century, the Black Sea Germans differed from many other ethnic German communities in Romanov or Habsburg lands, such as the Transylvanian Saxons (*Siebenbürger Sachsen*) and the Baltic Germans, in that they maintained relatively circumscribed connections to German-speaking central Europe. The reasons for this were both geographical and cultural. The comparative remoteness of the Black Sea Germans meant that outside of the city of Odessa there were few opportunities to trade directly with central Europe. Owing to the Black Sea Germans' relatively low level of educational development, they had little need to engage with the broader Germanophone cultural world. The notable exceptions were southern Ukraine's Protestant and Catholic clergy and ethnic German instructors. While some clergymen and teachers received training at German institutions, many of them pursued their studies at German-speaking institutions within the Russian Empire, either in the Baltic or on the Volga.⁸⁸ During the nineteenth

⁸⁶ Brandes, *Von den Zaren adoptiert*, 475-78.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 483.

⁸⁸ A key example of this trend was the noted Nazi ethnographer Karl Stumpp, who conducted demographic surveys of Ukraine during the Second World War. Born in 1896 near Odessa, Stumpp completed his primary and secondary education in nearby Gross Liebental and then attended the University of Dorpat before the 1917 Revolution. Schmaltz and Sinner, "The Nazi Ethnographic Research of Georg Leibbrandt and

century, the Black Sea Germans were thus among the most historically divorced groups of ethnic Germans from Germany—a feature of their historical development that would have important implications for the contours of German occupation policy during the Second World War.

Notwithstanding an evolving relationship between local German-speakers and imperial power and continued latent interethnic conflict with area non-Germans, the latter half of the nineteenth century marked the Black Sea Germans' historical high watermark. Within the course of less than one hundred years, the region's German-speakers had established a dominant economic position in the countryside surrounding Odessa and had secured precisely the religious freedoms that their ancestors sought in the tsarist empire. Despite the fact that the Russian autocracy's efforts at modernization had eroded some of their historical privileges, the Black Sea Germans remained a socio-economically privileged population that had little opportunity or reason to maintain any but the most basic connections with their ancestors' former homeland.

The Black Sea Germans in an Era of Revolutions and Civil War, 1905-1922

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Russian Empire's domestic problems appeared to be of little concern to area Volksdeutsche. In comparison to the acute interethnic and class violence that the 1905 Revolution spawned in the Baltic, the Black Sea Germans were little affected by the upheaval. As the autocracy's apparent inability to police the countryside became apparent to local residents, however, the area's German settlers, like their Baltic German counterparts, established *Selbstschutz* (or self-defense) units to guard their communities against possible theft and interethnic violence. Perhaps one of the

Karl Stumpp in Ukraine, and Its North American Legacy,” 31.

Revolution's strangest episodes exemplifies the degree to which the Black Sea Germans sought to maintain the status quo in the midst of upheaval. In an effort to bolster their fledgling militia forces, a group of Baltic German leaders traveled by rail to the Black Sea German settlements and suggested that the two groups combine self-defense units for a joint assault on revolutionaries in the Baltic. Black Sea German leaders declined on the grounds that they could not see any advantage to defending Baltic German privilege.⁸⁹

The Black Sea Germans underscored their support for the status quo following Nicholas II's October Manifesto by returning Octobrist representatives to the First Duma, who accepted the tsar's manifesto as sufficient reform. When P.A. Stolypin's government dissolved the Second Duma and issued new election laws that favored propertied interests, the political power of southern Ukraine's ethnic Germans increased further.⁹⁰ Given that New Russia's German settlers escaped most of the Revolution's violence, their Duma electoral results highlighted their continued fealty to the tsarist autocracy, whose favor remained instrumental in maintaining their privileged socio-economic position.

As the Black Sea Germans owed their dominate socio-economic position to historical privileges that the tsarist regime had granted them, it is ironic that the first major twentieth-century state challenge to their settlements came from the *ancien régime*. In 1915, tsarist authorities became increasingly uneasy about the presence of German-speakers—both ethnic Germans and Yiddish-speaking Jews—along the Empire's western periphery. Fearing the Jews and ethnic Germans could become a fifth column for the armies of the advancing Central Powers, tsarist officials pursued repressive policies against its Germanophone

⁸⁹ Fleischhauer, *Die Deutschen im Zarenreich*, 372-76.

⁹⁰ Brandes, *Von den Zaren adoptiert*, 484.

subjects in the Empire's western borderlands.⁹¹ Although ethnic Germans and Jews, who were closest to the front in areas like Volhynia, faced the brunt of these policies, such as expropriation and deportation, the Black Sea Germans saw much of their linguistic, educational, and religious autonomy evaporate.⁹² For the Black Sea Germans, these measures signaled the state's departure from its historical role as the protector of area ethnic Germans and its emergence as one of their primary opponents.

In the midst of their progressively deteriorating position during the last years of the tsarist regime, the Black Sea Germans greeted the February 1917 Revolution with guarded optimism. The Provisional Government's initial policies suggested that the Revolution would benefit southern Ukraine's ethnic Germans. In March 1917, the Provisional Government declared the equality of all citizens and rolled back many of the repressive tsarist measures that had targeted the Empire's ethnic Germans.⁹³ The October 1917 Revolution, however, immediately threatened to undo these advances. While, during the last years of the tsarist regime, the Black Sea Germans had suffered from increasingly repressive policies, as wealthy farmers they stood to lose significantly more from a radically new socio-economic order. Over the next three years, they launched a quixotic effort to maintain the status quo antebellum.

The local Selbstschutz, which first defended local ethnic German communities from theft and ultimately joined counter-revolutionary forces, spearheaded the Black Sea German

⁹¹ Fleischhauer, *Die Deutschen im Zarenreich*, 479, 502; Peter Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia during World War I* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 23; Eric Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign Against Enemy Aliens during World War I* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 100, 104-108.

⁹² Fleischhauer, *Die Deutschen im Zarenreich*, 452.

⁹³ Gatrell, *Whole Empire Walking*, 180. Fleischhauer, *Die Deutschen im Zarenreich*, 555.

response to the October Revolution. As they had in 1905, during the 1917 Revolution southern Ukraine's ethnic Germans raised indigenous self-defense forces to protect their communities.⁹⁴ When the German army occupied southern Ukraine in 1918, local German commanders implemented measures that favored area Volksdeutsche. The German military trained and armed local Selbstschutz units as a bulwark against area non-Germans and suspected revolutionaries.⁹⁵ The Black Sea Germans reciprocated this privileged treatment by purchasing German war bonds valued at 60 million Goldmarks.⁹⁶ Assistance from area German forces, however, ended almost as quickly as it had begun. Following the November 1918 revolution in Germany, the German military withdrew from the region. In the power vacuum left in the wake of retreating German forces, the Red Army, the anarchist Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of Ukraine (or Black Army), and the anti-revolutionary White Army vied for control of southern Ukraine.⁹⁷ Anticipating that victory for the Bolsheviks would threaten their dominant socio-economic position in the area and besieged by Ukrainian anarchist forces under the command of Nestor Makhno, the Black Sea Germans sided with the Whites.⁹⁸ During the spring and summer of 1919, Black Sea German militiamen fought alongside White forces led by A.I. Denikin and P.N. Wrangel, which resupplied the Selbstschutz with arms brought from the White-controlled port of

⁹⁴ Fleischhauer, *Die Deutschen im Zarenreich*, 585.

⁹⁵ Colin Peter Neufeldt, "The Fate of Mennonites in Ukraine and the Crimea During Soviet Collectivization and the Famine (1930-1933)" (PhD Dissertation, University of Alberta, 1999), 12.

⁹⁶ Fleischhauer, *Die Deutschen im Zarenreich*, 583.

⁹⁷ On the Russian Civil War in Ukraine see, Arthur E. Adams, *The Bolsheviks in Ukraine: The Second Campaign, 1918-1919* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1963); Taras Hunczak, ed., *The Ukraine, 1917-1921: A Study in Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977).

⁹⁸ On Nestor Makhno's Black Army see, Michael Malet, *Nestor Makhno in the Russian Civil War* (London: Macmillan, 1982).

Sevastopol.⁹⁹ When Black and later Red forces routed the Whites during 1920, thousands of Black Sea Germans fled southern Ukraine, primarily for Germany and North America.¹⁰⁰ The remaining Black Sea Germans were left to live under a Soviet regime whose creation they had just taken up arms to oppose.

The Black Sea Germans under Soviet Rule, 1922-1941

Following the Russian Civil War, the Black Sea Germans were an embattled population on two fronts. First, particularly in southern Ukraine, the war's devastation was immense. As in much of the rural Soviet Union, years of warfare had decimated the countryside. The conscription of young men and draft animals by warring armies robbed southern Ukraine of these valuable resources and hamstrung subsistence agriculture. The destruction of ethnic German settlements and agricultural equipment disrupted agricultural production and precipitated widespread hunger and disease.¹⁰¹ Second, during the preceding years, the Black Sea Germans had made themselves the archenemies of the new Soviet regime. As onetime staunch supporters of the tsarist autocracy, recipients of wartime German military assistance, and finally as allies of the White Army, the Black Sea Germans had, at every opportunity, thrown their lot in with Bolsheviks' avowed opponents. Soviet authorities routinely labeled local ethnic Germans, and particularly ethnic German men, as counter-revolutionaries and ordered their arrest, deportation, and often execution. This move exacerbated the deficit of Volksdeutsche men in the area and intensified economic hardship in the region's ethnic German communities.

⁹⁹ Fleischhauer, *Die Deutschen im Zarenreich*, 587-589.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 578.

¹⁰¹ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 25.

Despite their inauspicious early encounters with Soviet rule, the Black Sea Germans benefited from certain policies that the Soviet government pursued during the 1920s. In contrast to War Communism and its ruinous grain requisitions, the New Economic Policy (NEP), begun in 1921, permitted local German-speakers limited space for independent agricultural production. More importantly, Soviet nationalities policies during the 1920s, typified by *korenizatsiia* (nativization), endowed the Black Sea Germans with significant cultural freedom.¹⁰² Like the Volga Germans, whom the Soviet regime granted an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in 1924, the Black Sea Germans received substantial administrative and linguistic independence in southern Ukraine—privileges that the tsarist regime had denied the group during the First World War.¹⁰³ Local Volksdeutsche response to these measures was tepid at best. Not only were their economic opportunities under NEP more limited than they had been under the tsarist regime, but cultural autonomy in the face of anti-religious measures that the Soviet regime later implemented had little appeal to most area ethnic Germans.¹⁰⁴

For the Black Sea Germans, mass expropriation, famine, and arrest punctuated the 1930s. Beginning in the winter of 1929-30, the Soviet regime, with Josef Stalin now

¹⁰² See Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).

¹⁰³ On the Volga German Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, see A.A. German, *Nemetskaia avtonomiia na Volge: 1918-1941* (Saratov: Izdvo Saratovskogo universiteta, 1992).

¹⁰⁴ On Soviet repression of ethnic German clergy during the 1930s see O. Litsenberger, "Repressii protiv liutieranskikh i katolicheskikh sviashchennoslyzhitelei v SSSR," in *Nakazannyi narod: po materialam konferentsii "Repressii protiv rossiiskikh nemtsev v Sovetskom Soiuze v kontekste sovetskoi natsional'noi politike"*, ed I.L. Shcherbakova, (Moscow: Zven'ia, 1999)

Linguistic autonomy was also problematic because Soviet authorities insisted on High German as the lingua franca for the country's German minority. Soviet Volksdeutsche spoke an array of German dialects and objected to this imposed linguistic uniformity. Irina Mukhina, *The Germans of the Soviet Union* (London: Routledge, 2007), 31.

squarely at the helm, pursued an intense policy of dekulakization and collectivization. While local Soviet authorities had implemented these measures haphazardly, they now intensified. Alleged wealthy farmers, whom Soviet officials identified as “kulaks,” faced property confiscation, arrest, and deportation.¹⁰⁵ While the Soviet regime did not target German-speakers as an ethnic minority, dekulakization fell particularly hard on Ukraine’s historically economically productive Volksdeutsche. Despite accounting for only two percent of the region’s population, ethnic Germans constituted 15 percent of all “kulaks.”¹⁰⁶ This figure is particularly striking, given that Soviet statisticians had estimated that only three percent of the country’s peasant households merited categorization as kulaks.¹⁰⁷ Like many of their non-German neighbors, those Black Sea Germans who survived dekulakization found themselves compelled to surrender their property and join collective farms. An immediate consequence of dekulakization and collectivization was famine. Decreased agricultural output coupled with increased state grain requisition precipitated a famine across large portions of Ukraine during 1932 and 1933, claiming the lives of some 10 percent of the region’s population.¹⁰⁸ While the famine was particularly severe in eastern Ukraine, southern Ukraine’s Odessa oblast’, where most Black Sea Germans lived, was also hard hit.¹⁰⁹ In response to perceived rural recalcitrance and agricultural “sabotage,” the Soviet regime

¹⁰⁵ As Fitzpatrick notes, Soviet officials labeled individuals as “kulaks” for a host of reasons, not simply because of socio-economic class. Fitzpatrick, *Stalin’s Peasants*, 48-79. Also see Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

¹⁰⁶ Buchsweiler, *Volksdeutsche in der Ukraine*, 122.

¹⁰⁷ Fitzpatrick, *Stalin’s Peasants*, 29.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 69-76.

¹⁰⁹ Prior to the Second World War, Odessa oblast’ was significantly larger and included territory along the Bug River. Today, much of this region falls within Ukraine’s Mykolaiv oblast’.

intensified repressive measures in the countryside.¹¹⁰ Although, during the early 1930s, Soviet authorities did not target the Black Sea Germans as an ethnic minority and maintained much of the group's cultural and administrative independence, southern Ukraine's Volksdeutsche, like area non-Germans, felt the full brunt of Soviet agricultural policy.

In the latter half of the 1930s, the Soviet regime targeted southern Ukraine's Volksdeutsche as a suspect ethnic minority. The shift reflected a broader change in Soviet nationalities policy. Despite earlier efforts to spread the Soviet model by granting ethnic minorities extensive cultural and linguistic independence, beginning in 1935, the Soviet regime became concerned about the potential for diaspora populations to project foreign, capitalist influence within the Soviet Union. While the Soviet state remained suspicious of other minority groups, such as Finns, Poles, and Koreans, ethnic Germans constituted a particular problem for Soviet authorities. In late 1929, in the midst of increasingly repressive Soviet agricultural policies, thousands of Volksdeutsche descended on the German Embassy in Moscow and demanded assistance in obtaining exit visas. Public outrage in Germany at the condition of German-speakers in the Soviet Union precipitated intensive diplomatic engagement with the issue and the formation of a charity, *Brüder in Not* (Brothers in Need), to aid the country's Volksdeutsche.¹¹¹ Soviet fears that these initiatives were an effort to insert German influence into internal Soviet affairs intensified in 1933, when the vociferously anti-communist Nazi party assumed power in Germany.

Beginning in 1935, the Soviet regime began to pursue measures against ethnic minorities along Ukraine's western borderlands. It expanded the border region and deported

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 76-79.

¹¹¹ Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 319-320.

the area's ethnically Polish and German residents to Kazakhstan, where they became "special settlers" alongside kulaks, whom Soviet authorities had sent to the region a few years earlier.¹¹² By 1936, Soviet authorities had deported roughly half of the territory's Volksdeutsche to Central Asia.¹¹³ As the Black Sea Germans fell outside of the designated border zone, they weathered this initial wave of ethnically based deportation. Nevertheless, Soviet officials curtailed Germanophone administrative bodies and cultural institutions, eventually ending German-language education by the eve of the Second World War.¹¹⁴ Soviet authorities ramped up anti-German measures during the Great Terror of 1936-38. Inspired by the infamous NKVD decree 00447, in early 1938 the Politburo ordered the Soviet security apparatus to take repressive measures against a host of diaspora minorities, including German-speakers.¹¹⁵ At roughly the same time, local communist party officials in Odessa oblast' ordered the deportation of some 5,000 ethnic German households for suspected anti-Soviet activities.¹¹⁶ By the summer of 1941, a return to ethnic-based discrimination that the Black Sea Germans had first tasted under tsarist regime during the First World War underscored to local Volksdeutsche their increasingly endangered position under Soviet rule.

A Changing of the Guard: The Violent Summer of 1941

The beginning of Operation Barbarossa has been the topic of tremendous scholarly

¹¹² Ibid., 330. Natalija Rublova, "Die Deutschen in der sowjetischen Ukraine, 1933-1939," in *Die Volksdeutschen in Polen, Frankreich, Ungarn und der Tschechoslowakei: Mythos und Realität*, eds. Jerzy Kochanowski and Maïke Sach (Osnabrück: Fibre Verlag, 2006), 137-42.

¹¹³ Brown, *A Biography of No Place*, 160.

¹¹⁴ Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 332.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 337.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 336.

inquiry.¹¹⁷ Many researchers have rightly focused on the brutality of the German advance into Soviet territory and the role of German military and police forces in the murder of local residents, and especially Jews, during the campaign's opening months.¹¹⁸ Until very recently, however, scholars have rarely examined the extent to which the local population suffered at the hands of both retreating Soviet and advancing German forces.¹¹⁹ Examining violence that both Soviet and German authorities unleashed in tandem is not meant to relativize or minimize the unique intentionality with which the German invaders targeted civilians, and particularly Jews, for murder. Rather, examining the violent summer of 1941 is necessary to reconstruct the experiences of local residents, and specifically ethnic Germans, in the months leading up to Sonderkommando R's arrival in September 1941.

The German invasion of the Soviet Union caught the Soviet government and military completely off balance. During the first months of the invasion, the German Blitzkrieg was highly effective against often poorly organized Soviet resistance. The German and Romanian sweep through southern Ukraine was no exception. Although Antonescu's determination to capture Odessa without German assistance prevented the invaders from taking the city until the end of October 1941, the campaign in what would become Transnistria lasted a matter of weeks. While slowed by periods of intense fighting, German and Romanian forces wrested control of much of the region west of the Bug River from

¹¹⁷ See, for example, Geoffrey Megargee's work on the opening months of the campaign. Megargee, *War of Annihilation*.

¹¹⁸ See, for example, Dieter Pohl, "The Murder of Ukraine's Jews und German Military Administration and in the Reich Commissariat Ukraine," in *The Shoah in Ukraine: History, Testimony, Memorialization*, eds. Ray Brandon and Wendy Lower, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 23-76.

¹¹⁹ As Karel Berkhoff has observed, the Red Army and Soviet security apparatus behaved like a retreating army as it withdrew from much of Ukraine during the summer of 1941. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 33-34.

Soviet control by the end of August 1941.

Between the outbreak of hostilities and the Red Army's retreat in late July and early August 1941, Soviet authorities sought first to prepare defenses against the German and Romanian onslaught and then to evacuate matériel, agricultural equipment, and local residents to the country's interior. Like their tsarist predecessors a generation earlier, the Red Army and NKVD suspected that area Volksdeutsche would likely become a German fifth column and ramped up repressive measures against local German-speakers.¹²⁰ Beginning shortly after the start of the German offensive, Soviet authorities impressed area ethnic German men into forced labor squads and assigned them to dig trenches and construct other fortifications.¹²¹ When it became apparent to Soviet commanders that they would be unable to stop the German and Romanian thrust into southern Ukraine, Soviet military and security forces started stripping the countryside of livestock and agricultural equipment.¹²² Soviet authorities placed special emphasis on removing tractors and other agricultural machinery from the Machine Tractor Stations that peppered southern Ukraine's countryside.¹²³ This scorched earth policy appears to have been aided by a growing number of Slavs and Jews, who correctly anticipated their dire fate under occupation and scrambled to flee to the Soviet

¹²⁰ Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire*, 172.

¹²¹ Aussage von J. G., November 26, 1962, BAL, B162/2299, 142. Aussage von J. F., November 29, 1963, BAL, B162/2301, 18. Aussage von P. K., August 3, 1962, BAL, B162/2302, 102. Aussage von R. B., October 31, 1962, BAL, B162/2301, 4-5.

¹²² On Soviet evacuation of livestock, see Aussage von A. T., October 22, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 81. On Soviet evacuation of agricultural machinery, see Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von J. S., December 12, 1961, BAL, B162/2290, 140.

¹²³ Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von A. S., August 17, 1962, BAL, B162/2296, 176. Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von D. R., n.d., BAL, B162/2290, 133. Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von J. D., August 14, 1962, BAL, B162/2296, 166.

interior.¹²⁴ To transport livestock, agricultural machinery, and local residents across the Bug River, Soviet authorities turned to local Volksdeutsche men. Using area Volksdeutsche to shuttle animals, equipment, and refugees away from advancing German and Romanian forces accomplished two tasks simultaneously. It not only denied the invaders access to these important resources, but it also promised to remove a group that historically had demonstrated a willingness to collaborate with invading German forces.

Shortly before enemy forces reached the area, Soviet commanders ordered all ethnic German men from the ages of sixteen to sixty to assemble in their localities to staff the evacuation transports.¹²⁵ Some area Volksdeutsche anticipated that their departure would mean permanent relocation to the Soviet interior and hid in their homes or the surrounding countryside to await the German invaders.¹²⁶ Most ethnic German men, however, feared Soviet reprisals and mustered for transport duty. The forced evacuation transports departed southern Ukraine for the Bug River shortly before the area became a combat zone. As far as can be reconstructed from postwar statements, the evacuation was an amateurish enterprise. While Soviet authorities ordered ethnic Germans to use their wagons to transport civilian refugees across the Bug, there was no rail or truck transport available to relocate their livestock or agricultural equipment. Many area Volksdeutsche were left herding cattle and driving their tractors and threshing machines in a futile and undoubtedly halfhearted effort to

¹²⁴ Aussage von O. B., November 13, 1962, BAL, B162/2301, 41. Aussage von A. E., November 19, 1962, BAL, B162/2301, 152.

¹²⁵ Aussage von H. J., August 22, 1962, BAL, B162/2302, 187.

¹²⁶ Aussage von H. B., July 7, 1962, BAL, B162/2300, 94. Aussage von H. J., August 22, 1962, BAL, B162/2302, 187.

outrun German and Romanian forces.¹²⁷

The evacuation was predictably only partially successful. Owing to their greater speed, horse-drawn civilian evacuation transports tended to reach the Soviet interior. The relocation of livestock and agricultural equipment, which proceeded at a comparatively glacial pace, was far less successful. Advancing German military units overran many of these transports and freed their impressed drivers from their Soviet guards, who either fled or were taken prisoner.¹²⁸ After liberation, German soldiers ordered the Volksdeutsche transport drivers to return home with their livestock and agricultural equipment—a trek that took up to several weeks.¹²⁹ Although the rapidity of the German advance spared many Volksdeutsche from deportation to the Soviet interior, Soviet authorities managed to transfer a sizable portion of the region's population and economic infrastructure as well as no less than 6,000 ethnic German men behind the lines.¹³⁰ This final deportation of Volksdeutsche men fell particularly heavily on Black Sea German communities that had already lost many of their adult males to earlier Soviet arrests and deportations. It also underscored to local German-

¹²⁷ Protokol doprosa / Fet Ivan, May 18, 1948, USHMM, RG-38.018M, Reel 79, 3750-3752. Protokol doprosa / Renner Yakov Yakovich, May 18, 1948, USHMM, RG-38.018M, Reel 79, 3696. Aussage von A. E., November 19, 1962, BAL, B162/2301, 152. Aussage von A. H., November 23, 1962, BAL, B162/2299, 125. Aussage von A. T., October 22, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 81. Aussage von J. R., August 24, 1962, BAL, B162/2302, 5. Aussage von N. A., June 30, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 133. Aussage von N. R., November 3, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 97.

¹²⁸ Aussage von O. B., November 13, 1962, BAL, B162/2301, 40-41. Aussage von P. K., August 3, 1962, BAL, B162/2302, 102. Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung J. S., December 12, 1961, BAL, B162/2290, 140. Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von J.D., August 14, 1962, BAL, B162/2296, 166.

¹²⁹ Aussage von N. A., June 30, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 133. Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von J. D., August 14, 1962, BAL, B162/2296, 166.

¹³⁰ In October 1941, Soviet authorities estimated that they had removed 6,000 ethnic German men from southern Ukraine during the previous summer. Their ultimate destination was the Altai Republic, which borders Kazakhstan, Mongolia and China. Alfred Eisfeld and Victor Herdt, eds., *Deportation, Sondersiedlung, Arbeitsarmee: Deutsche in der Sowjetunion 1941 bis 1956* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1996), 98. Wartime German estimates pegged the number of Volksdeutsche men that Soviet authorities deported during the summer of 1941 at 7,500. Zusammenstellung: der aufgebauten kulturellen Einrichtungen von Sonderkommando 'R,' n.d., NARA, T175/ 72/2589157, 2589167.

speakers that their days under Soviet rule were numbered. Notwithstanding earlier hardships, southern Ukraine's Volksdeutsche had never faced the prospect of wholesale deportation from the region. Their experiences during the final weeks and days before the occupation highlighted to the Black Sea Germans the grim fate that awaited them should they again fall into Soviet hands. For local ethnic Germans, whose parents had fought against the Bolsheviks during the Russian Civil War and for whom Soviet rule had precipitated a multigenerational decline, this final, brutal period of Soviet power in southern Ukraine left them with little alternative but to welcome the arrival of German forces.

Early encounters between the Wehrmacht and local ethnic Germans appear to have been relatively benign. Not only had the German army liberated many local Volksdeutsche men, who otherwise might have become permanent residents of Central Asia, but it also provided the first line of defense against Romanian troops who had begun raiding Volksdeutsche settlements. The German army temporarily assumed responsibility for the safety of ethnic German communities by erecting placards to ward off their Romanian allies and stationing reserve units in the area to prevent further Romanian incursions.¹³¹

While the German Eleventh Army, which was deployed to southern Ukraine during the late summer of 1941, protected area ethnic German residents from Romanian banditry, its soldiers also tapped into the virulent animosity that many local Volksdeutsche felt toward the Soviet regime. During the 1920s and 1930s, Soviet authorities had arrested, deported, and sometimes executed suspected political opponents on the basis of denunciations from other local residents.¹³² Now, with German forces in control of the region, the shoe was on the

¹³¹ Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*, 261-66.

¹³² Aussage von E. T., May 20, 1965, BAL, B162/2304, 67. Aussage von A. K., October 10, 1964,

other foot. Local Volksdeutsche, whose relatives area residents had denounced to Soviet officials prior to the war, took their revenge by denouncing the informants to German forces as communist agents.¹³³ From the existing records, it is unclear to what extent the German army had orders to pursue suspected communists within area Volksdeutsche settlements. It appears, however, that initially individual Wehrmacht units responded to this groundswell of denunciations by carrying out summary executions. In the town of Speyer, some 45 kilometers northwest of Nikolaev (Mykolaiv), for example, an ethnic German woman merely flagged down a passing German tank and denounced the administrator of the local collective farm as a communist responsible for the Soviet-era deportations of local residents. A member of the tank's crew dismounted and shot the man before his unit continued eastward.¹³⁴ Perhaps to systematize what had been an ad hoc response to local Volksdeutsche denunciations, the Wehrmacht's *Geheime Feldpolizei* (Secret Field Police) launched investigations into the complicity of individual ethnic Germans in the Soviet regime's brutality, and particularly into the deportation of Volksdeutsche men immediately prior to the arrival of German forces.¹³⁵ Throughout Transnistria's Volksdeutsche settlements the Wehrmacht became a conduit for local ethnic German frustration with the Soviet regime by carrying out dozens of executions of suspected local Soviet collaborators.¹³⁶

BAL, B162/2303, 17. Aussage von E. E., May 30, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 104. On denunciation in the rural Soviet Union during the 1920s and 1930s, see Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants*, 254-261.

¹³³ The significance of denunciation in southern Ukraine during the summer of 1941 underscores Robert Gellately's earlier findings about its importance for Gestapo operations in Germany. Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*.

¹³⁴ Aussage von M. H., August 11, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 208.

¹³⁵ Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*, 267-68.

¹³⁶ Aussage von A. T., October 22, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 82.

The Wehrmacht's efforts were merely the initial salvo in the Nazi regime's efforts to purge southern Ukraine's Volksdeutsche settlements of political opponents and racial enemies—a project that would consume the attention of German officials in the area for years to come. As German military forces pushed deeper into the Soviet Union, Einsatzgruppe D assumed responsibility for the security of local Volksdeutsche settlements. Whereas the Wehrmacht responded to local denunciations by executing Volksdeutsche communists, Einsatzgruppe D's primary function was to purge the German military's rear areas of suspected communists and Jews. During mid-August 1941, Einsatzgruppe D's Einsatzkommandos swept through southern Ukraine's Black Sea German communities in search of local Soviet collaborators and Jews.¹³⁷ As earlier Wehrmacht units had discovered, area Volksdeutsche were eager to identify their perceived Soviet-era tormentors—both Jews and gentiles—to German authorities. Nevertheless, in deciding whether or not to denounce local residents to German forces area Volksdeutsche made nuanced assessments about individual complicity in the Soviet regime's violence. Einsatzgruppe D's personnel, however, were uninterested in determining the gradations of local involvement in the Soviet regime for area ethnic Germans, let alone for Jews, whose murder was a central part of their mission. Whereas local Volksdeutsche would have been content for German forces to kill area residents who were complicit in prewar Soviet terror, Einsatzgruppe D slated most former Soviet administrators and all local Jews for murder. As the unit's aims became apparent to area ethnic Germans—many of whom Einsatzgruppe D required to assist it in

¹³⁷ Aussage von A. E., November 19, 1962, BAL, B162/2301, 152-153. Aussage von A. E., November 16, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 123. Aussage von A. D., July 21, 1967, BAL, B162/2309, 18. Aussage von A. S., March 17, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 4. Aussage von A. M., October 15, 1962, BAL, B162/2300, 115-116. Aussage von A. F., May 22, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 131. Aussage von C. K., October 16, 1962, BAL, B162/2300, 129. Aussage von E. A., August 18, 1964, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2684, 29. Aussage von E. P., July 16, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 192. Aussage von F. V., June 24, 1970, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2702, 82.

disposing of its victims' bodies—some local residents attempted to retard the process that they had helped to set in motion. Prior to shooting operations, local ethnic Germans periodically interceded on behalf of those former Soviet administrators, whom they regarded as innocent of wrongdoing under Soviet rule.¹³⁸ Likewise, when it became apparent to local ethnic Germans that Einsatzgruppe D had resolved to murder not only individual Jews and Jewish families, but also the Jewish spouses, Volksdeutsche partners, and children of “mixed race” families, many ethnic German communities resolved to hide handfuls of more thoroughly integrated local Jews from the SS. The decision to shield selected Jews from Einsatzgruppe D would have lethal consequences when German authorities discovered this subterfuge the following year. While local residents supported and even encouraged the initial German drive to root out the enemies of National Socialism, as its proportions became evident, many local Volksdeutsche attempted often unsuccessfully to limit Einsatzgruppe D's murder campaign.¹³⁹

Einsatzgruppe D targeted not only a far more extensive group of residents than that with which most Volksdeutsche appeared comfortable, but also reintroduced a form of public violence into the region that had not been seen there since the upheaval of the Russian Civil War a generation earlier. With the exception of the Red Army's brutal retreat through the region during the preceding weeks, Soviet violence had been bureaucratized and, although an open secret, typically obscured from plain sight. Einsatzgruppe D's murderous sweep through the area during the summer of 1941 was precisely the opposite. Upon arriving in a Volksdeutsche settlement, the members of Einsatzgruppe D's Einsatzkommandos typically

¹³⁸ Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von E. H., December 29, 1961, BAL, B162/2290, 147. Aussage von A. E., November 19, 1962, BAL, B162/2301, 152-153.

¹³⁹ See chapter three for a detailed discussion of this phenomenon.

established a temporary local command post and solicited information from local residents about the identifies of Soviet agents and Jews, often using public meetings to encourage denunciations.¹⁴⁰ Upon identifying their targets, Einsatzgruppe D's personnel arrested alleged Jews and communists and detained them at their command post while local residents received orders to dig trenches at the edge of town. The Einsatzkommandos then shot their victims before advancing eastward. As Anton T., an ethnic German from the town of Landau (Shyrokolanivka), some 50 kilometers northwest of Nikolaev, later described one of Einsatzkommando 12's killing operations:

An SD unit of approximately 25 men arrived in Landau at the end of August 1941 and remained there at most 10 days. . . . These SD personnel shot 8 Jews in Landau, including an elderly local Jewish woman and seven other Jews, who all lived in the Landau's retirement home. The shooting took place at a sand pit 500 meters to the southwest of Landau. . . . Mayor F. ordered Willibald S., Michael W., and Johann L., and I to dig a pit the size of a double grave. Then the SD personnel arrived. After a time we heard the shots fired. Before that [however] Raphael S. the coachman from the retirement home had arrived. We found out from him that he had to drive the old Jews from the retirement home on a horse-drawn wagon to the pit. About 10 minutes after the shots were fired the SD personnel—it was four of them—came to us and ordered us to cover the grave.¹⁴¹

In a pattern that repeated itself through southern Ukraine, Einsatzgruppe D's personnel gunned down area residents whom they had identified as the enemies of National Socialism within plain sight of the local population. In some instances, Einsatzgruppe D's staff even posted signs announcing which inhabitants they had murdered.¹⁴² The opening of weeks of German rule in southern Ukraine left area Volksdeutsche with few illusions about the Nazi regime's desire to hunt down and murder Jews and suspected communists.

¹⁴⁰ Aussage von J. H., April 1, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 29. Aussage von O. W., November 19, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 170. Aussage von R. M., May 29, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 95-96.

¹⁴¹ Aussage von A. T., October 22, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 81.

¹⁴² Aussage von A. M., October 15, 1962, BAL, B162/2300, 117.

Conclusion

Einsatzgruppe D's peripatetic mass murder campaign constituted the historical nadir of a minority whose position in the region had deteriorated dramatically since the turn of the twentieth century. As the beneficiaries of the structural privileges that the tsarist regime had established at the beginning of the nineteenth century to attract settlers from central Europe to New Russia, the Black Sea Germans had maintained a dominant socio-economic position in southern Ukraine and a large measure of cultural and linguistic autonomy until the beginning of the First World War. Fearing the unreliability of this German-speaking minority along the Empire's periphery, tsarist officials took increasingly repressive measures against area Volksdeutsche during the first years of the conflict. While the establishment of the Provisional Government and the German army's brief occupation of southern Ukraine provided temporary relief, the October 1917 Russian Revolution and subsequent Russian Civil War brought new challenges. Having sided with the Whites during the Civil War, the Black Sea Germans were left to reap the whirlwind of a generation of Soviet rule in which local authorities targeted them first as political and class opponents and then as a potentially disloyal ethnic minority. Stripped of their property and, by the eve of the Second World War, of the remnants of their historical linguistic and cultural independence, the Black Sea Germans constituted a beleaguered minority prior to 1941. Between the end of June and the beginning of September 1941, both retreating Soviet and advancing German forces exposed the Black Sea Germans to a level of violence that was unprecedented even for a population that had, during the past thirty years, experienced world war, revolution, civil war, collectivization, famine, and the full brunt of the Soviet security apparatus. When Sonderkommando R arrived on the heels of Einsatzgruppe D's withdrawal in early

September 1941, it faced Germanophone enclaves whose economies were wrecked, whose men had been deported, whose livestock and agricultural equipment had been largely stolen, and whose Jews and former local leaders had been brutally and publicly murdered.

Although the legacy of Soviet interwar policies and the destruction wrought by Operation Barbarossa's opening months was not the ideal foundation for the Third Reich to launch its *völkisch* project, this history prepared area Volksdeutsche for Nazi rule in two ways. First, most local ethnic Germans grasped that, one way or another, they would never be able to return to their prewar Soviet existence. An increasingly persecuted minority under Stalin, in the final weeks of Soviet power in the region local Volksdeutsche caught a glimpse of what they could anticipate if they were again to come under Soviet control. In contrast to their experiences during the 1920s and 1930s, area ethnic Germans faced not random arrests and expropriation, but the wholesale deportation of their communities to the Soviet interior and the destruction of their way of life. Second, their contact with the Wehrmacht and Einsatzgruppe D had taught them two valuable lessons about their new German masters. On the one hand, in contrast to their generally positive experiences with the German army a generation earlier, initial encounters with German forces illustrated to area Volksdeutsche the intensity of the Nazi campaign to eliminate the Third Reich's racial and political opponents from local ethnic German communities. Within the context of mutual denunciations, area Volksdeutsche realized how easily they could become targets of Nazi violence. On the other hand, preliminary Nazi moves against Jews and accused Soviet collaborators highlighted the degree to which local residents could help shape the specific contours of Nazi violence. While the events of the preceding months left area ethnic Germans little choice but to embrace their German occupiers as the only viable alternative to Soviet rule, they realized

that their status in the new order would depend to a large extent on the inclinations of their recently arrived German overlords.

CHAPTER II: ORDINARY NAZIS AND ORDINARY MEN: HIMMLER'S AGENTS OF GERMANIZATION AND GENOCIDE IN TRANSNISTRIA

In February 1962, West German police interviewed Alexander Fetsch, a former mayor of the Volksdeutsche settlement Lichtenfeld. Regarding the town's commander, SS-Hauptsturmführer Nobert Pachschwöll, Fetsch explained: "in the Bereichkommando P[achschwöll] was a little God."¹⁴³ While Fetsch's quip reflected Volksdeutsche discontent with the VoMi's heavy hand during the occupation, it also underscored the importance of Sonderkommando R's personnel in shaping ethnic German policy and ultimately spearheading the Holocaust in the region. With few other German units permanently stationed in Transnistria, Hoffmeyer's underlings enjoyed an unparalleled opportunity to conceive and implement the Third Reich's plans for area Volksdeutsche. To understand the contours of the VoMi's Volksdeutsche policy in Transnistria, it is necessary to analyze the Germans whom Himmler charged with making "on the spot" decisions in the region. Were they "ordinary men" with little attachment to the Nazi regime or were they National Socialist "berserkers" (*Berserker*) for whom participation in the Third Reich's projects of racial revolution reflected deep-seeded attachment to the Nazi worldview?¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Aussage von A. F., February 23, 1962, BAL, B162/2291, 66.

¹⁴⁴ Volksdeutscher Oscar W. sympathized with Bereichkommando XIV's chauffeur, whom he described as a somewhat pitiful former taxi driver who had joined the NSKK for strictly professional reasons. Aussage von O. W., November 19, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 169. Gabriel K. referred to Franz Liebl as a "Bezirker." Aussage von G. K., September 18, 1963, BAL, B162/2302, 288.

This chapter aims to understand the men and women who dictated Volksdeutsche policy in Transnistria and ultimately catalyzed ethnic German involvement in the Holocaust, thereby creating a prosopography of Sonderkommando R. Without a wartime roster of the 200 to 300 German men and women whom the VoMi deployed to Transnistria, it is impossible to reconstruct an exhaustive collective biography of Hoffmeyer's subordinates. Nevertheless, a mass of identifiable wartime SS personnel files, *Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt* (Race and Settlement Main Office or RuSHA) marriage applications, individual ethnic German naturalization records, and the protocols of extensive statements that former members of the unit and their families gave to the West German police during the 1960s and 1970s permit a detailed collective biography of the unit. These records paint the portrait of an exceptionally if not uniquely diverse group of men and women, whose early life experiences, educational backgrounds, political orientations, organizational affiliations, and levels of anti-Semitism varied dramatically.

Notwithstanding these differences, two clear patterns emerge. First, on average the unit's leadership corps and professional staff demonstrated a deeper ideological attachment to National Socialism than did Sonderkommando R's rank-and-file personnel. Although the VoMi drew its managerial and professional staff from an array of sources, which ranged from Volksdeutsche "experts," to ethnic German "resettlers" from Eastern Europe, to undistinguished Nazi party "old fighters," to female medical professionals and career Nazi party organizers, a commitment to the National Socialist movement bound this diverse group together. By contrast, Sonderkommando R filled its ranks with National Socialist Motor Corps (*Nationalsozialistische Kraftfahrkorps* or NSKK) personnel, who typically did not exhibit a strong ideological commitment to Nazism. Second, despite its diversity,

Sonderkommando R maintained a surprising degree of cohesion that permitted it to function in the field. Although institutional rivalries between the unit's SS-dominated leadership corps and its subordinate organizations created friction within Sonderkommando R, particularly in its regional headquarters in Landau, a pair of factors mollified these tensions in rural areas, where most of its personnel operated. On the one hand, much of the unit's SS and NSKK personnel had participated together in the VoMi's earlier population "resettlements" in Eastern Europe. This established a common frame of reference that facilitated interactions between members of both groups. On the other hand, the abnormally high proportion of German women in the unit permitted Sonderkommando R's mid-level SS leaders to pursue romantic relationships in the field. Incestuous relations within the unit created what one scholar has described recently as a "clan society" (*Sippengemeinschaft*), which blunted inter-institutional tensions and strengthened interpersonal bonds within Sonderkommando R.¹⁴⁵ It was thus accident, rather than design, that permitted Sonderkommando R, a unit fraught by manifold cleavages, to function.

Scholars of the Holocaust have long probed the biographies of the Germans—and to a much lesser extent non-Germans—charged with implementing the Third Reich's murderous policies to understand their behavior.¹⁴⁶ Autobiographies, penned by heavily implicated Germans like Dr. Hans Frank and Rudolf Höss, are among the earliest accounts of

¹⁴⁵ Gudrun Schwarz, *Eine Frau an Seiner Seite: Ehefrauen in Der "SS-Sippengemeinschaft"* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1997).

¹⁴⁶ Biographies of Volksdeutsche perpetrators from the Soviet Union, in particular, have received recent scholarly attention. Dean, "Soviet Ethnic Germans and the Holocaust in the Reich Commissariat Ukraine, 1941-1944;" Lower, "Hitler's "Garden of Eden" in Ukraine: Nazi Colonialism, Volksdeutsche, and the Holocaust, 1941-44;" Eric C. Steinhardt, "The Chameleon of Trawniki: Jack Reimer, Soviet *Volksdeutsche* and the Holocaust," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 23, no. 2 (2009): 239-262. For recent research on non-German perpetrators from the Soviet Union see Pohl, "Ukrainische Hilfskräfte beim Mord an den Juden."

perpetrators.¹⁴⁷ Pioneering research by Hannah Arendt and Gitta Sereny employed biographical analysis of mass murderers to explain their motivations.¹⁴⁸ Although somewhat sidelined by social histories of the Third Reich and institutional studies of German agencies involved in the Final Solution during the 1970s and 1980s, biographical research on Holocaust perpetrators has enjoyed a renaissance in the past two decades.¹⁴⁹ Recent research has produced impressive collective biographies of the men who staffed the Third Reich's machinery of persecution and destruction.¹⁵⁰

This vein of research has yielded several important findings. First, it has underscored the importance of biographical variables in explaining perpetrator behavior. Michael Mann's quantitative analysis of Holocaust perpetrators, for example, suggests that the Third Reich's murderers originated disproportionately from border regions plagued by interethnic conflict prior to the Second World War.¹⁵¹ Similarly, Michael Wildt's study of the Reich Security Main Office's (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, RSHA) midlevel leaders points to biographical factors, such as a high level of participation in interwar radical student politics, in explaining

¹⁴⁷ Hans Frank, *Das Diensttagebuch des Deutschen Generalgouverneurs in Polen 1939-1945*, ed Werner Präg and Wolfgang Jacobmeyer (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1975); Rudolf Höss, *Commandant of Auschwitz: The Autobiography of Rudolf Hoess*, 1st ed. (Cleveland, OH: World Pub. Co, 1959).

¹⁴⁸ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*; Gitta Sereny, *Into That Darkness: An Examination of Conscience* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983).

¹⁴⁹ Peter R. Black, *Ernst Kaltenbrunner, Ideological Soldier of the Third Reich* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984); Richard Breitman, *The Architect of Genocide: Himmler and the Final Solution* (New York: Knopf, 1991); David Cesarani, *Becoming Eichmann: Rethinking the Life, Crimes, and Trial of a "Desk Murderer"* (Cambridge, M.A.: Da Capo Press, 2007); Ulrich Herbert, *Best: Biographische Studien über Radikalismus, Weltanschauung und Vernunft, 1903-1989* (Bonn: J.H.W. Dietz, 1996). Edouard Husson, *Heydrich et la Solution Finale* (Paris: Perrin, 2008); Peter Longerich, *Heinrich Himmler: Biographie* (Munich: Siedler, 2008).

¹⁵⁰ Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1986); Lozowick, *Hitler's Bureaucrats*; Orth, *Die Konzentrationslager-SS*. Safrian, *Die Eichmann-Männer*; Segev, *Soldiers of Evil*.

¹⁵¹ Michael Mann, "Were the Perpetrators of Genocide 'Ordinary Men' or 'Real Nazis'?": Results from Fifteen Hundred Biographies," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 14, no. 3 (2000): 343-66.

perpetrator behavior.¹⁵² Second, in light of this research, scholars have begun to sketch a more nuanced continuum of Holocaust perpetrators that ranges from killers, who maintained little particular affinity for the Third Reich's murderous agenda and whose participation in the Final Solution is best explained by specific situational factors, to perpetrators whose crimes reflected a *Weltanschauung* that preceded and often survived the war.¹⁵³

Recent collective biographies of Holocaust perpetrators have focused on the Third Reich's professional *génocidaires* rather than on case studies of military, police, and auxiliary units tasked with carrying out the Holocaust. This line of inquiry has shed much light on the heart of the Nazi "machinery of destruction," but it perhaps unwittingly presents a picture of fairly homogenous groups of thoroughly Nazified perpetrators. To capture the biographical diversity of Holocaust perpetrators, several recent edited volumes have highlighted the lives and careers of perpetrators who operated beyond the confines of the central Nazi security apparatus.¹⁵⁴ While this recent trend has provided a more variegated portrait of Hitler's executioners, recent scholarship has devoted less attention to sketching the collective biographies of German police and military units involved in the Holocaust and dissecting how biographical factors influenced unit dynamics.¹⁵⁵ This collective biography of Sonderkommando R's personnel in Transnistria aims to provide precisely such a

¹⁵² Wildt, *Generation des Unbedingten*.

¹⁵³ For discussion on the current state of this research see Paul, *Die Täter der Shoah*; Browning, "Ideology, Culture, Situation, and Disposition. Holocaust Perpetrators and the Group Dynamics of Mass Killing."

¹⁵⁴ Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Gerhard Paul, eds., *Karrieren der Gewalt: nationalsozialistische Täterbiographien* (Darmstadt : Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2004).

¹⁵⁵ A notable recent exception to this trend is Waitman Beorn's recent article on the involvement of a Wehrmacht unit in the Holocaust. Beorn, "Negotiating Murder: A Panzer Signal Company and the Destruction of the Jews of Peregruznoe, 1942." Browning's path-blazing study, *Ordinary Men*, employed similar analysis to examine group dynamics in Reserve Order Police Battalion 101. Browning, *Ordinary Men*.

contribution.

Sonderkommando R

Prior to reconstructing Sonderkommando R's collective biography, the unit's unique composition must be understood within the context of both its original purpose and its organizational antecedents. The Sonderkommando R's personnel were abnormally diverse because the SS created the unit for a unique purpose. Tasked with governing Volksdeutsche in the German-occupied Soviet Union, Sonderkommando R differed from the majority of German units involved in the Holocaust because it was part of neither the military nor the police. This special mission had two primary implications for the individuals that the VoMi wanted and could assign to the unit. First, despite the prominence of former soldiers and members of the Nazi security apparatus in Sonderkommando R, the VoMi placed a premium on personnel who could succor area ethnic Germans with material aid and provide them with appropriate National Socialist ideological instruction. The VoMi assigned specialized personnel with practical and theoretical experience in Volksdeutsche affairs, including teachers, doctors, Red Cross nurses, and dozens of professional Nazi party organizers. Second, the unit's specialized purpose limited the personnel that the Third Reich could devote to the enterprise. Sonderkommando R had no military application and, at the unit's genesis, there was little reason to suspect that its personnel would assist in the murder of the Soviet Union's Jews. When Himmler ordered Sonderkommando R's creation in spring 1941, Germany had not yet decided to murder Soviet Jewry. What more limited plans for the mass murder of the Soviet Union's Jews existed in late spring 1941 were the bailiwick of other German authorities and, in Transnistria, the responsibility of the Romanians.¹⁵⁶ At roughly

¹⁵⁶ The chronology of the origins of the Final Solution is a topic of tremendous historical debate.

the time at which the Third Reich began deploying middle-aged reservists and dragooning enemy prisoners of war to murder Jews—a project to which the Nazi regime devoted infinitely greater resources and assigned infinitely greater priority—the VoMi had slim pickings for Sonderkommando R.¹⁵⁷ Himmler, put simply, ran Sonderkommando R out of his back pocket.

While the VoMi cobbled Sonderkommando R together out of whatever manpower it could scrape together, it drew on its earlier Volksdeutsche “resettlement” campaigns in Eastern Europe for both inspiration and personnel. After the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Hitler charged Himmler, in his capacity as Reich Commissar for Strengthening of Germanism, with the task of relocating Volksdeutsche living on the western periphery of the newly defined Soviet sphere of influence to the “incorporated territories” of German-occupied Poland. As noted in the introduction, this policy constituted a marked departure from the German state’s post-1918 policies, which sought to maintain large German minority communities in Eastern Europe to secure influence there. Hitler, however, regarded their removal as necessary both to avoid conflict with the Soviet Union while Germany waged war against Great Britain and France and to preserve what the Nazis regarded as the biological

Absent new records that would suggest otherwise, Browning’s contention that the Nazi regime decided to murder Soviet Jewry in mid-July 1941 appears plausible. Christopher R. Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939-March 1942* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 314.

¹⁵⁷ Middle-aged reservists were the primary demographic group in Reserve Order Police Battalion 101. Browning, *Ordinary Men*. German authorities recruited some 5,000 Soviet POWs for training at its Trawniki facility near Lublin. See Peter Black, “Die Trawniki Männer und die “Aktion Reinhard”,” in *Der Völkermord an den Juden in Generalgouvernement 1941-1944*, ed Bogdan Musial (Osnabrück: Fibre Verlag, 2004), 309-352; Dieter Pohl, “Die Trawniki-Männer im Vernichtungslager Belzec 1941-1943,” in *NS-Gewaltherrschaft: Beiträge zur historischen Forschung und juristischen Aufarbeitung*, ed Alfred Gottwaldt, Norbert Kampe, and Peter Klein, vol. 11, Publikationen der Gedenk- und Bildungsstätte Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz (Berlin: Edition Heinrich, 2005), 278-289; David Alan Rich, “Reinhard’s Footsoldiers: Soviet Trophy Documents and Investigative Records as Sources,” in *Remembering for the Future: The Holocaust in an Age of Genocide*, ed John K. Roth and Elizabeth Maxwell, vol. 1, 2 vols. (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

building blocks needed to Germanize annexed Polish territories.¹⁵⁸ Between fall 1939 and fall 1940, Himmler charged the VoMi with relocating hundreds of thousands of Volksdeutsche from the Baltic, Volhynia and Podolia, and Bessarabia and northern Bukovina to the Greater German Reich and especially to West Prussia and the Warthegau. These VoMi “resettlement” units, which by 1940 numbered more than 1,000 members, shaped how Sonderkommando R filled its personnel needs in two ways. First, these Eastern European Volksdeutsche “resettlement” actions provided the VoMi with the organizational concept that it later applied to Sonderkommando R—namely large mixed units of motorized SS and non-SS personnel deployed to the East to take charge of local ethnic Germans. Second, the deployments, which Himmler regarded as highly successful, staffed the VoMi with a cadre of expert personnel. Sonderkommando R was thus the descendant and manpower beneficiary of earlier SS-orchestrated population transfers from Eastern Europe.

Sonderkommando R’s SS Leaders

An examination of Sonderkommando R’s leadership corps underscores both its personnel continuities with earlier VoMi operations in Eastern Europe and the cohort’s ideological commitment to the Nazi cause. Horst Hoffmeyer, the man to whom Himmler entrusted Sonderkommando R, remains one of the unit’s most enigmatic officers. Owing to the fact that Hoffmeyer committed suicide shortly after being captured by Soviet forces in Romania in August 1944, he was one of the few ranking Sonderkommando R officers not to have been questioned by German or Soviet officials. Surviving documentation about Hoffmeyer, however, paints the portrait of a meteoric advance through the SS’s ranks. Born in Posen (Poznań) in 1903, Hoffmeyer’s youth precluded service in the First World War but

¹⁵⁸ Lumans, *Himmler’s Auxiliaries*, 154.

not association with the interwar radical right.¹⁵⁹ At sixteen, Hoffmeyer enlisted in *Freikorps Grenzschutz Ost* (Free Corps Border Patrol East) and served with the unit for six months in 1919. The following year, upon leaving the Freikorps, Hoffmeyer joined *Stahlhelm* (Steel Helmet) and remained a member of that organization until 1923.¹⁶⁰

Hoffmeyer's activities during the late 1920s and early 1930s can be only partially reconstructed due to the fragmentary documentary record. According to his SS personnel file, Hoffmeyer joined the SA (*Sturmabteilung*, Stormtroopers) in March 1927.¹⁶¹

Hoffmeyer's wife later testified that when they married in Königsberg seven years later, he was working as a manager for Dr. Theodor Oberländer's *Bund Deutscher Osten* (League of the German East).¹⁶² The incorporation of this interwar *völkisch* organization under the VoMi's aegis during the mid-1930s presented Hoffmeyer with an entrée into the SS, which he embraced. To advertise his National Socialist credentials and to launch his SS career, Hoffmeyer likely embellished a detailed personal narrative of active, albeit secret, Nazi party membership dating back to 1927. According to a June 1935 letter that his former SA commander submitted to Erich Koch, East Prussia's *Gauleiter* (local Nazi party leader), Hoffmeyer's alleged but unspecified "special service" (*Sonderdienst*) required that his party membership remain off the books so that Hoffmeyer would not have to perjure himself if asked to testify in court.¹⁶³ Whether or not Koch found Hoffmeyer's story compelling is

¹⁵⁹ SS Offizier Akte Horst Hoffmeyer, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SSO-109A, 1376.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 1377.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² Aussage A. H., April 22, 1966, BAL, B 162/2306, 90.

¹⁶³ SS Offizier Akte Horst Hoffmeyer, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SSO-109A, 1397. In his examination of Hoffmeyer's personnel file, Lumans hypothesizes that his "special services" and references to his association with Hermann Behrends demonstrated Hoffmeyer's SD membership. Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, 56. That

unclear. Hoffmeyer's personnel file indicates, however, that he did not officially join the Nazi party until May 1937 and did not receive a commission in the SS until March 1939.¹⁶⁴ Based on VoMi chief SS-Obergruppenführer Werner Lorenz's March 3, 1939, recommendation, which indicates that Hoffmeyer's service with the VoMi prompted his request to transfer to the SS, it appears that Hoffmeyer's induction into the SS had more to do with the flow of career Volksdeutsche organizers into the SS than it did with any clandestine Nazi party activities a decade earlier.¹⁶⁵

Once in the SS, Hoffmeyer's superiors promoted him at an astonishing rate. Between March 1939 and October 1941—a mere two and half years—Hoffmeyer advanced six grades from the rank of SS-Untersturmführer to that of SS-Oberführer.¹⁶⁶ Hoffmeyer owed his success to two primary factors. First, Hoffmeyer distinguished himself through impressive wartime service in both the VoMi and in the Waffen-SS. In October 1939, Lorenz tapped Hoffmeyer to oversee the resettlement of Latvia's Baltic Germans in Riga. Following the completion of that operation the following month, Lorenz recommended Hoffmeyer for a promotion, complimenting his “outstanding character traits and his excellent service performance.”¹⁶⁷ Later that year, Hoffmeyer's superiors granted him sole command of arduous Volksdeutsche “resettlement” operations in Volhynia and Podolia, which relocated

the only reference to Hoffmeyer's “special services” to the Nazi party appears in a letter likely designed to secure a plum position for him in a new SS career makes Lumans's conclusion possible, but unlikely.

¹⁶⁴ SS Offizier Akte Horst Hoffmeyer, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SSO-109A, 1377.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 1415.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 1376.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 1394.

some 135,000 Volksdeutsche during the bitter winter of 1939-1940.¹⁶⁸ In the summer of 1940, Hoffmeyer spearheaded the “resettlement” of a roughly equal number of ethnic Germans from Bessarabia and northern Bukovina.¹⁶⁹ The VoMi delighted in Hoffmeyer’s performance during this final operation and published a glossy photo album in 1942 to extol its success.¹⁷⁰ After completing his duties for the VoMi in southeastern Europe, Hoffmeyer transferred to the Waffen-SS and took part in combat operations in Yugoslavia and Greece.¹⁷¹ Although Hoffmeyer had served as a reserve non-commissioned officer in the interwar German army, his combat experience undoubtedly beefed up his National Socialist vita and helped to overshadow his late entry into the Nazi party.¹⁷²

Second, for an officer of relatively low rank, there is evidence that Hoffmeyer came to Himmler’s attention. As Lumans notes, Himmler personally decorated Hoffmeyer in Przemyśl following the conclusion of VoMi operations in Volhynia and Polodia.¹⁷³ When interviewed by the West German police shortly before his death in 1974, the elderly Lorenz explained that Himmler had always been “very interested” in Hoffmeyer.¹⁷⁴ Under investigation by West German authorities for his involvement in Sonderkommando R’s crimes and eager to conceal his own close relationship with Hoffmeyer, Lorenz likely

¹⁶⁸ Lumans, *Himmler’s Auxiliaries*, 169.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 1389.

¹⁷⁰ Gerhard Wolfrum, *Der Zug der Volksdeutschen aus Bessarabien und dem Nord-Buchenland* (Berlin: Volk und Reich Verlag, 1942).

¹⁷¹ SS Offizier Akte Horst Hoffmeyer, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SSO-109A, 1399.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 1387.

¹⁷³ Lumans, *Himmler’s Auxiliaries*, 162.

¹⁷⁴ Vernehmung von Werner Lorenz, April 16, 1973, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2787, 101.

exaggerated the Himmler-Hoffmeyer connection to mask his own role in Transnistria.¹⁷⁵ Hoffmeyer's relationship with Himmler appears to have operated on a professional, rather than on a personal level. Surviving wartime records of meetings between Himmler and Hoffmeyer support this conclusion. Himmler's day planner, for example, lists six meetings between the two men between August and December 1942.¹⁷⁶ With the exception of the year's final meeting on New Year's Eve, at which Lorenz and Hoffmeyer lunched with Himmler at his Hochwald compound in East Prussia, the other five meetings all occurred during Himmler's trips to Ukraine.¹⁷⁷ According to a 1942 British intercept of German police radio traffic, it took Hoffmeyer four months to schedule his first recorded appointment with Himmler in 1942.¹⁷⁸ Although he never entered Himmler's circle of intimate acquaintances, Hoffmeyer had, within the course of five years, parlayed a lackluster career as a Volksdeutsche organizer into that of a battle-hardened SS officer and Himmler's point man for ethnic German affairs.

SS-Obersturmführer Dr. Klaus Siebert, Hoffmeyer's subordinate during these earlier Volksdeutsche "resettlement" operations and later Sonderkommando R's first executive officer in Transnistria, had a more typical, if less spectacular SS career. Born near Dessau to

¹⁷⁵ Lorenz, for example, claimed that Himmler removed Hoffmeyer from his chain of command and subordinated Sonderkommando R to the *Höhere SS- und Polizeiführer* (Higher SS and Police Leader). Vernehmung von Werner Lorenz, April 16, 1973, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2787, 102. As such a position did not exist for Transnistria, Hoffmeyer reported directly to Himmler. While perhaps technically true, wartime British radio decryptions of German police radio traffic demonstrate that Hoffmeyer remained at least partially under Lorenz's command. During the evacuation of Transnistria's Volksdeutsche, for example, Lorenz called Hoffmeyer on the carpet for failing to report in and admonished him that "it is to be avoided that other Reich offices are better informed than me." German Police Decodes No. 1 Traffic: 18.4.44, BNA, HW 16, Piece 40, 3.

¹⁷⁶ Peter Witte, Uwe Lohalm, and Wolfgang Scheffler, eds., *Der Dienstkalender Heinrich Himmlers 1941/42* (Hamburg: Christians, 1999), 511, 524, 553, 591-592, 600-601.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 660.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 524.

a chemist and his wife in 1904, Siebert was a committed *völkisch* activist and an enthusiastic, early adherent to National Socialism.¹⁷⁹ Like Hoffmeyer, while Siebert's youth prevented him from serving in the First World War, he demonstrated a commitment to rightwing politics. Attaching himself to a local German army unit in late 1919, the sixteen-year-old Siebert took part in the abortive Kapp Putsch the following year.¹⁸⁰ Returning home after his unit's dissolution in March 1920, Siebert concluded his *Gymnasium* studies and passed the Abitur in 1922. After completing apprenticeships in business and farming, Siebert undertook an agricultural science course in 1925, studying at the universities of Königsberg and Breslau.¹⁸¹ Following his initial studies in 1928, Siebert and three of his friends sought some practical agricultural experience and set off on a month-long hike through the Baltic States in search of "German agriculture."¹⁸² Upon his return to Königsberg, Siebert completed his doctoral degree in agricultural science in 1930.¹⁸³

Unlike Hoffmeyer's murky initial commitment to National Socialism, Siebert was an early Nazi activist and a career SD officer. Shortly after completing his doctoral studies, Siebert, as he later described in his personnel file's autobiography, "followed the call of the Carinthian *Heimabund* in Klagenfurt" to help repopulate the region as a demographic bulwark against growing encroachments by neighboring Slavs.¹⁸⁴ Purchasing a 60-hectare

¹⁷⁹ SS Offizier Akte Klaus Siebert, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SSO-135B, 483. Aussage von K. S., October 30, 1963, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2690, 73.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 496.

¹⁸¹ Aussage von K. S., October 30, 1963, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2690, 73.

¹⁸² SS Offizier Akte Klaus Siebert, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SSO-135B, 496.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

farm north of Klagenfurt, the newly-wed Siebert divided his time between raising a family and organizing Austria's clandestine Nazi party.¹⁸⁵ In March 1932, Siebert joined the Klagenfurt's SA and, after offering his farm as a meeting place for local Nazis, rose to the rank of SA-Sturmführer.¹⁸⁶ Siebert's participation in a second failed putsch—this one in 1934 against the Austrian government—forced him to slip across the Yugoslavian frontier and return to Germany.¹⁸⁷

His livelihood martyred for the National Socialist cause, Siebert, much like Adolf Eichmann a year earlier, sought employment with the Nazi party.¹⁸⁸ Assigned to the SD Main Office (*Hauptamt*) in Berlin's Wilhelmstrasse in January 1935, Siebert quickly secured a commission as an SS-Untersturmführer and sent for his wife and two young daughters, who had remained laboring on their Carinthian farm.¹⁸⁹ Siebert's initial responsibilities entailed the surveillance of other Nazi party organizations.¹⁹⁰ Over the next three and a half years Siebert advanced steadily, reaching the rank of SS-Sturmbannführer and securing a post in the RSHA's Department (*Abteilung*) III, specializing in internal intelligence.¹⁹¹ In November 1939, Siebert's superiors seconded him to aid the VoMi in its Volksdeutsche population transfers.¹⁹² As Hoffmeyer's second in command, Siebert took part in all of the VoMi's

¹⁸⁵ Aussage von K. S., October 30, 1963, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2690, 73.

¹⁸⁶ SS Offizier Akte Klaus Siebert, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SSO-135B, 497.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Cesarani, *Becoming Eichmann*, 36.

¹⁸⁹ Aussage von K. S., October 30, 1963, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2690, 74.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

Eastern European ethnic German “resettlement” campaigns, including Hoffmeyer’s much-fêted Bessarabian operation.¹⁹³ Although in his postwar statements to the West German police Siebert claimed that his transfer to the VoMi occurred in late 1939, his SS personnel file indicates that he remained an active SD officer temporarily attached to the VoMi until his permanent transfer to Sonderkommando R in June 1941.¹⁹⁴ Excluding his personal *völkisch* farming enterprise in Austria, Siebert, unlike Hoffmeyer, had no experience in Volksdeutsche matters prior to 1939. While the VoMi’s wartime manpower needs likely contributed to Siebert’s assignments to the organization in 1939 and 1940, it is also conceivable that his established National Socialist track record assured Hoffmeyer’s superiors that the VoMi’s population transfers and its then untested commander remained in good hands.

Beyond providing a test bed for Sonderkommando R’s senior leaders, the VoMi’s earlier “resettlement” operations became a school for Eastern European Volksdeutsche specialists, who ultimately formed the unit’s mid-level leadership core as *Bereichkommandoführer* (Regional Commanders). SS-Untersturmführer Franz Liebl, *Bereichkommandoführer* of Lichtenfeld’s *Bereichkommando XX*, typified the SS officers who cut their teeth under Hoffmeyer’s command elsewhere in Eastern Europe in 1939 and 1940. Born at the turn of the century in Mannheim, Liebl spent his childhood in Riga. Interned by Russian authorities at the beginning of the First World War as a German national, Liebl returned to Germany after Riga’s occupation by German forces more than three years later. He served in the German Army from August 1918 until Germany’s capitulation in November of that year. After the end of the First World War, Liebl drifted in and out of

¹⁹³ SS Offizier Akte Klaus Siebert, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SSO-135B, 521.

¹⁹⁴ Aussage von K. S., October 30, 1963, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2690, 74. SS Offizier Akte Klaus Siebert, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SSO-135B, 498.

paramilitary organizations and the military, serving for five months in both the Freikorps and the German army. Upon exiting the German army in February 1920, Liebl married and settled into a relatively stable existence as a civil servant.¹⁹⁵

Liebl's brief experience with Germany's postwar right-wing paramilitary units apparently whetted his appetite for radical politics. Liebl joined the Nazi party in February 1932, more than a year before party membership became an occupational norm for government employees.¹⁹⁶ From 1932 until 1939 Liebl served as a Nazi party *Ortsgruppenleiter* (Local Group Leader).¹⁹⁷ Exactly how and when Liebl joined the VoMi is unclear. A July 1944 notation in his personnel file indicates that he was a member of the VoMi "since the beginning of the resettlements."¹⁹⁸ Owing to the fact that he had lived in the Baltic as a youth and spoke both Latvian and Russian, it seems highly likely that the VoMi tapped Liebl to accompany Hoffmeyer to Riga in October 1939.¹⁹⁹ Liebl's role in the VoMi's subsequent resettlement operations is more evident. In late 1939 and early 1940, Liebl ran a reception camp in Germany for Volksdeutsche "resettlers" from Volhynia and Podolia. Later in 1940, Liebl accompanied Hoffmeyer and Siebert to Bessarabia and assisted in relocating ethnic Germans from those territories. After a brief deployment with the VoMi to Lithuania later that year, Liebl received a discharge from the organization.²⁰⁰ When the VoMi began

¹⁹⁵ SS Offizier Akte Franz Liebl, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SSO-260A, 596-597.

¹⁹⁶ Aussage von F. J. L., January 16, 1965, BAL, B162/2303, 305. SS Offizier Akte Franz Liebl, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SSO-260A, 596.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 596.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 598.

¹⁹⁹ Aussage von F. J. L., January 16, 1965, BAL, B162/2303, 305.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

forming Sonderkommando R little more than a year later, the SS reactivated Liebl for service and deployed him to southern Ukraine.²⁰¹ While, like many of his fellow Bereichskommandoführer, Liebl had previous experience with Eastern Europe and had demonstrated an affinity for the Nazi cause, it was his participation in the VoMi's earlier Volksdeutsche "resettlement" actions that had prepared him for a midlevel leadership position in Sonderkommando R.²⁰²

Earlier VoMi resettlement campaigns also permitted Nazi academic specialists on ethnic Germans to gain practical experience that they would later apply to Transnistria. Dr. Gerhard Wolfrum, Sonderkommando R's resident intellectual, knew both Hoffmeyer and Siebert before 1939. All three men enjoyed a strong connection to both Theodor Oberländer and the University of Königsberg, where Oberländer held a university chair during the mid-1930s. Wolfrum in particular maintained an intimate relationship with Oberländer prior to and then especially after the Second World War, when he served as Oberländer's personal advisor during the latter's tenure as *Bundesminister für Vertriebene* (Minister of Expellee Affairs) during the mid-1950s. A child of a university professor, Wolfrum was born in Leipzig in 1911.²⁰³ Although neither his SS officer file nor his disingenuous 1965 statement to the West German police offer much insight into his youth, his political orientation during the 1930s is evident. At the age of twenty-two, Wolfrum joined the SA months after the Nazi seizure of power and, like Hoffmeyer, assumed a leadership role in the *Bund Deutscher*

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Liebl himself noted this personnel continuity. Ibid., 306.

²⁰³ SS Offizier Akte Gerhard Wolfrum, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SSO-001C, 731. Aussage von G. W., May 21, 1965, BAL, B 162/2304, 347.

Osten in East Prussia a few years later.²⁰⁴ After completing his doctoral degree in history at the University of Königsberg, Wolfrum published his first book through the organization entitled *Die polnischen territorialen Forderungen gegen Deutschland in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung* (*Polish Territorial Claims against Germany and their Historical Development*) in 1936.²⁰⁵ Wolfrum joined the Nazi party in May 1937.²⁰⁶ Mobilized for the German army in August 1939, Wolfrum participated in the invasion of Poland. Attached to an artillery unit, Wolfrum sustained injuries in an accident behind the front two days after the start of the German offensive and spent the remainder of his Wehrmacht service convalescing in a Königsberg military hospital.²⁰⁷

Following his recovery, Wolfrum joined the VoMi. Selected by Hoffmeyer personally for his expertise in Volksdeutsche matters, Wolfrum took part in the VoMi's 1940 relocation of the Bessarabian and Bukovinian Germans. Awarded an SS commission commensurate with his role as VoMi *Abteilungsleiter* (Departmental Director), Wolfrum wrote the mission's operational history, which Volk und Reich Verlag published in 1942 as a glossy photo album complete with Lorenz's foreword.²⁰⁸ Wolfrum's offhanded comments about Slavs and Jews in *Der Zug der Volksdeutschen aus Bessarabien und dem Nord-Buchenland* (*The Migration of Ethnic Germans from Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina*) suggests that he had

²⁰⁴ SS Offizier Akte Gerhard Wolfrum, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SSO-001C, 724.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 723. Gerhard Wolfrum, *Die polnischen territorialen Forderungen gegen Deutschland in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung*. (Königsberg: Bund Deutscher Osten, 1936).

²⁰⁶ SS Offizier Akte Gerhard Wolfrum, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SSO-001C, 744.

²⁰⁷ Aussage von G. W., May 21, 1965, BAL, B 162/2304, 348.

²⁰⁸ SS Offizier Akte Gerhard Wolfrum, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SSO-001C, 770.

internalized Nazi stereotypes of both groups.²⁰⁹ Recounting the unit's entry into the Soviet Union, Wolfrum described incompetent and brutish Soviet border guards who "rifled through every article of clothing with [their] dirty fingers."²¹⁰ Wolfrum explained how the VoMi doctor's apparently exotic medical instruments mystified Soviet border guards and quipped that the physician bore the brunt of the inspection.²¹¹ These inconveniences, however, were nothing compared the roadblocks thrown up by their Soviet counterpart, "the Jew Dobkin," who attempted to sabotage the VoMi's operation at every turn.²¹² Although no evidence links Wolfrum to a 1942 VoMi request on his behalf that a "Jewish apartment" be placed at his disposal to facilitate his family's relocation to Berlin, given his apparent distain for Slavic *Untermenschen* and "Jew-Bolsheviks," it appears doubtful that he would have objected.²¹³

Ethnic Germans, whom the VoMi had relocated to Germany in earlier population transfers from Eastern Europe, constituted a disproportionate number of Sonderkommando R's officers. The reasons for this were two-fold. First, as non-German citizens, Volksdeutsche could not be conscripted for Wehrmacht service and were a group that SS recruiters earmarked to fill their bottomless manpower needs. Given that ethnic Germans received SS commissions commensurate with their participation in right-wing *völkisch* organizations abroad during the interwar period, they constituted a particularly ideologically committed group of SS officers. Second, the SS appears to have selected Eastern European Volksdeutsche with esoteric language skills for Sonderkommando R. Although the absence

²⁰⁹ Wolfrum, *Der Zug der Volksdeutschen*.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 10.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid., 24.

²¹³ SS Offizier Akte Gerhard Wolfrum, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SSO-001C, 751.

of VoMi records on the subject frustrates efforts to draw conclusions about its plans to staff Sonderkommando R, the substantial number of Russian and Romanian-speaking ethnic Germans that it deployed to Transnistria as officers suggests that the VoMi anticipated the unit's polyglot needs and assigned what ethnic German SS officers that it had at its disposal.

The composition of Sonderkommando R's Volksdeutsche SS officers reflected the ethnic German populations that the VoMi had relocated prior to the onset of Operation Barbarossa. The VoMi assigned a large number of recent Baltic German émigrés to Sonderkommando R. Freiherr Erich Edgar Alexander von Sievers exemplified this trend. Born in 1896 on his family's centuries-old ancestral estate Gotthardsberg in what was then the Livland province of the Russian Empire, von Sievers was a prototypical anti-Bolshevik and *völkisch* activist.²¹⁴ Educated by private tutors until the age of eleven, when he pursued secondary education at the German *Gymnasium* in Reval (Tallinn), von Sievers was a member of the area's Baltic German aristocracy. Mustered for service in the Russian army in 1917, von Sievers fled overland to Finland in the hopes of traveling to Germany via neutral Sweden and enlisting in the German military. Tsarist officials apprehended him before reaching the Swedish frontier and von Sievers spent the remaining months of the *ancien régime* as a prisoner in Krasnoyarsk.²¹⁵ Returning to the Baltic after the Russian Revolution in an abortive attempt to take up his studies at the University of Dorpat (Tartu), von Sievers quickly secured a commission in the *Baltische Landwehr* (Baltic Militia).²¹⁶ Wounded in Kurland in January 1919, von Sievers retained his commission until the Baltische

²¹⁴ SS Offizier Akte Erich von Sievers, NARA, RG 242, A 3343, SSO-139B, 938, 950.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 950.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

Landwehr's dissolution the following year.²¹⁷

Unable to prevent the genesis of an independent Latvian state, von Sievers relocated to Germany, where he began his studies anew at the University of Berlin.²¹⁸ After receiving a scholarship to continue his education at the University of Jena, von Sievers relocated to the city and began courting Freifrau Erika von Richter, a fellow Baltic German aristocratic refugee. The two married in 1923.²¹⁹ Returning to Latvia without concluding his studies, von Sievers and his new wife began administering the 70 hectares that remained of his ancestral holdings after the Latvian Republic's postwar agricultural reforms.²²⁰ Diminished in wealth, but not *völkisch* fervor, von Sievers established himself as the leader of the Baltic German farmers' organization during the interwar period.²²¹

While von Sievers had returned to Latvia after a brief self-imposed exile during the early 1920s, perhaps anticipating the growing Soviet threat, he and the rest of his extensive clan immigrated to German-occupied Poland as part of Hoffmeyer's 1939 "resettlement operation."²²² Von Sievers began working for the SS on November 21, 1939, and received German citizenship two days later.²²³ Although von Sievers's SS intake officers maintained reservations about his only son Gert, whose apparently underdeveloped "physical and mental condition" perturbed them, they nevertheless praised von Sievers's "exemplary leadership

²¹⁷ Ibid., 939, 947-948.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 946.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 938.

²²⁰ Ibid., 946.

²²¹ Ibid., 1006.

²²² A careful examination of the von Sievers family's *Einbürgerungsanträge* (Naturalization Applications) illustrates this exodus, which included many of the clan's elderly members.

²²³ *Einbürgerungsantrag* Erich von Sievers, NARA, RG 242, A3343, EWZ53 H042, 1148.

qualities in the struggle for the German race.”.²²⁴ After only six months of working for the SS and even less time as a German citizen, von Sievers’s superiors awarded him a commission as an SS-Sturmabführer, permitting him to jump three grades automatically.²²⁵ Both von Sievers’s activities in interwar Latvia and his brief service for the Reich impressed the SS, which sought to secure a suitable estate in German-occupied Poland to reward his loyalty and compensate him for his family’s partial expropriation in interwar Latvia. On July 1, 1941, shortly before the SS seconded him to Sonderkommando R, Himmler personally awarded von Sievers the 508-hectare Buchwalden estate near present-day Września, Poland.²²⁶ Pegged for advancement in the SS even before he received German citizenship, von Sievers’s language skills and interwar *völkisch* activism added both practical and ideological contributions to Sonderkommando R.

Although Baltic Germans received unique opportunities to advance in the VoMi, Volksdeutsche from southeastern Europe also constituted a smaller and less well-documented, but nevertheless significant group of SS officers in Sonderkommando R. Like von Sievers and the unit’s other Baltic Germans, Theophil Weingärtner had an ideological adherence to the SS’s *völkisch* project and obscure language skills. Sparse naturalization and SS personnel records combined with Weingärtner’s probable suicide at the war’s end, which denied postwar investigators the opportunity to question him, create obstacles in reconstructing Weingärtner’s biography and VoMi career path.²²⁷ Nevertheless, a

²²⁴ SS Offizier Akte Erich von Sievers, NARA, RG 242, A 3343, SSO-139B, 1019. Einbürgerungsantrag Erich von Sievers, NARA, A3343, EWZ53 H042, 1144.

²²⁵ Ibid., 1148. SS Offizier Akte Erich von Sievers, NARA, RG 242, A 3343, SSO-139B, 938.

²²⁶ Einbürgerungsantrag Erich von Sievers, NARA, A3343, EWZ53 H042, 1146.

²²⁷ Ethnic Germans from Weingärtner’s Bereichkommando and former colleagues recounted hearsay

fragmentary portrait emerges. Born near Teplitz (Teplitza) in Bessarabia in 1909, Weingärtner divided his formative years between Romania and Germany, where he studied theology at the Universities of Königsberg and Berlin apparently without completing a degree.²²⁸ A member of the crypto-fascist *Erneuerungsbewegung* (Renewal Movement) in Romania since 1933, he demonstrated an early affinity for National Socialism.²²⁹ Despite the fact that Weingärtner had served in the interwar Romanian army, whatever attachment he felt to that country did not prevent him from relocating to Germany in 1940 as part of Hoffmeyer's "resettlement" of the Bessarabian Germans.²³⁰

Weingärtner's established political credentials smoothed his entry into the Waffen-SS a full three months before he applied for German citizenship.²³¹ Trumpeted as a "flawless ethnic German" by his SS evaluator, Weingärtner was assigned first to the staff of Danzig's *Höhere SS und Polizeiführer* (Higher SS and Police Leader) and then to the Reich Commissar for the Strengthening of Germandom, where he worked from February through August 1941.²³² Recruited by Hoffmeyer personally for service in Transnistria, Weingärtner impressed his new colleagues. Writing in support of Weingärtner's efforts to obtain an estate

evidence that he and his family committed suicide in 1945 to avoid capture by advancing Soviet forces. Aussage von A. G., November 28, 1962, BAL, B162/2301, 156 (verso). Aussage von A. F., May 22, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 133. Aussage von E. F., January 13, 1965, BAL, B162/2303, 285. Aussage von H. A., November 22, 1962, BAL, B162/2301, 158 (verso). Aussage von W. F., October 17, 1962, BAL, B162/2300, 123.

²²⁸ SS Offizier Akte Theophil Weingärtner, NARA, A3343, SSO-229B, 468. Einbürgerungsantrag Theophil Weingärtner, NARA, A3343, EWZ51 G011, 1342.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ SS Offizier Akte Theophil Weingärtner, NARA, A3343, SSO-229B, 469.

²³¹ Weingärtner's naturalization application, dated September 10, 1940, notes that he had served in the Waffen-SS since the beginning of May of that year. Einbürgerungsantrag Theophil Weingärtner, NARA, A3343, EWZ51 G011, 1342-1343.

²³² SS Offizier Akte Theophil Weingärtner, NARA, A3343, SSO-229B, 468, 473.

in German-occupied Poland in November 1942, SS-Sturmbannführer Karl Götz, a fellow Sonderkommando R officer, praised him as “one of the most diligent men in our ranks” whom he valued “equally highly as a person, SS man and comrade.”²³³ Notwithstanding Götz’s kind words, Weingärtner’s seemingly interminable struggles to obtain an estate a paltry fifth the size of the one that von Sievers had secured suggests that, while in the SS’s eyes all Volksdeutsche were better than non-Germans, not all Volksdeutsche were equal.²³⁴

Although most of Sonderkommando R’s senior and midlevel leaders had participated in earlier VoMi missions in Eastern Europe either as members of Hoffmeyer’s staff or as ethnic German “resettlers,” Nazi party “old fighters,” who lacked experience with ethnic German affairs, also constituted a portion of Sonderkommando R’s leadership corps. Frequently too aged for military service and too incompetent for assignments that the SS considered more critical, their primary qualification was deep seeded ideological commitment to the Nazi cause. Transferring these third-rate troops to the VoMi satisfied two SS concerns simultaneously. On the one hand, these comparatively elderly officers were one of the only available manpower pools that remained at the SS’s disposal. On the other hand, VoMi postings were a way for the regime to reward long-time National Socialists who had proven their loyalty to the movement and yet failed to receive a plum position.

For Paul Mattern, Groß-Liebenthal’s Bereichkommandoführer, an assignment to Sonderkommando R constituted a modest and much-delayed reward for years of party service.²³⁵ Born in Mohrunen, East Prussia, in 1895, Mattern was a textbook Nazi party

²³³ Ibid., 471.

²³⁴ Ibid., 476-487.

²³⁵ GML Nr. 140, n.d., BNA, HW 16, Piece 60, 124.

“old fighter.”²³⁶ After his elementary education, Mattern completed an apprenticeship as a gardener prior to 1914.²³⁷ At the First World War’s outbreak, the nineteen-year-old Mattern enlisted in the German army. Defending his native East Prussia from advancing Russian troops, Mattern’s father perished during the war’s opening campaigns.²³⁸ Stationed initially on the Eastern Front, Mattern redeployed to France to take part in the 1916 Verdun offensive. Decorated with the Iron Cross Second Class and promoted to the rank of *Unteroffizier* (non-commissioned officer), Mattern ended the war as a machine gun instructor.²³⁹ Following his demobilization, he returned to his home in East Prussia, purchased a floral shop, and married.²⁴⁰

Life as an unsuccessful florist failed to satisfy the former machine gunner and by the end of the 1920s Mattern’s restlessness gave way to rightwing political agitation. He joined the Stahlhelm in 1927 and both the SA and the Nazi party in 1932.²⁴¹ By the eve of the Nazi seizure of power, Mattern had advanced to the rank of SA-Sturmführer.²⁴² An active local Nazi enforcer, he played a key role in establishing the party’s control in East Prussia. One night in March 1933, Mattern and his SA subordinates took the SPD (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, Social Democratic Party of Germany) mayor of neighboring Freiwalde, Reinhold P., into *Schutzhaft* (protective custody) on the charge of discharging a firearm

²³⁶ Aussage von P. M., July 9, 1956, BAL, B162/2295, 96.

²³⁷ Aussage von P. M., March 13, 1962, BAL, B162/2292, 147.

²³⁸ Eidesstattliche Erklärung von P. M., December 15, 1956, BAL, B162/2295, 111.

²³⁹ Aussage von P. M., March 13, 1962, BAL, B162/2292, 147.

²⁴⁰ Aussage von P. M., July 9, 1956, BAL, B162/2295, 96.

²⁴¹ Aussage von P. M., March 13, 1962, BAL, B162/2292, 147.

²⁴² Aussage von P. M., July 9, 1956, BAL, B162/2295, 96.

illegally.²⁴³ Although Mattern would later dispute these accusations during a postwar West German investigation into the night's events, other witnesses implicated him as the orchestrator of P.'s nocturnal abduction and likely assassination.²⁴⁴ Perhaps as a reward for decapitating local SPD resistance in East Prussia, Mattern advanced in the SA. Marked as a future SA leader, Mattern completed an impressive array of leadership training courses throughout Germany. After concluding his training, Mattern advanced to the rank of SA-Obersturmführer and served as a small arms instructor at the SA academies first, in Memmingen and later in Kapfenburg.²⁴⁵ By mid-1934, Mattern's star in the SA was rising.

Were it not for the June 1934 Röhm Putsch, it is likely that Mattern would have enjoyed a reasonably successful SA career. Like many members of the SA, however, Mattern's prospects faded with the organization's precipitous decline in significance. Following the dissolution of the *SA-Sportschule* (Sports Academy) Kapfenburg the following year, Mattern found himself unemployed. After applying at the local employment office, he obtained work as a municipal gardener in Schäbisch-Gmünd. Dissatisfied with his hefty demotion, although apparently undeterred in his enthusiasm for National Socialism, Mattern applied for SS membership in 1936.²⁴⁶ Although his application succeeded, Mattern's new career in the SS paled in comparison to the meteoric one that he had enjoyed in the SA but a few years earlier. Without the educational qualifications that became *de rigueur* for a SS commission and stained by his earlier SA service, Mattern floated listlessly through a series

²⁴³ Aussage von P. M., February 21, 1957, BAL, B162/2295, 103-104.

²⁴⁴ Aussage von R. K., May 13, 1957, BAL, B162/2295, 118-119.

²⁴⁵ Aussage von P. M., March 13, 1962, BAL, B162/2292, 147-148.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

of dead-end postings.²⁴⁷ Despite having served as an SA-Obersturmführer, he initially received the rank of a SS non-commissioned officer.²⁴⁸ Even after the SS assigned him to the VoMi for deployment with Sonderkommando R in fall 1941, Mattern never advanced beyond the rank of SS-Untersturmführer (SS Second Lieutenant).²⁴⁹ While his dim career prospects after 1934 did not discourage his faith in National Socialism—an affinity that Mattern instilled in his sons, who volunteered for the SS—his SS career would have remained in the doldrums had Sonderkommando R’s manpower needs not precipitated his transfer to southern Ukraine.²⁵⁰

Hoffmeyer’s Female Subordinates

The high proportion of German women on Sonderkommando R’s staff constituted one of the unit’s most exceptional features. Accounting for perhaps 10 percent of all Germans deployed to Transnistria with Sonderkommando R, German women performed specialized tasks ranging from providing medical care to organizing local National Socialist programs. Frequently, Hoffmeyer’s female employees had educational and ideological qualifications that surpassed those of their male superiors. Disproportionate to their numbers, German women facilitated Sonderkommando R’s mission in southern Ukraine.

The role of German women in the Third Reich and their participation in Nazi plans to Germanize Eastern Europe have been the subject of considerable research over the past two and a half decades. Claudia Koonz’s pioneering study, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, concluded

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 147.

²⁴⁹ GML Nr. 140, n.d., BNA, HW 16, Piece 60, 124.

²⁵⁰ Eidesstattliche Erklärung von P. M., December 15, 1956, BAL, B162/2295, 113.

that “Nazi women, no less than men, destroyed ethical vision, debased humane traditions, and rendered decent people helpless.”²⁵¹ More recent research, by scholars such as Gudrun Schwarz, has probed the direct participation of women in the Nazi “machinery of destruction,” by exploring their variegated roles, ranging from administrative staff in the German bureaucracy to concentration camp guards.²⁵² Elizabeth Harvey’s scholarship underscores the important contribution of German women in implementing Nazi plans for the Germanization of occupied Poland.²⁵³ Dubbing German women who served as teachers and administrators in occupied Poland “agents of Germanness,” Harvey concludes that the educational and welfare initiatives that these women oversaw constituted a key avenue for transmitting National Socialist ideology to newly “resettled” ethnic Germans.²⁵⁴ Lower’s ongoing research on German women stationed in occupied Ukraine echoes many of Harvey’s

²⁵¹ Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987), 17.

²⁵² Gudrun Schwarz, “Verdrängte Täterinnen: Frauen im Apparat der SS (1939-1945),” in *Nach Osten: Verdeckte Spuren nationalsozialistischer Verbrechen*, ed. Theresa Wobbe, (Frankfurt: Verlag Neue Kritik, 1992), 197-227. Following Schwarz, more recent historically scholarship has also addressed the role of women as perpetrators. Also see, Brigitte Scheiger, “‘Ich bitte um baldige Arisierung der Wohnung’: Zur Funktion von Frauen im bürokratischen System der Verfolgung,” in *Nach Osten: Verdeckte Spuren nationalsozialistischer Verbrechen*, ed. Theresa Wobbe, (Frankfurt: Verlag Neue Kritik, 1992), 175-96; Daniel Patrick Brown, *The Camp Women: The Female Auxiliaries Who Assisted the SS in Running the Nazi Concentration Camp System* (Schiffer Military History. (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Pub., 2002). Alexandra Przyrembel, “Ilse Koch--’normale’ SS-Ehefrau oder ‘Kommandeuse’ von Buchenward?,” in *Karrieren der Gewalt: Nationalsozialistische Täterbiographien*, ed. Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Gerhard Paul, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2004), 126-33; Elisabeth Kohlhaas, “Gertrud Slottke--Angestellte im niederländischen Judenreferat der Sicherheitspolizei,” in *Karrieren der Gewalt: Nationalsozialistische Täterbiographien*, ed. Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Gerhard Paul, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2004), 207-18.

²⁵³ Elizabeth Harvey, *Women and the Nazi East: Agents and Witnesses of Germanization* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003). Also see Elizabeth Harvey, “‘Die deutsche Frau im Osten’: ‘Rasse,’ Geschlecht und öffentlicher Raum im besetzten Polen 1940-1944,” *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 38 (1998): 191-214; Elizabeth Harvey, “We Forgot All the Jews and Poles’: German Women and the ‘Ethnic Struggle’ in Nazi-Occupied Poland,” *Contemporary European History* 10, no. 3 (2001): 447-61; Elizabeth Harvey, “German Women’s Recollections of the ‘Ethnic Struggle’ in Occupied Poland During the Second World War,” in *Home / Front: The Military, War and Gender in Twentieth-Century Germany*, ed. Karen Hagemann and Stefanie Schüler-Springorum, (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 275-91.

²⁵⁴ Harvey, *Women and the Nazi East*, 9.

findings and suggests that, in the occupied Soviet Union, German women had far greater direct exposure to the murder of Jews and, at times, more expanded opportunities to kill than in Poland.²⁵⁵ Examining Hoffmeyer's female subordinates has the potential both to inform Sonderkommando R's collective biography and to further scholarship on the role of German women in the Holocaust in Ukraine.

When Sonderkommando R arrived in Transnistria in September 1941, it had no female members. As Odessa did not fall for another six weeks, it is likely that the initial absence of women reflected the SS's desire to shield German women from a potentially dangerous security situation. Once the unit established that Transnistria's terrain was infertile for Soviet partisans—at least outside of Odessa's catacombs—Hoffmeyer's female subordinates began to arrive in fall 1941. As most of the information regarding these women comes from statements that they made after the war to the West German police, recovering a representative portrait of the unit's female subordinates is difficult. Nevertheless, a general biographical profile emerges.

Most German women attached to Sonderkommando R were part of either the German Red Cross (*Deutsches Roten Kreuz* or DRK) or career Nazi party organizers in the *NS-Frauenwerk* (National Socialist Women's Organization). Arriving between October 1941 and March 1942, DRK members reported to DRK-Bevollmächtigte (plenipotentiary) Ursula Kästner, who was posted first in Rowno (Rivne) and later in Landau. DRK nurses received assignments throughout Transnistria.²⁵⁶ There, day-to-day command rested in the dozen or

²⁵⁵ Wendy Lower, "Male and Female Holocaust Perpetrators and the East German Approach to Justice, 1949–1963," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 24 (2010), 56–84.

²⁵⁶ German Police Decodes, No. 2 Traffic: 10.12.42., December 14, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 36, 2. Aussage von A. F., August 21, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 255. Aussage von U. L., December 21, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 310. Aussage von E. A., September 30, 1966, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2695, 107.

so physicians assigned to rural Transnistria. Where no doctor was stationed, as was frequently the case, DRK nurses reported to local SS commanders.²⁵⁷ Numbering perhaps 50 by the height of Sonderkommando R's deployment, DRK nurses attended to the medical needs of the unit's personnel and area Volksdeutsche.²⁵⁸

From what can be reconstructed of these women's biographies, a couple of distinct patterns become apparent. First, some DRK nurses—from among both the oldest and youngest assigned to the region—received posting in Transnistria simply because Hoffmeyer's unit required medical personnel. Else A., a forty-eight-year-old nurse from Freiburg joined the DRK in February 1917 and served during the First World War. After a deployment to Alsace in 1941, and without any apparent affinity for or previous experience with Volksdeutsche affairs, she received a transfer to the Hoffmeyer Sonderkommando.²⁵⁹ Similarly, Irmela K., the twenty-four-year-old daughter of a Protestant minister from Halle, had just completed a DRK training course in Dresden when her superiors transferred her to Sonderkommando R.²⁶⁰ Like A., the evidence suggests that K. had no previous exposure to either the VoMi or to Volksdeutsche.

Second, despite the idiosyncratic nature of some DRK assignments to Transnistria, a

²⁵⁷ Determining chain of command from postwar testimony remains elusive, perhaps because the practice varied extensively on a local level. Wartime records, however, indicate that Bereichkommandoführer were responsible for authorizing furloughs for nurses under their command. German Police Decodes Nr 2 Traffic: 3.10.42., October 7, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 36, 3. Sonderkommando R also had the authority to order mandatory vaccinations for DRK nurses. Rundanweisung Nr. 94, January 25, 1943, BB, R59/66, 27.

²⁵⁸ If one estimates two to three DRK nurses per Bereichkommando and a larger number of nurses assigned to each VoMi doctor in Transnistria, then an estimate of 50 nurses seems reasonable at the peak of the unit's deployment. This estimate is confirmed by a DRK nurse after the war. Aussage von I. K., March 17, 1967, BAL, B162/2307, 419.

²⁵⁹ Aussage von E. A., September 30, 1966, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2695, 106.

²⁶⁰ Aussage von I. K., March 17, 1967, BAL, B162/2307, 419.

surprising number of DRK nurses volunteered for wartime service and frequently for deployment to occupied Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Thirty-four-year-old Ursula K., for example, left medical school at the University of Munich to deploy to Ukraine as a DRK nurse. Although K. was silent after the war about her motivations for leaving her medical studies for a wartime deployment, the fact that she had served as a *Bund Deutscher Mädchen* (League of German Girls) *Obergauführerin* (Senior Area Leader) for Bayerischen Ostmark casts some light on her political leanings.²⁶¹ Other women had more personal motivations for volunteering for posting in the German-occupied Soviet Union. Twenty-six-year-old Franziska W. from Carinthia, for example, joined the DRK and requested a posting on the Eastern Front in early 1942 following the death of her fiancée, who was killed fighting near Murmansk.²⁶² For some DRK personnel, deployment to Transnistria grew on them. Hildegard Schneider, for example, began a three-month practicum with Sonderkommando R in mid-September 1942. Only a month into her apprenticeship, she requested a permanent posting to the unit after the scheduled completion of her state exam in December.²⁶³ While the postwar statements of former DRK nurses frequently only hint at their motivations for volunteering for this assignment, the available evidence suggests that many of them had significant ideological and personal reasons for seeking their assignments.

The second largest cohort of women under Hoffmeyer's command engaged in what former members of the unit described as "women's work" (*Frauenarbeit*).²⁶⁴ Loosely

²⁶¹ Aussage von U. L., December 21, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 310.

²⁶² Aussage von F. W., October 13, 1967, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2699, 20.

²⁶³ German Police Decodes Nr. 2 Traffic: 20.10.42, October 25, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 36, 6.

²⁶⁴ Aussage von G. B., March 18, 1966, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-004, Band 8, 1325.

conceived, women's work sought to transform local ethnic German women and children into appropriate National Socialist mothers and youths. This undertaking entailed establishing schools, creating a local National Socialist youth organization, and training local young men, and particularly local young women, to spread the Nazi gospel.

In contrast to the DRK nurses assigned to Hoffmeyer, who varied somewhat in their attachment to the Nazi regime and to its Volksdeutsche project in Transnistria, the professional female Nazi party activists deployed to southern Ukraine were committed National Socialists with a keen interest in transforming local Volksdeutsche women in their own image. The head of Frauenarbeit in Transnistria, Gertrude Braun, had made a career in the Third Reich of supervising the National Socialist conversion of ethnic German women.²⁶⁵ Born in 1906 in Yevpatoria on Crimea, Braun's early life experiences left her a committed anti-Bolshevik. After Soviet authorities had executed her father in 1919, she had fled to Germany with her mother and two siblings.²⁶⁶ During the late 1920s and early 1930s, Braun worked for a number of Protestant women's welfare agencies in southwestern Germany. It is likely that Braun's decision to join the *Reichsarbeitsdienst's* (Reich Labor Service) *Weiblicher Arbeitsdienst* (Women's Labor Service) stemmed from the large-scale centralization of Protestant welfare agencies under the Nazi party's aegis after 1933.²⁶⁷

Once a member of the Women's Labor Service, Braun advanced rapidly to the position of *stellvertretende Bezirksführerin* (Deputy Regional Leader) in Stuttgart as a protégée of *Reichsfrauenführerin* (Reich Women's Leader) Gertrude Scholtz-Klink. In 1939,

²⁶⁵ German Police Decodes No. 1 Traffic: 15.3.43, March 21, 1943, BNA, HW 16, Piece 37, Part 1, 5.

²⁶⁶ Aussage von G. B., June 16, 1966, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2694, 144.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

Braun's superiors promoted her to the staff of the *Reichsleitung des Deutschen Frauenwerks* (Reich Leadership of the German Women's Organization) in Berlin with the title of

Sachbearbeiterin für das Russlanddeutschtum (Administrator for Russian Germandom).²⁶⁸

As the organization's point woman for ethnic German affairs in the Soviet Union, Braun took part in the VoMi "resettlement" of Volhynian and Galician Volksdeutsche by supervising programs for ethnic German women in the VoMi's resettlement camps in the Warthegau.²⁶⁹

In her 1966 interview with the West German police, Braun articulated her motivations for deploying with Sonderkommando R: "After the outbreak of hostilities with Russia it was always my aspiration to deploy to the East to care for and change my fellow ethnic German countrymen and, if possible, to return to my old homeland again."²⁷⁰ Braun accomplished both goals. In the summer of 1943, when German forces still controlled Crimea, Braun took a six-day vacation to Yevpatoria.²⁷¹

The subordinates whom Braun selected to help her Nazify Transnistria's ethnic German women were cut from the same cloth. In some cases, Braun handpicked these women. Former gymnastics teacher Johanna W., for example, had volunteered to assist the VoMi in its Volksdeutsche resettlement camps in the Warthegau. There, Braun recruited her for subsequent deployments with the VoMi to the occupied Soviet Union.²⁷² Irene H., a twenty-nine-year-old former gymnastics instructor turned professional Nazi party organizer, shared a Stuttgart connection with Braun. A former Bund Deutscher Mädel leader and Nazi

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Aussage von G. B., June 16, 1966, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2694, 144.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Aussage von J. W., March 5, 1968, BAL, B162/2309, 256.

party member since 1939, H. worked for the NS-Frauenwerk in Stuttgart when she received an offer from Braun to serve in Transnistria. As H. later recounted, she accepted Braun's offer because she found the opportunity intriguing.²⁷³ H. was not alone among Braun's former subordinates to express an affinity for her duties. As Ilse S., then a twenty-year-old from Schleswig-Holstein, later recounted: "I always had a particular interest in the East. In 1942, I was asked if I would be interested in a deployment in the Occupied Eastern Territories. I agreed."²⁷⁴ Like many DRK members deployed to Transnistria, Braun and her female subordinates were as thoroughly Nazified as any German women in the Third Reich.

Sonderkommando R's Rank-and-File Personnel

In contrast to Sonderkommando R's leaders or its specialized female employees, the unit's rank and file generally had a significantly lower commitment to the Nazi cause. As it had in the VoMi's earlier "resettlement" campaigns, the NSKK contributed a remarkably high proportion of Sonderkommando R's personnel. Numbering some 150 members on the eve of the unit's deployment to Transnistria and growing steadily thereafter, Sonderkommando R's NSKK complement comprised between one third and one half of the Hoffmeyer Sonderkommando's staff.²⁷⁵ Although the NSKK was the second largest Nazi party mass organization, in which more than half a million Germans claimed membership by July 1941,

²⁷³ Aussage von I. H., April 28, 1967, BAL, B162/2307, 528.

²⁷⁴ Aussage von I. S., February 26, 1965, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2680, 95.

²⁷⁵ The number of NSKK members that the VoMi fielded to Transnistria in September 1941 as part of Sonderkommando R remains in some dispute. Wartime Romanian records peg Sonderkommando R's initial strength at 80 members. Copie de pe adresa Nr. 67148 a Ministerului Afacerilor Străine Dir politică către M.St.M., September 11, 1941, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed Hr 1081, 13. Postwar West German testimony given by Sonderkommando R's second highest ranking NSKK officer, Thorwald R., puts the number at a more plausible 150 men. Aussage von T. R., March 9, 1965, BAL, B162/2303, 348.

it remains remarkably understudied. To date Dorothee Hochstetter's monograph, *Motorisierung und "Volksgemeinschaft": Das Nationalsozialistische Kraftfahrkorps, NSKK, 1931-1945*, remains the only academic study of the organization.²⁷⁶ Owing to the relative paucity of archival material related to the NSKK, Hochstetter's study focuses on the organization's activities in the Third Reich and provides a more skeletal treatment of the its deployment in the German-occupied Soviet Union.²⁷⁷ The NSKK's relative obscurity necessitates a brief recovery of its history.

Founded in April 1931, the NSKK styled itself as the Nazi party's "motorized armed force."²⁷⁸ Originally conceived of as the *Nationalsozialistisches Automobil-Korps* (National Socialist Automobile Corps) in 1929, the NSKK sought to harness the Third Reich's motor vehicles and drivers for the Nazi party's own ends.²⁷⁹ Given the relatively low rate of car ownership in Germany at the time, this was a heady endeavor. In 1939, there was roughly one car for every 40 Germans. In the same year, the ratio of cars to Americans was roughly 1 to 4. As Jeffrey Herf has noted recently, Hitler's Germany "was overwhelmingly a nation of pedestrians."²⁸⁰ While its bread and butter remained the car, the NSKK exerted its authority over all vehicles with internal combustion engines, ranging from motorcycles to speedboats. Although after the war many of the organization's former members, which included a

²⁷⁶ Dorothee Hochstetter, *Motorisierung und "Volksgemeinschaft": Das Nationalsozialistische Kraftfahrkorps, NSKK, 1931-1945* (München: R. Oldenbourg, 2005).

²⁷⁷ Although Hochstetter's monograph addresses both issues at least cursorily, she focuses her analysis of NSKK deployment to the occupied Soviet Union on the NSKK's *Verkehrskompanien* (Transportation Companies) and does not address NSKK personnel seconded to Sonderkommando R. Ibid., 422-454.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 99.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 102.

²⁸⁰ Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda During World War II and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 29.

number of public figures in the Federal Republic, such as Axel Springer, defended it as a simple automobile club akin to the ADAC (*Allgemeiner Deutscher Automobil-Club e.V.*, General German Automobile Club). The reality was both more complicated and more sinister. As Hochstetter aptly concludes: “the NSKK was a strictly organized, hierarchical National Socialist formation that, along with the SA and SS, formed the Nazi party’s political triumvirate.”²⁸¹

As an umbrella organization that sought to synchronize the Third Reich’s motorized activities, the NSKK was remarkably diverse. NSKK membership was voluntary and, except for a brief 1934 ban on new members, all driver license holders were eligible to join.²⁸² From July 1933 until November 1937, NSKK membership tripled from 100,000 to 300,000, reaching more than 500,000 shortly after the beginning of Operation Barbarossa.²⁸³ The NSKK drew its membership predominately from the urban petty bourgeoisie. The occupational breakdown of the NSKK’s 262,000 members in 1938, for example, indicates that workers and farmers were underrepresented in the organization relative to their proportion of the German population.²⁸⁴ The NSKK also maintained a curious mix of young and middle-aged members. Based on membership data from 1937, veterans of the First World War constituted nearly a quarter of the NSKK’s members. Nevertheless, the majority of NSKK, who were between the ages of twenty and thirty five, were too young to have seen combat.²⁸⁵ Notwithstanding impressive growth during the 1930s, the majority of NSKK

²⁸¹ Hochstetter, *Motorisierung und “Volksgemeinschaft”*, 148.

²⁸² Ibid., 102.

²⁸³ Ibid., 104.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 108-109.

members did not own vehicles, and the majority of the Third Reich's vehicle owners were not NSKK members.²⁸⁶

Ascertaining why NSKK members volunteered for the organization is a difficult task. Memoirs and statements that former members gave during denazification proceedings invariably downplayed any ideological attraction to the Nazi movement or its anti-Semitic agenda. Nevertheless, using these sources Hochstetter articulates three motivations for why Germans joined the NSKK: political, sporting, and professional.²⁸⁷ The political appeal of the organization to many NSKK members is evident. By 1935, nearly one-third (31.5 percent) of the NSKK's members shared membership in the Nazi party.²⁸⁸ During the Nazi party's 1933 to 1937 ban on new members this statistic is ambiguous. On the one hand, that nearly of one third of the NSKK's 1935 members had joined the Nazi party prior to the ban suggests that many early NSKK members had an affinity for the Nazi agenda. Although not as high as that of the SS, which stood at 48.9 percent, the proportion of dual memberships in the NSKK remained significantly higher than that of the SA, which stood at a comparatively modest 23.2 percent.²⁸⁹ As Hochstetter aptly suggests, NSKK membership provided an alternate type of party affiliation for Germans who felt that association with the Nazi party was advantageous, yet were unable to join after 1933.²⁹⁰ On the other hand, Hochstetter hypothesizes that for some Germans, and particularly for some university students, NSKK

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 108.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 111-112.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 116.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 120.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 107.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 117.

membership proved attractive because it offered a concrete, albeit more tepid connection to the Nazi movement and permitted them to avoid formal party membership.²⁹¹ For some Germans who joined the NSKK during the 1930s, membership in the organization was the next best thing to joining the Nazi party. For other NSKK members, it provided an avenue to avoid precisely the formal party membership that some of their compatriots coveted.

In their postwar explanations for joining the NSKK, former members stated that they joined the organization because it provided a venue for pursuing their interests in competitive motor sports and automobile technology. At first glance, these claims reflect a certain reality about the post-*Gleichschaltung* (party synchronization) Nazi order. With Nazi efforts to place all motorized activity under the NSKK's supervision, it would have been difficult for automobile enthusiasts to pursue their avocation independently of the organization.

Nevertheless, the postwar propensity of former NSKK members to divorce their enthusiasm for motor sports from its specific ideological content in the Third Reich appears to be too convenient an alibi. As Hochstetter convincingly observes: "during the 1930s no political movement identified itself so closely with the project of national motorization and with the symbol of the motor as the NSDAP."²⁹² Although admittedly speculative, it appears likely that the sporting interests that many German articulated for joining the NSKK were part of an affinity for the Nazi regime's broader agenda.

Many NSKK members joined the organization because doing so became a professional necessity in the Third Reich. After 1933, German men whose livelihoods revolved around manufacturing, selling, maintaining, or operating motor vehicles felt

²⁹¹ Ibid., 117-119.

²⁹² Ibid., 1.

pressure to join the NSKK. The NSKK explicitly targeted automobile mechanics and technicians for recruitment. NSKK membership provided admission to a party-sanctioned automobile network that afforded privileged access to related goods and services.²⁹³ Put simply, for many Germans, membership in the organization became “an occupational norm” and even a necessity in the Third Reich.²⁹⁴

Prior to and during the Second World War the NSKK maintained close connections to the Wehrmacht and police. Before 1939, the NSKK lent the German military its expertise by training motorized and mechanized units.²⁹⁵ Following the onset of hostilities, the NSKK extended logistical support for the German military, the SS, and the Order Police. After November 1939, all NSKK units assisting German military and police units became subordinate to the head of the Order Police and operated under German military law.²⁹⁶ By 1940, 60 percent of NSKK members were deployed in this capacity. Three years later this proportion had increased to 80 percent.²⁹⁷

As a manpower pool of last resort, NSKK personnel were ordered to participate in the Holocaust in the Soviet Union. In May 1941, Himmler ordered the creation of NSKK Transportation Companies (*NSKK-Verkehrskompanien*) for deployment to the Soviet Union. With the status of special policemen, NSKK personnel deployed with the Einsatzgruppen and the Order Police during Operation Barbarossa.²⁹⁸ In the field the NSKK lent logistical

²⁹³ Ibid., 121.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 422.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 456.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 430.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 461.

support to and participated in the mass murder of Jews. Owing to the absence of postwar criminal investigations focused on the NSKK's crimes, relatively little is known about these missions. Nevertheless, Hochstetter notes that there is no evidence of widespread resistance within the NSKK to participating in the Holocaust.²⁹⁹

When the VoMi formed Sonderkommando R in the summer of 1941, Hoffmeyer drew on extensive experience commanding NSKK personnel. Although scholarship on the VoMi during the first two years of the war has largely overlooked the prominence of the NSKK during its Volksdeutsche "resettlement" campaigns, NSKK members played a critical role in these deployments. In late 1939 and early 1940, more than 120 NSKK members helped relocate Volksdeutsche from Volhynia and Galicia. During the Volksdeutsche "resettlement" from Bessarabia and northern Bukovina later in 1940, Hoffmeyer's command had some 500 NSKK men.³⁰⁰ NSKK members not only provided valuable manpower, but many of them placed their personal vehicles at the VoMi's disposal.³⁰¹ The NSKK also staffed more than 50 of the VoMi's *Umsiedlungslagern* (Resettlement Camps).³⁰² When Hoffmeyer selected personnel for Sonderkommando R, he had an extensive list of NSKK members to choose from for his new command.

Obtaining a profile of the NSKK members who deployed to Transnistria as part of Sonderkommando R is handicapped by the same documentary limitations that Hochstetter encountered in researching her monograph about the organization. Without wartime rosters

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 469.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 441.

³⁰¹ Aussage von O. H., August 15, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 234.

³⁰² Hochstetter, *Motorisierung und "Volksgemeinschaft,"* 441.

for NSKK personnel deployed to Transnistria or personnel files, it is virtually impossible to obtain a representative portrait of the contingent. What remains are perhaps a dozen detailed interview protocols of former NSKK members stationed in the region that the West German police recorded during the 1960s. Based on this admittedly limited source base, it appears that the majority of NSKK personnel deployed to Transnistria were men who had little particular affinity for the Nazi regime or its anti-Semitism. Except for their previous shared experience “resettling” Volksdeutsche from Eastern Europe, most of Hoffmeyer’s NSKK subordinates represented a cohort of “ordinary men.”

Anecdotally, the NSKK personnel deployed to Transnistria fit a common four point profile. First, the majority of NSKK men assigned to Sonderkommando R joined the organization because membership facilitated their occupational goals. Second, most NSKK members had entered the organization prior to the outbreak of the Second World War. The remaining personnel all did so before the onset of Operation Barbarossa in 1941. Third, virtually all of the NSKK men in Sonderkommando R had served with Hoffmeyer in earlier Volksdeutsche “resettlement” campaigns. And lastly, most of the NSKK men under Hoffmeyer’s command were not Nazi party members. Even by the organization’s standards, Sonderkommando R’s NSKK personnel appear to have been among the least Nazified.

A couple of brief biographical sketches exemplify this trend. Thirty-seven-year-old Otto Hotz, a professional test driver for Porsche, had joined the NSKK during the 1930s for occupational reasons.³⁰³ In 1940, the NSKK assigned him to assist the VoMi in its Volksdeutsche “resettlement” operations in Volhynia and Galicia. As required, Hotz drove

³⁰³ SS Offizier Akte Otto Hotz, NARA, A3343, SSO-117A, 812.

his personal vehicle from Stuttgart to take part in the mission.³⁰⁴ Following its successful completion, Hotz's superiors ordered him to northern Serbia to assist the VoMi in the Banat.³⁰⁵ With the conclusion of that deployment, Hotz received orders to accompany Sonderkommando R to southern Ukraine.³⁰⁶ Ernst R.'s journey to Transnistria as part of the NSKK was even more circuitous. The Berlin automobile mechanic joined the ADAC in 1933 and, at the request of his employer, joined the NSKK a few years later.³⁰⁷ R.'s superior in Berlin, and future NSKK chief in Transnistria, Ernst Gutsche, tapped him to participate in ethnic German "resettlement" operations in Bessarabia and the Baltic.³⁰⁸ Returning to Berlin, R. began work servicing the VoMi motor pool. By dint of "personal difficulties" at his new post, he requested help from Gutsche, who arranged for his transfer to Hoffmeyer's unit in Transnistria during the summer of 1942.³⁰⁹ Rather than Nazi ideologues or Volksdeutsche "experts," most of Hoffmeyer's NSKK men received orders to deploy to Transnistria because their affinity for motoring put them in a category of readily draftable men.

Circumstantially, there is evidence to suggest that Hoffmeyer selected NSKK personnel with specialized skills beyond those of operating and maintaining vehicles necessary for the unit's operations. Hoffmeyer drew both medical professionals and Russophone Volksdeutsche from the NSKK's ranks. Dr. Otto Franke, Sonderkommando R's

³⁰⁴ Aussage von O. H., August 15, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 234.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 235.

³⁰⁷ Aussage von E. R., February 16, 1968, BAL, B162/2309, 206-207.

³⁰⁸ Ibid. German Police Decodes: 30.7.41, August 3, 1941, BNA, HW 16, Piece 32, 2.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 206.

chief physician, came to the unit via the NSKK. A member of the NSKK since 1933, Franke took part in the VoMi's Volksdeutsche "resettlements" from Volhynia and Galicia. After a brief stint as a German Army surgeon, Franke requested that Hoffmeyer transfer him back to the VoMi perhaps because a posting behind the lines appeared safer to him. Hoffmeyer requested his transfer to Sonderkommando R, and Franke deployed to southern Ukraine with the unit.³¹⁰

Like the SS, the NSKK fielded a number of Volksdeutsche from the Soviet Union that the VoMi had relocated prior to the beginning of Operation Barbarossa. Thirty-three-year-old Otto T. typified this trend. An ethnic German originally from Volhynia, T. settled in the Warthegau in early 1940. Perhaps lacking the educational or National Socialist credentials that smoothed the admission of many Volksdeutsche from the Baltic or Bessarabia into the SS, T. volunteered for the NSKK shortly after arriving in occupied Poland. Despite the fact that T. primarily served as a truck driver, he was one of a handful of Russian-speaking NSKK men—a skill that was undoubtedly not lost on his superiors.³¹¹ As with SS personnel deployed to Transnistria, the VoMi selected NSKK members who frequently possessed unique skills for Sonderkommando R.

The VoMi's appetite for manpower was so ravenous that in selecting personnel it frequently remained blind to National Socialist or even professional qualifications. In the case of NSKK personnel, this often resulted unintentionally in deploying highly skilled personnel to perform menial jobs. *Zahntechniker* (dental technician) turned truck driver

³¹⁰ Aussage von O. F., December 15, 1966, BAL, B162/2307, 354-354. German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 1 August - 31st August 1942, September 7, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 20.

³¹¹ Aussage von O. T., December 18, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 249-250.

Erwin Niessner exemplified these sometimes preposterous assignments. Born in the Sudetenland in 1912, the bilingual Niessner spent his formative years in Germany, where he joined the *Hitler Jugend* (Hitler Youth) and later the Nazi party.³¹² Although absent more comprehensive wartime documentation it is difficult to pinpoint why Niessner joined the Nazi party, it is a distinct possibility that he did so merely because of the professional advantages that party membership afforded. Despite established SS conventions, even in April 1944, when Niessner received an SS commission as an SS-Untersturmführer, his personnel file noted that he remained a practicing Catholic.³¹³ Regardless of why Niessner joined the NSDAP, his deployment to Transnistria owed more to his membership in the NSKK than it did to any personal political loyalties. Seconded to the VoMi in Berlin August 1940, Niessner served as a chauffeur for the organization until his superiors attached him to Sonderkommando R for service in southern Ukraine.³¹⁴ Although he was originally assigned merely to drive a mobile dispensary, it was not until he reached Odessa in late October 1941 that his SS superiors realized that he might be more valuable to the unit as a dentist than as a truck driver.³¹⁵ In its haste to fill Sonderkommando R's ranks, the VoMi often displayed a startling inability to assign effectively even the limited manpower that it had at its disposal.

Group Cohesion in Sonderkommando R

How did Sonderkommando R's diversity affect its cohesion as a unit? The answer is decidedly mixed. The unit's SS-dominated leadership corps distrusted its subordinate

³¹² SS Offizier Akte Erwin Niessner, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SSO-350A, 512. According to British intelligence's radio decrypts, Niessner received his commission as an SS-Untersturmführer on April 21, 1944. GML Nr. 140, n.d., BNA, HW 16, Piece 60, 126.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Aussage von E. N., September 14, 1962, BAL, B162/2298, 47-48.

³¹⁵ Aussage von E. N., October 20, 1967, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2699, 46.

organizations, the NSKK, the DRK, and the NS-Frauenwerk, which collectively contributed the majority of the unit's personnel, and fought internal power struggles with them. This institutional strife prompted the SS to issue periodically bizarre orders aimed at punishing Sonderkommando R's non-SS members. At the unit's headquarters in Landau, this atmosphere poisoned relations between its leaders and the members of the NSKK, the DRK, and the NS-Frauenwerk. In rural Transnistria, however, these conflicts appear to have had little impact on relations among Sonderkommando R's variegated staff. There, two different covalent bonds permitted the unit's diverse members to function with apparently minimal friction. Isolated from other Germans in an alien environment, SS and NSKK personnel drew on a shared reservoir of experiences that many of them acquired in their previous VoMi deployments to Eastern Europe in 1939 and 1940. In rural Transnistria, Sonderkommando R's leaders enjoyed far more intimate relations with their DRK and NS-Frauenwerk subordinates. Romantic liaisons lubricated interpersonal interactions between Sonderkommando R's SS midlevel leaders and their female subordinates.

The unit's institutional rivalries were not simply byproducts of the SS's hubris, but, as with so many of Sonderkommando R's features, originated in the VoMi's Eastern European population transfers. The VoMi's initial plan for its fall 1939 "resettlement" operations in the Baltic envisioned substantial support from local Nazi party administrators in West Prussia and the Warthegau, who were to care for the Baltic Germans once they arrived in the Reich. To the VoMi's chagrin, it discovered that local Nazi party administrators were acutely unenthusiastic about the Baltic German "resettlers" and had failed to make adequate preparations. Himmler's epiphany that few Nazis outside of the SS shared his zeal for ethnic German resettlement projects prompted him to order the creation of a VoMi-run resettlement

center in Posen. This experience merely sharpened the SS's already pronounced desire to centralize all Volksdeutsche affairs under its authority. Subsequent VoMi "resettlement" operations in Volhynia and Polodia, and Bessarabia and northern Bukovina remained under exclusive SS control from start to finish.³¹⁶ This autarkic mindset had significant consequences for the SS's cooperation (or lack thereof) with its institutional partners in Sonderkommando R.

Landau was the epicenter of the SS's protracted power struggle with the NSKK. NSKK-Truppenführer Gutsche's autonomous staff in Landau was a perennial thorn in the SS's side. Unlike in rural Transnistria, where area NSKK leaders made infrequent inspection visits and where the organization's personnel were subordinated to Sonderkommando R's SS officers, in Landau a robust NSKK staff presented a viable competitive chain of command.³¹⁷ The SS found this challenge to its authority unacceptable and, beginning in 1942, Hoffmeyer attempted repeatedly to have Gutsche recalled to Berlin and to subordinate his staff directly to the SS. Hoffmeyer succeeded in doing precisely this in mid-1943.³¹⁸ Without available wartime records on the subject, it is difficult to determine the precise contours of this contest. That Gutsche's removal and the large-scale transfer of NSKK personnel to the SS coincided with the withdrawal of NSKK units elsewhere in the German-occupied Soviet Union suggests that broader institutional factors, rather than local circumstances, may have

³¹⁶ Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, 159.

³¹⁷ NSKK personnel in Transnistria nicknamed Thorvald R., Gutsche's executive officer, "Steppenwolf" because of his peripatetic inspection tours. Aussage von A. S., March 25, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 48.

³¹⁸ Thorvald R. remembered this change 20 years later as having occurred in late 1943. Aussage von T. R., March 9, 1965, BAL, B162/2303, 348. Anecdotal evidence from the SS officer files created for NSKK personnel at the time of their transfer suggests that this shift occurred in mid-1943. For example, Kyrill Epinatjeff, originally an NSKK member, received an SS commission in April 1943. SS Offizier Akte Kyrill Epinatjeff, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SSO-189, 258-259.

precipitated an end to the NSKK's nominal independence in Transnistria.

Presumably taking their cues from Hoffmeyer's running feud with Gutsche, SS personnel in Landau launched a petty campaign against their NSKK colleagues. Siebert went out of his way to sharpen the distinction between the SS and the NSKK in Landau. From the beginning of the occupation, he billeted members of both organizations separately, establishing the SS's barracks in a former government building and NSKK's quarters in an erstwhile school on the other side of Landau's church.³¹⁹ The SS's hostility toward the NSKK had a trickle-down effect on Sonderkommando R's rank-and-file personnel in Landau. Herman J., a former policeman and NSKK member, whose deployment to Transnistria with Sonderkommando R marked his second VoMi operation in the East, recounted bitterly that "the SS repeated to us that we were only 'drinkers' and not 'fighters.'"³²⁰ Abuse levied by SS personnel against NSKK members was not merely verbal. NSKK member Ernst R. later described having been threatened physically by an SS member during a squabble.³²¹ Care should be taken not to overstate the discord between SS and NSKK personnel in Landau. In their postwar statements to the West German police, NSKK members likely exaggerated this inter-institutional strife to distance themselves from the SS and to deflect suspicion. Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that the SS and NSKK's marriage of convenience was an unhappy one in Landau.

Sonderkommando R's SS leaders fought similar institutional turf wars with the organizations to which the unit's female members belonged. Hoffmeyer and his deputies

³¹⁹ Aussage von J. S., November 23, 1962, BAL, B162/2301, 80-81.

³²⁰ Aussage von H. J., August 28, 1962, BAL, B162/2302, 156.

³²¹ Aussage von E. R., February 16, 1968, BAL, B162/2309, 208.

began grouching about both the DRK and the NS-Frauenwerk a few months after both organizations reached their full complements in mid-1942. The SS's primary objection was that both organizations fell only loosely under its command. Despite the fact that the SS was supposed to authorize the DRK and NS-Frauenwerk's personnel transfers, this chain of command appears to have worked better in theory than in practice. An April 10, 1943, staff order, for example, chastised both the DRK and the NS-Frauenwerk for moving personnel about without the SS's approval.³²² Hoffmeyer's frustration with his apparent inability to exert his desired control over these subordinate organizations was such that he risked a confrontation with Himmler. According to British signals intelligence, Himmler ordered the NS-Frauenwerk to dispatch a further 40 members of its staff to Transnistria to beef up its Nazification program. Hoffmeyer resisted the order, claiming that the region was already "overflowing" with representatives of the DRK and the NS-Frauenwerk.³²³ To make matters worse, Hoffmeyer lamented that although these organizations continued "working under the direction of Vomi [sic]" they "remain under the command of their own stations."³²⁴ Owing to a gap in the documentary record, it is unclear whether or not Hoffmeyer's rearguard action was successful. Anecdotally, there appears to have been a decline in the number of new DRK and NS-Frauenwerk personnel assigned to Transnistria after April 1943. Given the increasingly precarious German military position in the Soviet Union at this time, a slackening of additional transfers of German women to Transnistria is more likely to have been a reflection of the overall military situation than a result of Hoffmeyer's protestations.

³²² Stabbefehl Nr. 101, April 10, 1943, BB, R59/67, 104.

³²³ German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 8 April - 8 May 1943, May 9, 1943, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 3.

³²⁴ Ibid.

While Hoffmeyer may have been less successful in bridling the DRK and NS-Frauenwerk than the NSKK in Transnistria, Sonderkommando R's SS leaders in Landau followed Hoffmeyer's example by ratcheting up pressure on the members of both the DRK and the NS-Frauenwerk. In May 1943, Sonderkommando R banned German women from riding horses and ordered them henceforth to ride bicycles, which the unit hoped to obtain for them.³²⁵ The consequences of this punitive order were predictable. Four months later, Hoffmeyer's command had to eat crow. In August 1943, Sonderkommando R ordered its SS and NSKK personnel to cooperate more closely with their female counterparts and admonished them that their continued complaints about these women were unfounded.³²⁶ At the unit's Landau headquarters, the SS's poor institutional relations with the NSKK, the DRK, and the NS-Frauenwerk catalyzed increasing interpersonal tensions within the unit.

Outside of Landau, the unit's primary institutional battleground, relations between SS and NSKK personnel were significantly better. Complaints by former NSKK personnel about antagonistic behavior by their SS counterparts were limited overwhelmingly to NSKK members who had been stationed in Landau. Away from Landau, former Sonderkommando R members described a relaxed atmosphere in which SS officers socialized freely with their NSKK subordinates.³²⁷ Some command posts dispensed with formal ranks and coworkers used the informal *du* to address colleagues during their day-to-day operations.³²⁸ As became apparent during the early years of the lengthy West German police investigation into

³²⁵ Stabbefehl Nr. 107, May 24, 1943, BB, R 59/67, 67.

³²⁶ Stabbefehl Nr. 113, August 2, 1943, BB, R 59/67, 46.

³²⁷ Aussage von G. G., March 3, 1965, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2680, 116.

³²⁸ Aussage von E. M. C., August 6, 1962, BAL, B162/2293, 176.

Sonderkommando R's crimes, many of the unit's former members maintained close connections with one another decades after the war, organizing annual reunions that included both former SS and NSKK members.³²⁹ Notwithstanding the fact that inter-institutional tensions precipitated friction between the unit's rank-and-file SS and NSKK members in Landau, interpersonal relations within Sonderkommando R in rural Transnistria were far better.

An array of factors, including a more clearly defined chain of command, encouraged better SS-NSKK relations in Sonderkommando R's rural Bereichkommandos than in Landau. The comparative remoteness of the unit's rural command posts from Landau, the epicenter of the unit's inter-institutional strife, largely quarantined the antagonistic relationship between Sonderkommando R's SS and NSKK leaders in the unit's regional headquarters. There, many SS and NSKK personnel drew on shared experiences because of their participation in the VoMi's earlier Volksdeutsche population transfers. This provided a common frame of reference for a staff that frequently had little else in common. Absent the intense inter-institutional strife that characterized Sonderkommando R's operations in Landau, in rural Transnistria this shared operational history smoothed interpersonal relations between the unit's heavily Nazified SS leadership and relatively un-Nazified NSKK rank-and-file.

In contrast to the SS's relations with their NSKK subordinates in Sonderkommando R's rural Bereichkommandos (regional command posts), inherent ideological affinity catalyzed far more intimate relations between the SS and their female subordinates. Particularly in rural Transnistria, scores of Sonderkommando R's personnel initiated

³²⁹Brief von E. M. C. an H., January 12, 1958, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-002, Band 3, 449. Aussage von H. J., May 19, 1965, BAL, B162/2304, 66.

romantic relationships with DRK nurses and NS-Frauenwerk workers. With the exception of Odessa and Landau, where larger populations of Reichsdeutsche women offered greater possibilities for female companionship, there were few eligible German women in rural Transnistria. As many of the women attested to after the war, the isolation of Sonderkommando R's rural Bereichkommandos meant that the unit's male and female personnel worked and socialized together for months at a time, routinely dining together daily.³³⁰ Beyond the exceptional proximity that Sonderkommando R's German men and women enjoyed, many German women deployed to Transnistria had a passion for their work. As a self-selected cohort of professional Nazi Volksdeutsche activists, many of Sonderkommando R's German women were suitable romantic and political partners for the unit's men. Sequestered in the Ukrainian countryside with a group of disproportionately Nazified German women, who frequently expressed an affinity for ethnic German affairs, many of Hoffmeyer's male subordinates were struck—somewhat not surprisingly—by Cupid's arrow.

Admittedly, the records available to reconstruct liaisons between German men and women in southern Ukraine—RuSHA files and postwar testimony—imperfectly capture the range of relationships. Both sources heavily overrepresent the number of long-term relationships and likely underrepresent more ephemeral liaisons. RuSHA files, by their very nature, only recorded applications for authorization to marry. Postwar testimony taken by the West German police is virtually silent about casual encounters between German men and women in Transnistria either because discussing these relationships violated 1960s German

³³⁰ Aussage von A. F., August 21, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 257. This was also the case in Odessa. Aussage von E. S., November 12, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 5, 727.

sensibilities or because these relationships appeared irrelevant to investigators.

Notwithstanding these documentary limitations, the available information paints the portrait of a highly incestuous unit in which work and pleasure overlapped.

Anecdotally, three notable patterns to these relationships emerge. First, in contrast to the frequently temporary liaisons between SS and NSKK members and local Volksdeutsche women, a significant number of relationships between German men and women in Transnistria ended in long-term unions. When the West German police interviewed these women during the 1960s, many of them were still married to former members of the unit, whom they had met during their deployment to southern Ukraine. Friederike C. is a case in point. Originally from the Sudetenland, she joined the German Red Cross as a nurse's assistant in 1935. In May 1942, C.'s superiors mobilized her for service in Ukraine and she deployed to Transnistria via Breslau and Rowno. At 38 years old, C. was well past the marriage age for most German women.³³¹ Nevertheless, during her deployment she initiated a relationship with Rosenfeld's Bereichskommandoführer, SS-Obersturmführer Heinz Born, a forty-nine-year-old fellow Sudeten German.³³² Married for over two decades when the West German police interviewed her in 1968, she attempted to shield her husband from prosecution by concocting a farfetched story about their efforts to save Jews by smuggling them into Odessa.³³³

Second, German women assigned to Sonderkommando R were more likely to have long-term relationships with the unit's higher ranking members and especially its officers. In

³³¹ Aussage von F. M. B., February 9, 1968, BAL, B162/2309, 185-186.

³³² Aussage von H. B., January 14, 1965, BAL, B162/2303, 285. SS Offizier Akte Heinz Born, NARA, A 3343 SSO 092, 1230.

³³³ Aussage von F. M. B., February 9, 1968, BAL, B162/2309, 186.

many cases, these unions constituted a marked social advancement for the women. Anna R.'s romance with and subsequent marriage to Erich von Fircks typified this trend. An Austrian by birth, R. volunteered for the German Red Cross following the 1938 *Anschluss*. In 1940, R.'s superiors assigned her to a VoMi resettlement camp for Bukovinian Volksdeutsche in Herberstein in Steiermark. After a brief deployment with the Luftwaffe, the German Red Cross dispatched R. to Transnistria as part of Sonderkommando R. Assigned to Bereichkommando XI in Rastatt (Porech'e), R. began a relationship with the commander of neighboring Bereichkommando XIV in Worms (Vinogradnoe), SS-Untersturmführer Erich von Fircks, a Baltic German nobleman, who had joined the SS after relocating from Latvia to German-occupied Poland in 1940.³³⁴ Shortly after meeting at a Sonderkommando R social gathering, von Fircks orchestrated R.'s transfer from Rastatt to his command in Worms. When R. departed Transnistria in May 1943, she was carrying von Firck's child. The couple married the following month in her native Steiermark.³³⁵

Lastly, DRK nurses and doctors under Hoffmeyer's command had an exceptionally high rate of intermarriage. Given that DRK nurses reported to the unit's physicians scattered throughout Transnistria's countryside, it is little surprise that this intimacy and isolation led to romance. Even based on the fragmentary documentary record available, it is evident that at least a quarter of the physicians subordinated to Hoffmeyer met their spouses during their service in Transnistria.³³⁶ SS-Untersturmführer Dr. Herbert Lützendorf, Sonderkommando

³³⁴ Der Reichsführer SS Hauptamt Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle SS-Sonderkommando 'R' BK XIV-Worms an den Herrn Präfekten Oberst Popp Jud. Beresowka, April 6, 1943, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 18, Fond 2361, Opis 1, Ed Hr 70, 44.

³³⁵ Aussage von A. F., August 21, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 256.

³³⁶ Another example of a Sonderkommando R doctor who met his spouse on duty was SS-Untersturmführer Dr. Eberhard Mohr. Mohr's 1942 marriage to DRK nurse Elisabeth Weyel was his second

R's head doctor, met his future wife during his deployment to Transnistria. An SA member during his medical studies at the Universities of Munich and Halle during the 1930s, Lützkendorf enjoyed a reasonably successful career as a VoMi physician, having participated in the "resettlement" campaigns that Hoffmeyer led in Volhynia and Podolia, the Baltic, and Bessarabia. After working as a doctor for the Einwandererzentrale and a six-month posting at the *Universitätsklinik* (University Clinic) in Berlin, Lützkendorf's superiors transferred him to Landau as Hoffmeyer's chief physician in April 1942.³³⁷ The following month, Lützkendorf met his future bride, Hildegard Stefan, when the DRK assigned her to Landau as kindergarten teacher.³³⁸ A nurse's assistant, who had volunteered for the DRK in 1938 and then sought duty at the front following the start of hostilities the following year, Stefan was Lützkendorf's romantic and likely ideological match.³³⁹ After a six-month romance, Lützkendorf proposed in early October 1942 and the couple married in June 1943.³⁴⁰ Perhaps as a testament to her devotion to Lützkendorf, Stefan was still using her married name when the West German police interviewed her in 1964, despite the fact that her husband had been missing in action since March 1945.³⁴¹

Scholars have long pointed to the part that German women played in supporting the

marriage to a member of the German Red Cross. Mohr's previous wife, whom he had met during an earlier VoMi deployment, had passed away in December 1941. RuSHA Akte Eberhard Mohr, NARA, A 3343 RS E35, 284-492.

³³⁷ RuSHA Akte Dr. Herbert Lützkendorf, NARA, A 3343 RS D5210, 1520-1523.

³³⁸ Ibid., 1542-1545.

³³⁹ Ibid., 1545.

³⁴⁰ Aussage von H. L., March 19, 1963, BAL, B162/2304, 21. RuSHA Akte Dr. Herbert Lützkendorf, NARA, A 3343 RS D5210, 1523.

³⁴¹ Aussage von H. L., March 19, 1963, BAL, B162/2304, 20.

Third Reich and its murderous policies from their often circumscribed domestic roles.³⁴² In her examination of the family lives of concentration camp staff, Schwarz argues that these incestuous relationships created a “clan society” (*Sippengemeinschaft*) in which German women oiled the machinery of destruction.³⁴³ Schwarz’s concept of a *Sippengemeinschaft* aptly captures the interpersonal dynamics that these romances created within Sonderkommando R. In a heterogeneous group fraught with inter-institutional strife, these liaisons stabilized an otherwise fragmented unit by blunting much of the institutional criticism that the unit’s leaders levied at both organizations. Within the context of myriad liaisons between the unit’s midlevel leadership and their female subordinates, institutional sniping held little truck on the local level.

Conclusion

In his recent case study of the Nazi security apparatus in Kiev, Alexander Prusin describes the Sipo-SD (*Sicherheitspolizei und Sicherheitsdienst*, Security Police and Security Service) as a “community of violence.”³⁴⁴ He argues: “regardless of rank and personal disposition to violence—which varied from enjoyment to distaste—or whether one’s violent proclivities were awakened or acquired, SiPo/SD functionaries perceived themselves as a single community designed or fated to maintain order by violence in the Generalbezirk Kiev.”³⁴⁵ Prusin’s findings about Sipo-SD personnel assigned to the Generalbezirk Kiev provide a fruitful comparison to Sonderkommando R’s staff in Transnistria. In both cases,

³⁴² Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 17.

³⁴³ Gudrun Schwarz, *Eine Frau an Seiner Seite*.

³⁴⁴ Alexander V. Prusin, “A Community of Violence: The Sipo/SD and its Role in the Nazi Terror System in Generalbezirk Kiev.”

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

comparatively diverse groups of Germans cooperated to implement the Third Reich's genocidal plans in the occupied Soviet Union. The discontinuities between both groups of German perpetrators highlight the very exceptional nature of Sonderkommando R's personnel in Transnistria. In contrast to Sipo-SD officials stationed in Kiev, Himmler never conceived of Sonderkommando R as a manpower pool that might be called upon to murder Jews. The unit's limited portfolio of mobilizing the region's ethnic Germans necessitated specialized personnel, such as DRK nurses and NS-Frauenwerk organizers, who were absent from other groups of heavily implicated killers. Moreover, given that the unit had no military application, the SS assigned whatever personnel it could gather together with little thought as to how this eclectic cast of characters might function in the field. The unit's diversity was thus a product of the wartime manpower pressures that the VoMi faced.

This same diversity also nearly sabotaged the unit in the field. Although subordinating a conglomeration of non-SS staff that reported to an array of organizations was an unavoidable necessity for the VoMi, it violated the organization's engrained autarkic mindset that sought to secure all Volksdeutsche operations in the SS's hands. This inherent contradiction moved Sonderkommando R's SS leaders to seek to expand their authority at the expense of the NSKK, the DRK, and the NS-Frauenwerk, which asserted at least nominal control over the majority of the unit's personnel. Particularly in Sonderkommando R's regional headquarters in Landau, this infighting poisoned interpersonal relations between the SS and members of the NSKK, DRK, and NS-Frauenwerk. In rural Transnistria, where Sonderkommando R deployed the majority of its personnel, two unanticipated factors largely inoculated the unit's staff to this infighting. First, the unit's SS Bereichkommandoführer and their NSKK subordinates drew on a common frame of reference that they shared by dint of

their participation in earlier VoMi Volksdeutsche “resettlement” operations in Eastern Europe. Second, many of Sonderkommando R’s SS mid-leaders had liaisons with their female subordinates, which strengthened interpersonal bonds between members of the SS, the DRK, and the NS-Frauenwerk, despite clear institutional tensions between the organizations. Wartime manpower shortages prompted the VoMi to staff Sonderkommando R with a hodgepodge of personnel, whose very diversity threatened to hamstring the unit’s operations in Ukraine. Sonderkommando R became a “community of violence” that functioned in spite of itself.

CHAPTER III: HARVEST OF VIOLENCE: SONDERKOMMANDO R'S CAMPAIGN AGAINST INTERNAL ENEMIES IN RURAL TRANSNISTRIA

In the Transnistrian countryside, Sonderkommando R's personnel encountered a local population embittered by its loss of privileged status and traumatized by the war's opening months, when Soviet and German forces both targeted local ethnic Germans. As discussed in chapter one, prior to withdrawing in August 1941, the Red Army and NKVD attempted to remove or destroy the region's military, economic, and transportation infrastructure. Paying particular attention to German-speakers, whom Soviet authorities correctly suspected might become a fifth column, Soviet security forces tried to evacuate all ethnic German men of military age as well as the area's agricultural equipment and livestock across the Bug River. Although advancing Wehrmacht forces overtook many of these transports before they reached the Soviet interior, thousands of displaced Volksdeutsche refugees roamed the countryside for weeks in their trek home.³⁴⁶ Profiting from the temporary absence of most male Volksdeutsche, Romanian soldiers plundered the region's already partially denuded Germanophone settlements.³⁴⁷ The German Eleventh Army stationed in Transnistria

³⁴⁶ Volksdeutsche from almost every one of Transnistria's major Germanophone settlements later testified to Soviet attempts to force local German-speakers to drive their livestock and agricultural machinery across the Bug River in the late summer of 1941. See, for example, Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von D. R., n.d., BAL, B162/2290, 133. Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von J. S., December 12, 1961, BAL, B162/2290, 140. Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von J. D., August 14, 1962, BAL, B162/2296, 166. Aussage von A. H., November 23, 1962, BAL, B162/2299, 125.

³⁴⁷ Dallin, *Odessa, 1941-1944*, 67-68. Aussage von F. E., August 27, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 NSG 0589-002, Band 4, 573. As indicated by the fact that Sonderkommando R devoted the first two of

responded by assigning sentries to guard against further Romanian raids and threatened harsh punishment for any thieves that it caught. As German combat forces withdrew from the area, Einsatzgruppe D assumed the Wehrmacht's guard duties. Beyond simply protecting local Volksdeutsche from further Romanian banditry and assisting in their economic recovery, Einsatzgruppe D prepared the communities for Nazi rule by murdering members of "mixed race" Jewish-Volksdeutsche families and suspected Communist Party functionaries.³⁴⁸ How did Hoffmeyer's ragtag subordinates begin to mobilize this brutalized population for the National Socialist cause? Their solution was to launch yet another violent campaign to eradicate perceived internal enemies within Transnistria's Volksdeutsche settlements—an initiative that began with murdering surviving Jews and quickly snowballed to include suspected Volksdeutsche opponents as well.

This chapter recovers Sonderkommando R's increasingly violent attempts to identify and eliminate real and largely imagined adversaries of National Socialism in southern Ukraine. Despite their collective inexperience in the region, Sonderkommando R's staff suspected correctly that the earlier German effort to murder local Jews had been only partially successful. Succoring the *Volksgemeinschaft* in Transnistria without first establishing its racial and political foundations threatened, from the SS's perspective, to rot the entire enterprise from its very core. At first, Sonderkommando R's personnel in rural Transnistria emulated Einsatzgruppe D's previous murderous anti-Jewish campaign. As permanent German authorities in the region, Sonderkommando R's staff launched a

its staff orders to the problem of Romanian theft in late September 1941, it appears that Romanian marauding ran rampant. Dienstanweisung Nr. 1, September 22, 1941, BB, R59/66, 154. Dienstanweisung Nr. 2, September 22, 1941, BB, R59/66, 153.

³⁴⁸ Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*, 254-94.

comprehensive “mopping up” operation to kill Jews and members of “mixed race” families who had escaped the initial German dragnet. This preliminary campaign not only provided Hoffmeyer’s subordinates with scores of victims, but it also revealed that local Volksdeutsche, some of whom the Germans had often placed in positions of authority, had conspired to hide these individuals. In hiding some Jews, Transnistria’s Volksdeutsche had behaved no differently than the Nazi leadership had suspected that Germans would have acted had the regime targeted such thoroughly integrated Jews in the Reich. Most Volksdeutsche did not conceive of hiding their Jewish or part Jewish neighbors and relatives as an act of broader resistance to the Third Reich’s murderous anti-Semitic agenda. Nevertheless, within the context of Sonderkommando R’s deep-seeded concerns about the viability of the Black Sea Germans as a *Volksgruppe*, the epiphany that some local residents had undermined the SS’s murder campaign fed the unit’s perception that area ethnic Germans constituted a politically unreliable population. In this atmosphere of suspicion, Sonderkommando R began to construe any ethnic German behavior that its personnel deemed to be undesirable as a form of opposition to the unit’s broader agenda. Hoffmeyer’s subordinates read Volksdeutsche efforts to shield a highly selective group of local Jews from the SS as the tip of the iceberg to a concerted Volksdeutsche resistance to the VoMi project in Transnistria that never actually existed.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁹ The term “resistance” is a deeply loaded one in historical scholarship on the Third Reich. Historians have grappled with how to discuss opposition to the Nazi regime. During the 1980s, Martin Broszat expressed it in terms of *Resistenz* as opposed to *Widerstand*. Martin Broszat, “Resistenz und Widerstand: Ein Zwischenbilanz des Forschungsprojekts,” in *Bayern in der NS-Zeit: Herrschaft und Gesellschaft im Konflikt*, ed. Martin Broszat et al., vol. 4, (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1981), 691-709; Detlef Peukert and Ian Kershaw similarly have pointed to an array of behavior under the Third Reich that fell short of actual opposition. See Detlev J.K. Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition, and Racism in Everyday Life*, Trans. Richard Deveson, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Ian Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich, Bavaria 1933-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983). Here “resistance” is used to describe the wide spectrum of Volksdeutsche behavior that Sonderkommando R understood as challenges to its

In early 1942, this increasing frustration boiled over as Sonderkommando R's midlevel leaders used their autonomy to expand earlier attempts to kill local Volksdeutsche "communists" into an uneven, yet brutal effort aimed at stamping out real and often imagined Volksdeutsche resistance to the unit's mission in Transnistria. What began as an effort to punish fugitive Volksdeutsche "communists" evolved rapidly into a system of routinized punishments and assaults that brutalized any ethnic German who demonstrated inadequate enthusiasm for the Nazi cause or whose moral conduct the SS regarded as unbecoming of a prospective member of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. Absent effective oversight from Sonderkommando R's senior leadership, the unit's more sadistic members used these ad hoc initiatives as a pretext for abusing Volksdeutsche without restraint. By early 1943, this brutality had reached such proportions that Hoffmeyer was forced to intervene. He relieved his deputy responsible for Transnistria and brought in new leadership, which attempted to tamp down these abuses by ordering a halt to senseless brutality and channeling this violence into a concentration camp for the region's Volksdeutsche.

Germans and Volksdeutsche

Scholars have struggled to capture the ambiguous relationship between ethnic Germans and Nazi violence in Eastern Europe. Historically, it is a complex subject. The proximity of many Volksdeutsche to the Holocaust in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union permitted them to participate disproportionately as both the perpetrators and the immediate material beneficiaries of genocide. However, as Bergen has noted, "the rewards for Germanness . . . were only for those Volksdeutschen who proved loyal, active partners in

plans in Transnistria. Ethnic German reluctance to embrace all dimensions of the Nazi project in the region is better articulated as recalcitrance.

the Nazi project.”³⁵⁰ After the war, the victimization narrative that many ethnic Germans in the Federal Republic developed to cloak their complicity in the Nazi regime’s crimes merely amplified this ambiguity.³⁵¹ As a necessary corrective to this distorted narrative, typically historians have underscored Volksdeutsche participation in the Holocaust, particularly in the Soviet Union, without paying corresponding attention to what Bergen has aptly termed the violent “ripple effects” of the Nazi worldview that many ethnic Germans experienced.³⁵² Scholarship on the German occupation of Ukraine has, however, grown increasingly sensitive to violent encounters between German authorities and area Volksdeutsche. Angrick’s excellent examination of Einsatzgruppe D, for example, highlights the unit’s parallel efforts to murder both local Jews and Volksdeutsche “communists” in southern Ukraine.³⁵³ Similarly, Lower’s lucid case study of Zhytomyr under Nazi rule underscores the fact that “ethnic Germans changed sides during the war, often blurring the categorical distinctions of victim, perpetrator, and bystander.”³⁵⁴ The radicalization of Sonderkommando R’s efforts from hunting surviving Jews and Volksdeutsche “communists” to using violence to root out imagined Volksdeutsche resistance to National Socialism demonstrates that, even among a group of Volksdeutsche as heavily implicated in the Holocaust as the Black Sea Germans, the threat of German brutality remained an omnipresent feature of life under Nazi

³⁵⁰ Bergen, “The ‘Volksdeutschen’ of Eastern Europe, World War II, and the Holocaust,” 79.

³⁵¹ The *Heimatsbuch* (homeland chronicle) from the Volksdeutsche settlement of Kandel exemplifies this narrative. The book describes a few of Sonderkommando R’s crimes in great detail, yet conveniently omits a more comprehensive engagement with Volksdeutsche participation in the Holocaust. Anton Bosch and Josef Lingor, *Entstehung, Entwicklung und Auflösung der deutschen Kolonien am Schwarzen Meer am Beispiel von Kandel von 1808 bis 1944* (Stuttgart: Landsmannschaft der Deutschen aus Rußland, e.V., 1990), 170-174.

³⁵² Bergen, “The *Volksdeutsche* of Eastern Europe and the Collapse of the Nazi Empire, 1944-1945,” 109.

³⁵³ Angrick. *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*, 269.

³⁵⁴ Wendy Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building*, 12.

rule.

The same postwar ethnic German victimization narrative that has made historians rightly leery of Volksdeutsche claims that they were brutalized by the Nazi regime presents acute methodological challenges in recovering Sonderkommando R's violence against ethnic Germans in Transnistria. As local commanders, rather than Sonderkommando R's senior leadership, shaped the unit's policies toward area Volksdeutsche during 1942, contemporary records about this brutality were kept at the unit's lowest levels. As surviving documentation from Sonderkommando R's subunits is extraordinarily rare and as former members of the unit were generally reticent to discuss their mistreatment of local ethnic Germans after the war, statements that former Volksdeutsche gave to the West German police often contain the only references to this violence. As many ethnic Germans assumed correctly that they might become suspects in criminal investigations, they had every reason to exaggerate their victimization at the hands of Hoffmeyer's subordinates to distract investigators' attention from their own crimes. Nevertheless, both the number of corroborating statements, often given by ethnic German women who grasped that they were not under suspicion, and fragmentary surviving German and Soviet wartime records provide a sufficiently diverse source base to help distinguish hyperbole from reality.

Sonderkommando R in Transnistria

Prior to discussing the increasingly violent campaign that Sonderkommando R's staff launched during 1942, it is useful first to examine briefly the unit's administrative structure, communications network, and leadership—all of which played a role in granting the unit's midlevel commanders tremendous latitude to shape the VoMi's Volksdeutsche policy in southern Ukraine. Sonderkommando R's commanders had to design the unit's organizational

structure to compensate for an acute manpower shortage. In Transnistria, Sonderkommando R's roughly 120 to 150 initial members were responsible for shaping policy for the region's 130,000 Volksdeutsche inhabitants, who were scattered through Odessa, a major metropolitan area, and in towns and hamlets in a large surrounding countryside. Put somewhat differently, Sonderkommando R initially fielded one staff member for every 130 Volksdeutsche and, to cover the entire region, that just one staff member was responsible for all ethnic German affairs in an area approximately as large as the city of Atlanta.

From the beginning of Sonderkommando R's deployment, the unit's leaders attempted to cover the maximum possible territory with the fewest possible staff members. When Sonderkommando R departed its Stahnsdorf headquarters in mid-August 1941, the unit's caravan numbered some one hundred vehicles that ranged from sedans, to trucks, to specialized vans equipped with radio receivers, field kitchens, and even a dark room for the unit's professional photographer.³⁵⁵ Traveling via Łódź, Sonderkommando R reached Zhytomyr, where Hoffmeyer divided the 200-man unit roughly equally. Approximately half of the unit remained in Zhytomyr for later deployment to other ethnic German population centers in the recently created Reichskommissariat Ukraine.³⁵⁶ Under Siebert's command the other half of Sonderkommando R proceeded into Romanian-occupied Transnistria, where, by early September, fighting was limited largely to Odessa. Siebert selected Landau as the location for Sonderkommando R's headquarters (*Hauptstab*) in Transnistria because of

³⁵⁵ Rundanweisung Nr. 5, October 13, 1941, BB, R59/66, 148, Einheit Feldpost Nr. 10528 / Betr.: Munitionsverbrauch und Gebrauch von Schußwaffen, March 14, 1942, BB, R59/66, 111. Rundanweisung Nr. 14 / Betr.: Feier des Tages der nationalen Erhebung, January 20, 1942, BB, R59/66, 125. Protokol doprosa / M. A., June 7, 1945, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2902, 31, 112. Aussage von H. J. G., August 1, 1962, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 NSG 0589-001, Band 2, 91. Aussage von G. B., December 13, 1966, BAL, B162/2307, 329.

³⁵⁶ Protokol doprosa / A. M. G., September 20, 1944, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2902, 56.

both its equidistance from other area Volksdeutsche settlements and its available buildings to house Sonderkommando R's administrative offices.³⁵⁷ Siebert then divided the bulk of his staff into eighteen four- to five-man Bereichkommandos. Commanded by a midlevel SS officer, the Bereichkommandoführer, these subunits mixed SS and NSKK personnel, the latter of which were responsible for driving and maintaining the handful of vehicles assigned to each Bereichkommando.³⁵⁸ On Siebert's orders, these Bereichkommandos established outposts throughout Transnistria in the predominately ethnic German towns of Alexanderfeld, Anam, Bischofsfeld, Groß Liebenthal, Halberstadt, Hoffnungsthal, Janovski, Johannsfeld, Lichtenfeld, Mannheim, Marianburg, Neudorf, Rastatt, Rosenfeld, Selz, Speyer, and Worms as well as in the city of Odessa.³⁵⁹ Given the relative absence of other German units in Transnistria, Hoffmeyer's subordinates in the region could count themselves among the most isolated German administrators in the occupied Soviet Union.

Siebert faced immense difficulties in trying to communicate with his subordinates in the field. Like other parts of the rural Soviet Union, road conditions made motor vehicle traffic extraordinary difficult, particularly in inclement weather. In good weather, Landau was two days of hard driving from Kiev. In bad weather, washed out roads made this trip impossible.³⁶⁰ Winter further complicated ground travel. In late December 1941, for example, Sonderkommando R's subunit assigned to Nikopol in the Reichskommissariat

³⁵⁷ Aussage von K. S., October 30, 1963, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2690, 76.

³⁵⁸ Aussage von E. M. C., August 6, 1962, BAL, B162/2293, 171.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ These transportation difficulties were a primary reason why Höhere SS- und Polizeiführer Hans-Adolf Prützmann granted Hoffmeyer exclusive authority over Transnistria's Selbstschutz units. SS- und Polizeigericht XVIII / Betr.: Unterstellung des volksdetuschen Selbstschutzes in Transnistrien unter die SS- und Polizeigerechtsbarkeit, November 23, 1942, BAL, B162/2292, 126.

Ukraine could not reach its destination due to poor road conditions.³⁶¹ Because streets were frequently impassible for wheeled vehicles, Sonderkommando R often used horses to courier weekly mail deliveries and written staff orders to individual Bereichkommandos—a distribution method that took days.³⁶² Sonderkommando R depended on its own version of the Pony Express to transport even cipher books and other decoding materials from Nikolaev for its radio transponder in Landau.³⁶³ Although VoMi offices in Landau and eventually Odessa had police band radio transmitters with which Sonderkommando R's staff remained in touch with their superiors in Kiev and Berlin, individual Bereichkommandos had no radio equipment.³⁶⁴ To catch Wehrmacht news broadcasts, Hoffmeyer instructed his subordinates to tune in using their car radios.³⁶⁵ Periodically, and perhaps as infrequently as every three months, Hoffmeyer or Siebert chaired conferences for Transnistria's Bereichkommandoführer. These meetings, held initially in Landau and then in Odessa, provided an opportunity for the unit's leadership to set policy and troubleshoot problems as well as for Bereichkommandoführer to socialize and provision themselves with German sundries that were hard to obtain in their remote outposts.³⁶⁶ Aside from occasional written

³⁶¹ German Police Decodes Nr 2 Traffic: 21.12.41, January 6, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 32, 2.

³⁶² Ironically, Sonderkommando R apparently distributed a staff order by mounted courier to inform local Bereichkommandoführer that subsequent staff orders would be distributed in the same fashion. Rundanweisung Nr. 8, n.d. BB, R 59/66, 142. Rundanweisung Nr. 9 / Skizze der Reiterstaffettenverbindung, November 18, 1941, BB, R 59/66, 139-140.

³⁶³ Aussage von O. T., February 23, 1965, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2680, 77.

³⁶⁴ German Police Decodes: 27.11.41, December 6, 1941, BNA, HW 16, Piece 32, 1. Aussage von H. S., March 17, 1966, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2693, 140-141.

³⁶⁵ Rundanweisung Nr. 5, October 13, 1941, BB, R 59/66, 148.

³⁶⁶ Stabbefehl Nr. 101, April 10, 1943, BB, R 59/67, 106. Bereichskommando 12 des SS-Sonderkommandos / Bericht, August 26, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1088, 192. Aussage von H. K., October 13, 1966, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2695, 131. Aussage von G. G., March 3, 1965, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2690, 117. Aussage von F. M., October 9, 1967, Staatsarchiv

orders dispatched by mounted riders and even less frequent face-to-face meetings, Sonderkommando R's senior leaders had few opportunities to supervise their subordinates spread throughout the Ukrainian countryside.

That Sonderkommando R's senior leaders demonstrated painfully little interest in supervising the unit's daily operations merely compounded the de facto independence that many Bereichskommandoführer enjoyed. Hoffmeyer's casual attitude toward managing the unit exemplifies this lack of oversight. A man of action and tremendous ambition, Hoffmeyer emulated his SS superiors' *Wanderlust* and attempted to manage his disparate personnel while constantly on the move. Johann P., one of his chauffeurs, recounts ferrying Hoffmeyer back and forth from Berlin to various destinations in German and Romanian-occupied Ukraine innumerable times.³⁶⁷ Hoffmeyer aped senior Nazi leaders by traveling in a style well above his pay grade of SS-Oberführer (Brigadier General). He maintained an entourage of ten to fifteen, including driver and mechanics, who kept both hard-topped and convertible limousines at the ready, depending on the weather and Hoffmeyer's preference.³⁶⁸ Hoffmeyer also maintained a host of accommodations, conveniently located en route from Berlin to Ukraine, including two in Łódź and Kiev.³⁶⁹ Rumor had it that the VoMi-run Łódź way station was a particular favorite for the married Hoffmeyer because of the charms of its female proprietor, conveniently the mother of one of his young protégées.³⁷⁰ Occasionally,

Münster, Nr. 2699, 5. Aussage von F. D., November 27, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 208.

³⁶⁷ Aussage von J. P., December 12, 1966, BAL, B162/2307, 325. Other Sonderkommando R members confirm Hoffmeyer's incessant travel. Aussage von V. R., July 31, 1962, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2671, 151.

³⁶⁸ German Police Decodes Nr. 2 Traffic: 17.10.42, October 23, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 36, 1. Protokół doprosy / A. M. G., September 20, 1944, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2902, 33.

³⁶⁹ Aussage von E. S., December 15, 1966, BAL, B162/2307, 349-350.

³⁷⁰ Aussage von F. J. L., January 16, 1965, BAL, B162/2303, 310. Other postwar testimony confirms a

Hoffmeyer would visit Landau, Odessa, or the odd rural Bereichkommando on inspection tours with much pomp and circumstance.³⁷¹ During one visit to Rastatt, for example, Hoffmeyer's arrival necessitated an honor guard from the local ethnic German militia unit, complete with white dress uniforms conceived especially for the occasion.³⁷² Invariably, the unit's photographer, SS-Untersturmführer Georg Bauer, was on hand to capture the photo op.³⁷³ On important matters, such as Sonderkommando R's participation in the murder of Jewish deportees during the winter of 1941-42, Hoffmeyer conferred with his staff *in situ*.³⁷⁴ Hoffmeyer, however, left all but the most crucial issues to the discretion of his subordinates who, if they were lucky, could reach him by radio.³⁷⁵ Hoffmeyer was, put simply, the epitome of a "seagull manager."

Sonderkommando R's Bereichkommandoführer in Transnistria exercised surprising independence in shaping Volksdeutsche policy in their Bereichkommandos. Only some of this autonomy was by design. Frequently the only German officials within a day or two of travel, the unit's midlevel leaders had substantial authority to implement VoMi policy independently. Nevertheless, Sonderkommando R's woefully inadequate communications infrastructure, which more often than not depended on written dispatches couriered by riders,

personal relationship between Hoffmeyer and the woman. Aussage von O. H., August 15, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 236.

³⁷¹ Aussage von F. D., November 27, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 207. Aussage von J. P., December 12, 1966, BAL, B162/2307, 325. Aussage von G. Z., October 15, 1962, BAL, B162/2300, 113.

³⁷² Aussage von E. P., July 16, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 194-195.

³⁷³ Aussage von G. B., December 13, 1966, BAL, B162/2307, 330-332. SS Offizier Akte Georg Bauer, NARA, RG 242, A3343 SSO-040, 45324-45325. Aussage von A. G., January 15, 1965, BAL, B162/2303, 304.

³⁷⁴ Aussage von E. S., November 12, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 5, 734.

³⁷⁵ For this purpose, Hoffmeyer appears to have notified his staff about his whereabouts. German Police Decodes Nr. 2 Traffic: 10.10.42, October 15, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 36, 2.

ensured that speedy intervention from the unit's senior leader would have been virtually impossible even had Hoffmeyer and his immediate subordinates been so inclined. Important decisions about an array of subjects, including the unit's campaign against internal enemies in Transnistria's Volksdeutsche communities, fell almost exclusively to local commanders during the first year and a half of the occupation. In Transnistria, the "'on the spot' decision-making" that Lower has aptly identified as part of the organizational culture of German administrators in the occupied Soviet Union, was not simply an institutional ethos, but also a necessity.³⁷⁶

The Murder of Local Jews and "Mixed Race" Families in Transnistria's Volksdeutsche Settlements

In Transnistria's Volksdeutsche settlements, the Nazi regime pursued an anti-Jewish policy that was far more radical than the one that it felt able to implement in Germany. The major distinction was whether or not the Jewish spouses of "Aryans" and their part Jewish children were to be considered as Jews for the purposes of the Final Solution. In Germany, the Nazi party met repeated stiff opposition from the German civil service when it proposed that both groups should be regarded as Jews. Both following the 1935 Nürnberg Laws and at the Wannsee Conference in early 1942, German civil servants cautioned that moves against Jewish spouses of Germans were inadvisable because of potential popular backlash against the regime.³⁷⁷ Heeding these warning, Nazi authorities reluctantly resolved not to pursue the members of these "privileged marriages" and their partially Jewish offspring in the Reich. In

³⁷⁶ Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building*, 8.

³⁷⁷ Jeremy Noakes, "The Development of Nazi Policy Towards the German-Jewish 'Mischlinge' 1933-1945," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 34, no. 291-354 (1989): 304-7, 343; Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, 148.

Transnistria, by contrast, concerns about local opinion failed to moderate Nazi racial policy. There, Einsatzgruppe D and later Sonderkommando R murdered both area Jews and local residents, who were members of “mixed race” families. In some instances, German forces murdered not only the Jewish spouses of Volksdeutsche and local *Mischlinge*, but also these unions’ “Aryan” partners.³⁷⁸ When Transnistria’s ethnic Germans hid their Jewish or part Jewish neighbors and family members from the SS, they behaved precisely as German civil administrators had predicted that many Reich Germans would have done had the Nazi regime implemented similarly radical anti-Jewish policies in Germany. Sonderkommando R appears not to have grasped that the SS had pursued these measures in Transnistria precisely because the suspect nature of local Volksdeutsche made it indifferent to local reactions to these killings. Hoffmeyer’s subordinates interpreted area ethnic German efforts to save a highly selective group of Jews and *Mischlinge* from the SS not as a predictable response to a murderous policy that the Nazi regime had deemed potentially too unpopular to implement in Germany, but rather as evidence of Volksdeutsche resistance and unreliability.

Upon its arrival in Transnistria, Sonderkommando R inherited Einsatzgruppe D’s responsibilities for making the region’s Volksdeutsche settlements *judenrein* (free of Jews). None of the unit’s surviving records reveal evidence of written orders from Sonderkommando R’s commanders to their staff to begin murdering surviving local Jews. However, the fact that members of the unit pursued the same genocidal policy in isolated Bereichkommandos suggests that at least the unit’s officers received oral orders to do so either before separating in Landau or, more likely, before the unit departed Stahnsdorf. Despite the similarities with Einsatzgruppe D’s efforts to murder local Jews living in

³⁷⁸ Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*, 270-71.

Transnistria's ethnic German towns and hamlets, Sonderkommando R's task was significantly more challenging. In its initial sweep through the region during the summer of 1941, Einsatzgruppe D had shot only those Jews whom the unit could identify with or without the help of local ethnic Germans. The handful of Jews who remained in the region's Volksdeutsche settlements were either Jews whose ethnic German neighbors had hidden them from the SS or Jews who had returned to local Volksdeutsche communities after Einsatzgruppe D's departure. In either case, unlike Einsatzgruppe D's victims, Sonderkommando R's Jewish targets typically had much deeper roots in Transnistria's Volksdeutsche settlements. By dint of the fact that these surviving Jews were difficult to spot and, almost invariably, were being assisted by local ethnic Germans, Sonderkommando R's attempt to murder area Jews was a lengthy process that continued well into 1942.

Initially, Sonderkommando R's involvement in the murder of local Jews in Transnistria constituted a second sweep that often retraced Einsatzgruppe D's route weeks or months earlier. Killings in the regional center of Hoffnungsthal, a predominantly ethnically German town of between 2,500 and 3,000 residents some 90 kilometers north of the city of Odessa, exemplifies Sonderkommando R's initial "mopping up" efforts.³⁷⁹ Shortly after Romanian and German troops occupied the town in August 1941, a 20 to 30 strong detachment from Einsatzgruppe D entered Hoffnungsthal and announced its intention to solve the local "Jewish question."³⁸⁰ With the aid of local informants, Einsatzgruppe D detained a handful of local Volksdeutsche "communists" as well as between 50 and 60 Jews, whom ethnic German witnesses later identified alternatively as local Jews and Jewish

³⁷⁹ Aussage von R. B., November 29, 1963, BAL, B162/2301, 14. Aussage von J. F., November 29, 1963, BAL, B162/2301, 17.

³⁸⁰ Aussage von A. W., April 23, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 80-81.

expellees from Bessarabia, and shot their prisoners a kilometer from the edge of the town. As was its established practice in Transnistria, Einsatzgruppe D ordered local Volksdeutsche men to bury the bodies in a mass grave.³⁸¹

Despite implausible postwar remonstrations from Sonderkommando R's former personnel,³⁸² the "Jewish question" was far from solved when SS-Hauptsturmführer Weingärtner³⁸³ and his subordinates, SS-Obersturmführer Konrad Hoffmann,³⁸⁴ SS-Oberscharführer Alexander Lerche,³⁸⁵ NSKK chauffeur Hermann J.,³⁸⁶ established their Bereichkommando in Hoffnungsthal the following month. When Weingärtner and his staff arrived in Hoffnungsthal, the town appears to have had an unusually high number of surviving Jews for two reasons. First, it appears likely that Einsatzgruppe D's earlier sweep had focused on Freiburg, a predominantly Jewish village of roughly 100 residents some three kilometers away, and thus overlooked many of Hoffnungsthal's Jewish residents.³⁸⁷ Second, postwar evidence suggests that Einsatzgruppe D's initial killings shocked area Volksdeutsche, who had hidden surviving local Jews from the SS. August F., a local resident whom Einsatzgruppe D ordered to serve in the burial detail, recounted being "full of fear" at the

³⁸¹ Aussage von A. F., May 22, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 131.

³⁸² Aussage von H. J., May 19, 1965, BAL, B162/2304, 65.

³⁸³ SS Offizier Akte Theophil Weingärtner, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SSO-229B, 468. Einbürgerungsantrag Theophil Weingärtner, NARA, RG 242, A3343, EWZ51 G011, 1342.

³⁸⁴ SS Offizier Akte Konrad Hoffmann, NARA, RG 242, A3343 SSO-108A, 818-824.

³⁸⁵ RuSHA Akte Alexander Lerche, NARA, RG 242, A3343 RS D5030, 108-186.

³⁸⁶ Aussage von H. J., May 19, 1965, BAL, B162/2304, 65.

³⁸⁷ Aussage von H. A., November 22, 1962, BAL, B162/2301, 158. Aussage von J. A., December 4, 1962, BAL, B162/2301, 98. The precise fate of Freiburg's Jewish inhabitants is unclear. When DRK nurse Hildegard E. arrived in area in 1943, the town's Jews had disappeared and Freiburg had only Volksdeutsche inhabitants. Aussage von H. E., September 16, 1966, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2695, 53-54. Rumor had it that German authorities had shot the town's Jews. Aussage von A. G., November 28, 1962, BAL, B162/2301, 156.

sight of the corpses and having been unable to eat for days after the shootings.³⁸⁸ Adolf W., another denizen of Hoffnungsthal, recounted how the community was “not in agreement” with the killings.³⁸⁹ Both popular and private disdain for the murders moved Hoffnungsthal’s newly appointed mayor, Gottlieb B., to shelter the town’s remaining Jews from the SS. When Weingärtner discovered B.’s efforts on behalf of his Jewish neighbors, he sacked B. in favor to another local resident, who was seemingly more sympathetic to the Nazi agenda.³⁹⁰ B.’s advanced age apparently spared him from a harsher punishment.³⁹¹ The Jews whom he attempted to help, however, were not so lucky. Witness accounts describe how Weingärtner’s subordinates rounded up the surviving members of the town’s ten to fifteen Jewish families and executed them on Hoffnungsthal’s environs.³⁹² Many local ethnic Germans appear to have reacted equally negatively to this subsequent round of killing. As Heinrich F., aged fourteen in 1941, later recounted: “as a boy I was really shocked [by the shootings], because the Jewish children, with whom we had been together, suddenly were no longer among us.”³⁹³ In a pattern that replicated itself in many of Transnistria’s Volksdeutsche settlements, Sonderkommando R’s initial responsibilities involved murdering local Jews who, often with the assistance of area ethnic Germans, had eluded Einsatzgruppe D.³⁹⁴

³⁸⁸ Aussage von A. F., May 22, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 131.

³⁸⁹ Aussage von A. W., April 23, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 80-81.

³⁹⁰ Aussage von W. M., May 24, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 148-149.

³⁹¹ Aussage von A. F., May 22, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 132.

³⁹² Aussage von M. B., August 21, 1962, BAL, B162/2302, 86. Aussage von A. F., May 22, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 133. Aussage von A. G., November 28, 1962, BAL, B162/2301, 156.

³⁹³ Vernehmung von H. F., August 2, 1962, BAL, B162/2296, 125.

³⁹⁴ References to these killings pepper postwar testimony. On Rosenfeld, see Vernehmung von W. H., July 19, 1962, BAL, B162/2297, 58. On Landau, see Vernehmung von J. B., November 15, 1962, BAL, B162/2299, 254. On Neu-Rohrbach, see Aussage von H. S., July 6, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 153. On

Like those of Einsatzgruppe D, Sonderkommando R's efforts to expunge Jews from Transnistria's ethnic German communities also entailed the murder of members of "mixed race" Volksdeutsche-Jewish families. This initiative created even greater problems for Sonderkommando R. Members of "mixed race" marriages and their children, who had survived Einsatzgruppe D's murder campaign, had done so by avoiding detection. While luck sometimes played a role, more often than not survival depended on both the concrete assistance of "Aryan" relatives and at least a tacit agreement among local residents not to paint them as targets for Sonderkommando R. Finding local informants to finger members of "mixed race" marriages and their offspring may have proven particularly difficult because any would-be denouncer would have known that providing the information to Sonderkommando R would have contributed to the murder of local children with surviving local relatives. It was thus not until the better part of a year into the VoMi's administration of Transnistria's Volksdeutsche settlements that local residents denounced these surviving Jews and *Mischlinge* to Sonderkommando R.

Perhaps as a reflection of the unease that these killings created among local residents, witnesses focused disproportionately on these crimes in postwar statements to both West German and Soviet authorities. The murder of members of "mixed race" families was an initial catalyst for the West German criminal probe into Sonderkommando R's wartime activities. In November 1961, after reading an article about the work of German prosecutors in a local newspaper in British Columbia, an ethnic German émigré from Transnistria penned a letter about these crimes to the German consulate in Vancouver, which the German Foreign

Katharinental, see Aussage von A. D., October 30, 1962, BAL, B162/2299, 290.

Office forwarded to Ludwigsburg.³⁹⁵ Before grasping the scope of Sonderkommando R's involvement in the mass murder of Jews during the winter of 1941-42, West German investigators focused their inquiry on the unit's role in murdering the members and children of "mixed race" marriages in Transnistria's Volksdeutsche communities. These types of killings also left their mark on local non-Germans, which is reflected in the fact that these crimes constitute one the rare instances in which the Soviet Extraordinary Commission investigated Sonderkommando R's crimes against local residents (as opposed to Jewish deportees).³⁹⁶ This rich source base provides a unique opportunity to reconstruct how Hoffmeyer's subordinates prosecuted this final campaign to make Transnistria's Volksdeutsche settlements *judenrein*.

Sonderkommando R's efforts to eliminate the last vestiges of Jewish "contamination" from Selz, a town of some 3,000 Volksdeutsche some 50 kilometers northwest of Odessa, exemplifies the difficulties that Hoffmeyer's subordinates faced in carrying out this aspect of their mission. As in Hoffnungsthal, Einsatzgruppe D had operated in the town, executing a sizable number of local Jews and Volksdeutsche "communists" and recruiting a handful of ethnic German men to serve as interpreters, some of whom accompanied the unit as far as Crimea.³⁹⁷ Like their colleagues in Hoffnungsthal, the head of Bereichkommando XXIII, SS-Obersturmführer Norbert Pachschwöll,³⁹⁸ and his deputy, SS-Untersturmführer Johannes

³⁹⁵ Brief an das Consulate of the Federal Republic of Germany, Vancouver, Canada von Herrn E. G., November 28, 1961, BAL, B162/2290, 80-82.

³⁹⁶ Akt No. 37, October 17, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 75. Akt No. 40, October 17, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 75.

³⁹⁷ Aussage von L. S., October 3, 1962, BAL, B162/2300, 146. On the recruitment of Volksdeutsche interpreters, including Hans Volk, see Aussage von L. D., August 7, 1967, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2698, 39.

³⁹⁸ SS Offizier Akte Norbert Pachschwöll, NARA, RG 242, A3343 SSO-360A, 1041.

F.,³⁹⁹ inherited responsibility for a Volksdeutsche town that, unbeknownst to them, was only partially purged of “Jewish” influences.

Prior to the war, Selz had been home to a number of Jews, many of whom had anticipated correctly the Nazi threat and had evacuated eastward with retreating Soviet forces during the summer of 1941.⁴⁰⁰ For local Jews who had intermarried with the town’s ethnic Germans, however, Selz appeared to provide a refuge amid the chaos of the German and Romanian offensive. Apparently judging that his Volksdeutsche wife Martha and their four young children afforded him protection from German aggression, Kasper Thielman, a collective farm worker known locally as “Kasper the Jew,”⁴⁰¹ (*Judenkasper*) opted to remain in Selz.⁴⁰² Area ethnic Germans, who were married to Jews, likewise regarded Selz as a safe haven. Georg Deibert was a case in point. During the mid-1930s, Deibert, a professional musician and choral director, had moved to Odessa, where he married a Jew and fathered two children.⁴⁰³ When Romanian occupation authorities arrested his wife, Deibert returned to his parents’ home in Selz with their two children because his hometown appeared to offer them a better chance for survival than Odessa, which, during the fall of 1941, was the epicenter of Romanian anti-Jewish violence.⁴⁰⁴ Surprisingly, both Thielman and Deibert’s assumptions

³⁹⁹ Aussage von J. F., July 19, 1962, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2671, 71.

⁴⁰⁰ Aussage von A. F., August 6, 1962, BAL, B162/2302, 70.

⁴⁰¹ Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung J. S., December 12, 1961, BAL, B162/2290, 142. Aussage von H. L., December 21, 1961, BAL, B162/2291. Aussage von L. W., n.d., BAL, B162/2291, 31. Aussage von F. J., December 21, 1961, BAL, B162/2291, 24. Aussage von E. K., December 21, 1961, BAL, B162/2291, 25.

⁴⁰² Quoted in Aussage von J. D., November 26, 1962, BAL, B162/2291, 26. Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von D. R., n.d., BAL, B162/2290, 136.

⁴⁰³ Ibid., 134.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid. Aussage von J. H., August 6, 1962, BAL, B162/2302, 115. Aussage von F. J., December 21, 1961, BAL, B162/2291, 24.

about their ability to submerge themselves in Selz were correct, albeit tragically temporarily.

Reconstructing precisely how Pachtschwöll and his subordinates discovered these families in Selz is particularly difficult not because of the absence of postwar testimony, but rather because of the ubiquity of likely exculpatory statements that suspected perpetrators gave to the West German police. Pachtschwöll,⁴⁰⁵ F.,⁴⁰⁶ and Alexander Fetsch,⁴⁰⁷ the SS-appointed ethnic German mayor of Selz, all provided differing accounts that ranged from absurd denials of any wrongdoing, to blaming anonymous and perhaps phantom SS officers, to fingering one another. With the aid of an October 1944 report prepared for the Soviet Extraordinary State Commission and postwar statements given by other local residents, however, a partial picture emerges.⁴⁰⁸ During the winter of 1941-42, both families succeeded in hiding among the local ethnic German population. Deibert, whom some former residents remembered fondly as a featured performer at dances held in the town, apparently hid his children in plain sight.⁴⁰⁹ Although other residents were aware that both the Thielman and Deibert families had members with Jewish ancestry, no one in Selz denounced them to Pachtschwöll or his subordinates, despite the fact that, by January 1942, no one in Transnistria

⁴⁰⁵ An Austrian citizen, and apparently unconcerned with appearances, Pachtschwöll hid from West German authorities first in Austria and then in North Africa. Although never interviewed by West German investigators about the killing of these two families, in October 1971, Pachtschwöll sent a letter to the German Embassy in Morocco. In it, he objected that the investigation was portraying the SS in an unfairly negative light. Brief von N. P. an die Deutschen Botschaft in Marokko / Betr.: Meine Tätigkeit während des Krieges in den Gebieten Ost- und Südost-Europas, October 29, 1971, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2787, 61.

⁴⁰⁶ F. provided a detailed and likely phony description of handing the “mixed race” children over to two anonymous SS officers, thereby conveniently distancing himself from their murder. Aussage von J. F., July 19, 1962, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2671, 81-82.

⁴⁰⁷ Fetsch also gave descriptions of the families’ murders to the West German police and equally conveniently pointed responsibility directly at Pachtschwöll and Fischer. Aussage von A. F., February 23, 1962, BAL, B162/2291, 66-67. Aussage von A. F., August 6, 1962, BAL, B162/2302, 70-71.

⁴⁰⁸ Akt No. 40, October 17, 1944, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 75, 62.

⁴⁰⁹ Aussage von D. P., April 26, 1967, BAL, B162/2307, 524.

could have remained ignorant of the SS's complicity in the murder of Jewish deportees. This conspiracy of silence ended abruptly in April 1942, not because of an end to the community's tacit agreement to shelter the families, but rather because Deibert's wife escaped from her Romanian captors—whose brutal conditions she had endured for more than six months—and returned to her family in Selz.⁴¹⁰ In a town of 3,000 residents, Bereichkommando XXIII's staff, some of whom had just arrived from Germany, might not have detected Mrs. Deibert's return were it not for the fact that recently Sonderkommando R had begun issuing permanent ethnic German identification cards (*Volkstumsausweise*) to area Volksdeutsche.⁴¹¹ A few months earlier, both the large-scale treks of ethnic German refugees back to their home villages from captured Soviet deportation transports and Sonderkommando R's mass murder campaign would have obscured a newcomer's arrival in the community. By early April 1942, however, the absence of the appropriate SS-issued identification invited close scrutiny from Sonderkommando R's personnel. After determining Mrs. Deibert to be a Jew, Pachschwöll and F. arrested her at the family home a short distance from their command post, drove her a kilometer outside of the village, and shot her.⁴¹² Perhaps because Mrs. Deibert's appearance had increased the vigilance of Bereichkommando XXIII's staff, or

⁴¹⁰ Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von D. R., n.d., BAL, B162/2290, 136. Aussage von J. H., August 6, 1962, BAL, B162/2302, 115.

⁴¹¹ Establishing when Sonderkommando R distributed *Volkstumsausweise* is a difficult proposition, as it likely varied according to local circumstances. A late December 1941 staff order from Hoffmeyer directed his subordinates to distribute identification cards by February 25, 1942. Rundanweisung Nr. 11 / Betrifft [sic] namentliche Erfassung und Reigstrierung aller Volksdeutschen in Transnistrien, December 28, 1941, BB, R59/66, 132. Evidence from Bereichkommando XI in Rastatt, however, suggests that members of its Selbstschutz received *Volkstumsausweise* only at the beginning of April 1942. See, for example, Einbürgerungsantrag Peter Heck, September 12, 1944, NARA, A3342-EWZ50-C57, 574.

⁴¹² F. provided the most vivid account of the arrest, at the conclusion of which he conveniently and implausibly claimed that he handed her over to another SS officer. Aussage von J. F., July 19, 1962, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2671, 81-82. Fetsch stated simply after the war that Mrs. Deibert disappeared. Aussage von A. F., August 6, 1962, BAL, B162/2302, 70. Other residents confirm her disappearance. See Aussage von H. L., December 21, 1961, BAL, B162/2291, 26.

perhaps because her brutal murder convinced a local informant that keeping the town's secret might now prove equally fatal, in short order Pachschwöll and his subordinates identified Kasper Thielman as a Jew and shot him as well.⁴¹³

While Pachschwöll and F. killed both Jews immediately after their discovery, the two SS officers waited for more than a week before they murdered the families' "mixed race" children.⁴¹⁴ It seems that by mid-1942 Sonderkommando R's standing order instructed its staff to permit VoMi experts from Landau to inspect "mixed race" children for their biological suitability to be included in the *Volksgemeinschaft*. The experience of Wilhelm S., a local ethnic German truck driver employed by Sonderkommando R in Helenental, supports this theory. After witnessing the murder of local Jews by Einsatzgruppe D and by Sonderkommando R, S. began to fear for the safety of his two, half-Jewish grandchildren. He presented the situation to a sympathetic member of the local Bereichkommando, who requested direction from his superiors. The responsible Bereichkommandoführer and two SS officers from Landau appeared to evaluate the children and, as S. later described, "because of my duties at the Bereichkommando in Helenental and the fact that my grandchildren did not have a Jewish appearance, nothing happened to them."⁴¹⁵ Although speculative, it is possible that the two mid-ranking SS officers, whom F. referenced in his postwar testimony and blamed for Mrs. Deibert's disappearance, appeared in Selz to perform precisely the same

⁴¹³ Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von D. R., n.d., BAL, B162/2290, 137. Other witnesses confirm T.'s disappearance. See Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von J. S., December 12, 1961, BAL, B162/2290, 142.

⁴¹⁴ According to F., the SS rounded up Deibert's children 8 to 10 days after Mrs. Deibert's arrest. Aussage von J. F., July 19, 1962, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2671, 81.

⁴¹⁵ Aussage von W. S., September 15, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 304.

function that S. described in Helenental.⁴¹⁶

Regardless of whether the children were in fact subjected to racial examination, a little more than a week after the murder of the parents Bereichkommando XXIII's staff moved against the youngsters. Early one April morning, with the assistance of Mayor Fetsch and two local ethnic Germans, Franz Wald and Rafael Wilhelm, Pachschwöll and F. collected the children in their staff car.⁴¹⁷ Under the alleged pretext of taking the children to an orphanage, the SS requested that Deibert hand over his son and daughter.⁴¹⁸ Apparently without protest, Deibert dutifully bundled his children, eight-year-old Rafael and seven-year-old Lena, against the morning cold and permitted the SS officers and their helpers to load the youths into the staff car.⁴¹⁹ When the party arrived at the Thielman residence with the same request, Martha Thielman insisted on accompanying her children.⁴²⁰ The SS obliged her and packed the woman and her children, Peter, Rosa, Wendelin, and Maria, into their vehicle.⁴²¹ Josef S., a fellow Selz resident, later described the scene: "the mother of the children did not

⁴¹⁶ Aussage von J. F., July 19, 1962, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2671, 81.

⁴¹⁷ Akt No. 40, October 17, 1944, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 75, 62.

⁴¹⁸ Fetsch's testimony suggests that an SS request to place the children in an orphanage was the subterfuge that the SS used to convince Deibert to separate from his children. Aussage von A. F., February 23, 1962, BAL, B162/2291, 66. Aussage von A. F., August 6, 1962, BAL, B162/2302, 71.

⁴¹⁹ Akt No. 40, October 17, 1944, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 75, 62. A former local resident confirmed the approximate ages of Deibert's children. Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von D. R., n.d., BAL, B162/2290, 134.

⁴²⁰ It is impossible to establish with certainty that the murder of both families' children occurred at the same time. Local residents of Selz merely stated after the war that both families' children disappeared at roughly the same time in 1942. Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von D. R., n.d. BAL, B162/2290, 137. Particularly if representatives from Landau examined both sets of children simultaneously, it seems likely that the Deibert children and the surviving members of the Thielman family were arrested during the same operation. Evidence from the Soviet Extraordinary State Commission supports the conclusion that all of the victims were murdered on the same day. Akt No. 40, October 17, 1944, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 75, 62.

⁴²¹ Ibid.

want to live without them. I saw at a distance of several hundred meters how the children and the women were brought forward. The woman was holding a little one in her arms.”⁴²² As the SS drove them out of town, Fetsch calmed the children by handing out candy.⁴²³ Upon arriving at the sand dunes between Selz and the neighboring town of Strasburg, the SS, perhaps aided by their local helpers, gunned down the entire party.⁴²⁴ Upon returning to town, Pachschröll banned local residents from burying the bodies in the local cemetery.⁴²⁵ Remarkably, sometime later, Pachschröll requested that Deibert reprise his role as the town choral director and he once again entertained the community with his music.⁴²⁶

Both Einsatzgruppe D and Sonderkommando R’s attempts to murder Jews and *Mischlinge* in Transnistria’s Volksdeutsche communities underscore the important role that local ethnic Germans played in both lubricating and sabotaging the “machinery of destruction” at the local level. Without the unqualified support of the local community, the Nazi regime’s efforts to murder every last Jew remained a difficult, if not impossible task. When asked to identify their Jewish neighbors, area Volksdeutsche initially kept the identities of at least some local residents of Jewish ancestry hidden from both units. During the summer of 1941, local ethnic Germans had fingered most area Jews to Einsatzgruppe D during its sweep through the region. Nevertheless, these same Volksdeutsche informers failed to denounce a handful of them to the SS. Why local ethnic Germans decided to expose

⁴²² Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von J. S., December 12, 1961, BAL, B162/2290, 142.

⁴²³ Akt No. 40, October 17, 1944, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 75, 62.

⁴²⁴ Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von D. R., n.d., BAL, B162/2290, 137. Curiously, while the Extraordinary State Commission supports this postwar testimony, it does not list Martha Thielman as one of the victims. Akt No. 40, October 17, 1944, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 75, 62.

⁴²⁵ Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von J. S., December 12, 1961, BAL, B162/2290, 137.

⁴²⁶ Aussage von J. H., August 6, 1962, BAL, B162/2302, 115.

some Jews and *Mischlinge* to the SS and sheltered others is largely speculative. Anecdotally, however, ethnic Germans aided Jews and members of “mixed race” families, whom they regarded as integrated members of the local community. In doing so, Transnistria’s Volksdeutsche behaved no differently than Reich Germans would have had the Nazi regime attempted to deport and murder Jewish spouses and offspring of “mixed marriages.” Although Transnistria’s Volksdeutsche were ready partners in German efforts to murder many of their Jewish and “mixed race” neighbors, they remained reluctant to assist German authorities in hunting down the Nazi regime’s final racial enemies within their midst.

Despite ongoing local Volksdeutsche support for a small fraction of their Jewish and “mixed race” neighbors during the first nine months of the occupation, Einsatzgruppe D and Sonderkommando R perceived ethnic German enthusiasm for murdering Jews very differently. Area ethnic Germans had responded to Einsatzgruppe D’s entreaties for assistance with scores of denunciations, satisfying the unit’s members that many local Volksdeutsche were willing partners in the Nazi project—so much so that they recruited local interpreters from the region’s ethnic German communities. For Sonderkommando R, however, the repeated discovery of hidden local Jews and members of “mixed race” families cast serious doubt as to the willingness of local ethnic Germans to participate in the Nazi project. The unit’s staff realized that the continued survival of these targeted minorities would have been impossible without the concrete assistance of a few and a tacit support of virtually all local Volksdeutsche. Moreover, Sonderkommando R’s winter 1941-42 mass shooting operation (to be discussed in chapters seven and eight) had illustrated to local Volksdeutsche that the SS expected them to murder Jews if called upon to do so. That Sonderkommando R’s staff in rural Transnistria continued to find Jews and members of

“mixed race” families well into 1942 suggested to the unit’s midlevel leaders that many local ethnic Germans remained opposed—however selective in reality—to at least this key component of the National Socialist agenda.

Sonderkommando R’s discovery that some residents of Jewish ancestry had survived in Transnistria’s Volksdeutsche communities with local ethnic German assistance merely contributed to existing concerns within the unit about the viability of the VoMi’s efforts in Transnistria. From the unit’s first deployment to southern Ukraine, it was apparent to at least the veterans of earlier Volksdeutsche resettlement campaigns in Eastern Europe that ethnic Germans in the pre-1939 boundaries of the Soviet Union compared unfavorably to the Germanophone minorities that they had encountered earlier in their service. Even the unit’s senior leadership acknowledged repeatedly that the level of economic development in rural Ukraine and the comparatively weak linguistic, cultural, and political ties that the Black Sea Germans had maintained with the Reich historically would present unique obstacles to the unit’s mission.⁴²⁷ While it is virtually certain that Sonderkommando R’s rank and file on average thought even less of local Volksdeutsche, it is difficult to gauge this perception. As the “agents of Germanization” in Transnistria, Sonderkommando R’s staff rarely if ever articulated their low regard for the local residents, whom it was their job to succor, in official records.⁴²⁸ Likewise, in their postwar statements to the West German police, Sonderkommando R’s former personnel did not articulate these sentiments, as they would

⁴²⁷ See, for example, Rundanweisung Nr. 11 / Betrifft [sic] namentliche Erfassung und Registrierung aller Volksdeutschen in Transnistrien, December 28, 1941, BB, R 59/66, 132.

⁴²⁸ For Sonderkommando R’s staff to have articulated their dissatisfaction with the quality of the Black Sea Germans as a *Volksgruppe* risked divulging these reservations to other elements within the Nazi regime, which, in contrast to the SS, opposed the VoMi’s efforts in Ukraine. Schmaltz and Sinner, “The Nazi Ethnographic Research of Georg Leibbrandt and Karl Stumpp in Ukraine, and Its North American Legacy,” 47.

have been out of step with the portrayal of their task in the context of West German judicial investigations during the 1960s and 1970s as an aid or rescue mission.⁴²⁹ If, however, in its attempt to put a positive spin on the unit's mission, Sonderkommando R's leadership had to acknowledge the potential unsuitability of local Volksdeutsche, then it seems implausible that their subordinates would have thought much better of area ethnic Germans. An already suspect group of Volksdeutsche in the eyes of their new German masters, the Black Sea Germans demonstrated what the SS regarded as an alarming lack of devotion to National Socialism. For Sonderkommando R's staff, racial and political reservations about the region's Volksdeutsche became mutually reinforcing.

The realization that local Volksdeutsche had hamstrung repeated German efforts to kill a handful of Jews as well as the offspring of mixed marriages in the region's ethnic German settlements, however, did not simply reinforce Sonderkommando R's negative perceptions of the Black Sea Germans—it suggested that the unit had a real problem on its hands. If, even after Sonderkommando R had called upon area Volksdeutsche to assist in the mass murder of Jews, many local ethnic Germans continued to aid their Jewish and “mixed race” neighbors, then what else might they be hiding? In this atmosphere of growing suspicion, Sonderkommando R's staff began to regard any ethnic German recalcitrance or misbehavior as a possible concerted opposition to the Nazi project. Their solution was to nip this perceived (and likely imaged) Volksdeutsche resistance in the bud with brutal and immediate consequences.

⁴²⁹ A number of the unit's former officers depicted it as a type of aid mission. See, for example, Aussage von K. S., October 30, 1963, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2690, 75.

Policing Transnistria's Volksdeutsche

Initially, like its anti-Jewish measures, Sonderkommando R's efforts to purge Transnistria's Volksdeutsche communities of alleged ethnic German political opponents were simply a continuation of earlier German operations in the region. Sonderkommando R's role in rooting out local Volksdeutsche "communists" was, in fact, numerically comparatively insignificant. Discontent with Soviet rule was sufficiently widespread that, during the summer of 1941, both the Wehrmacht and later Einsatzgruppe D had no difficulty finding local informants, who frequently sought out German authorities. On the basis of these initial denunciations, the German military and Einsatzgruppe D had already shot many of the worst Volksdeutsche "offenders" before Sonderkommando R arrived on station in Transnistria. Sonderkommando R's preliminary role was thus again to complete earlier German sweeps of the region.

What began as a simple "mopping up" operation to kill suspected local Volksdeutsche "communists," whose presence earlier German forces had not detected, escalated rapidly into an effort to locate, detain, and execute ethnic Germans "communist" fugitives, whose neighbors implicated them in prewar Soviet repression.⁴³⁰ Sonderkommando R's efforts to arrest Friedrich M., the former chairman of the village soviet in Neudorf, a Volksdeutsche settlement of roughly 2,400 residents some 60 kilometers northwest of Odessa, underscores the unit's rapidly evolving role.⁴³¹ Local Volksdeutsche held M. accountable for expropriating his neighbors, whom Soviet authorities had identified as "kulaks."⁴³²

⁴³⁰ See, for example, Sonderkommando R's arrest of Volksdeutsche "communists" in Hoffnungsthal. Aussage von H. A., November 22, 1962, BAL, B162/2301, 160-161.

⁴³¹ Vernehmungsniederschrift von J. K., July 17, 1962, BAL, B162/2296, 55.

⁴³² Aussage von A. S., April 23, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 71.

According to some sources, during the course of collectivization, M. routinely raped the wives of farmers whose property he had confiscated. For the latter crime, Soviet authorities allegedly had sentenced M. to seven years in prison.⁴³³ After his release shortly before the war's beginning, M. relocated to Pervomaisk, either because Soviet authorities had not permitted him to return to Neudorf due to his criminal record or because he feared local retribution.⁴³⁴ In Pervomaisk, however, Karolina H., one of M. former victims who had also since moved to the city, recognized him. Upon returning to Neudorf, H. denounced M. to the town's Bereichskommandoführer, SS-Untersturmführer Matthäus Köhli.⁴³⁵ At Köhli's request, German authorities in Pervomaisk arrested M. and returned him to Bereichkommando XXIV in Neudorf, where he was made to face his accusers.⁴³⁶ During his lengthy incarceration in the Bereichkommando's office, Köhli ordered M. to perform hard labor under the guard of the local militia. Köhli also permitted M.'s detractors to beat him savagely, leaving him with seven broken ribs.⁴³⁷ After the pummeling, on Köhli's orders, members of the area's Selbstschutz drove M. to a vegetable garden a half kilometer from Neudorf, forced him to dig his own grave, and shot him. Köhli refused M.'s wife's request

⁴³³ It is difficult to determine whether or not the charge of rape has any merit. Although it is conceivable, it may also have been a postwar fabrication designed to justify M.'s execution. Aussage von J. R., May 24, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 152. Interestingly, after the war, Anna D. made similar accusations against the Soviet-era mayor of Worms, Georg W. Aussage von A. D., August 13, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 218.

⁴³⁴ M.'s nephew, August S., confirmed that he had moved to Pervomaisk prior to the war. Aussage von A. S., April 23, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 71.

⁴³⁵ Aussage von J. R., May 24, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 152.

⁴³⁶ Both S. and R.'s testimonies confirm that German authorities returned M. to Neudorf from Pervomaisk. Aussage von A. S., April 23, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 71. Aussage von J. R., May 24, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 152.

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

that she be permitted to move her husband's body to Neudorf's cemetery.⁴³⁸

Sonderkommando R's efforts to pursue Volksdeutsche "communist" fugitives, such as M., constituted an entree for local SS commanders to launch increasingly repressive measures against area ethnic Germans, whose recently uncovered efforts to shelter some local Jews raised new questions about their political reliability. Absent wartime documentation, it is difficult to reconstruct these initial measures in their entirety. Based largely on postwar statements that former ethnic German residents from Transnistria gave to West German investigators, however, three major features of Sonderkommando R's efforts to police the region's Volksdeutsche population become apparent. First, the unit's preliminary efforts at policing area ethnic Germans were fly-by-night initiatives. Even if authorization for these measures came from Sonderkommando R's commanders—a possibility that surviving fragmentary records do not support—Hoffmeyer and Siebert had little opportunity to shape them in the remote corners of Transnistria, where they had posted their subordinates. As the SS officers responsible for Volksdeutsche affairs in the area, Bereichkommandoführer were the ultimate arbiters of objectionable Volksdeutsche behavior and meted out punishments. For more minor Volksdeutsche offenses, Bereichkommandoführer delegated disciplinary responsibilities to their German subordinates and, in some instances, to local SS-appointed Volksdeutsche officials.⁴³⁹ The low number of Sonderkommando R personnel and their local helpers relative to Transnistria's ethnic German population exacerbated the capriciousness and idiosyncrasy of SS power, which apparently had no statutory basis to begin with. The towns in which Sonderkommando R had based its Bereichkommandos bore

⁴³⁸ Aussage von A. S., April 23, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 71.

⁴³⁹ Aussage von J. F., July 19, 1962, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2671, 78-79.

the brunt of the unit's policing efforts because they were among the few locales where German authorities maintained a permanent presence. In the region's more remote Volksdeutsche villages and hamlets, which Sonderkommando R's German staff typically visited on periodic inspection tours, Bereichkommandoführer and their subordinates often decided to punish Volksdeutsche "on the spot," typically with little understanding of local realities.⁴⁴⁰ Even in a penal system defined by the whims of local SS officers, enforcement was uneven.

Second, although decisions about what constituted a Volksdeutsche crime were initially the purview of individual Bereichkommandoführer, whose internal records generally did not survive the war, it is apparent that Sonderkommando R's midlevel officers cracked down on a wide variety of alleged ethnic German offences. Preeminent among these transgressions was a reluctance to embrace visibly the new Nazi order. In Selz, for example, Pachschröll was notorious for punishing local ethnic Germans who failed to greet the SS's arrival with a stiff-armed Hitler salute (*Hitlergruß*).⁴⁴¹ Similarly, ethnic Germans from Landau later complained about being beaten when they failed to address their SS superiors with their appropriate rank.⁴⁴² In other instances, the SS punished ethnic Germans for failing to meet its labor requisitions for Sonderkommando R's infrastructure improvement projects. When Sedor S., an ethnic German wagon driver from Rastatt, arrived at a road construction site later than expected, Rudolf Hartung, the local Bereichkommandoführer, ordered his

⁴⁴⁰ Aussage von G. G., March 3, 1965, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2680, 116.

⁴⁴¹ Vernehmungsniederschrift von L. L., July 19, 1962, BAL, B162/2296, 48.

⁴⁴² Aussage von P. B., October 18, 1962, BAL, B162/2300, 138.

subordinates to beat him.⁴⁴³ Sonderkommando R also policed social mores within their Volksdeutsche bailiwicks. In spring 1942, for example, SS-Untersturmführer Bernhard Streit, the local Bereichkommandoführer based in Worms, punished a married ethnic German woman and her lover for adultery by ordering the pair to perform the grisly task of collecting the corpses of victims from the previous winter's mass shooting campaign that the melting snow had revealed.⁴⁴⁴ Given the dubious level of commitment of many of Sonderkommando R's rank-and-file personnel to the Nazi regime and the unit's disturbing level of promiscuity in the field, it is ironic that Hoffmeyer's subordinates disciplined Transnistria's Volksdeutsche for failings that the unit's staff had in spades.

The final feature of Sonderkommando R's early efforts to police Transnistria's Volksdeutsche was its brutality. As a number of the examples above illustrate, beatings were a favorite form of SS punishment for Volksdeutsche infractions. Both the ubiquity and violence of these attacks shocked even ideologically committed Germans. Anna R., a DRK nurse who ultimately married her commanding officer, SS-Untersturmführer von Fircks, later recounted treating an ethnic German woman in Worms, whom the SS accused of having stolen from the collective farm. The woman had been virtually "lynched" (*gelyncht*) by the SS and its local helpers and her backside was so bloodied that she was unable to sit down.⁴⁴⁵ Beatings, even severe ones, were, however, not the only punishments that the SS handed out. For offenses that local SS officers considered more serious, Sonderkommando R's staff detained ethnic German offenders in Bereichkommando offices in hastily constructed

⁴⁴³ Zeugeschaftliche Vernehmung von L. B., January 16, 1962, BAL, B162/2290, 165.

⁴⁴⁴ Aussage von H. S., June 29, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 129.

⁴⁴⁵ Aussage von A. F., August 21, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 257-258.

holding cells in doubtlessly appalling conditions.⁴⁴⁶ What constituted a major crime versus a minor infraction depended almost exclusively on the whims of local Bereichskommandoführer. Whereas many SS officers corporally punished Volksdeutsche whom they suspected of theft, in other cases local Bereichskommandoführer ordered the offenders' execution.⁴⁴⁷ In rural Transnistria, local SS officers had ethnic Germans shot for extraordinarily petty offenses. The fall 1942 execution of Linus W., an ethnic German from the twenty-one-farm hamlet of Hörnersfeld near Lichtenfeld, exemplifies this brutality.⁴⁴⁸ W., a fur trader and an apparent alcoholic, had a long history of bartering his products for moonshine with his predominantly ethnically Russian clientele. One day, when W. had insufficient pelts to trade for vodka, he offered his Volkstumsausweis as collateral for the alcohol. While the thriving black market trade in ethnic German identity papers in Transnistria initially made this an attractive proposition for the Russian distiller, the seller soon found document dealing to be more hazardous than bootlegging and turned W.'s Volkstumsausweis over to Liebl, Lichtenfeld's Bereichskommandoführer. As this was the latest in a long line of complaints about W.'s behavior, Liebl judged him to have "disgraced Germandom" (*das Deutschtum blamiert*). On Liebl's orders, his local ethnic German subordinates shot W. next to Lichtenfeld's cemetery the following day.⁴⁴⁹ Concerned that local village youngsters might pick on W.'s seven children for their father's foolishness,

⁴⁴⁶ Aussage von J. F., July 19, 1962, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2671, 79. Aussage von E. K., September 15, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 301.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁸ Aussage von K. Z., November 19, 1962, BAL, B162/2299, 108.

⁴⁴⁹ Aussage von A. S., March 17, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 4. Aussage von K. Z., November 19, 1962, BAL, B162/2299, 111.

Liebl asked a neighbor to prevent unnecessary bullying.⁴⁵⁰ As W.'s execution demonstrates, for Transnistria's Volksdeutsche, drunkenness and stupidity could prove deadly.

The Escalation of Sonderkommando R's Violence in Transnistria

Lack of oversight from the unit's headquarters in Landau combined with the mounting disdain that many of Sonderkommando R's staff felt toward local ethnic Germans created a perfect environment in which the unit's members could vent their frustrations on local residents. In contrast to the litany of staff orders that Hoffmeyer and his deputies issued in early 1943, which emphasized more benign treatment for Volksdeutsche prisoners, Sonderkommando R's surviving staff orders remained silent on the issue throughout the entirety of 1942. Many Bereichskommandoführer likely interpreted the lack of criticism as tacit authorization from their superiors to ramp up violence against whichever ethnic German ran afoul of Sonderkommando R's personnel. As Christine F., a former resident of Guldendorf, summed up the situation: the town's Bereichskommandoführer "was very unpopular because he never hesitated to beat us ethnic Germans when things did not go as he wanted."⁴⁵¹

During 1942, punishing Volksdeutsche offenders became a pretext for members of Hoffmeyer's command to brutalize local ethnic Germans. Frequently, mere and perhaps fabricated suspicion was sufficient to merit a sadistic assault. The severe beating and attempted rape of Rebecca B., a domestic servant for Sonderkommando R in Worms, by a local SS NCO named B. illustrates the level of violence to which these attacks rose.⁴⁵²

⁴⁵⁰ Aussage von A. S., March 17, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 4.

⁴⁵¹ Aussage von C. F., November 26, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 203.

⁴⁵² B.'s identity remains unclear. As an SS NCO, B. did not generate a surviving personnel file and West German prosecutors were unable to identify his given name. One witness confused him with SS-

Rebecca B.'s SS employer accused her of having stolen five Reichmarks from his quarters and, on his orders, members of the Worms Selbstschutz arrested the cleaning woman. At B.'s behest, the Selbstschutz paraded Rebecca B. through the town on a rope and forced her to admit her guilt publicly. B. then incarcerated Rebecca B. in a cell in the basement of the town's former hospice care facility, which contained three other women—all suspected Jews whom B. and his colleagues had recently arrested.⁴⁵³ The next morning, B. returned to the cell, ordered the women to strip naked, and paraded them in a circle through the town's main square. B. then pulled Rebecca B. into a nearby ditch, with the apparent aim of sexually assaulting her. When Rebecca B. attempted to fight off her attacker, B. pulled her out of the ditch by the hair and beat her "black and blue" with a rubber truncheon.⁴⁵⁴ Only the intervention of Rebecca B.'s aunt and other local residents, who heard her screams, saved the woman from further injury.⁴⁵⁵ For local residents, this attack rekindled unpleasant memories of prewar violence at the hands of Soviet authorities.⁴⁵⁶

While B.'s brutality precipitated a speedy reply from his superiors in Landau, who sacked him, this assault was by no means isolated.⁴⁵⁷ Sonderkommando R's personnel frequently attacked area ethnic Germans, when they objected too vociferously to the unit's policies concerning personal property. For example, when Peter B., an ethnic German

Oberscharführer Ludwig B., whom Sonderkommando R removed in late 1941 for cattle rustling. Aussage von H. S., January 6, 1965, BAL, B162/2303, 263. Two other witnesses, however, fingered B., an SS NCO, as the attacker. Aussage von H. S., January 6, 1965, BAL, B162/2303, 263. Aussage von A. D., August 13, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 218.

⁴⁵³ Aussage von H. S., January 6, 1965, BAL, B162/2303, 263.

⁴⁵⁴ Aussage von A. D., August 13, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 218

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., 218-219.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., 219.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

married to area Ukrainian woman, hesitated to surrender his horse to the local mayor, an SS enlisted man pistol whipped him so severely that he was bedridden for a month in the Landau hospital. His facial scars from the beating were still visible more than twenty years later to the West German policemen who interviewed him.⁴⁵⁸ Similarly, in Rastatt, Hartung repeatedly imprisoned and ultimately ordered one of his subordinates to rough up Franz K., who had appealed to Hartung's superiors, when the latter had refused to remove squatters from K.'s house.⁴⁵⁹ Excessive alcohol consumption by Sonderkommando R's staff members fueled many of these beatings. SS-Hauptsturmführer Paul Eisenreich based in Mannheim, for example, had a nasty habit of beating Volksdeutsche indiscriminately while intoxicated.⁴⁶⁰ The reasons for other beatings were frequently even more idiosyncratic. Adam R., an ethnic German from Rastatt, later noted that Hartung beat him for doing a sloppy job of grooming his horse.⁴⁶¹ Johann D., a resident of Speyer, perhaps best captured how many area Volksdeutsche reacted to Sonderkommando R's unrestrained brutality during 1942: "we suffered almost more than during Soviet times because we were never beaten by the Russians."⁴⁶²

Sonderkommando R's Efforts to Rein in Local SS Violence

Although silent through much of 1942, beginning in early 1943, Sonderkommando R's leaders energetically began to crack down on the abuse of local Volksdeutsche by the

⁴⁵⁸ Aussage von P. B., October 20, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 57-58.

⁴⁵⁹ Aussage von F. K., September 11, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 286-287.

⁴⁶⁰ SS Offizier Akte Paul Eisenreich, NARA, RG 242, A3343 SSO-182, 1343-1365. Aussage von F. B., November 27, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 210.

⁴⁶¹ Aussage von A. R., September 26, 1963, BAL, B162/2302, 294.

⁴⁶² Aussage von J. D., May 4, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 100.

unit's personnel. This change in policy coincided with the dismissal of Hoffmeyer's deputy in Transnistria and a reduction of Bereichkommandos in the region. Siebert, Hoffmeyer's subordinate and Sonderkommando R's de facto commanding officer in Transnistria, began his deployment in Ukraine as one of the VoMi's most able field officers. He had served as Hoffmeyer's deputy in all of the VoMi's ethnic German "resettlement" operations in Eastern Europe during 1939 and 1940. As an SD member, his participation in these missions likely assuaged the VoMi's leadership that Hoffmeyer, a then untested commander with less than sterling Nazi credentials, had solid surveillance. While Siebert's experience and service history under Hoffmeyer was undoubtedly why Hoffmeyer selected him to command Sonderkommando R's personnel in Transnistria, his performance in southern Ukraine was apparently less than stellar. That he had done little to protect local ethnic Germans from the brutality of his Bereichkommandoführer was symptomatic of his detached leadership style, which merely exacerbated the effects of Hoffmeyer's itinerant aloofness. Siebert's passion for hunting apparently distracted him from his duties and made him a lackadaisical supervisor.⁴⁶³ Siebert's laissez-faire managerial ethos endeared him to his subordinates, one of whom described him as "a very calm and matter-of-fact man."⁴⁶⁴ In Landau, Siebert interacted casually with his command's SS and non-SS members. As Thorwald R., the number two NSKK man assigned to Sonderkommando R in Transnistria, later recounted: "Siebert was actually one of the very few [SS officers], who did not fit in with the other higher SS leaders. He was not as exclusive as the others, who regarded themselves as a

⁴⁶³ Aussage von H. S., March 17, 1966, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2693, 142.

⁴⁶⁴ Aussage von V. R., July 31, 1962, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2671, 151.

special master race.”⁴⁶⁵ None of these attributes, however, made for effective leadership. In March 1943, Hoffmeyer reassigned Siebert to command Sonderkommando R’s Einsatzgruppe Shitomir.⁴⁶⁶ For old time’s sake, Hoffmeyer wrote Siebert an overly generous evaluation two months later, complementing him most disingenuously as “a particularly active SS leader.”⁴⁶⁷

Following Siebert’s departure, as one of Sonderkommando R’s former radio operators described, “a very different wind blew in Landau.”⁴⁶⁸ SS-Sturmbannführer Erwin Müller, the forty-year-old former bicycle shop owner whom Hoffmeyer selected to replace Siebert, brought a far more engaged and aggressive leadership style to Sonderkommando R in Transnistria.⁴⁶⁹ In contrast to Siebert, whose staff liked his easy going manner, Müller’s subordinates described him as “an outspoken, vulgar character” (*ein ausgesprochener Landsknechtstyp*).⁴⁷⁰ Müller’s background was eerily similar to Siebert’s. Like Siebert, Müller had received a SS commission in the early 1930s and served as an SD officer before his supervisors seconded him to the VoMi in 1939.⁴⁷¹ As a member of Hoffmeyer’s staff, Müller had also participated in all of the organization’s major Eastern European Volksdeutsche “resettlement” operations during 1939 and 1940.⁴⁷² With more than a year of

⁴⁶⁵ Aussage von T. R., March 9, 1965, BAL, B162/2303, 346.

⁴⁶⁶ SS Offizier Akte Klaus Siebert, NARA, RG 242, A3343 SSO-135B, 504.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁸ Aussage von H. S., March 17, 1966, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2693, 142.

⁴⁶⁹ SS Offizier Akte Erwin Müller, NARA, RG 242, A3343 SSO-328A, 1105A, 1164,

⁴⁷⁰ Aussage von V. R., July 31, 1962, BAL, B162/2294, 151.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., 1105B, 1110.

⁴⁷² Ibid., 1216.

previous service in the Reichkommissariat Ukraine as the Bereichkommandoführer of Nikopol, Müller provided Sonderkommando R in Transnistria with much-needed fresh leadership.

Müller began his tenure as Sonderkommando R's chief in Transnistria by cleaning house after a year and half of Siebert's apparent mismanagement. Müller lambasted his subordinates for becoming complacent in their assignments. Within weeks of taking up his new post, Müller warned his new subordinates that, within the context of total war, it was possible that up to two-thirds of the unit's staff would be removed from their cushy roles as occupation administrators and sent to the front.⁴⁷³ Müller denounced the evils of personal enrichment while stationed in Ukraine: "the longer that one is tied to a particular locale, the more one acquires. To speak about private property is in most cases nonsense (*Quatsch*). It is comradely to live 'luxuriously,' while a recently transferred comrade has only the bare necessities."⁴⁷⁴ Müller likewise signaled to his subordinates that he was aware that Sonderkommando R personnel had embezzled some of the unit's funds and threatened to punish the culprits.⁴⁷⁵ Financial improprieties were not Müller's only concerns. He further ordered all Sonderkommando R members to report instances of venereal disease to him in Landau.⁴⁷⁶

Müller also launched a dramatic reorganization of Transnistria's Bereichkommandos. In June 1943, Müller cut the number of Bereichkommandos in Transnistria from eighteen to

⁴⁷³ Stabbefehl Nr. 101, April 10, 1943, BB, R 59/67, 105.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁵ Stabbefehl Nr. 102, April 18, 1943, BB, R 59/67, 98.

⁴⁷⁶ Stabbefehl Nr. 103, April 24, 1943, BB, R 59/67, 93.

twelve.⁴⁷⁷ This measure eliminated Bereichskommandos in Bischofsfeld, Halberstadt, Janovski, Lichtenfeld, Mannheim, and Marianburg, and expanded the geographical boundaries of the remaining subunits to compensate. In part, this move made good Müller's earlier warnings that the demands of total war would necessitate freeing up personnel for combat service.⁴⁷⁸ It also appears to have been a convenient opportunity for Müller to sack corrupt, inefficient, and incompetent mid-level leaders. Although the evidence is circumstantial, it appears that Müller sent problem Bereichskommandoführer packing at precisely the time that he eliminated their Bereichskommandos from Sonderkommando R's rolls. Eisenreich's unceremonious dismissal, for example, coincided with Müller's decision to close down the Bereichskommando in Mannheim.⁴⁷⁹ Eisenreich, originally an SS non-commissioned officer assigned to Sonderkommando R, had received both his command and his commission as an SS-Hauptsturmführer only on March 1, 1943, a few days shy of his fiftieth birthday.⁴⁸⁰ Eisenreich's perpetual intoxication, incompetence, and indiscrete extramarital liaison with a DRK nurse were sufficiently spectacular, even by Sonderkommando R's unarguably low standards, that his own staff requested his removal after only six weeks.⁴⁸¹ When Müller summoned him to a scheduled Bereichskommandoführer conference in Odessa to account for himself, Eisenreich

⁴⁷⁷ Protokoll doprosa / A. M. G., September 20, 1944, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2902, 56. Einheit FP. Nr. 10 528 B.K. XI / An den Herrn Präfekten Oberst Leonidas Popp, Beresovca, August 9, 1943, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 18, Fond 2361, Opis 1, Ed Hr 70, 67.

⁴⁷⁸ Protokoll doprosa / A. M. G., September 20, 1944, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2902, 56-57.

⁴⁷⁹ SS Offizier Akte Paul Eisenreich, NARA, RG 242, A3343 SSO-182, 1343-1365.

⁴⁸⁰ Betr.: Ernennung der Angehörigen des Rußland-Kommandos des Hauptamtes Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle zu Fachführern der Waffen-SS in SS Offizier Akte Fritz Dankert, February 27, 1943, NARA, RG 242, A3343 SSO-135, 1018.

⁴⁸¹ Aussage von F. B., November 27, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 211-212.

inexplicably appeared a day late.⁴⁸² Müller relieved Eisenreich in April 1943, and transferred him back to Stahnsdorf.⁴⁸³ Eisenreich's command disappeared a few weeks later. Back in Germany, Eisenreich's superiors bounced him from one dead-end posting to another until March 1944, when the *Reichskriminalpolizeiamt* (Reich Criminal Police Office) in Auschwitz arrested him for accepting bribes and for theft of state property. The SS stripped Eisenreich of his commission the following month.⁴⁸⁴ Müller was, no doubt, happy to use the reshuffling of Bereichkommandos as an excuse to rid himself of such troublesome subordinates.

A primary goal of these shake ups was to stem Sonderkommando R's rampant brutality against local Volksdeutsche. Müller took two unimaginative, yet effective steps. First, he did something that his predecessor apparently never attempted—he simply ordered his subordinates to stop abusing area Volksdeutsche. On March 21, 1943, Müller circulated a stern warning to Sonderkommando R in Transnistria, admonishing his staff that area Volksdeutsche were not be mistreated. Müller emphasized that “the education and maintenance of the ethnic Germans is a duty that necessitates the fullest attention of the responsible SS officers and NCOs.”⁴⁸⁵ Müller reminded his men that “we will have won no man over to us or the ideas of our Führer with poor and comradely treatment.”⁴⁸⁶ He underscored his order the following August by promising dire consequences for any members of his command who continued to mistreat local ethnic Germans: “starting today every

⁴⁸² Ibid.

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁴ SS Offizier Akte Paul Eisenreich, NARA, RG 242, A3343 SSO-182, 1358-1359.

⁴⁸⁵ Rundanweisung Nr. 98, March 21, 1943, BB, R 59/66, 16

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid.

beating that comes to Oberführer [Hoffmeyer's] attention will be punished harshly."⁴⁸⁷

Müller threatened that the responsible staff member would have to travel to Kiev to face Hoffmeyer's wrath personally.⁴⁸⁸

Second, recognizing that the unrestrained authority of his subordinates contributed to the wanton brutalization of the region's Volksdeutsche, Müller created an ethnic German concentration camp under his control to centralize responsibility for disciplining Volksdeutsche offenders. This initiative grew out of earlier efforts by Sonderkommando R's leaders to halt its Bereichskommandoführer from summarily executing Volksdeutsche in rural Transnistria.⁴⁸⁹ Within less than a month of taking up his command in Landau, Müller eroded the authority of the unit's mid and low-ranking members still further. On April 3, 1943, Müller ordered SS-Untersturmführer Walter Nadolny, the local Bereichskommandoführer based in Johannsfeld, to create a concentration camp capable of housing 100 Volksdeutsche inmates.⁴⁹⁰ Nadolny revamped a large, 80 by seven meter building, which prior to the war had served as a communal dormitory for local residents.⁴⁹¹ Volksdeutsche laborers constructed between eight and ten cells, each designed to house up to ten ethnic German prisoners. The facility also contained a common kitchen and mess hall.⁴⁹² According to German Sonderkommando R personnel and local ethnic Germans, the unit

⁴⁸⁷ Stabbefehl Nr. 115, August 28, 1943, BB, R 59/67, 33.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁹ Rundanweisung Nr. 97, February 20, 1943, BB, R 59/66, 21.

⁴⁹⁰ Rundanweisung Nr. 100, April 3, 1943, BB, R 59/66, 1-2. Nadolny was a long-time member of Hoffmeyer's command. German Police Decodes, 24.1.40, n.d. BNA, HW 16, Piece 28, 6.

⁴⁹¹ Aussage von F. N., February 25, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 19. Aussage von H. E., November 25, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 190.

⁴⁹² Ibid.

recycled construction materials to remodel the dormitory from the warehouse complex in Dalnik, where the Romanian military had burned tens of thousands of Jews to death a year and a half earlier.⁴⁹³ Nadolny completed this so-called *Straferziehungslager* (Penal Reeducation Camp) in a mere three weeks.⁴⁹⁴ The facility opened in late April 1943, when Müller ordered the transfer to Johannisfeld of all ethnic German prisoners held locally at Bereichkommandos throughout Transnistria.⁴⁹⁵ There, under the guard of the local Selbstschutz unit, Volksdeutsche inmates worked as agricultural laborers on the town's remaining collective farm until they had served out the sentences that Müller and his staff in Landau now handed down.⁴⁹⁶

Müller's efforts to rein in his subordinates and to standardize punishments for area ethnic Germans in mid-1943 merely centralized his staff's brutality. Anecdotally, Müller's initiatives did reduce some of the indiscriminate violence to which Sonderkommando R's staff subjected area ethnic Germans. That Müller had to reemphasize his earlier ban on beating local Volksdeutsche in August 1943 suggests that this form of brutality continued, but a precipitous decline in references to these assaults after mid-1943 in the postwar statements of former residents suggests that his policies had appreciable impact. Beginning in 1943, however, both the severity of punishments that the unit meted out to Volksdeutsche and the prisoner population of the Johannisfeld concentration camp mushroomed. Both phenomena

⁴⁹³ Aussage von F. N., February 25, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 19. Aussage von W. S., September 15, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 306-307.

⁴⁹⁴ Straferziehungslager is the titled used to describe the facility. See Stabbefehl Nr. 104, May 4, 1943, BB, R 59/67, 87.

⁴⁹⁵ Stabbefehl Nr. 103, April 24, 1943, BB, R 59/67, 93.

⁴⁹⁶ Aussage von H. B., January 14, 1965, BAL, B162/2303, 298-299. Stabbefehl Nr. 107, May 24, 1943, BB, R 59/67, 63.

were directly or indirectly tied to German defeat at Stalingrad. As German victory appeared increasingly doubtful, some local Volksdeutsche began to question the entire Nazi enterprise. Ethnic Germans, who unwisely did so publicly or whose neighbors denounced their private reservations about the Nazi regime to Sonderkommando R, found themselves imprisoned in Johannisfeld.⁴⁹⁷ Germany's declining military fortunes, moreover, appear to have led Sonderkommando R's staff to imbue perceived ethnic German recalcitrance with still greater political connotations and to ratchet up punishments accordingly. During 1942, local authorities addressed common Volksdeutsche crimes, such as unauthorized butchering of livestock, illegal burning of garbage, or black marketeering. Beginning in mid-1943, however, Sonderkommando R's staff began sentencing these comparatively petty ethnic German offenders to lengthy prison sentences in Johannisfeld.⁴⁹⁸ Ironically, while the Johannisfeld concentration camp helped to standardize punishments for ethnic German offenders, within the context of the Nazi regime's worsening military fortunes, it provided Sonderkommando R with an ideal way to ratchet up violence against an ethnic German population that was growing increasingly doubtful of the Third Reich's long-term prospects.

The creation of the Johannisfeld concentration camp also provided a key installation for Sonderkommando R to house the Red Army prisoners of war, upon whom the unit began to depend on for forced labor. During the first six months of the occupation, Sonderkommando R had little apparent inclination to employ Red Army POWs as forced laborers. In February 1942, for example, Bereichkommando XIV in Worms requested that

⁴⁹⁷ Aussage von A. F., November 27, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 197. Aussage von H. J., May 19, 1965, BAL, B162/2304, 63.

⁴⁹⁸ Aussage von H. B., January 14, 1965, BAL, B162/2303, 298. Aussage von A. F., May 22, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 132.

the Romanian Prefect for Berezovka county arrange to collect a half dozen Red Army POWs, whom the Bereichkommando's staff had captured.⁴⁹⁹ By 1943, both demographic realities and the SS's insatiable appetite for manpower had changed this situation. A series of Waffen-SS conscription campaigns during 1942 and early 1943 had exacerbated the acute shortage of local ethnic German men, many of whom Soviet authorities had deported prior to the war. Both wartime and postwar documentation on Sonderkommando R's deployment of Red Army POWs as forced laborers is limited. It is, however, evident that the unit expanded this program by housing these workers at the Johannisfeld concentration camp, where they worked side by side with ethnic Germans on the collective farm.⁵⁰⁰ Despite their differing status as prisoners, both Volksdeutsche "convicts" and Red Army POWs shared the final episode of Sonderkommando R's brutality. In March 1944, on the eve of the German evacuation from Transnistria, Sonderkommando R closed the Johannisfeld concentration camp. The unit released minor ethnic German "criminals" and permitted them to join evacuation transports bound for the Warthegau. Ethnic Germans, whom the unit regarded as having committed more serious offenses, and the few surviving suspected Volksdeutsche "communists" remained in Johannisfeld along with Sonderkommando R's forced laborers. After the main evacuation transport departed the area, members of the local Selbstschutz unit, who had previously guarded the camp, gunned down the remaining inmates on SS orders.⁵⁰¹ Müller's reforms, it seems, could channel, but not eliminate the unit's tendency to

⁴⁹⁹ BK 14 Worms an den Prefekten Oberst Loghin in Berezovka, February 14, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 20, Fond 2361, Opis 1s, Ed. Hr. 7, 110.

⁵⁰⁰ Aussage von H. B., September 8, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 270-271.

⁵⁰¹ Brief an die Zentrale Stelle Ludwigsburg, April 14, 1963, BAL, B162/2302, 224. Aussage von W. M., May 24, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 149. Aussage von K. E., November 23, 1962, BAL, B162/2301, 154. Aussage von J. Z., February 16, 1962, BAL, B162/2291, 52.

use violence as a panacea to deal with allegedly problematic Volksdeutsche.

Conclusion

Sonderkommando R's violent efforts to hunt down its racial and political enemies within rural Volksdeutsche communities constituted a fundamental tenet of the unit's Nazification program in Transnistria. Initially, and undoubtedly ordered by the unit's senior leadership, Sonderkommando R continued Einsatzgruppe D's earlier campaign by targeting both Jews and members of "mixed race" families. The discovery that a number of Jews and *Mischlinge* had survived with the help or at least silent acquiescence of local ethnic Germans well into 1942 merely intensified the suspicion with which many of Sonderkommando R's midlevel leaders regarded local Volksdeutsche. In an atmosphere of mounting SS distrust of area ethnic Germans, Sonderkommando R's midlevel leaders expanded ongoing attempts to capture and execute Volksdeutsche "communists" into a brutal effort to stamp out all forms of perceived ethnic German misbehavior. Whether or not the unit's senior leadership authorized these measures is unclear. Nevertheless, the remoteness of Transnistria's rural Bereichkommandos combined with distinctly unenergetic oversight from the unit's commanders ensured that Sonderkommando R's midlevel leaders pursued these punitive measures with autonomy. This latitude permitted some of Sonderkommando R's more sadistic members to brutalize area ethnic Germans indiscriminately and at least initially with impunity. Belatedly Hoffmeyer responded to this senseless violence by bringing in fresh leadership to take charge of the situation. To put an end to this brutality, Sonderkommando R's new leaders in Transnistria reined in ineffective Bereichkommandoführer and centralized responsibility for punishing ethnic Germans by forming a rudimentary concentration camp.

Sonderkommando R's efforts to root out its racial and often perceived political

enemies exceeded attempts that the Nazi regime pursued in Germany in proximity, visibility, and unfettered scope. In the Reich, Nazi authorities labored to remove communists and other political opponents from daily life as well as to eradicate all traces of the country's Jews. An elaborate, but far from omnipresent or omnipotent security apparatus continued to search for internal enemies long after the Nazi regime had deported German Jews to be murdered in Eastern Europe and incarcerated obvious political adversaries. While these precedents no doubt inspired Sonderkommando R's staff, the transparency of the Nazi regime's brutality was far greater for Transnistria's Volksdeutsche than it was for Reich Germans. With the exception of the 1938 *Reichskristallnacht* pogrom, whose naked violence shocked many Germans, in Germany, Nazi authorities generally avoided targeting their enemies in plain sight. In Transnistria's Volksdeutsche communities, by contrast, this brutality was not masked by the fig leaf of arrests, imprisonment, and at least theoretically secret killing programs, but rather played out before area ethnic Germans, with, at least initially, little concern for their reaction. Local Volksdeutsche knew that the Nazi regime's brutality was directed not solely against Jews and non-Germans, but understood that they too could feel the "ripple effects" of this violence. *Alltag* in Transnistria proved to be a hazardous one for many area ethnic Germans.

CHAPTER IV: CHRISTIANS INTO NAZIS: SONDERKOMMANDO R'S

KULTURKAMPF IN TRANSNISTRIA

When Theodor W., a former resident of Bischofsfeld in Transnistria, described the town's former Bereichkommandoführer, Harold Krause, to the West German police in 1962, he lodged a number of complaints against his former SS leader.⁵⁰² W. specifically objected to the fact that Krause "had let no one enter the Church, which as Catholics, was very painful." Krause was, in W.'s estimation, "a brute with a bad reputation."⁵⁰³ Krause's refusal to open Bischofsfeld's Catholic Church was not the result of an SS officer's autonomous and overzealous actions, but reflected an important aspect of Sonderkommando R's religious policy in Transnistria's Volksdeutsche settlements. This chapter reconstructs Sonderkommando R's *Kulturkampf* in Transnistria and situates it within the Nazi regime's ambivalent relationship with the Church.

The Third Reich remained schizophrenic about where the Church featured in the Nazi new order. Certain radical elements within the Nazi regime (most notably Alfred Rosenberg and Martin Bormann) regarded organized Christianity as inimical to National Socialism and courted its destruction. Other Nazi leaders responded to movements within the Church, which sought to incorporate and accommodate National Socialism, as a possible ally of the

⁵⁰² Krause was one of Sonderkommando R's original Bereichkommandoführer. Aktenvermerk / Betr.: Berörderung und Übernahme der nachstend aufgeführten Kameraden in SS Offizier Akte Dr. Gerhard Wolfrum, NARA, RG 242, A 3343, SSO 001C, 767.

⁵⁰³ Aussage von T. W., November 23, 1962, BAL, B162/2299, 136-137.

regime. At varying times, the Third Reich thus pursued policies in Germany that both supported and undercut elements within the Church. Insofar as Nazi Germany maintained a unified Church policy, it was one of caution, partial accommodation, and procrastination. At Hitler's insistence, the Nazi regime remained cautious of pursuing religious measures that the Catholic and Protestant faithful might regard as an affront to their religious sensibilities. After the beginning of the Second World War, this impetus to maintain social tranquility merely intensified. Regardless of what policies the Nazi regime sought to pursue vis-à-vis the Church in Germany, Hitler made it clear that none of them should upset wartime German popular opinion.

As committed SS officers, Sonderkommando R's leaders regarded efforts to reestablish the Church in southern Ukraine's Volksdeutsche communities with the utmost suspicion. Sonderkommando R perceived that the Church's reintroduction in Transnistria would pose particularly acute problems for its Nazification project for two primary reasons. First, in the absence of significant historical contact between Germany and the Black Sea Germans and after decades of Soviet rule, Sonderkommando R's Nazification project stood on particularly wobbly foundations. Any competition, not least from an alternative ideology as powerful as Christianity, threatened to undermine its efforts in the region. Second, the Black Sea Germans had, on average, a far greater affinity for the Church than did Germans living in the Reich. An historically deeply religious people, the Black Sea Germans understood confession as a key ethnic marker that distinguished the region's predominantly Catholic and Lutheran ethnic Germans from the overwhelming Orthodox majority of the region's population. Moreover, the Soviet regime's ever-expanding anti-religious measures before the war galvanized religious observance as a form of anti-Soviet expression for area

Volksdeutsche. Sonderkommando R's mission thus required it to carry out its Nazification project not simply among an exceptionally isolated group of ethnic Germans, but rather among a Volksdeutsche population that had maintained an exceptional affinity for the Church.

Free from the concerns over German public opinion that moderated Church policy in Germany, Sonderkommando R responded to this perceived threat to its Nazification project by launching an unprecedented *Kulturkampf* against the Church's reintroduction in the region's Volksdeutsche settlements. For fear of competition from the Church for the "hearts and minds" of Transnistria's Volksdeutsche, initially the SS had no plans to reintroduce Christianity to the area's ethnic German communities. When activist priests from the German Catholic Church in Romania did precisely that, the SS responded by attempting to suppress Catholicism in Transnistria. Although only partially successful because of the intervention of the Romanian civil administration, which allied itself with the Catholic Church to antagonize the SS, Sonderkommando R's anti-Catholic campaign constituted a dramatic departure from earlier German efforts to support the Catholic Church in southern Ukraine. Drawing on the experience of its stillborn attempt to prevent the reintroduction of Catholicism to Transnistria, Sonderkommando R labored to shape the Protestant renaissance in the region by partnering with the German Christian Movement (*Glaubensbewegung "Deutsche Christen"*). Ironically, postwar evidence from Catholic and Protestant clergy who operated in the region suggests that the Church not only constituted little threat to Sonderkommando R's project, but also participated actively in the conspiracy of silence after the war that obfuscated the unit's crimes.

The Church in the Third Reich and the German-Occupied Soviet Union

Before recovering Sonderkommando R's religious policies in southern Ukraine, it is useful to explore briefly the orientations of both the Protestant and Catholic Churches to the Nazi regime in Germany and the Third Reich's stance on organized Christianity. Relations between the Church and the Third Reich have been the subject of significant historical research since the 1960s. Saul Friedländer, Ian Kershaw, and Michael Phayer, among other scholars, have probed the Vatican's diplomatic relations with Hitler's Germany and dissected the Catholic Church's response to the Nazi regime.⁵⁰⁴ Other historians, led by Doris Bergen, Robert Ericksen, and Susannah Heschel, have explored the Protestant Church's frequently ambivalent orientation toward the Third Reich and specifically its anti-Jewish policies.⁵⁰⁵ Although this area of inquiry remains an innovative field of research, thanks to this pioneering scholarship, it is possible to provide an overview of the topic.

Given the differing responses of the Catholic and Protestant Churches to the Nazi regime, it is useful to treat both denominations separately. During the Third Reich, the Protestant Church split, not in opposition to the Nazis, but rather in opposition to itself. Created in 1932, the German Christian Movement sought to wed Protestant theology with Nazi racial thinking. Although the German Christian Movement's 600,000 lay and clergy members accounted for a tiny fraction of Germany's 40 million Protestants, they wielded

⁵⁰⁴ Saul Friedländer, *Pius XII and the Third Reich: A Documentation* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1966); Kershaw, *Popular Opinion & Political Dissent in the Third Reich*; Michael Phayer, *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust, 1930-1965* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000).

⁵⁰⁵ Doris L. Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Robert P. Ericksen, *Theologians Under Hitler: Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus, and Emanuel Hirsch* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985); Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

disproportionate influence, owing to their overrepresentation in the Church's hierarchy and in theological circles. To create a *Volkskirche* (People's Church) for the Nazi racial community, German Christian theologians jettisoned baptism as a path to salvation and instead advanced the notion that "non-Aryans" could never join the fold.⁵⁰⁶ This new theological construct precipitated a vigorous reply from a minority of Protestant clergy, who declared the German Christian Movement's reinterpretation of baptism heretical and formed the Confessing Church (*Bekennende Kirche*) in 1934. While some members of the Confessing Church, and notably Dietrich Bonhoeffer, resisted the Nazi regime on religious grounds, few Protestants, either within or outside of the Confessing Church, condemned the Third Reich's genocidal policies. Despite overtures from the German Christian Movement for closer cooperation with the Nazi regime, in Germany the Third Reich's leaders remained tepid toward the organization. Nevertheless, the existence of the German Christian Movement signaled to the Nazis that willing Protestant collaborators remained at the Third Reich's disposal. It was precisely this overture that, when pressed, Hoffmeyer accepted.

Like the Protestant Church, the Catholic Church enjoyed ambivalent relations with Nazi Germany. The 1933 *Reichskonkordat* (Reich Concordat) provided the basis for the Catholic Church and the Nazi regime to coexist in Germany. The agreement guaranteed the inviolability of the Catholic Church's institutional structure and spiritual mission in Germany at the expense of the end to formal Catholic involvement in German politics. This accord cut both ways. On the one hand, it protected an autonomous, Catholic *milieu* that provided the faithful with a potent alternative to National Socialism and thus put a chink in the Nazi regime's totalitarian armor. The continued integrity of Catholicism in the Third Reich is a

⁵⁰⁶ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 2.

likely explanation for the fact that organized Catholic efforts to embrace National Socialism remained insignificant in comparison to those of the Protestant German Christian Movement.⁵⁰⁷ On the other hand, the *Reichskonkordat* set the precedent for Catholic acquiescence to the Nazi regime provided that the Third Reich did not infringe on its institutions or persecute its faithful. In the rare instances in which Catholic leaders protested Nazi policies, such as Clemens August Graf von Galen's August 1941 denunciation of the T-4 "Euthanasia" Program or resistance to Adolf Wagner's ham-handed efforts to remove crucifixes from Bavarian schools, the points of contention were not the Nazi regime's policies per se, but rather specific affronts to Catholic doctrine and practice.⁵⁰⁸ This orientation also applied to the Catholic response to the Holocaust. As Phayer's masterful research demonstrates, Pope Pius XII's public stance on the murder of Jews reflected the pontiff's concern with the Church's survival as an institution, rather than with its moral responsibilities in the world.⁵⁰⁹ While the Catholic Church, and particularly its leadership, proved unwilling to protest the Nazi regime's genocidal policies directly, the perpetuation of a licit, autonomous sphere within the Third Reich posed a long-term challenge to the National Socialist project. It was precisely this thorn in the Nazi regime's side that Hoffmeyer first sought to exclude from Transnistria's Volksdeutsche communities.

Pragmatic concerns dictated the Nazi regime's response to the Church in Germany. Despite its periodically countervailing Church policies, Hitler's anxiety that any concerted

⁵⁰⁷ For recent research on Catholic priests who maintained an affinity for National Socialism see Kevin P. Spicer, *Hitler's Priests: Catholic Clergy and National Socialism* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008).

⁵⁰⁸ Kershaw, *Popular Opinion & Political Dissent in the Third Reich*, 331-357.

⁵⁰⁹ Phayer, *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust*, xv.

attack on the Church during the war could provoke domestic social unrest moderated the Third Reich's religious policies in the Reich. With the beginning of the war in 1939, Hitler ordered all anti-religious, and specifically anti-Catholic measures, to cease in the interest of preserving national solidarity.⁵¹⁰ Hitler reiterated these instructions the following year and, during the course of the war, retreated from policies that met with widespread Church resistance.⁵¹¹ Following von Galen's August 1941 protest against the murder of mentally and physically handicapped patients—a program that Hitler had authorized personally two years earlier—he backpedaled and ordered the initiative to continue in secret.⁵¹² Likewise, Hitler called Wagner on the carpet for his independent efforts to curb Catholicism in Bavaria—a policy that produced precisely the popular blowback that Hitler had hoped to avoid.⁵¹³ Although privately some in the Nazi regime may have planned for Christianity's future demise after the war, during the conflict the Nazi leadership deescalated its anti-religious policies for practical reasons.⁵¹⁴

German officials in the occupied Soviet Union shared Hitler's pragmatism in their stance toward organized religion, albeit without his concern for public opinion. Aware of the unpopularity of Soviet anti-religious policy in the Soviet Union's borderlands, occupation

⁵¹⁰ Kershaw, *Popular Opinion & Political Dissent in the Third Reich*, 331

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, 332.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*, 339.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*, 355.

⁵¹⁴ For example, as Gerhard Weinberg has noted recently, Nazi plans for the postwar reconstruction of German cities after the Allied strategic bombing campaign allocated no space for churches, suggesting that Nazi planners envisioned little role for Christianity after the war. Gerhard L. Weinberg, "Kristallnacht 1938: As Experienced Then and Understood Now," (Washington, D.C.: Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Monna and Otto Weimann Annual Lecture, May 13, 2009), 10. Also see Jost Dülffer, Jochen Thies, and Josef Henke, *Hitlers Städte: Baupolitik im Dritten Reich* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1978), 20.

authorities in German-controlled Ukraine supported the reconstruction of indigenous religious institutions, albeit in a circumscribed and controlled fashion.⁵¹⁵ Despite German claims during the war that Nazi rule promised religious freedom, the Third Reich merely used the verisimilitude of free religious expressions to enlist the local population's support for the Third Reich's war against "Judeo-Bolshevism"—an enterprise in which most Ukrainians stood simply to substitute one foreign overlord for another. Provided that Sunday services made Ukrainians more receptive to the Third Reich's agenda in the Soviet Union, German occupation officials were, in principle, happy to hold the church door open for them.

German authorities in the conquered Soviet Union pursued these pragmatic policies not simply against the majority Orthodox population, but also against the territory's Protestant and Catholic minorities. As Karel Berkhoff has noted, in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine German occupation officials regarded Baptists and evangelicals as innocuous and targeted neither group for persecution. This latitude permitted Protestant missionaries to roam about the countryside illicitly and even to distribute illegal literature.⁵¹⁶ Berkhoff notes, however, that German officials treated local Catholics far more harshly. Owing to deep Nazi suspicion of the Vatican and prejudice against Poles, who constituted the majority of the region's Catholic population, German authorities in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine ramped up pressure against the Catholic hierarchy by closing churches as well as detaining and even killing local priests.⁵¹⁷ These measures contrasted sharply with German policy in the Reich

⁵¹⁵Karel C. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 232-252. Also see, Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, 440-444. German authorities pursued often diverse policies toward local religious institutions in occupied Ukraine that varied depending on the predispositions of the responsible German officials and local circumstances. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 234-235.

⁵¹⁶*Ibid.*, 238-239.

⁵¹⁷*Ibid.*, 239.

and even in occupied Poland, where the Catholic Church's hierarchy continued to exercise significant autonomy.

German authorities in the occupied Soviet Union could implement what amounted to an independent religious policy, even against Protestants and Catholics, that was more restrictive than the one that their colleagues pursued in the Reich because they could do so without provoking social unrest in Germany—the Nazi regime's overarching concern. The reasons for this were twofold. First, and most obviously, Nazi authorities were much less concerned about maintaining social equilibrium in the occupied Soviet Union than they were in Germany. Second, unlike in the Reich, in the German-occupied Soviet Union German authorities could implement their religious policies—particularly with regard to Protestants and Catholics—without interference from German clergy, whom the *Reichsministerium für die besetzten Ostgebiete* (Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories) banned from operating there as early as September 1941.⁵¹⁸ Safe from the prying eyes of independent German religious leaders, who could object to Nazi religious policy, in the German-occupied Soviet Union, authorities had a free hand to pursue whatever religious policy they felt best suited the Third Reich's interests. In Transnistria, where the SS had exceptional latitude to shape its own policies, Hoffmeyer further radicalized these measures by attempting to restrict the Church from Transnistria's Volksdeutsche communities, a move unprecedented in either Germany or elsewhere in the occupied Soviet Union.

The Church and the Black Sea Germans

Sonderkommando R pursued these exceptional measures precisely because of the historical significance of the Church in the lives of the Black Sea Germans. Prior to the 1917

⁵¹⁸ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 53.

Russian Revolution, the region's ethnic Germans maintained a deep commitment to the Church, whose religious ceremonies ordered many aspects of their daily lives, ranging from interpersonal relations to the yearly calendar cycle of most communities. Roughly 60 percent of Odessa Oblast's Volksdeutsche were Roman Catholic and the remaining 40 percent were Protestants, predominately Lutherans with a handful of Mennonites.⁵¹⁹ Perhaps because Germanophone settlements and their daughter colonies were segregated by confession and farming proved lucrative for Catholics and Protestants alike, whatever historical inter-confessional strife that the region's ethnic Germans may have imported dissolved fairly quickly. While Catholics and Protestants rarely intermarried prior to 1917, probably because Volksdeutsche communities in rural Odessa oblast' were highly incestuous, their faith constituted a key ethnic marker that differentiated both groups from their predominately Orthodox Ukrainian neighbors. The role of confession in defining their ethnic identity as a minority population merely compounded the Church's spiritual importance for local Volksdeutsche.

Soviet rule precipitated a caesura in the religious life of the region's ethnic Germans and added an important political significance to the Church for local Volksdeutsche. Beginning in the late 1920s, the Soviet regime targeted the Church as part of its anti-religious campaign. As with other confessions in the Soviet Union, state authorities circumscribed religious services, arrested and deported clergy, confiscated Church property, and converted churches to serve a variety of secular functions, such as stabling livestock and housing agricultural products. Although Soviet efforts to curtail Volksdeutsche religious observance were initially part of a campaign against religion in general, local ethnic Germans did not

⁵¹⁹ Völkl, *Transnistrien und Odessa*, 84-85.

perceive it as such. While, at least initially, Soviet authorities did not conceive of dismantling Catholic and Lutheran religious life as a specific assault on the ethnic identity of area German-speakers, local Volksdeutsche correctly understood that the Soviet regime's policies had precisely that effect because they threatened to eliminate one of the primary markers of ethnic identity.⁵²⁰ Within the context of dekulakization and collectivization, which targeted local Volksdeutsche disproportionately as class enemies, area ethnic Germans interpreted Soviet moves against the Catholic and Protestant Churches in southern Ukraine as key components of a broader and ever-intensifying assault on local German-speakers. The origins of Volksdeutsche hopes for a religious renaissance were not simply spiritual in origin, but rather reflected a desire to roll back a whole host of policies that Soviet authorities had enacted since the end of the Russian Civil War. For these reasons, the Church appeared to pose a formidable alternative to Sonderkommando R's National Socialist agenda.

The Catholic Church in Transnistria's Volksdeutsche Settlements

The VoMi's initial religious policy in Transnistria is best described as a ban by omission. Based on surviving documentation from Sonderkommando R and the records of extensive postwar interrogations of the unit's officers by West German and Soviet investigators, Sonderkommando R had no initial plan to reopen the region's churches. Admittedly, it is impossible to demonstrate the absence of an initial religious policy based on incomplete documentation. However, it seems highly plausible that the unit consciously failed to prepare for a religious renaissance in Transnistria's Volksdeutsche communities because it regarded the Church as an undesirable potential competitor to National Socialism.

⁵²⁰Heinrich Roemmich, "Die evangelische Kirche in Russland in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart," in *Die Kirchen und das religiöse Leben der Russlanddeutschen*, ed Joseph Schnurr, (Stuttgart: Landsmannschaft der Deutschen aus Russland, 1972), 262.

After all, why should Sonderkommando R labor to reintroduce an institution known to its leaders to retard the National Socialist project when decades of Soviet anti-religious policy had already done the dirty work of closing churches? Despite widespread Volksdeutsche wishes to the contrary, Sonderkommando R's leaders appear to have been content to make the Soviet regime's anti-religious measures permanent.

The reintroduction of the Catholic Church in Transnistria appears to have surprised Sonderkommando R's leadership. Given the origins of the Protestant Reformation in Germany, it is perhaps ironic that the renaissance of the Catholic Church in Transnistria came about in a strikingly similar way—namely by the largely autonomous efforts of a meddling Catholic priest. Returning southern Ukraine's Catholic Volksdeutsche to the fold was the personal mission of Father Nikolaus Pieger, a forty-one-year-old Franconian priest. In contrast to many of his Protestant counterparts, Pieger had no apparent personal connection to this ministry. Decades after the war, he recalled that an elementary school geography lesson on ethnic Germans in the Russian Empire had first kindled his interest in Eastern European Volksdeutsche.⁵²¹ After his 1932 ordination, Pieger became the director of a Catholic school in Nürnberg, where his interactions with Volksdeutsche pupils from Eastern Europe reawakened his earlier interests in the group.⁵²² In response to this calling, Pieger transferred to the German Catholic archdioceses in Bucharest in 1936. Ever eager to minister to ethnic Germans, from Bucharest Pieger cast his gaze further east toward the Soviet Union. In 1938, he launched an unsuccessful bid to celebrate mass in the German Embassy in

⁵²¹Nikolaus Pieger, "Die religiösen Verhältnisse in der Südukraine (Transnistrien)," in *Die Kirchen und das religiöse Leben der Russlanddeutschen*, ed Joseph Schnurr, (Stuttgart: Landsmannschaft der Deutschen aus Russland, 1972), 43.

⁵²²Aussage von N. P., November 13, 1961, BAL, B162/2289, 74. Pieger, "Die religiösen Verhältnisse in der Südukraine (Transnistrien)," 43

Moscow—an effort halted by Soviet authorities, who refused Pieger an entry visa.⁵²³

As Pieger later recounted, the June 1941 German invasion “fulfilled my wish to go to Russia.”⁵²⁴ Presented with the opportunity to expand his ministry to the Soviet Union—a goal that Pieger had maintained for years—he “pulled out all of the stops to get to Russia.”⁵²⁵ As Pieger noted decades later, this was not an easy task. In August 1941, he first used his connections at the German Embassy in Bucharest to obtain permission to enter what was then an operational zone for the German and Romanian armies. According to Pieger, securing the necessary authorizations from his ecclesiastical superiors was an even greater challenge. After his bishop denied him permission to travel to the recently occupied Soviet Union, Pieger turned to the Papal Nuncio to Romania, Andreas Cassullo. Despite Cassullo’s initial inclination to seek Vatican authorization for such a journey, Pieger convinced him that the dire situation of the faithful in southern Ukraine necessitated an immediate response and the Nuncio authorized his exploratory mission to the region.⁵²⁶

Absent civilian transportation to southern Ukraine, Pieger convinced Father Josef Arnold, a Catholic priest serving with the Wehrmacht as a medic, to smuggle him into the military’s rear area disguised as his authorized passenger.⁵²⁷ Arriving in Transnistria on August 20, 1941, Pieger began a three-week itinerant trek to survey the region’s major Volksdeutsche Catholic settlements, including Strasburg, Baden, Kandel, Selz, Landau,

⁵²³Ibid.

⁵²⁴Ibid.

⁵²⁵Ibid.

⁵²⁶Ibid.

⁵²⁷Ibid., 44.

Karlsruhe, Rastatt, Speyer, and Sulz.⁵²⁸ Pieger's brief travelogue, penned during the 1970s, recounts a local Catholic population that yearned to reestablish its communion with the Church of Rome. Perhaps reflecting subsequent tribulations in the region, his description of celebrating mass in Strasburg, the first stop on his journey evokes images of the early Church:

Generally, the church was maintained, but the bells were removed and the steeple had been taken away. The interior no longer resembled a house of worship. All altars, pictures and the like had disappeared. [Soviet] authorities had turned it into a dance and theater hall. When the people heard that Mass was to be held the next morning, the whole community worked to clean the church late into the night. At 8 AM the people picked me up from my accommodations and escorted me to the overflowing church that they had furnished with makeshift decorations and a temporary altar. At the chancel, where three vessels of water stood, the old church father greeted me as a Catholic priest and asked me to bless the water and the desecrated church. To my great surprise, during the service the choir sang the Holy Liturgy completely correctly in Latin. After blessing the church, I heard the Te Deum sung as I had never heard it sung before. Following an address to the congregation, a Requiem was held for the murdered and deceased members of the community. The Requiem and finally the Salve Regina, which had last been sung in 1932, were sung in three and five-part harmonies.⁵²⁹

Before moving on to Baden the next day, Pieger baptized 300 children in Strasburg and reported that another hundred youths would have to wait for the sacrament.⁵³⁰

At the conclusion of his sojourn to Transnistria, Pieger returned to Bucharest in early October 1941 imbued with missionary zeal. He dispatched a personal report on the dire situation of the region's Catholics to the Vatican and lobbied for a Church mission to the region. Perhaps cognizant of the fact that, by obtaining authorization for his trip from the Papal Nuncio, he had openly defied his bishop and made himself *persona non grata* with his

⁵²⁸Ibid, 45-49.

⁵²⁹Ibid., 45.

⁵³⁰Ibid.

immediate superiors, Pieger requested that Dr. Martin Glaser, a former member of the diocese of Saratov and current regent of the German Catholic seminary in Iași, be named head of the mission. Glaser received his appointment as apostolic visitor ten days later. Glaser, Pieger, and their colleague in Bucharest, Father Walter Kampe, departed for Transnistria immediately. Without independent transportation or any apparent authorization from the German or Romanian militaries, the party followed Pieger's earlier route by entering the occupation zone with the aid of another Catholic priest working as Wehrmacht ambulance driver. Arriving in Odessa a few weeks after the city's occupation by German and Romanian forces, the Church's mission to Transnistria located the St. Clemens Cathedral, which Soviet authorities had converted into a warehouse, stables, and ordinance depot. Tellingly, a gigantic portrait of Stalin had replaced the original alter painting of the assumption of Mary.⁵³¹

Initially housed in "a primitive room" in the home of a local Polish family, the three priests set about reestablishing the Catholic Church in Odessa and the surrounding countryside.⁵³² The mission focused on returning St. Clemens Cathedral as "the center of religious life" in the region.⁵³³ Under Glaser's supervision, local artisans restored both the cathedral's marble floor and replaced Stalin's likeness with the original alter painting that Pieger and his colleagues identified on display in a local Museum. Subsequent negotiations with the city's Romanian administrators yielded a large building on Risel'evskaya street near the cathedral with sufficient space for the mission to expand its growing administrative

⁵³¹Ibid., 49.

⁵³²Ibid.

⁵³³Ibid.

offices.⁵³⁴ Although supplying rural Transnistria with sufficient clergy to service the spiritual needs of local Volksdeutsche proved to be a perennial problem, Catholic officials reached a series of agreements with their Romanian counterparts to satisfy “the most urgent pastoral needs.”⁵³⁵ Staffed primarily with Volksdeutsche priests from Romania and Bessarabia, by early June 1942 the mission’s staff included some fifteen priests.⁵³⁶ The Catholic Church’s renaissance was so successful that Glaser’s superiors elevated him to the office of bishop in 1943.⁵³⁷ Notwithstanding these accomplishments, the Third Reich’s increasingly precarious military situation forced the mission to quit the region little more than a year later. In Pieger’s conclusion about his ministry, he emphasized: “This work, however, was not for nothing. Our faithful witnessed that the Church did not leave them in the lurch and are today still thankful for that.”⁵³⁸

Sonderkommando R responded to the spontaneous Catholic renaissance in Transnistria by launching an intense anti-Catholic campaign that reflected not only the unit’s opposition to the reintroduction of Catholicism into the region’s Volksdeutsche settlements, but also its ongoing power struggle with the area’s Romanian administrators. Pieger personally became a focal point for the SS’s wrath. The SS put a stop to Pieger’s inconvenient visits to rural Transnistria, where it was busy leading local Volksdeutsche on a mass murder campaign, by driving him out of the countryside at gunpoint.⁵³⁹ Pieger returned

⁵³⁴Ibid. Völkl, *Transnistrien und Odessa (1941-1944)*, 85-86.

⁵³⁵Pieger, “Die religiösen Verhältnisse in der Südukraine (Transnistrien),” 50.

⁵³⁶Völkl, *Transnistrien und Odessa (1941-1944)*, 85-86.

⁵³⁷Pieger, “Die religiösen Verhältnisse in der Südukraine (Transnistrien),” 49.

⁵³⁸Ibid., 51.

⁵³⁹Aussage von N. P., November 13, 1961, BAL, B162/2289, 75.

to Odessa, where the SS pursued him. Tipped off by one of Bereichkommando XXV's Volksdeutsche employees to planned SS efforts to detain him there, Pieger took refuge with the city's Romanian occupation authorities.⁵⁴⁰ A subsequent Sonderkommando R circular order issued in early April 1942 instructed its staff that Pieger's activities in the region were henceforth banned.⁵⁴¹

While Sonderkommando R was able to quarantine Pieger in Odessa, it was unable to remove him or other Catholic priests from the region. In contrast to German-occupied Soviet territory, in which the German civil administration had banned German clergy from operating, in Transnistria such decisions were the purview of Romanian authorities. Not only did the region's Romanian civil administration fail to institute such a ban, but it defended the Catholic Church from Hoffmeyer. The initial involvement of Transnistria's Romanian Civil Governor, Professor Gheorghe Alexianu, in this dispute is illustrative. Perhaps because of threats to Pieger's safety, Glaser beseeched both the Papal Nuncio in Bucharest and the Romanian civil administration for assistance. Surviving records provide only a partial reconstruction of the results of Glaser's pleas for help. From what can be recovered, however, Cassullo wrote Hoffmeyer on February 8, 1942, to press the Church's rights in Transnistria, in general, and to complain that Sonderkommando R had banned area priests from celebrating mass during Christmas, in specific.⁵⁴² Hoffmeyer replied to Cassullo in early March 1942 and circulated a copy of his reply to Alexianu, suggesting that Romanian

⁵⁴⁰Ibid., 76-77.

⁵⁴¹Rundanweisung Nr. 38, April 9, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 95.

⁵⁴²Copie / Sonderkommando der Volksdeutschen Mittelstelle / An den Zivilgouverneur von Transnistria, Herrn Professor Alexianu, Tiraspol, March 16, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1085, 119.

authorities had also raised these issues with Sonderkommando R.⁵⁴³ Hoffmeyer was undoubtedly truthful when he explained to Cassullo that “I also worry about the development of the Catholic ministry in Transnistria and have observed it with much concern,” but probably for reasons that differed dramatically from those of the Papal Nuncio. According to Hoffmeyer, he had denied Glaser’s request to hold services the previous Christmas because Glaser was unable to produce any documentation to show that his activities in Transnistria were sanctioned by his ecclesiastical superiors.⁵⁴⁴ Furthermore, Hoffmeyer complained that “Prelate Dr. Glaser was unable to offer any constructive suggestions for the development of an orderly Catholic Church. Above all, in all of these months he has been unable to name a single Catholic priest who would like to take up his responsibilities in Transnistria for the long term.”⁵⁴⁵ In Hoffmeyer’s eyes, Pieger apparently lacked adequate sincerity.

Despite Hoffmeyer’s efforts to rationalize his role as the Grinch who stole Christmas, he remained acutely aware of the fact that Romanian support for the Catholic Church in Transnistria limited his freedom of action. Romanian patronage was both bureaucratic and material. On the one hand, in contravention of Sonderkommando R’s pronounced wishes, during 1941 and 1942 the Romanian civil administration authorized a steady stream of Catholic priests to operate in Transnistria, including the most troublesome Father Pieger.⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴³ A March 28, 1942, letter from Alexianu to Glaser indicates that Romanian authorities had raised the Catholic Church’s concerns with the SS. Given that Hoffmeyer felt compelled to provide Alexianu with a copy of his reply to Cassullo, the evidence suggests that Romanian and Vatican authorities approached Hoffmeyer about this issue at roughly the same time. *Către Profiatul romano / catholic Odesa la mâna Sf. Sale Prelatului Dr. M. Glaser*, March 28, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1085, 118.

⁵⁴⁴ Copie / Sonderkommando der Volksdeutschen Mittelstelle / An den Zivilgouverneur von Transnistria, Herrn Professor Alexianu, Tiraspol, March 16, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1085, 119.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁶ Rundanweisung Nr. 38, April 9, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 94.

Moreover, when the Church felt threatened, Alexianu pressed Hoffmeyer on the issue. On the other hand, Romanian authorities furnished the Catholic Church with a building in Odessa to house its mission. Why the overwhelmingly Eastern Orthodox Romanians succored the German Catholic Church in Transnistria is unclear. An admittedly speculative, but nevertheless highly plausible explanation is that the Romanians supported Glaser precisely because the Catholic mission in Odessa irritated Sonderkommando R and thereby furthered the Romanian position in their ongoing struggle with the SS. The running feud between the Romanians and the SS, it seems, made for strange bedfellows.

Realizing that his unit had been outmaneuvered by the alliance between the Catholic Church and the Romanians, Hoffmeyer backpedaled. A few weeks after his reply to Cassullo and Alexianu, Sonderkommando R issued a staff order that instructed the unit's mid-level leaders to curtail their most aggressive and public measures against Catholic priests in Transnistria. It informed Sonderkommando R's Bereichkommandoführer that "every form of struggle against the Church is to cease."⁵⁴⁷ "Above all," the unit's leadership warned its subordinates "to refrain from all childish harassment and mockery" of the Catholic Church.⁵⁴⁸ At least publicly, Sonderkommando R promised to end its anti-Catholic campaign in Transnistria.

Sonderkommando R's orders, however, were not to halt its *Kulturkampf*, but simply to conceal it. Hoffmeyer's somewhat improbable March 1942 assurance to Cassullo that Glaser had been "given freedom to carry out his pastoral duties" was simply a bald-faced

⁵⁴⁷Ibid., 95.

⁵⁴⁸Ibid.

lie.⁵⁴⁹ The same staff order that sought to tamp down the unit's openly anti-Catholic stance simultaneously ramped up covert restrictions on the Catholic Church in Transnistria's Volksdeutsche communities, where Sonderkommando R enjoyed exclusive authority. It commanded the unit's Bereichkommandoführer to pursue a litany of coercive measures against the Catholic Church in their Bereichkommandos. The order stipulated, for example, that Catholic school books were not to be distributed and that texts that had already been handed out were to be confiscated. Excluding baptism and funerals, church services were to take place only on the weekend, so as not to interfere with necessary agricultural production. The unit's senior leadership also banned priests from performing baptisms or marriages without the SS's oversight, presumably because both sacraments threatened to introduce non-Germans into the local Volksdeutsche population.⁵⁵⁰ These measures had the added benefit of eliminating "the influence of the Catholic Church on the selection of given names" and promised to erode the Church's influence.⁵⁵¹ The orders noted further that while "the distribution of rosaries, confessional schedules, icons, etc., cannot be prohibited, it is undesirable."⁵⁵² Sonderkommando R continued its struggle against the Catholic Church well into 1943. In June of that year, Hoffmeyer informed his subordinates that he had succeeded in pressuring Glaser to recall the apparently meddlesome Father T., who was now no longer permitted to preach.⁵⁵³ While Sonderkommando R bent to pressure from Romanian authorities and curbed its most blatant attacks on the Catholic Church, Hoffmeyer

⁵⁴⁹Ibid., 120.

⁵⁵⁰Rundanweisung Nr. 38, April 9, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 94.

⁵⁵¹Ibid., 95.

⁵⁵²Ibid.

⁵⁵³Stabbefehl Nr. 109, June 22, 1943, BB, R 59/67, 59.

diverted the assault to a clandestine and continuing anti-Catholic campaign.

Ironically, Sonderkommando R's anti-Catholic measures in Transnistria constituted a marked departure from the Third Reich's earlier efforts to succor the region's Catholic Church. Prior to 1941, Soviet authorities had targeted Transnistria's Catholic Church during their anti-religious campaign. Evidence from the German Consulate dating from the mid-1930s suggests that Soviet suspicions of Volksdeutsche Catholic priests as German fifth columnists had some merit. In 1934, for example, both the *Auswärtiges Amt* (Foreign Office) in Berlin and the German Embassy in Moscow took a keen interest in increasingly repressive Soviet measures directed against Volksdeutsche priests in southern Ukraine and requested status reports from the German Consulate in Odessa.⁵⁵⁴ The Consulate replied by furnishing a list of area ethnic German Catholic priests, whom it was supporting with a 1,000 Reichsmark fund provided by the Foreign Office.⁵⁵⁵ The relatively modest sum that German diplomats used to underwrite the Catholic Church in southern Ukraine suggests that this project was a holdover from existing Weimar-era efforts to succor Volksdeutsche in Eastern Europe. This program is nevertheless interesting precisely because it contrasts with Sonderkommando R's later efforts to circumscribe the region's Catholic Church. Whereas German diplomats at the dawn of the Third Reich regarded a functioning Catholic hierarchy as a vehicle for supporting Volksdeutsche in the region, in the midst of an all-out Nazification program the SS understood it as inimical to its goals and sought unsuccessfully to subvert it.

⁵⁵⁴Brief von der Deutschen Botschaft in Moskau an das Deutsche Konsulat in Odessa, August 10, 1934, BB, R 9327, 65. This request was a follow up to a broader conversation concerning ethnic German clergy in the Soviet Union. See Brief von der Deutschen Botschaft in Moskau an das Auswärtiges Amt, July 28, 1934, BB, R 9327, 69-71.

⁵⁵⁵Liste katholischer Geistlicher, July 2, 1934, BB, R 9327, 78-79. Beglaubigte Abschrift für D.K. Odessa / Auswärtiges Amt / Berlin an die Deutsche Botschaft in Moskau, July 2, 1934, BB, R 9327, 78.

The Protestant Church in Transnistria's Volksdeutsche Settlements

For the first six months of the occupation, the Protestant Church's renaissance in Transnistria paralleled that of the Catholic Church. Like their Catholic counterparts, Protestant clergy arrived in Transnistria with the assistance of the German army. Protestant pastors, serving as Wehrmacht chaplains, were among the first Germans to pass through the region during the late summer of 1941. Some pastors, such as Heinrich Römmich, were natives of the region for whom, like Pieger, Operation Barbarossa was a chance to establish ties with area Volksdeutsche.⁵⁵⁶ These initial peripatetic forays into Transnistria by Wehrmacht chaplains quickly gave way to a more permanent Protestant presence in the region. On Sunday, December 7, 1941, without any apparent authorization from Sonderkommando R, Protestant authorities reconsecrated Odessa's St. Pauli Church, less than two months after Romanian and German authorities had captured the city.⁵⁵⁷

Despite these parallels, Sonderkommando R responded very differently to Protestant as opposed to Catholic clergy. Whereas Pieger's ministry in the Transnistrian countryside appears to have provoked a speedy reply from Sonderkommando R, there is no evidence that Hoffmeyer took any immediate action against the Protestant Church in the region's Volksdeutsche settlements. The absence of activity against the Protestant Church amid a flurry of anti-Catholic measures suggests that Hoffmeyer and his subordinates regarded the former as a lesser threat to its mission in the region. Based on Sonderkommando R's surviving records, it appears that Hoffmeyer only turned his attention to the Protestant Church after his unsuccessful bid to hamstring the Catholic Church in the region. That the

⁵⁵⁶Roemmich, "Die evangelische Kirche in Russland in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart," 254.

⁵⁵⁷Völkl, *Transnistrien und Odessa*, 85.

Catholic Church's alliance with the Romanian civil administration blunted his anti-Catholic measures appears, moreover, to have shaped his policy toward the Protestant Church.

Perhaps fearing that Protestant clergy might seal a similar marriage of convenience with Romanian authorities, Hoffmeyer decided to authorize a Protestant ministry for Transnistria's Volksdeutsche. Rather than providing the Protestant Church with more latitude, this move permitted Hoffmeyer to exercise greater control over its theology.

To harness the Protestant Church in Transnistria, Hoffmeyer took the exceptional step of forging a cooperative agreement with the German Christian Movement. Ostensibly, as Hoffmeyer indicated to Alexianu in a June 1942 letter, Sonderkommando R merely entered into an accord with the Transylvanian Protestant Church in Hermannstadt (Sibiu) to obtain ministers to shepherd the region's Protestants.⁵⁵⁸ What Hoffmeyer neglected to mention in his communiqué to Alexianu was the fact that the Transylvanian Protestant Church proved an attractive partner for the SS not merely because of its geographical proximity, but also because of its pronounced affinity for the German Christian Movement, in specific, and National Socialism, in general.

The wartime Transylvanian Protestant Church was a creation of its bishop, Wilhelm Staedel, a fervent member of the German Christian Movement and committed National Socialist. Born in 1890, Staedel followed a typical education track for a Transylvanian Saxon, studying theology in Jena, Budapest, and Berlin. After serving as a field curate during the First World War, *völkisch* nationalism and ultimately National Socialism attracted Staedel's devotion. A prime mover in the Nazification of the region's Volksdeutsche youth movement, Staedel was a member of the fascist German Peoples' Party in Romania

⁵⁵⁸ Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. 3, 1455.

(*Deutsche Volkspartei in Rumänien*). Although Staedel's political activities prompted his predecessor as bishop to sack him from his pastoral duties, a subsequent groundswell of National Socialist sentiment in Transylvania precipitated his reinstatement and facilitated his election as bishop in February 1941. Staedel used his position as bishop to strengthen the Transylvanian Protestant Church's affiliation with the German Christian Movement. His convictions led him to close collaboration with the movement and ultimately moved Staedel to create a branch of the Jena-based Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Church Life (*Institut zur Erforschung und Beseitigung des jüdischen Einflusses auf das deutsche kirchliche Leben*) in Hermannstadt.⁵⁵⁹ Under Staedel's supervision, the German Christian Movement became the new Protestant orthodoxy in Transylvania—an ideological position that Staedel maintained well after 1945.⁵⁶⁰ In Staedel, Hoffmeyer found an ideal partner to help guide Transnistria's Protestant Church in the appropriate National Socialist direction.

Not surprisingly, Hoffmeyer regarded his arrangement with Staedel as completely satisfactory. Hoffmeyer's initial agreement with Staedel yielded four Transylvanian pastors for Volksdeutsche congregations in Odessa, Johannistal, Lichtenfeld, and Helenental.⁵⁶¹ Staedel assigned Waldemar Keintzel, Helmut Hoffman, Hellmut Hochmeister, and Erwin Barth to take up these assignments.⁵⁶² Apparently pleased with the content of their ministry, later in 1942 Hoffmeyer authorized Staedel to send a further nineteen pastors to

⁵⁵⁹ Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus*, 129-131.

⁵⁶⁰ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 52, 227-28.

⁵⁶¹ Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. 3, 1455.

⁵⁶² Völkl, *Transnistrien und Odessa*, 85.

Transnistria.⁵⁶³ In April 1943, Hoffmeyer even floated the idea of introducing the Transylvanian Protestant Church's liturgical calendar to Transnistria "as a counterweight to the propaganda of the Catholic Church" and invited commentary from his staff.⁵⁶⁴ While Hoffmeyer's partnership with Staedel was an alliance born out of a failed attempt to exclude the Catholic Church from the region's Volksdeutsche settlements, it provided Sonderkommando R with exceptional control over the religious lives of area Protestants. If Hoffmeyer had to suffer the reintroduction of religion into Transnistria's Volksdeutsche communities, at least in the case of the Protestant Church, it was of a form of his choosing.

The Church and the Holocaust in Transnistria

Given the lengths to which Hoffmeyer went first to try to exclude the Catholic Church and to shape the theological content of the Protestant Church's ministry for Transnistria's Volksdeutsche, the question remains did either denomination represent a unique threat to Sonderkommando R's Nazification project in the region? The answer is most decidedly no. If the postwar reticence of Protestant and Catholic clergy to discuss the Holocaust in Transnistria is any indication, despite the SS's fears to the contrary, the Church's threat to the Nazi regime's enterprise in the area was no greater than in Germany. Moreover, a careful analysis of police statements and published accounts of the war from Protestant and Catholic clergy reveals that religious leaders from both denominations took an active role in the postwar conspiracy of silence surrounding Sonderkommando R's crimes.

After the war, Protestant clergy who had proselytized in Transnistria remained virtually silent about the Holocaust. Römmich's postwar publication, "Die evangelische

⁵⁶³Ibid.

⁵⁶⁴Stabbefehl Nr. 102, April 18, 1943, BB, R 59/67, 99.

Kirche in Russland in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart,” (The Protestant Church in Russia in the Past and the Present) typifies this trend. In the chapter he presents a history of the Protestant Church in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union laced with anecdotes from his experiences as an ethnic German pastor from southern Ukraine now living in exile in the Federal Republic. In keeping with the postwar expellee narrative, Römmich’s account emphasizes Volksdeutsche suffering at the hands of the Soviets. Recounting his interwar ministry in Bessarabia, for example, Römmich describes giving shelter to fellow clergymen, who fled the Soviet anti-religious campaign during the 1930s: “I was able to offer asylum in my house to six Catholic priests, one of whom arrived with a gunshot wound, and a Protestant pastor, who fled from the [Soviet] bloodhounds through night and fog across the [Dniester] river. After a few days of rest they returned down the same dangerous road to their congregations and were later arrested and convicted. When I arrived in their communities in 1941, I could find none of them. At a show trial in Odessa, the Protestant pastor had been exiled for five years and is missing.”⁵⁶⁵ Notwithstanding this brutality, in his description of his visit to his hometown of Worms in southern Ukraine, Römmich emphasizes the renaissance of Lutheran religious life under German rule: “When I was able to visit my hometown of Worms near Odessa for a few hours on the first Sunday after the departure of the Bolshevik troops, August 16, 1941, the first service in five years took place in a [recently] cleaned and makeshift church. After the service, the preacher, a soldier from the German Wehrmacht, baptized children and blessed marriages.”⁵⁶⁶ As these vignettes illustrate, the trajectory of Römmich’s narrative is one of the triumph of faith in the face of

⁵⁶⁵Roemmich, “Die evangelische Kirche in Russland in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart,” 254.

⁵⁶⁶Ibid., 263.

adversity.

Römmich's history of the Protestant Church in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union is, however, more interesting for the events that it selectively omits. In his published narrative, the author jumps a decade and a half from his homecoming in Worms to Konrad Adenauer's 1955 state visit to the Soviet Union, which he emphasizes secured a loosening of restrictions for German-speakers whom Soviet authorities had deported to Central Asia and Siberia during and after the Second World War. By glossing over the war, Römmich is able to fashion a tale of the suffering of innocent Volksdeutsche at the hands of Soviet Union, while jettisoning the problematic complicity of ethnic Germans—notably those from his hometown of Worms—in the Nazi regime's persecution of Jews. It is possible, though unlikely, that during his trip through Transnistria during the summer of 1941 as a Wehrmacht chaplain Römmich did not encounter the progressive waves of German violence unleashed against both local Jews and Volksdeutsche. Postwar testimony from Worms suggests that some of these events may have transpired after Römmich's departure from the town. While possible, this appears to be too convenient of an explanation for his omission of the subject. Perhaps tellingly, when the West German police attempted to interview Römmich in 1965 about wartime events in Worms, he broke off the interview and refused to answer further questions.⁵⁶⁷ Like many of his fellow Lutheran clergymen from the region, Römmich's postwar aversion to discussing Nazi violence—including crimes against his own coreligionists—contributed to a postwar conspiracy of silence about Volksdeutsche

⁵⁶⁷The Stuttgart police officer who interviewed Römmich noted “when asked if he knew about the mass numbers of Jews who were killed near Worms, R[ömmich] indicated that he would not answer this question.” Römmich's interviewer noted perceptively that “based on his comportment, it can be concluded that during his visit to his birthplace during the war, he learned of the mass shootings near Worms.” Aktenvermerk über H. R., November 2, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 277.

involvement in the Holocaust and perhaps indicates an affinity for elements of the National Socialist agenda.

Although privately more forthcoming about wartime Nazi brutality, Catholic clergy also failed to engage publicly with the Holocaust in the region after the war. That Pieger, who had been the target of Nazi violence personally, did not discuss the Holocaust after 1945 is particularly startling. Despite having had front row seats to the Third Reich's brutal policies toward some of the area's Volksdeutsche as well as Romanian and German efforts to murder Jews in Transnistria, neither subject appears in Pieger's account of the Church's mission to the region, "Die religiösen Verhältnisse in der Südukraine (Transnistrien)," (The Religious Circumstances in Southern Ukraine (Transnistria)), which he published alongside Römmich's chapter. In his detailed description of his visit to Strasburg, for example, Pieger merely references the fact that "during the fighting various houses in the village were destroyed."⁵⁶⁸ Although he mentions "the murdered and deceased members of the community," for whom he held a Requiem, the context implies that the dead were the victims of Soviet violence. Undoubtedly many of the departed were. Yet, they were not the only ones. By the time of Pieger's arrival in Strasburg, German and Romanian forces had killed significant numbers of local Jews and ethnic Germans. Postwar statements that Strasburg's residents gave to the West German police are replete with references to the SS's murder of the town's communist officials, Johannes M. and Adam G., during summer 1941.⁵⁶⁹ Local villagers apparently denounced the men to Einsatzgruppe D for what one of their former

⁵⁶⁸Pieger, "Die religiösen Verhältnisse in der Südukraine (Transnistrien)," 45.

⁵⁶⁹Aussage von A. M., September 7, 1962, BAL, B162/2302, 183. Aussage von H. K., November 5, 1962, BAL, B162/2299, 178-179. Aussage von J. R., August 24, 1962, BAL, B162/2302, 6-7. Aussage von P. F., November 14, 1962, BAL, B162/2299, 140.

neighbors described as “allegedly have taken part in purges (*Säuberungsaktionen*) on behalf of the Russians in 1937.”⁵⁷⁰

According to the postwar testimony that the West German police collected, Strasburg was also the site of the mass murder of Jews by Romanian forces during the summer of 1941.⁵⁷¹ As Franz B., a resident of Strasburg later recounted, “at the end of August 1941 Romanian Jews were executed in our locale. Romanian troops drove them toward our town, but came no further because it was occupied by [German] soldiers. The [Romanian] soldiers drove the fleeing Jews from the houses and transported them roughly one kilometer in the direction of the Kutchnokanka stream. There, they were presumably driven into the water and shot. I know about this because I had to help recover the bodies. . . . The civilian population did not discuss the fact that Romanians had pick up and murdered these Jews—it was common knowledge.”⁵⁷² The brutality of the occupation’s opening weeks in Strasburg was by no means an aberration. Rather, Pieger’s August and September 1941 journey led him through many of the Volksdeutsche towns and hamlets where Einsatzgruppe D had murdered both Jews and ethnic Germans mere weeks if not days earlier. While the ubiquity of German and Romanian violence against both Jews and some ethnic Germans during the summer and fall of 1941 is not something that Pieger could have missed easily, if for no other reason than the fact that some of his initial pastoral duties were almost certainly to bury the dead.

While Pieger made no reference to the Holocaust in print, unlike his Protestant

⁵⁷⁰Aussage von G. M., December 1, 1962, BAL, B162/2301, 46.

⁵⁷¹Ibid., 45. Vernehmungsniederschrift von L. H., August 7, 1962, BAL, B162/2296, 146.

⁵⁷²Vernehmungsniederschrift von F. B., July 18, 1962, BAL, B162/2296, 41-42.

counterpart Römmich, he did assist the West German police's criminal investigation into Sonderkommando R. When asked by West German investigators about his summer 1941 trip to rural Transnistria, Pieger explained that in the Volksdeutsche settlement of Katharinental "I discovered from a local resident that a large number of Jews were shot and were buried in a grave that he had helped to dig personally. As I passed through the town, I was almost whacked (*umgelegt*) as a suspected Jew. I was told that [local Volksdeutsche] had received firearms to liquidate Jews who had had leading position during Soviet times and were partly responsible for the deportation of many [ethnic] German men."⁵⁷³ In contrast to what Pieger's published travelogue suggests, his police statements indicate a more comprehensive private postwar engagement with the Holocaust.

The specific episodes of Nazi violence that Pieger presented to the West German police, however, underscore not a general concern about Nazi brutality, but rather a more narrowly focused interest in Nazi measures against Catholics. In his 1961 interview, for example, Pieger discusses the SS-led mass murder of tens of thousands of Jews in the Transnistrian countryside in the abstract, but provides two unrepresentative examples to illustrate the SS's brutality. First, Pieger focuses on the murder of the "mixed race" children of a Jewish-Volksdeutsche couple. As Pieger explained "one day a Jew, who had married an [ethnic] German woman, was picked up and shot by the SS. A short time later the woman was ordered to hand over her mixed race children (*Mischlingskinder*). When the woman refused they threatened to burn down the barn, where the children were allegedly hidden. When the children left their hiding place and came to their mother [they] refused to be separated and they were all shot together. Our people explained that the SS under

⁵⁷³Aussage von N. P., November 13, 1961, BAL, B162/2289, 74-75.

[Bereichskommandoführer] Pachschwöll carried out these shootings.”⁵⁷⁴ Second, Pieger references traveling to a concentration camp in Transnistria to celebrate Holy Communion with a Jewish inmate, who had converted to Catholicism, and recounted attempting to secure food and medicine for the camp’s prisoners.⁵⁷⁵ In contrast to Pieger’s published account of the Catholic Church’s activities in Transnistria, his earlier police statements do discuss episodes of Nazi violence in the region. Nevertheless, the way in which he frames his discussion of the Holocaust suggests that his response to the SS’s brutality was shaped less by universal humanitarian concerns than by a more narrowly defined anxiety about the Third Reich’s encroachment on the Catholic Church’s institutional prerogatives and the violence that it directed against Catholics. For all of Pieger’s activism in establishing the Catholic mission in Transnistria, the content of his private reflections on the Holocaust to the West German police suggest a troublingly narrow interest in Nazi violence that reflected a continuity with the Catholic Church’s response to the Holocaust during the war.

That both Römmich and Pieger opted to publish their wartime experiences in *Die Kirchen und das religiöse Leben der Russlanddeutschen* (*The Churches and Religious Life of the Russian Germans*), a volume produced by the Stuttgart-based *Landsmannschaft der Deutschen aus Russland* (Territorial Association of Germans from Russia), is itself illustrative of their lack of engagement with the Nazi past after the war. The Landsmannschaft der Deutschen aus Russland was and remains a political and cultural organization for Russian Germans in the Federal Republic, whose purpose it is to represent the interests of that particular expellee community. As became clear during the course of the

⁵⁷⁴Ibid., 76.

⁵⁷⁵Ibid., 77.

West German police's investigation into the Holocaust in southern Ukraine, during the 1960s and 1970s a significant number of suspected ethnic German perpetrators held leading positions in the organization. Although not under investigation for having participated in mass shootings, its head, Dr. Karl Stumpp, had been an active participant in the Nazi regime's *völkisch* projects in Ukraine. During the war, Stumpp, a Nazi party member, had commanded an SS Sonderkommando, whose primary duties were to conduct Nazi ethnographic surveys of conquered Soviet territory.⁵⁷⁶ His research silently documented the demographic consequences of the Third Reich's genocidal policies in the Soviet Union. Many of the organization's low-level leaders, however, were heavily implicated in the Holocaust in southern Ukraine. Pius W., Worms's first ethnic German mayor during the occupation, later served as chairman of the local chapter (*Kreis- und Ortsgruppe*) of the Landsmannschaft der Deutschen aus Russland in Dingolfing, Bavaria, where he settled after the war.⁵⁷⁷ One of W.'s fellow Volksdeutsche from Worms described him as "a big Jew-hater," (*ein großer Judenhasser*) and many witnesses fingered him as an enthusiastic local participant in the Holocaust.⁵⁷⁸ Römmich and Pieger were obviously aware that they were penning narratives for an organization populated with ethnic Germans, whose wartime involvement with the Nazi regime made them at the very least unreceptive to a candid

⁵⁷⁶In his capacity as the organization's chairman, Stumpp provided German investigators with information about the whereabouts of suspected Volksdeutsche perpetrators in the Federal Republic. Brief von Dr. K. Stumpp an den leitenden Oberstaatsanwalt bei dem Landgericht / Herrn Below, June 3, 1965, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 6, 997. Stumpp's wartime activities have been the subject of recent historical investigation. Schmaltz and Sinner, "The Nazi Ethnographic Research of Georg Leibbrandt and Karl Stumpp in Ukraine, and its North American Legacy."

⁵⁷⁷Aussage von P. W., October 21, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 68.

⁵⁷⁸Aussage von H. S., January 6, 1965, BAL, B162/2303, 265. On W.'s complicity in the Holocaust see Aussage von A. H., May 23, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 144. Aussage von G. S., July 27, 1967, BAL, B162/2309, 36. Aussage von J. H., August 24, 1962, B162/2302, 20-21.

engagement with the past. The fact that both Protestant and Catholic clergy—one of whom had tasted the Nazi regime’s brutality—cooperated with an organization that was now home to many of the Nazi regime’s ethnic German collaborators speaks to the reluctance of both churches to address the Holocaust in the region after the war. While Catholic clergy were, at least privately, more forthcoming about wartime Nazi violence, as evidenced by their participation in the postwar conspiracy of silence concerning the Holocaust in Transnistria, neither church would have presented a substantive challenge to Hoffmeyer’s Nazification plans in the area.

Conclusion

Sonderkommando R launched its *Kulturkampf* in Transnistria because of the ideological predispositions of the unit’s senior leadership. Fearing that Christianity would offer local Volksdeutsche an alternative to National Socialism, Hoffmeyer had little incentive to reestablish the Church in Transnistria, particularly given that Soviet anti-religious policy had already excised the Church from the daily lives of area Volksdeutsche—a measure that radical elements of the Nazi regime may have desired but were wont to attempt in the Reich. Content with at least this convergence of Soviet and Nazi policies, the unit had no initial plans to reopen the region’s Volksdeutsche churches. Surprised by unanticipated Catholic and Protestant missions to the region and doubtlessly perturbed by the enthusiastic response of local ethnic Germans, among whom Sonderkommando R understood its Nazification program to be a tenuous enterprise, the unit responded in force. Particularly fearful of the Catholic Church’s ministry in Transnistria, perhaps because of the propensity of the Catholic *milieu* to immunize against National Socialism in Germany, Hoffmeyer led an ultimately partially successful effort to circumscribe the Church’s activities in the region’s

Volksdeutsche communities. While the Catholic Church's alliance with Romanian civil administrators fanned SS disdain for the Catholic mission in the area, Romanian intervention prevented German authorities from removing German clergy from Transnistria as they had done earlier in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine. Thwarted from banning the Church outright in Transnistria, Hoffmeyer used the unique latitude that his position afforded him in the region to pursue two measures that were unprecedented in Germany. First, Hoffmeyer launched a robust, yet clandestine campaign to limit the Catholic Church's activities in Transnistria that eclipsed Wagner's efforts to remove crucifixes from Bavarian schools. If he could not restrict the Catholic Church outright, then he could at least limit its success. Second, in contrast to the Nazi regime in Germany, that often kept its distance from the German Christians, Hoffmeyer forged a close working relationship with the movement. While permitting the Protestant Church to operate in Transnistria constituted a retreat from Hoffmeyer's earlier position, it permitted him to guide the theological content of the Protestant Church's teachings in the appropriate National Socialist direction. Hoffmeyer ultimately found this arrangement so conducive to the unit's goals that he toyed with the idea of using Protestantism as a counterweight to Catholicism. Much though he might have hoped to eliminate Christianity as a competitor to his unit's somewhat dicey Nazification project, Hoffmeyer made the best out of a bad situation to ensure that, insofar as it was possible, the Church supported, rather than undermined the SS's plans for the region's Volksdeutsche.

**CHAPTER V: HOFFMEYER'S BENEFICIARIES: THE ROLE OF VIOLENCE,
ROBBERY, AND PROPAGANDA IN CREATING TRANSNISTRIA'S
*VOLKSGEMEINSCHAFT***

During the first year and a half of the occupation, Sonderkommando R purged Transnistria's Volksdeutsche settlements of remaining racially and politically suspect residents and channeled ethnic German religious life into avenues that it regarded as compatible with the Nazi regime's goals. Although a primary focus on the unit's energies, and the source of much of Sonderkommando R's violence against local ethnic Germans, these efforts were merely preparatory measures to pour the foundation of the National Socialist project in the region. The VoMi's plans for Transnistria's Volksdeutsche hinged on Sonderkommando R's ability to persuade local ethnic Germans that they had a stake in the Nazi project. Without ethnic German support for National Socialism, Transnistria's Volksdeutsche could never become the demographic basis for future German expansion in the East. To mobilize local Volksdeutsche for the Nazi cause, Sonderkommando R needed to win the "hearts and minds" of the region's ethnic Germans—a task made all the more difficult by the unpopularity of the unit's murderous drive to eliminate local opponents and to reorganize religious life in the area. How then did Sonderkommando R seek to secure ethnic German support for the Nazi regime in Transnistria?

By recovering Sonderkommando R's security, population, economic, and propaganda initiatives within the region's Volksdeutsche communities, this chapter seeks to answer

precisely this question. As a result of policies launched by the unit's commanders and ad hoc measures pursued by local SS officers, Sonderkommando R's Nazification project took three primary forms. First, the unit sought to carve out autonomy in Transnistria by limiting Romanian influence in the area's Volksdeutsche settlements. Whereas on the global stage Romania was Nazi Germany's junior partner, in Transnistria this power relationship was inverted. Although theoretically independent, from the occupation's beginning Hoffmeyer's Lilliputian staff had to manage Transnistria's ethnic German communities both in cooperation and more often in conflict with the region's Romanian rulers. Even before Sonderkommando R established its Bereichkommandos in Transnistria, systematic Romanian pilfering of ethnic German property exacerbated preexisting enmity between the SS and the Romanians. Hoffmeyer and his subordinates responded to this challenge by arming area ethnic Germans and contesting perceived Romanian interference in the region's Volksdeutsche settlements. This move not only precipitated periodic skirmishes between Romanian forces and Sonderkommando R's local auxiliaries, but it also provided Hoffmeyer and his staff with the pretext to launch an ethnic cleansing campaign designed to establish homogenous Volksdeutsche communities in Transnistria. These strategic hamlets not only created a demographic barrier against subsequent Romanian attempts to undercut the unit's authority, but they also anticipated, at least in embryo, the types of militarized German agricultural settlements that the Nazi regime hoped might someday dominate German-conquered Soviet territory. While Sonderkommando R's economic dependence on Transnistria's Romanian occupiers stabilized an otherwise fractious relationship, these early and ongoing conflicts typified the frequently tortured interactions between German and Romanian authorities in the region.

Second, Sonderkommando R's Nazification project hinged on establishing Volksdeutsche economic dominance in Transnistria. This initiative took two forms. On the one hand, it entailed the redistribution of scarce local resources to area ethnic Germans, primarily through a de facto dissolution of collective farms in many Bereichkommandos. This move produced a heated response from local Romanian authorities, who realized that unilateral de-collectivization threatened their economic interests in Transnistria. On the other hand, Sonderkommando R imported large amounts of personal effects that the German state had stolen from its Jewish victims in occupied Poland and provided them to local Volksdeutsche at little or no cost. These projects had both immediate and long-term implications. In the short run, Sonderkommando R's acquisitive policies proved popular with local Volksdeutsche, who had lost tremendous amounts of property during Soviet rule and who yearned for a return to their once-privileged economic position in the area. In the long run, securing a dominant position for area ethnic Germans promised to cement future German influence in southern Ukraine.

Finally, Sonderkommando R launched a dedicated, if ultimately incomplete propaganda and education campaign to wrest the ideological convictions of a once deeply religious Volksdeutsche population that, for more than two decades, had lived under Soviet rule. Based in Odessa, which provided infrastructure that rural Transnistria sorely lacked, Sonderkommando R's propaganda apparatus depended primarily on a VoMi-published newspaper and an impressive National Socialist cultural center. Perhaps cognizant of the fact that Volksdeutsche youth constituted the most fertile ground for its propaganda initiatives, Sonderkommando R placed special emphasis on the ideological instruction of the region's ethnic German youngsters. The unit developed a substantial school system for local ethnic

German children that combined a high dose of National Socialist ideological instruction with a carefully crafted continuing education program for the region's Volksdeutsche teachers. The unit's attempts to create a National Socialist youth movement in Transnistria were, however, less successful. Initially unwilling and eventually reluctant to partner with the Office of the *Reichsjugendführer* (Reich Youth Leader), under whose auspices the area's National Socialist youth organization was to operate, Sonderkommando R missed a key chance to influence the ideological formation of local Volksdeutsche children. The unit's inability to capitalize on this opportunity because of the SS's determination to maintain its independence in the region provides a quintessential example of how Sonderkommando R's drive for autonomy became self-defeating.

Germans and Romanians in Transnistria: An Antagonistic Alliance

From the start of Sonderkommando R's deployment to Transnistria, relations between the Romanian government and the SS were antagonistic to the point of dysfunction. Antonescu and Himmler detested one another. Earlier in 1941, the SS had backed a failed coup led by Horia Sima's Iron Guard against Antonescu. To make matters worse, Himmler had orchestrated Sima's transfer to Germany, where the SS kept him on ice in Bavaria as alternative to the *Conducător*. Had the prospect of territorial expansion into occupied Soviet territory not proved so tantalizing to Antonescu, then, in all likelihood, he would have preferred to have had nothing to do with the SS. For the SS's part, even after geopolitical ambition forced what was undeniably a shotgun marriage, it deceived the Romanians about the number of German personnel that it intended to deploy to Transnistria.⁵⁷⁹

⁵⁷⁹Copie de pe adresa Nr. 67148 a Ministerului Afacerilor Străine Dir politică către M.St.M., September 11, 1941, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed Hr 1081, 13.

Sonderkommando R's partnership with the Romanian civil administration was, to paraphrase Reitlinger, "a house built on sand."⁵⁸⁰

Early Romanian moves against Transnistria's ethnic Germans, however, expanded fissures in this already tumultuous relationship. From the start of the campaign, Romanian forces mistreated southern Ukraine's population. Marauding Romanian soldiers stole tremendous amounts of civilian and state property.⁵⁸¹ To make matters worse from the German perspective, the Romanians did not exempt area Volksdeutsche from their cupidity and treated them as a conquered people, whose property was fair game for looting.⁵⁸² Georg B., an ethnic German from Mannheim, later recounted his initial encounter with the Romanian Army: "on the first day of the occupation, we had to hide in the basement and could not leave. . . . We were under Romanian military guard and were prevented from leaving the cellar. When we were finally let go, all of the poultry had been taken away by the Romanians."⁵⁸³ Both the Wehrmacht and Einsatzgruppe D took immediate measures to stem Romanian banditry during the summer of 1941. Their protection, however, was incomplete and neither the German military nor the German police had the time or resources to rebuild the area's largely denuded Volksdeutsche communities. That task fell to Sonderkommando R. As an illustration of the situation's magnitude, the unit's initial staff orders focused on mitigating the effects of Romanian theft. On September 22, 1941, Hoffmeyer ordered his freshly minted Bereichskommandoführer to "stop all [Romanian] requisitions in

⁵⁸⁰ Reitlinger, *The House Built on Sand*.

⁵⁸¹ Dallin, *Odessa, 1941-1944*, 68.

⁵⁸² Aussage von F. E., August 27, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-002, Band 4, 573

⁵⁸³ Aussage von G. B., August 29, 1962, BAL, B162/2302, 139.

Volksdeutsche villages.”⁵⁸⁴ Ethnic Germans left homeless by Romanian raids added particular urgency to Sonderkommando R’s efforts.⁵⁸⁵ Romanian pillaging continued throughout the fall of 1941. In November 1941, Hoffmeyer’s subordinates warned him of “growing Romanian pressure” and “renewed attacks on ethnic Germans near Landau.”⁵⁸⁶ Beyond damaging relations between local Romanian authorities and Sonderkommando R’s staff further, continued Romanian thefts jeopardized the survival of local Volksdeutsche and thus threatened to derail Hoffmeyer’s entire mission in Transnistria.

Hoffmeyer responded to Romanian looting in two primary ways. First, he confronted it with direct armed resistance. With fewer than 150 German subordinates spread thinly across Transnistria, he lacked the manpower to interdict Romanian raiding parties. To compensate for its small staff, Sonderkommando R expanded the local ethnic German militia or Selbstschutz to protect Transnistria’s Volksdeutsche settlements against Romanian theft. The origins, operations, and demographic composition of the Selbstschutz are discussed in detail in chapters seven and eight. What is important here, however, is the organization’s initial purpose. As Heinrich Krumbeck, the former Bereichkommandoführer of Janowska, later explained: “Bereichkommandoführer . . . were ordered to create a militia made up of ethnic German men to protect the Volksdeutsche population because there were no German troops . . . in the area. We could not rely on the Romanians. It was rather the case that we had to arm ourselves against the Romanians.”⁵⁸⁷ With what amounted to a private army,

⁵⁸⁴ Dienstanweisung Nr. 1, September 22, 1941, BB, R 59/66, 154.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid., 153.

⁵⁸⁶ Teleprinter Message, 22.11.41, January 16, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 53, 7.

⁵⁸⁷ Aussage von H. K., October 13, 1966, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2695, 131. RuSHA Akte Heinz Krumbeck, NARA, RG 232, A 3343 RS D347, 30-244.

Hoffmeyer commanded his subordinates to halt continued Romanian assaults on the region's Volksdeutsche settlements.

Now staffed to contest Romanian incursions into areas of Transnistria that Sonderkommando R considered its bailiwick, Hoffmeyer's command grew more assertive in exercising its prerogatives. Romanian authorities responded in kind, escalating what had been simmering hostility into a low-level armed conflict. A fall 1941 encounter between Sonderkommando R's staff in Halberstadt and Romanian Army soldiers stationed in nearby Varvarivka exemplifies the intensification of this antagonism shortly after the occupation's beginning. On November 20, 1941, Sergeant Marinescu of the 78th Romanian Infantry Battalion arrived in the predominantly ethnically German town of Steinberg and proceeded to the local mill, whose ownership Romanian and German authorities apparently contested. There, Marinescu attempted to eject the mill's Volksdeutsche employees, screaming "You Germans, you Hitler!" (*Du Deutsche, Du Hitler!*). At least according to the German version of events, during the ensuing brawl Marinescu attempted to throw a twelve-year-old local boy into the mill's flywheel. Steinberg's local residents appealed to Sonderkommando R's Bereichkommando in Halberstadt, which sent a member of its staff, SS-Rottenführer Franz Leibham, to intercede. Upon arriving in Steinberg, Leibham detained Marinescu and dispatched a local ethnic German, Matthäus Wanner, to report the arrest to Romanian authorities in Varvarivka. Infuriated by Marinescu's arrest, his commanders arrested Wanner on the likely trumped up charge of publicly insulting Romanian national honor. Leibham then traveled to Varvarivka with Marinescu in tow to negotiate for Wanner's release. Leibham approached Captain Constantin Sendrea, Marinescu's superior, who had imprisoned Wanner. After heated negotiations, in which Leibham banged his fists on the table out of

frustration over their mutual communications difficulties, Leibham and Sendrea reached a deal: each man would release his prisoner and Marinescu would be banned from patrolling near Steinberg. With the captives traded, Leibham headed home with Wanner. On the road back to Steinberg, they again encountered Marinescu, who, in violation of the agreement, was returning to the town accompanied by two fellow Romanian soldiers. In the ensuing wagon chase and shootout, Leibham recaptured Marinescu and took him back to Halberstadt for interrogation. Sonderkommando R released Marinescu back to his unit a short time later.⁵⁸⁸

While this bizarre skirmish is among the best-documented, it was by no means unique. Rather, it was part of an ongoing and periodically violent contest between Sonderkommando R and Romanian authorities for control of Transnistria's Volksdeutsche settlements. This struggle played out both physically and bureaucratically. Selbstschutz units frequently engaged Romanian soldiers, whom they suspected of pillaging ethnic German property. Confrontations between Volksdeutsche militiamen and Romanian soldiers were not limited simply to the occupation's opening months. In October 1942, for example, Sonderkommando R's liaison officer, SS-Untersturmführer Dr. Eckert, lodged a formal complaint with Romanian authorities about thefts from the vineyards and corn fields near the Volksdeutsche town of Peterstal. According to Eckert, "recently this plundering has reached

⁵⁸⁸ Both German and Romanian accounts of this encounter are preserved in correspondence between the Wehrmacht Liaison Office for Transnistria and the region's Romanian civil administration. Although both versions confirm the basic event, each portrays the other as the aggressor. Alexianu an Wehrmachtsverbindungsstab für Transnistrien in Tiraspol / Betr.: Beschwerde wegen Uebergriffe deutscher Soldaten, November 27, 1941, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1084, 70, 162. (Pages out of sequence). Verbindungsstab der Deutschen Wehrmacht für Transnistrien Ia. / Dem Kgl. Rum. Armeoberkommando Depatement [sic] des Zivilgouverneurs von Transnistrien / Betr.: Beschwerde wegen angebl Übergriffen deutsche Soldaten., January 2, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1084, 10-12.

such proportions that the [Romanian] soldiers are driving their booty to Odessa to sell.”⁵⁸⁹

The local Selbstschutz responded to one such incursion by firing on the Romanian soldiers.⁵⁹⁰ Sonderkommando R lamented the difficulties of disarming the frequently intoxicated Romanian troops peacefully. In September 1942, for example, Selbstschutz sentries in the Volksdeutsche town of Rauch caught and arrested a drunk Romanian soldier wandering through the town at three o’clock in the morning.⁵⁹¹ As an indication of this conflict’s duration, well into 1943 Sonderkommando R’s commanders admonished their subordinates to report shootouts between the ethnic German Selbstschutz and the Romanians to the unit’s headquarters in Landau. Direct confrontations between Sonderkommando R and Romanian authorities were a perennial feature of the occupation.

Although armed conflagrations between the Romanians and Sonderkommando R abounded, many of these engagements simply hemorrhaged ink and red tape. Transnistria’s Romanian civil administrators sniped at Sonderkommando R over frequently petty issues in reams of written complaints. As early as January 1942, in the midst of the mass killing of Jews in the region, Alexianu complained to Hoffmeyer about the “arbitrariness” (*Eigenmächtigkeit*) of Sonderkommando R’s staff.⁵⁹² In June of that year, Romanian

⁵⁸⁹ Reichsführer-SS Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle / Der Verbindungsführer beim Zivilgouverneur von Transnistrien Verwaltungsdirektion / Betr.: Feldplünderung im Judet Ovidiopol durch rumänische Soldaten, October 11, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opus 1, Ed. Hr. 1089, 169.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid. Reichsführer-SS Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle / Der Verbindungsführer beim Zivilgouverneur von Transnistrien / Betr.: Übergriffe rumänischer Soldaten in Freudental, October 12, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opus 1, Ed. Hr. 1089, 152.

⁵⁹¹ Abschrift, September 29, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 18, Fond 2361, Opus 1, Ed Hr 70, 244.

⁵⁹² Zivilgouverneur an Herrn Kommandanten der Volksdeutschen Mittelstelle Oberführer Hoffmeyer in Landau / Betr.: Übergriffe der SS in Marianowka, January 20, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opus 1, Ed. Hr. 1084, 86.

authorities called SS-Untersturmführer Köhli on the carpet for a litany of matters, including disseminating pro-German propaganda to local Ukrainians, spying on Romanian forces, and theft of Romanian vehicles.⁵⁹³ His colleague, SS-Untersturmführer Liebl, fared little better. In March 1943, the Romanian Prefect in Berezovka (Berezivka) demanded an explanation for why local Volksdeutsche were collecting wood from a forest that was off-limits to them.⁵⁹⁴ Sonderkommando R's friction with the Romanians could, at least for some Bereichskommandoführer, become a death by a thousand paper cuts.

The second major way in which Hoffmeyer sought to limit Romanian influence in Transnistria was by reorganizing the region's demographic landscape to create ethnically homogeneous Volksdeutsche strongholds that permitted Sonderkommando R to project its authority more effectively. Historically, the region's Volksdeutsche rarely lived in homogeneous Germanophone enclaves. When German and Romanian forces arrived in southern Ukraine in the late summer of 1941, even the smallest nominally ethnically German localities had residents, whom local German-speakers, let alone the SS, regarded as Ukrainians or Russians.⁵⁹⁵ The demographic upheaval precipitated in the war's opening months further muddied the region's ethnic waters. While targeted Soviet deportations had threatened the viability of some ethnic German communities by reducing the number of Volksdeutsche men, in some cases the war effectively created new ethnic German

⁵⁹³ Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle BK XXIV / 1068 an den Hauptstab Landau / Betr.: Stellungnahme zum Schreiben des Departments des Zivilgouverneurs für Transnistrien - Verwaltungsdirektion - Nr. 14 635 vom 28.3.1942, June 30, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1085, 116.

⁵⁹⁴ SS-Untersturmführer Liebl an die Präfektur Berezovka / Betr.: Ihr Schreiben vom 20.12.42, March 25, 1943, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 18, Fond 2361, Opis 1, Ed Hr 70, 8824-8825.

⁵⁹⁵ See, for example, Protokol doprosa Ionusa Aleksandra, April 6, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8454. Protokol doprosa Kokha Floriana, October 1, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8555-8556. Protokol doprosa Kokha Floriana, November 14, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8703.

settlements.⁵⁹⁶ Volksdeutsche spread throughout the region left many ethnic Germans vulnerable to continued Romanian harassment.

The unit's solution was to launch an ethnic cleansing campaign to create ethnically homogeneous communities where none had existed previously. As Gustav G., an NSKK chauffeur attached to the Bereichkommando in Bischofsfeld, later explained: "our primary responsibility in the Bereichkommando pertained to concentrating Volksdeutsche insofar as they lived with the Russian population in various villages. The Volksdeutsche were to be concentrated in certain residential areas as were the Russian residents."⁵⁹⁷ To achieve this historically unprecedented ethnic segregation required Sonderkommando R to relocate both area non-Germans and local Volksdeutsche. In towns with a significant population of German-speakers, Hoffmeyer's subordinates simply forced local non-Germans to relocate. As Franz M., a former resident of Kunersdorf near Berezovka, later explained: "[area Russians] from our locale were expelled."⁵⁹⁸ Similarly, in Friedensfeld, a town of 200 residents near Rosenfeld, Sonderkommando R deported half of the town's residents to create an ethnically "pure" Volksdeutsche settlement.⁵⁹⁹ Where Sonderkommando R's staff found insufficient numbers of area ethnic Germans to stake a claim to the town, they contented themselves with carving out a Volksdeutsche enclave from part of the locality. Peter B., one

⁵⁹⁶ In November 1942, for example, in the midst of a dispute about billeting Romanian troops in the town of Heinrichsdorf (Schevtschenko), even Sonderkommando R had to concede that its claim as a historically Germanophone settlement was tenuous. The unit was forced to admit that "a large part of the population" had arrived in the town "as a result of resettlements and the influence of the war." Reichsführer-SS Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle / Der Verbindungsführer beim Zivilgouverneur von Transnistrien an das Zivilgouvernement von Transnistrien Verwaltungsdirektion / Betr.: Einquartierung in Heinrichsdorf (Schevtschenko), November 21, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1089, 176.

⁵⁹⁷ Aussage von G. G., March 3, 1965, Staatsarchiv Münster, March 3, 1965, 115.

⁵⁹⁸ Aussage von F. M., July 20, 1967, BAL, B162/2299, 287.

⁵⁹⁹ Aussage von W. B., November 6, 1962, BAL, B162/2299, 184.

of a handful of ethnic Germans in the town of Roshkova, recounted one such effort: “only Russians lived in my neighborhood. In another section of Roschkova, Russians and Volksdeutsche lived mixed together. . . . The Germans carried out a resettlement. All Russian had to move into the exclusively Russian neighborhood. The section of town in which the Volksdeutsche lived received the name Weidenau.”⁶⁰⁰ Sonderkommando R also compelled B. to move to Weidenau, although not before asking him to separate from his Ukrainian partner and their two children—a request that he rejected.⁶⁰¹ In cases where Hoffmeyer’s subordinates encountered too few ethnic Germans to claim even part of a town, they simply relocated individual Volksdeutsche families to larger nearby settlements.⁶⁰² Remaking Transnistria’s demographic landscape constituted a key component of Sonderkommando R’s efforts to limit Romanian influence in the region’s Volksdeutsche settlements.

Not surprisingly, the unit’s attempts at population engineering quickly ran afoul of Transnistria’s Romanian civil administration. Area Romanian officials complained bitterly about the fact that Sonderkommando R’s expulsions had created indigent refugees, for whom local Romanian administrators could not find accommodations.⁶⁰³ To add insult to injury, Sonderkommando R’s deportations extended also to ethnic Moldovans.⁶⁰⁴ Pressure from

⁶⁰⁰ Aussage von P. B., October 20, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 57.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid.

⁶⁰² Aussage von H. D., December 16, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 238.

⁶⁰³ For Sonderkommando R’s response to Romanian complaints, see Der Reichsführer SS Hauptamt Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle Sonderkommando R an den Zivilgouverneur von Transnistrien Herrn Professor Alexianu, August 3, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1088, 145.

⁶⁰⁴ SS-Sonderkommando ‘R’ Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle BK XV Nebenstelle Großliebental an den Herrn Prätor von [Ill.] Kr. Ovidiopol, March 27, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 20, Fond 2369, Opis 1s Ed Hr 7, Frame unnumbered.

Alexianu reached such proportions that Hoffmeyer interceded with his staff—one of the rare instances in which he did so during 1942. On June 22, 1942, he ordered his subordinates to coordinate their deportations of non-Germans more closely with Romanian authorities.⁶⁰⁵

While Hoffmeyer's attempts to rein in his staff precipitated more carefully coordinated deportations in some instances, it did little to assuage Romanian anxiety about the process.⁶⁰⁶

Sonderkommando R's capacity to declare part or all of a town "ethnically German" and to reengineer local demographics to support that claim provided the unit with a potentially exponential capacity to expand its authority at the expense of that of the Romanian civil administration. Although inconclusive, surviving evidence suggests that Sonderkommando R used population resettlements not simply to guard against Romanian interference, but also to secure a long-term presence in the region. In April 1942, for example, Bereichkommando XI in Rastatt expelled the predominately ethnically Ukrainian residents of the nearby town of Gradovka (Hradivka) and replaced them with ethnic Germans from more remote local Volksdeutsche settlements, thereby creating a concentrated string of Volksdeutsche villages.⁶⁰⁷ Sonderkommando R's population policies provided it with an opportunity to expand its authority in the region and to create the islands of "Germanness" necessary to secure future German influence in the area—a fact that was not lost on Transnistria's Romanian civil administrators.

Despite the acrimony of this latent conflict, Sonderkommando R's economic dependence on the Romanian civil administration appears to have blunted at least some of

⁶⁰⁵ Rundanweisung Nr. 47, June 22, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 83.

⁶⁰⁶ Einheit Feldpost Nr. SS-10528 BK-Rastatt Stützpunkt Lichtenfeld / An den Bürgermeister des Dorfes Gieße-Chutor, August 9, 1943, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 18, Fond 2361, Opis 1, Ed Hr 70, 72.

⁶⁰⁷ Protokol doprosa Ionusa Aleksandra, February 25, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8338.

this hostility. This parasitic relationship resulted from the economic unviability of the VoMi's operations in Transnistria. Despite the fact that Sonderkommando R oversaw more than 370,246 hectares of farmland—a radically disproportionate 10 percent of Transnistria's arable land—that produced a diverse and impressive yield, the unit had no cost-effective way to bring these goods to market.⁶⁰⁸ Negotiations with possible German and Romanian buyers fell through repeatedly because the market value of Sonderkommando R's agricultural products in both countries could not, even with subsidies, cover the immense transportation costs of shipping these goods via an underdeveloped transportation infrastructure that was already buckling in the midst of a war of attrition.⁶⁰⁹ Hoffmeyer's command, however, desperately needed to sell its agricultural goods because its small budget was barely sufficient to pay its staff and local Volksdeutsche employees.⁶¹⁰ Sonderkommando R had but one option: it was forced to barter with Transnistria's Romanian civil administrators.

In exchange for large quantities of agricultural produce, Romanian authorities provided Hoffmeyer's unit with imported and scarce goods that the VoMi could not afford to purchase. Beginning in 1941, Sonderkommando R agreed to provide the Romanian civil administration with one half of all Volksdeutsche agricultural output in the region.⁶¹¹ In April

⁶⁰⁸ According to British signal intelligence, Sonderkommando R reported this figure to Berlin in September 1942. G.C. & C.S. Air and Military History, Vol. XIII, The German Police, c.1945, BNA, HW 16, Piece 63, 222. Transnistria had approximately 3.3 million hectares of arable land. Dallin, *Odessa, 1941-1944*, 51. By comparison, Transnistria's 130,000 Volksdeutsche accounted for no more than 5 percent of the region's population. Ibid., 62.

⁶⁰⁹ These were the conclusions of British analysts, who were privy to now destroyed German police radio intercepts and penned a classified history of the German police immediately after the war. G.C. & C.S. Air and Military History, Vol. XIII, The German Police, c.1945, BNA, HW 16, Piece 63, 222-223.

⁶¹⁰ In September 1942, Sonderkommando R sent a special request to Berlin for 500,000 Reichmark to support its educational initiatives in Transnistria. German Police Decodes Nr 2 Traffic: 8.9.42, September 11, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 47, 2.

⁶¹¹ Rundanweisung Nr. 72, September 29, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 54-55.

1942, once road travel became feasible, Siebert ordered his Bereichskommandoführer to provide half of the previous year's harvest to the agricultural director of the local Romanian Prefecture. Keenly aware of mounting Romanian complaints about his subordinates' behavior, Siebert ordered his staff to deliver the appropriate goods to the Romanians by June 1, 1942, and threatened to punish any non-compliant Bereichskommandoführer.⁶¹² Later in 1942, Sonderkommando R's leaders and their Romanian counterparts extended this agreement to include wheat, wool, and pelts that ethnic Germans had trapped.⁶¹³ Despite Sonderkommando R's earlier violent dispute with local Romanian authorities over a mill in rural Transnistria, both sides ultimately reached a profit sharing agreement concerning Volksdeutsche-operated mills. Beginning in August 1942, Romanian authorities agreed to allow ethnic Germans to operate some mills and Sonderkommando R consented to pay approximately 30 percent of the mills' revenue to the Romanian state.⁶¹⁴ To fulfill their part of the bargain, Romanian authorities granted Sonderkommando R access to otherwise inaccessible products. Throughout 1942, for example, Alexianu's staff provided Sonderkommando R with rations for area ethnic Germans that included cigarettes, matches, and distilled alcohol.⁶¹⁵ At year's end, the Romanian civil administration traded 100 tons of

⁶¹² Rundanweisung Nr. 37, April 9, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 96. Also see Reichsführer SS Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle Der Verbindungsführer beim Zivilgouverneur von Transnistrien an den Zivilgouverneur von Transnistrien Abt. Verwaltung / Betr.: Ablieferung von 50% Futtergras in Seebach, Jud. Ribnita, July 1, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1088, 157.

⁶¹³ On Sonderkommando R's required wheat deliveries see Rundanweisung Nr. 74, October 20, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 51. On wool deliveries see Rundanweisung Nr. 67, September 8, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 61. On required fur and pelt deliveries see Rundanweisung Nr. 88 / Betr.: Ablieferung sämtliche Häute und Felle sowie der Wolle, December 12, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 34. Rundanweisung Nr. 100, April 3, 1943, BB, R 59/66, 4.

⁶¹⁴ Rundanweisung Nr. 62 / Betr.: Staatsabgaben der Getreide- und Ölmühle, August 18, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 66. Rundanweisung Nr. 67, September 8, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 60.

⁶¹⁵ Rundanweisung Nr. 32, April 7, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 101. Rundanweisung Nr. 67, September 8, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 61.

salt for a special delivery of additional agricultural products from local Volksdeutsche.⁶¹⁶

The Romanians were also a primary source for construction materials that Sonderkommando R needed to improve local infrastructure. In July 1942, the unit asked the Romanian civil administration for a wagon of cement for roadwork between Worms and Landau.⁶¹⁷

Sonderkommando R repeated this request the following summer.⁶¹⁸ Similarly, in August 1943, Hoffmeyer's subordinates ordered five crates of window glass from the Romanian Prefect in Berezovka to fix damaged panes in a local ethnic German school.⁶¹⁹ This mutually beneficial economic partnership served to solidify an otherwise acrimonious relationship.

While trade agreements brokered by high level leaders from both Sonderkommando R and the Romanian civil administration—as opposed to their personnel in the field who continued to duke out their disputes—stabilized Romanian-German relations in Transnistria, they did little to eliminate long-term distrust between the two powers. Even as Sonderkommando R's commanders instructed the unit's midlevel leaders to cooperate with the Romanians, they made it clear to their staff that German and Romanian authorities had frequently conflicting interests. In June 1942, for example, Hoffmeyer reached an agreement with the Romanian military, whereby it was permitted to confiscate all vehicles of Soviet manufacture. Shortly after Hoffmeyer signed the agreement, he secretly instructed his subordinates to drive all of the unit's captured Soviet vehicles to Landau, where its NSKK

⁶¹⁶ Rundanweisung Nr. 90, December 29, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 31.

⁶¹⁷ Der Deutsche landw. Berater bei der Präfektur Beresowka an den Herrn Präfekt des Judez Berezovka, July 21, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 20, Fond 2361, Opis 1s, Ed. Hr. 7, 183.

⁶¹⁸ Einheit F.P. Nr. 10 528 BK. XI an den Herrn Oberst Leonidas Popp Beresovca [sic] / Betr.: Anforderung von Fensterglas, July 28, 1943, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 18, Fond 2361, Opis 1, Ed Hr 70, 65.

⁶¹⁹ Einheit Feldpost Nr. 10528 BK. XIII an die Präfektur Beresowka / Betr.: Anforderung von Fensterglas, August 2, 1943, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 18, Fond 2361, Opis 1, Ed Hr 70, 61.

staff would hide their origin by repainting them with SS registration numbers and issuing appropriate paperwork.⁶²⁰ Despite entreaties from their superiors in Landau to cooperate with the Romanians, perceptive Sonderkommando R staff understood the subtext: the unit's alliance with the Romanian civil administration was one of temporary necessity.

Enriching Transnistria's Ethnic Germans

As Sonderkommando R secured its position in rural Transnistria, it pursued parallel initiatives that sought to bolster local Volksdeutsche by helping them to achieve a dominant economic position in the region. Years of Soviet rule had turned a historically prosperous ethnic German population into paupers. Fragmentary information about Volksdeutsche property contained in wartime ethnic German naturalization papers is illustrative. The case of Jakob Feininger, an ethnic German from Friedenheim, a Germanophone hamlet near Rastatt, underscores the group's poverty on the eve of the invasion. On June 22, 1941, Feininger lived in a 50-square-meter one-room stone house with a dirt floor and no running water or electricity. In addition to a small garden plot, Feininger's personal possessions included two cows, two pigs, two sheep, five geese and a dozen chickens. He had four years of elementary school education and the last of his nine children died in childbirth in 1942.⁶²¹ This snapshot reflects the low level of economic development among area ethnic Germans even before the beginning months of Operation Barbarossa, during which both the Red Army's scorched earth policy and Romanian banditry further endangered the material well-being of local Volksdeutsche. When Sonderkommando R arrived in Transnistria in fall 1941, the Black Sea Germans were one of, if not the most impoverished group of ethnic Germans

⁶²⁰ Rundanweisung Nr. 46, June 20, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 84.

⁶²¹ Einbürgerungsantrag Jakob Feininger, September 20, 1943, NARA, RG 242, A3342-EWZ50-B58, 1494-1495.

that the unit's staff had encountered during its numerous deployments to Eastern Europe.

One of the two main ways in which Sonderkommando R sought to help local Volksdeutsche return to a dominant economic position in the region was to compensate them for property that the Soviet regime had expropriated during the 1920s and 1930s. In rural Transnistria, the main assets that the unit could distribute to area Volksdeutsche were controlled by the more than 3,100 collective farms in which 70 percent of the region's rural population labored.⁶²² Sonderkommando R's first and most significant step in improving the material position of area ethnic Germans was to dismantle a large number of collective farms and to redistribute the area's primary economic assets—land, agricultural equipment, and livestock—to local Volksdeutsche. Throughout the Transnistrian countryside, Sonderkommando R's Bereichkommandoführer divvied up collective farms and encouraged local ethnic Germans to cultivate crops independently.⁶²³ Sometimes Hoffmeyer's subordinates assigned collective farmland on the basis of prerevolutionary ethnic German land claims.⁶²⁴ In other instances, Bereichkommandoführer appear to have reallocated collective farmland roughly equally among area Volksdeutsche.⁶²⁵ Bereichkommandoführer also removed tractors from nearby Machine Tractor Stations (MTS) and either gave them to

⁶²² Dallin, *Odessa, 1941-1944*, 51.

⁶²³ This was a widespread experience among local ethnic Germans. See, for example, Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von J. F., January 17, 1962, BAL, B162/2290, 168. Aussage von R. B., October 31, 1962, BAL, B162/2301, 4. Aussage von P. H., October 17, 1962, BAL, B162/2300, 131. Aussage von J. S., November 23, 1962, BAL, B162/2301, 79. Aussage von J. S., April 13, 1962, BAL, B162/2292, 50.

⁶²⁴ Aussage von H. B., August 11, 1962, BAL, B162/2302, 124. In Worms, for example, the local Bereichkommando staff returned a farm that Soviet authorities had collectivized prior to the war to Oskar W.'s father. Aussage von O. W., November 19, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 169.

⁶²⁵ Aussage von W. H., November 26, 1963, BAL, B162/2301, 21.

or placed them at the exclusive disposal of area ethnic Germans.⁶²⁶ Some enterprising local commanders traveled as far afield as the Reichskommissariat Ukraine to obtain the much-desired machinery. As SS-Hauptsturmführer Martin Assmann, the one-time Bereichskommandoführer in Halberstadt, explained to Soviet counterintelligence in 1944, during the fall of 1941 or the spring of 1942, he removed 45 tractors from a MTS in German-occupied Nikolaev oblast', had them driven back to Transnistria, and distributed them to local ethnic Germans.⁶²⁷ Similarly, many Bereichskommandoführer emptied collective farms of livestock and provided it to area Volksdeutsche.⁶²⁸ If Assmann's statements to Soviet authorities—who took a keen interest in the theft of Soviet state property—are any indication, then the amount of livestock that Sonderkommando R gave to the region's Volksdeutsche was immense. According to Assmann, during his tenure as Halberstadt's Bereichskommandoführer, he emptied the area's collective farms of 1,000 cows, 2,000 horses, 500 sheep, and 30 teams of oxen for distribution to local ethnic Germans.⁶²⁹ Despite the scale of these reallocations, Sonderkommando R's staff appears to have been sensitive to the needs of individual ethnic Germans. In Worms, for example, the local Bereichskommandoführer, SS-Untersturmführer Ludwig Bruderman, demanded that the collective farm in Petrovka relinquish two horses, a cart, and a cow to Jacob Herz, a local

⁶²⁶ Zeugeschaftliche Vernehmung von L. B., January 16, 1962, BAL, B162/2290, 164.

⁶²⁷ Protokol doprosa / A. M. G., September 20, 1944, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2902, 46. Bereichskommando 12 des SS-Sonderkommandos / Bericht, August 26, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1088, 192.

⁶²⁸ Bescheinigung, October 20, 1941, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 20, Fond 2361, Opis 1s, Ed. Hr. 7, 289.

⁶²⁹ Protokol doprosa / A. M. G., September 20, 1944, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2902, 47.

ethnic German, or suffer “harsh consequences.”⁶³⁰ Similarly, during 1942, SS-Untersturmführer Reichert, the Bereichkommandoführer responsible for the ethnic German settlement of Marienberg, assisted Richard Tews’s property claims by ordering the local Selbstschutz to strong arm a nearby collective farm into surrendering two horses to him.⁶³¹ Between late 1941 and early 1942, Sonderkommando R’s midlevel leaders effectively reversed years of Soviet agricultural policy for many ethnic Germans living in rural Transnistria.

The decision of Sonderkommando R’s Bereichkommandoführer to dismantle collective agriculture was out of step with German occupation policy in the Soviet Union and a violation of superior orders to maintain collective farms in Transnistria. Despite the pronounced desires of most of the local population in occupied Soviet territory to the contrary, German authorities opted to continue collective agriculture for the duration of the war because it promised the only reliable method of requisitioning agricultural products.⁶³² Romanian authorities pursued a parallel policy in Transnistria, which, at least initially, Sonderkommando R’s personnel there were to follow.⁶³³ Over the course of the occupation, the unit’s commitment to maintaining collective agriculture diminished. In October 1941, Hoffmeyer instructed his staff that collective farms would be maintained indefinitely and even ordered the unit’s Bereichkommandoführer to centralize smaller collective farms to

⁶³⁰ BK 14 Worms / Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle / Bescheinigung, November 27, 1941, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Ed. Hr. 1083, 113.

⁶³¹ Reichsführer-SS Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle Sonderkommando ‘R’ BK. XXVII Marienberg an den Hauptstab, z.Hd. von SS-Ostuf. Dr. Siebert, August 3, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1089, 15-16.

⁶³² Protokol doprosa / A. M. G., September 20, 1944, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2902, 47.

⁶³³ Dienstanweisung Nr. 2, September 22, 1941, BB, R 59/66, 152.

increase efficiency.⁶³⁴ Exactly a year later, however, Hoffmeyer traveled to Bucharest in an apparently unsuccessful bid to reach a high level agreement “to loosen” collective agriculture in Transnistria.⁶³⁵ According to postwar testimony that his subordinates gave to both Soviet and West German authorities, in mid-1943 Hoffmeyer ordered his staff to redistribute land from collective farms to area ethnic Germans, officially ending collective agriculture for Transnistria’s Volksdeutsche.⁶³⁶ Although the unit’s staff orders do not contain this directive, they do indicate that, by 1943, Hoffmeyer and his immediate subordinates were not as keen to maintain collective farming as they had been two years earlier.⁶³⁷ While many local Bereichskommandoführer correctly anticipated this future change in Sonderkommando R’s policies, their unilateral moves against collective farms during fall 1941 and spring 1942—precisely the time at which Hoffmeyer reiterated his commitment to maintaining them as an institution—constituted a violation of their orders. This explains, in large measures, why, at least in a handful of Bereichkommandos, collective agriculture continued well into 1943.⁶³⁸ The extent to which Sonderkommando R later changed its official policy regarding collective farms as a result of mounting pressure from below is purely speculative. It is, however, clear that, as with so many other of Sonderkommando R’s initiatives in Transnistria, the de facto dissolution of collective agriculture was a project driven by the unit’s midlevel leaders.

⁶³⁴ Rundanweisung Nr. 7, October 14, 1941, BB, R 59/66, 143.

⁶³⁵ German Police Decodes Nr. 2 Traffic: 30.10.42, November 7, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 36, 2.

⁶³⁶ Protokoll doprosa / A. M. G., September 20, 1944, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2902, 48, 57. Although Liebl did not specify the date of Hoffmeyer’s order, he confirmed its existence. Aussage von F. J. L., January 16, 1965, BAL, B162/2303, 308.

⁶³⁷ Stabbefehl Nr. 109, June 22, 1943, BB, R 59/67, 58.

⁶³⁸ Collective agriculture continued in VoMi-administered areas, including Bischofsfeld, much to the consternation of local Volksdeutsche. Aussage von T. W., November 23, 1962, BAL, B162/2299, 136. Vernehmungsniederschrift von L. D., July 21, 1962, BAL, B162/2297, 46.

It is possible that after two years Hoffmeyer and his immediate subordinates reached the same conclusion that many of their Bereichskommandoführer had arrived at almost immediately—namely that continuing to operate collective farms did little to advance the long-term material status of local Volksdeutsche, let alone Sonderkommando R's position in the region. While perpetuating collective agriculture permitted occupation authorities to monitor production more closely, it also allowed the local population to pool land and particularly motorized equipment. The latter was particularly important in Transnistria because of the scarcity of tractors. In late summer 1941, Soviet forces had removed or destroyed nearly half of the region's tractors.⁶³⁹ Tractors in Transnistria were such prized commodities that even Sonderkommando R, which was busy acquiring a disproportionate share of them for ethnic German use, kept careful tabs on them. In March 1942, for example, NSKK-Sturmführer Hotz, the head of the MTS in Waterloo, decreed that local ethnic Germans who had stolen tractor parts had until the following month to return them or face “a general house-to-house search” for the missing components.⁶⁴⁰ According to Hotz, any person found intentionally sabotaging agricultural production by hiding the equipment would “suffer the harshest penalties.”⁶⁴¹ Although Romanian authorities eventually reopened the GINAP agricultural machinery plant in Odessa and imported several hundred tractors,

⁶³⁹ Dallin, *Odessa, 1941-1944*, 95. Local Volksdeutsche were acutely aware of this priority because Soviet forces ordered them to evacuate the tractors. See Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von J. D., August 14, 1962, BAL, B162/2296, 166. Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von D. R., n.d. BAL, B162/2290, 133. Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von A. S., August 17, 1962, BAL, B162/2296, 176. Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung J. S., December 12, 1961, BAL, B162/2290, 140. Protokol doprosa / Renner Yakov Yakovich, May 18, 1948, USHMM, RG-38.018M, Reel 79, 3696. Protokol doprosa / Fet Ivan, May 18, 1948, USHMM, RG-38.018M, Reel 79, 3750-3752.

⁶⁴⁰ Aufruf, March 27, 1942, BB, R 57/66, 112.

⁶⁴¹ Ibid.

primarily from Germany, agricultural equipment was effectively finite.⁶⁴² Sonderkommando R had good reason to attempt to monopolize this limited resource. On the one hand, confiscating tractors from MTSs permitted local Bereichkommandoführer to increase dramatically the amount of VoMi-administered territory under motorized cultivation. By February 1942, for example, Bereichkommando XIV based in Worms used 69 tractors to cultivate 56 percent of its more than 25,000 hectares of arable land.⁶⁴³ Access to a disproportionate number of tractors provided area Volksdeutsche farmers with a competitive advantage over their non-German neighbors. On the other hand, concentrating tractors in the hands of local Volksdeutsche permitted Sonderkommando R to deny them to area non-Germans, whose agricultural production on behalf of the Romanians suffered. Maintaining collective farms during the occupation only made sense if the desired goal were to increase total agricultural output—an aim that much of Sonderkommando R's staff understood to be incompatible with the unit's task of establishing ethnic German economic dominance in the region.

While Hoffmeyer may have been slow to recognize the degree to which Sonderkommando R stood to benefit from eliminating collective agriculture, his Romanian counterparts were not. The Romanian civil administration objected vociferously to Sonderkommando R's independent moves against collective farms. As early as late November 1941, Alexianu began to forward complaints from his subordinates to Sonderkommando R about SS assistance to ethnic Germans in stripping collective farms of

⁶⁴² Dallin, *Odessa, 1941-1944*, 102.

⁶⁴³ Zusammenstellung für Frühjahrssaussaat, February 10, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 20, Fond 2361, Opis 1s, Ed. Hr. 7, 58.

state property.⁶⁴⁴ In the midst of initiatives by the unit's midlevel leaders to remove a disproportionate number of tractors for exclusive Volksdeutsche use, SS-Obersturmführer Heinz Born, the commander of Bereichkommando XVI in Rosenfeld, had the temerity to request a fuel shipment from his Romanian counterparts to run the very equipment that he and his colleagues were quietly acquiring for their own purposes.⁶⁴⁵ As local Bereichkommandoführer intensified their acquisition of land and machinery in early 1942 in anticipation of the coming spring, Romanian complaints about Sonderkommando R's assaults on collective agriculture mounted.⁶⁴⁶ By late 1942, Romanian remonstrations had reached such proportions that the unit's liaison officer had no choice but to acknowledge the Romanian position and to issue a rare, yet tepid apology. In response to Romanian charges that SS-Untersturmführer Köhli, the Bereichkommandoführer in Neudorf, had removed agricultural equipment from a nearby Ukrainian town, Eckert explained that Köhli had simply attempted "to correct an old mistake" by returning the equipment to local Volksdeutsche, its rightful owners.⁶⁴⁷ Eckert assured his Romanian opposite numbers that for his well-intentioned, but misguided actions, Köhli had "received the sharpest reprimands

⁶⁴⁴ Alexianu an Wehrmachtsverbindungsstab für Transnistrien in Tiraspol / Betr.: Beschwerde wegen Uebergriffe deutscher Soldaten, November 27, 1941, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1084, 70.

⁶⁴⁵ Bereichkommando XVI an den Herrn Präfekt Beresowka, January 10, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 20, Fond 2361, Opis 1s, Ed. Hr. 7, 67.

⁶⁴⁶ Individual Bereichkommandoführer were compelled to respond to these complaints. Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle BK XXIV / 1068 an den Hauptstab Landau / Betr.: Stellungnahme zum Schreiben des Departments des Zivilgouverneurs für Transnistrien - Verwaltungsdirektion - Nr. 14 635 vom 28.3.1942, June 30, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1085, 116. Verbindungsstab der Deutschen Wehrmacht für Transnistrien / an das Zivilgouvernement von Transnistrien / Tiraspol, May 15, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1086, 112.

⁶⁴⁷ Reichsführer-SS Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle Der Verbindungsführer beim Zivilgouverneur von Transnistrien an das Zivilgouvernement von Transnistrien Verwaltungsdirektion / Betr.: Gewaltsame Entnahme einer Dreschmaschine, November 23, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1089, 208.

from headquarters in Landau.”⁶⁴⁸ Given that by November 1942, Hoffmeyer was already contemplating an end to collective agriculture, whatever tongue lashing Köhli received was more likely for ruffling Romanian feathers than for having removed the equipment. The following month, in a feeble effort to diffuse the situation, Siebert ordered his subordinates at least to consult with Romanian Prefects prior to acquiring tractors for Volksdeutsche use.⁶⁴⁹ Ironically, Sonderkommando R’s senior leaders were perhaps the last to recognize that the demise of collective agriculture in Transnistria on the SS’s terms stood to direct substantial, yet finite local resources to area Volksdeutsche and to increase the unit’s position in the region at the expense of the Romanians.

The second primary way in which Sonderkommando R sought to succor Transnistria’s Volksdeutsche was to supply them with clothing and personal effects stolen from the Third Reich’s Jewish victims. During the winter of 1941-42, Sonderkommando R had already facilitated Volksdeutsche robbery of Jewish property by permitting ethnic German militiamen to steal clothes from Jewish deportees. For Sonderkommando R, this experience underscored both the inadequacy and dangers of permitting local Volksdeutsche to acquire Jewish property in this fashion. On the one hand, these earlier thefts highlighted to Sonderkommando R both the poverty of local ethnic Germans and the massive amounts of purloined clothing that it would have to distribute to area Volksdeutsche to improve their general material welfare. The comparatively small amounts of clothing that the ethnic German militia stole during the winter of 1941-42 disproportionately benefited active perpetrators. The murdered Jewish deportees, who originated primarily from Bessarabia,

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁹ Rundsanweisung Nr. 84, December 9, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 37.

Bukovina, and elsewhere in Ukraine, were on average poorer than their Central or East Central European counterparts and had less desirable garments. Moreover, Romanian authorities and their Ukrainian helpers had already fleeced the Jewish deportees repeatedly, leaving slim pickings for members of the Selbstschutz. That Transnistria's Volksdeutsche militiamen snapped up apparel that even the Romanians had neglected to steal speaks to the abject poverty of many local ethnic Germans. Well into 1943, Germans deployed to Transnistria encountered poorly clad Volksdeutsche.⁶⁵⁰ As an illustration of the dire situation of local ethnic Germans, Sonderkommando R explored repeatedly the possibility of manufacturing straw shoes for area Volksdeutsche so that they would not have to go barefoot in winter.⁶⁵¹ As Rafael H., an ethnic German from Katharinenthal later explained, "given our circumstances then, . . . Jewish clothes (*Judenkleider*) . . . were very good."⁶⁵²

On the other hand, the initial theft of Jewish clothing by Selbstschutz members also illustrated to Sonderkommando R that independent Volksdeutsche robbery could pose a serious public health hazard. During the winter of 1941-42, Sonderkommando R had ordered its militia forces to murder the Jewish deportees in large part because it feared (not without reason) that the Jews, who had been held by Romanian authorities in appalling conditions, might spread typhus to the region's Volksdeutsche communities. As discussed in chapters seven and eight, by allowing ethnic German militiamen simply to take clothing from Jews awaiting execution, Sonderkommando R had exposed many local Volksdeutsche to the typhus-causing *Rickettsia* bacteria carried on parasites in the garments. A mass killing

⁶⁵⁰ Aussage von G. B., June 16, 1966, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2694, 146.

⁶⁵¹ Rundanweisung Nr. 71 / Betrifft.: Arbeiten von Strohschuhen, September 22, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 56. Rundanweisung Nr. 95, February 22, 1943, BB, R 59/66, 26.

⁶⁵² Aussage von R. H., March 19, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 18.

operation predicated at least partially on disease prevention ironically had precisely the opposite effect. Although unwilling to risk again exposing area Volksdeutsche to disease, Sonderkommando R remained conscious of local ethnic Germans' need for suitable clothes, which, within the context of the German war effort, were most readily obtainable from the Third Reich's Jewish victims killed elsewhere.

Sonderkommando R's solution was to create a centralized system for distributing the personal effects of Jews murdered in German-occupied Poland to Volksdeutsche in Transnistria. As the area's *entrepôt* and, more importantly, as the terminus for the region's rail system, Odessa was the logical hub for this network. In early 1942, Sonderkommando R established a warehouse there, whose primary function was to store, process, and sort stolen Jewish garments in preparation for their transfer to rural Transnistria. Under the control of the Odessa's *Wirtschaftsgruppe* (Economic Group) and known also as the "clothing camp" (*Kleiderlager*) to area Volksdeutsche and to Sonderkommando R's staff, the warehouse was a substantial facility. Elvira G., a German secretary for the Odessa-based SS *Wirtschaftsgruppe*, later recounted that "the [clothing] camp was housed in a school-type building. In [its] many rooms, clothing and underwear from Jews was stacked 1.5 to 2 meters high, so that the windows were partly covered."⁶⁵³ A communiqué from Hoffmeyer to Landau on February 13, 1943 provides some sense as the scale of this operation. He notified his subordinates to expect a 45-car train with "27,800 men's coats, 25,925 men's jackets, 32,325 pairs of men's pants, 14,825 men's vests, 9,800 pairs of men's shoes, 10,025 pairs of men's underpants, 4,700 panties, 5,100 women's stockings, 4,200 pairs of women's shoes, 7,780 pairs of children's shoes, 9,000 boy's coats, 850 boy's jackets, 600 pairs of

⁶⁵³ Aussage von E. G., December 2, 1966, BAL, B162/2307, 321.

boy's pants, 23,700 men's shirts, 600 pairs of men's socks, 44,000 women's jackets, . . . [and] . . . 29,085 miscellaneous pieces of women's clothing, including shirts . . . [and] 2,500 blouses.⁶⁵⁴ Although wartime German records do not specify the origins of these clothes, both information gathered by Soviet counterintelligence and postwar testimony taken by the West German police indicate that this trainload and earlier shipments had originated in occupied Poland, and perhaps in Auschwitz.⁶⁵⁵ As Johanna W., an NS-Frauenwerk organizer attached to Sonderkommando R, later recounted: "the clothes of at least 10,000 people, and probably more, passed through this [clothing] camp."⁶⁵⁶

By February 1943, Odessa's SS warehouse for looted Jewish goods was much more than a simple clearing house. Upon the arrival of a shipment of items, a team of local Volksdeutsche women sorted, washed, and mended the clothes before trucks transported the garments to rural Transnistria under armed Selbstschutz guard.⁶⁵⁷ This procedure served three purposes. The first was disease prevention. To protect area Volksdeutsche from the very illnesses that Nazi ghettoization policy had fueled among Jews, Sonderkommando R

⁶⁵⁴ German Police Decodes Nr 2 Traffic: 13.2.43, February 24, 1943, BNA, HW 16, Piece 37, Part 1, 2.

⁶⁵⁵ When interrogated by the Second SMERSH division of the Second Ukrainian Front in September 1944, SS-Hauptsturmführer Martin Assmann noted that Bereichkommando Halberstadt had received 12 to 15 truckloads of Jewish clothing from Odessa. According to Assmann, the clothes originated from a camp in Poland's Lublin District. Protokół doprosa / A. M. G., September 20, 1944, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2902, 45. Walter Vahldieck's 1955 blackmail letter identified the source of the clothing as Auschwitz. "50 000 Juden aus Odessa. Tatsachenbericht von Walter Vahldieck, *Holokost i Suchasnist': studiiv Ukraïni i sviti*, no. 4 (2008): 112. Given the bureaucratic structure of Nazi authorities in German-occupied Poland, Assmann's assertion appears more likely. Whereas Himmler had directed SS-Brigadeführer Odilo Globocnik, Lublin's Higher SS and Police Leader and his direct subordinate, to collect clothing from the victims of the Operation Reinhard camps for distribution to Volksdeutsche, Auschwitz remained under the control of SS-Obergruppenführer Oswald Pohl, the head of the *SS-Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt* (SS Economic and Administrative Main Office).

⁶⁵⁶ Aussage von J. W., March 5, 1968, BAL, B162/2309, 257.

⁶⁵⁷ Aussage von P. M., June 1, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 180. German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 15th January- 16th February 1942, March 17, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 12.

took disinfection seriously. Sonderkommando R's threatened to beat any ethnic Germans, who procured the garments before they had been cleaned.⁶⁵⁸ Despite its efforts, Sonderkommando R had mixed success in this area. As the warehouse's staff later testified, the sheer volume of clothing often required them simply to load the items on trucks for the countryside without proper preparation.⁶⁵⁹ Because of the amount of garments that arrived in Odessa, this system broke down in mid-1943. Initially, Hoffmeyer issued a sternly worded complaint about "inadequately" cleaned clothing and ordered that raiment "for the entire Black Sea area [be] returned to Odessa."⁶⁶⁰ In October 1943, Sonderkommando R opted to close the facility.⁶⁶¹ Cleaning garments previously owned by Jews devolved to Braun and her NS-Frauenwerk staff, who created special laundry facilities in Alexanderfeld, Johannisfeld, Worms, Speyer, Hoffnungstal, Selz, Gross Liebental, and Odessa.⁶⁶² Uncertain about the effectiveness of these localized disinfection centers, Sonderkommando R's commanders shifted ultimate responsibility for the cleanliness of the newly acquired apparel onto local Bereichkommandoführer and ethnic German mayors, and warned teachers to be on the lookout for Volksdeutsche children wearing unwashed clothes.⁶⁶³

Second, sorting the items permitted Sonderkommando R's commanders to earmark

⁶⁵⁸ Aussage von A. E., November 16, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 126.

⁶⁵⁹ Aussage von P. W., October 21, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 70-71.

⁶⁶⁰ German Police Decodes No. 1 Traffic: 10.3.43, March 17, 1943, BNA, HW 16, Piece 37, Part 1, 1. Disinfecting clothing stolen from Jews remained a problem for Sonderkommando R through much of 1943. German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 29 June - 28 July 1943, August 10, 1943, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 4.

⁶⁶¹ Zusatz zum Stabbefehl Nr. 116, October 10, 1943, BB, R 59/67, 27.

⁶⁶² Stabbefehl Nr. 116, October 8, 1943, BB, R 59/67, 24. Aussage von G. B., June 16, 1966, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2694, 146.

⁶⁶³ Zusatz zum Stabbefehl Nr. 116, October 10, 1943, BB, R 59/67, 27.

the most desirable clothes to reward Transnistria's most cooperative Volksdeutsche. Müller, for example, forbade their subordinates from simply handing out these garments randomly to area ethnic Germans. As he indicated in a March 1943 staff order, "the items of clothing are not gifts, but rather for Volksdeutsche to purchase."⁶⁶⁴ In rural Transnistria, Sonderkommando R authorized Bereichskommandoführer to barter the clothes for grain, whereas in Odessa the unit expected local ethnic Germans to pay cash for their new garments.⁶⁶⁵ To ensure that the unit was not shortchanged, Sonderkommando R's senior leadership provided its Bereichskommandoführer with a recommended, and distinctly macabre price list. Despite these careful instructions, Sonderkommando R's staff, for example, was to charge ethnic Germans between 15 and 50 RKKS (*Reichskreditkassenschein*, Reich's Credit Treasury Note) for men's coats and 2 to 10 RKKS for children's shoes, depending on their condition.⁶⁶⁶ Sonderkommando R's commanders permitted their subordinates to provide reliable local ethnic Germans with free or privileged access to the apparel. The same month, Müller informed his subordinates that area Volksdeutsche mayors, teachers, and other employees were to have first dibs on the garments.⁶⁶⁷ In selecting which local ethnic Germans would be permitted to purchase the remaining clothes, Müller recommended that his subordinates sell these items first to communities or families "who had performed exemplary service" to the unit.⁶⁶⁸ Volksdeutsche families who had lost a son or father in Waffen-SS service were to receive

⁶⁶⁴ Rundanweisung Nr. 99, March 27, 1943, BB, R 59/66, 9.

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid., 8.

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid., 11.

⁶⁶⁷ Rundanweisung Nr. 98, March 21, 1943, BB, R 59/66, 17.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid.

items free of charge.⁶⁶⁹

Finally, cleaning and mending the garments was a feeble attempt to hide their provenance from area ethnic Germans. Beyond the SS's immediate public health concerns, the garments simply could not be distributed to area Volksdeutsche in the condition in which they had arrived because they still bore the stains of genocide. As Elvira G. later testified, in the Odessa warehouse it was apparent "that a portion of the clothes still had a Jewish star attached and were also spattered with blood."⁶⁷⁰ Other garments had visible bloodstained bullet holes.⁶⁷¹ The SS instructed its female employees to search the clothes for hidden valuables that the garments' previous owners had sown into the linings and whose discovery would have divulged their origins.⁶⁷² To oversee the day-to-day operations of its clothing warehouse in Odessa and to secure its secrecy, Sonderkommando R selected Pius W., the former Volksdeutsche mayor of Worms, whose alleged anti-Semitism, independent participation in the Holocaust, and thirst for Jewish property made him the ideal manager of this ghoulish enterprise.⁶⁷³ At its height, the unit transferred as many as 300 Selbstschutz members from rural Transnistria to guard the facility from sticky fingered Volksdeutsche, who might remove unwashed clothing, and interlopers, who might discover the warehouse's activities.⁶⁷⁴

⁶⁶⁹ Stabbefehl Nr. 120, December 9, 1945, BB, R 59/67, 27.

⁶⁷⁰ Aussage von E. G., December 2, 1966, BAL, B162/2307, 321.

⁶⁷¹ Ibid.

⁶⁷² Aussage von P. M., June 1, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 180.

⁶⁷³ Aussage von P. W., October 21, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 70-71.

⁶⁷⁴ Lorenz D. later testified that he and 280 Selbstschutz members from rural Transnistria guarded Sonderkommando R's warehouse for Jewish property in Odessa. Vernehmungsniederschrift von L. D., July 21, 1962, BAL, B162/2297, 50-51.

This attempted subterfuge was as ineffective as it was nonsensical. As Sonderkommando R's centralized efforts to disinfect, clean, and repair the apparel buckled under the volume of garments that arrived in Odessa, so too did its attempts to remove valuables that Jews had sown into their clothing prior to death. It is unclear whether or not the NS-Frauenwerk continued to look for valuables in the garments after it inherited responsibility for cleaning them in 1943, or if Sonderkommando R simply gave up on this measure entirely. Regardless, Volksdeutsche began finding an array of hidden items, ranging from Polish bank notes to silverware, in items that they referred to as their new "Jewish clothing."⁶⁷⁵ Sonderkommando R responded to these discoveries by ordering all Volksdeutsche to surrender these hidden valuables to their local mayors, who were to forward them to the unit's Bereichskommandoführer.⁶⁷⁶ This directive merely served to spread the word about potential finds to all local ethnic Germans. Greed got the better of at least some ethnic Germans. When, for example, the Volksdeutsche mayor of Peterstal refused to turn over a watch that he had found while passing out clothing to local ethnic Germans, Gross Liebenthal's Selbstschutz allegedly gunned him down.⁶⁷⁷

Why Sonderkommando R went to such lengths to obscure the origins of the garments that it distributed to area Volksdeutsche is unclear. In its haste to transfer the clothes to Transnistria's ethnic Germans, the unit had no time to remove the physical evidence of genocide. Any recipients would have grasped that the garments' previous owners had not

⁶⁷⁵ Aussage von J. W., March 5, 1968, BAL, B162/2309, 257. Aussage von H. E., September 16, 1966, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2695, 54.

⁶⁷⁶ Although no written documentation of this orders exists, both German Sonderkommando R personnel and area Volksdeutsche confirmed these orders. Aussage von J. W., March 5, 1968, BAL, B162/2309, 257. Aussage von M. B., June 10, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 197.

⁶⁷⁷ Aussage von V. R., July 31, 1962, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2671, 156.

been German donors, as Sonderkommando R's cover story indicated, but rather had met with an untimely and violent demise.⁶⁷⁸ Yet, by virtue of their proximity to and direct participation in the Holocaust, area Volksdeutsche were unlike most of Hitler's other "beneficiaries."⁶⁷⁹ Thanks to the bureaucratized and theoretically clandestine "machinery of destruction," most Germans living in the Reich could bury their heads in the proverbial sand and claim blissful ignorance about the whereabouts of their former Jewish neighbors, as they acquired their property at fire sale prices. Having witnessed or helped to murder Jews often within sight of their own homes, Transnistria's Volksdeutsche had no such luxurious distance. Attempting to obscure the origins of their new "Jewish clothing" from area ethnic Germans amounted to denying the Holocaust to a population that was exceptionally implicated in its implementation. Predictably, except for a handful of prevaricators, both former Sonderkommando R members and area Volksdeutsche admitted after the war to having received and often relished their new "Jewish clothes."⁶⁸⁰

Enlightening and Educating Transnistria's Volksdeutsche

The final component of Sonderkommando R's Nazification project was to shape the *Weltanschauung* of Transnistria's ethnic Germans through an intense propaganda and education campaign. To supervise the VoMi's Volksdeutsche propaganda in Transnistria, Sonderkommando R arranged for the transfer of thirty-one-year-old SS-Sturmabführer

⁶⁷⁸ Aussage von H. E., September 16, 1966, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2695, 54. Aussage von K. D., December 7, 1964, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2682, 93.

⁶⁷⁹ Götz Aly, *Hitler's Beneficiaries: Plunder, Racial War, and the Nazi Welfare State*, trans. Jefferson Chase, (New York: Metropolitan, 2007).

⁶⁸⁰ For an unusual and implausible claim of ignorance surrounding the clothing's origins, see Aussage von I. S., February 26, 1965, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2680, 96. For more realistic descriptions, see Aussage von A. E., November 16, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 126. Aussage von H. E., November 25, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 190. Aussage von P. M., June 1, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 180. Aussage von P. W., October 21, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 70. Aussage von V. A., November 19, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 149.

Friedrich Hallenberger from the *Reichspropagandaamt* (Reich Propaganda Office) in Saxony. An early convert to right-wing politics, who protested the French occupation of the Ruhr in 1923 and suffered arrest for his membership in the fledgling Nazi party, Hallenberger was, as his personnel file noted, “a model National Socialist.”⁶⁸¹ An “old fighter,” who had joined the SA in 1926, and an *Ordensjunker* (Knight of the SS Order; a graduate of elite SS training) in the SS’s Krössinsee and Vogelsang *Ordensburgen* (SS castles; elite SS training centers), Hallenberger’s experience as a Volksdeutsche propagandist augmented his stellar National Socialist credentials. During his involvement in the 1940 Bessarabian Volksdeutsche “resettlement,” Hallenberger’s superiors charged him with finding politically appropriate reading materials for ethnic German youngsters. Hallenberger was also a prolific Volksdeutsche propagandist, who, on his own initiative, edited periodicals entitled *Wir sind daheim* (*We are at Home*) and *Deutschland grüßt Euch* (*Germany Welcomes You*), the latter of which the VoMi had trucked for a time from Dresden to Transnistria.⁶⁸² Having secured Hallenberger’s transfer to Odessa in 1942, Sonderkommando R charged him with propagandizing to the region’s ethnic Germans in two ways. First, Sonderkommando R placed a wireless propaganda truck at Hallenberger’s disposal to proselytize to local Volksdeutsche.⁶⁸³ Second, beginning in September 1942, Sonderkommando R established its own Odessa-based newspaper, *Der Deutsche in Transnistrien* (*The German in Transnistria*) to trumpet its efforts on behalf of the area’s ethnic Germans.⁶⁸⁴ Assisted by a group of local

⁶⁸¹ SS Offizier Akte Friedrich Hallenberger, NARA, RG 242, A3343 SSO 055A, 536.

⁶⁸² Ibid., 518-62. Aussage von F. H., July 24, 1962, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-001, Band 2, 181.

⁶⁸³ German Police Decodes Nr. 2 Traffic: 7.10.42, October 11, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 36, 4.

⁶⁸⁴ German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 1st May-30th June

Volksdeutsche women, Hallenberger edited the weekly periodical that the SS distributed throughout the city and its environs from July 1942 until March 1944.⁶⁸⁵ Advertising the VoMi's efforts on behalf of area ethnic Germans, the newspaper served as the SS's primary local mouthpiece.⁶⁸⁶ Görlich, who recently has surveyed the publication in detail, suggests quite plausibly that the content of the newspaper's articles focused less on naked anti-Semitism, than on casting mass murder as a component of a broader ideological struggle against "Judeo-Bolshevism."⁶⁸⁷ Above all, Görlich concludes, the periodical was designed to communicate the Third Reich's "blood and soil ideology" to raise the awareness of local Volksdeutsche about their "Germanness."⁶⁸⁸

In addition to Hallenberger's propaganda campaign, the SS also established a well-equipped National Socialist cultural center for Odessa and the surrounding area in the recently-confiscated Jewish theater at Gretsjeskaia Street 46. The *Deutsches Haus* (German House) opened its doors during a lavish ceremony on June 13, 1942, to which Hoffmeyer invited Alexianu.⁶⁸⁹ The building sported a lecture hall, a cinema (complete with

1942, July 17, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 12. Dallin, *Odessa, 1941-1944*, 200.

⁶⁸⁵ Aussage von E. S., November 12, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 5, 727-28. Aussage von F. H., July 24, 1962, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-001, Band 2, 181. Görlich, "Volkstumspropaganda und Antisemitismus in der Wochenzeitung 'Der Deutsche in Transnistrien' 1942-1944," 95.

⁶⁸⁶ The newspaper's publishers were under orders to advertise Sonderkommando R's welfare efforts on behalf of local Volksdeutsche. "Rundanweisung Nr. 75," November 6, 1942, BB, R 59 / 66, 50. "Stabbefehl Nr. 102," April 18, 1943, BB, R 59 / 67, 98. "Auswertung der Zeitung 'Der Deutsche in Transnistrien'," n.d., BAL, B162/2289, 29-35.

⁶⁸⁷ Görlich, "Volkstumspropaganda und Antisemitismus in der Wochenzeitung 'Der Deutsche in Transnistrien' 1942-1944," 103.

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid., 99.

⁶⁸⁹ Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle SS-Sonderkommando BK XXV, Odessa / Herr Zivilgouverneur von Transnistrien Minister Prof. Alexianu Tiraspol, June 6, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opus 1, Ed. Hr. 1087, 47. Rundanweisung Nr. 42, BB, R 59/66, 88. Dallin, *Odessa, 1941-1944*, 200. Völkl, *Transnistrien und Odessa*, 91.

Volksdeutsche ushers), a library, a restaurant, and even an extensive German-language record collection—all of which were accessible only to German and Volksdeutsche patrons.⁶⁹⁰ To keep Volksdeutsche abreast of the Reich's latest propaganda, Odessa's Bereichskommandoführer, personally supervised weekly screenings of the *Deutsche Wochenschau* (German Weekly Newsreel), Nazi Germany's official newsreel.⁶⁹¹ Over the next two years the *Deutsches Haus* added considerable flair to Sonderkommando R's Nazification project in Transnistria.

The same infrastructure that prompted the SS to develop an extensive ethnic German education and propaganda hub in Odessa also encouraged the VoMi to establish recreational facilities for Sonderkommando R's German personnel and trusted Volksdeutsche helpers. The *Deutsches Haus* exemplifies this trend. At the building's inauguration, Sonderkommando R not only invited high-level Romanian guests, but also provided a junket for Bereichskommandoführer and Volksdeutsche mayors from rural Transnistria, whom Hoffmeyer invited to the festivities.⁶⁹² The visit to the metropolis and respite from the drudgery of rural Transnistria was very well received and Siebert extended a follow-up invitation to Bereichskommandoführer and ethnic German mayors to celebrate at the *Deutsches Haus* six months later.⁶⁹³ These sojourns to Odessa proved popular and a few

⁶⁹⁰ Aussage von H. O., February 1, 1966, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-004, Band 7, 1266, 69. Aussage von K. O., November 15, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 5, 762. Aussage von W. O., January 3, 1965, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-004, Band 7, 1199. Rundanweisung Nr. 42, BB, R 59/66, 88. Rundanweisung Nr. 67, September 8, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 60.

⁶⁹¹ Aussage von W. O., January 3, 1965, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-004, Band 7, 1199.

⁶⁹² Rundanweisung Nr. 42, June 1, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 88.

⁶⁹³ Rundanweisung Nr. 92, January 11, 1943, BB, R 59/66, 28.

months later Sonderkommando R transferred all of its quarterly Bereichskommandoführer meetings from Landau to the *Deutsches Haus* in Odessa.⁶⁹⁴ The big city lights were so attractive to Sonderkommando R's personnel stationed in the surrounding countryside that, in April 1943, Müller chastised his subordinates that the local Bereichskommandoführer could not be expected to take room reservations.⁶⁹⁵

Education constituted the second major component of Sonderkommando R's efforts to mobilize the Black Sea Germans for National Socialism. The unit's aims were both ideological and practical. On the one hand, area Volksdeutsche youth remained more receptive to the Nazi agenda than their parents. This fact was not lost on Sonderkommando R's staff, which prioritized elementary education as a propaganda vehicle. On the other hand, Sonderkommando R realized that it would first need to teach local Volksdeutsche children the German language. Historically, even under Soviet rule, local ethnic Germans had maintained German-language elementary schools. Beginning in the late 1930s, however, pressure from increasingly suspicious Soviet authorities had circumscribed what had been a robust German-language school system in the region and created a growing generation of Volksdeutsche, most of whom had little if any formal training in German. In the midst of the invasion, the region's predominantly Russian-language school system had collapsed entirely, exacerbating the already low level of education in rural Ukraine.⁶⁹⁶ For Sonderkommando R, Transnistria's Volksdeutsche children constituted a group of ethnic Germans, who might be particularly receptive to the Nazi message, provided, of course, that the unit could teach them

⁶⁹⁴ Stabbefehl Nr. 101, April 10, 1963, BB, R 59/67, 106.

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid., 106.

⁶⁹⁶ Aussage von E. F., December 15, 1966, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-004, Band 8, 1359-1360.

German.

A desire for linguistic and ideological training shaped Sonderkommando R's initial foray into education. In September 1941, shortly after arriving in their rural Bereichkommandos, many local commanders reopened ethnic Germans schools on an ad hoc basis.⁶⁹⁷ Beginning in early 1942, however, Sonderkommando R took more comprehensive measures to reestablish German-language elementary education for the region's Volksdeutsche youths.⁶⁹⁸ In June 1942, for example, Sonderkommando R mandated that all ethnic German children begin elementary education at age six.⁶⁹⁹ The unit took attendance gravely seriously, ordering its subordinates to penalize ethnic German parents for their children's truancy with fines or forced labor.⁷⁰⁰ Sonderkommando R expected all of the region's ethnic Germans children to attend eight years of school, after which they would become eligible for a diploma that they would be required to show to obtain employment or a land grant.⁷⁰¹ Despite these lofty plans, anecdotal evidence suggests that Sonderkommando R found educating local Volksdeutsche children to be an uphill battle. In November 1942,

⁶⁹⁷ Bereichkommando XI in Rastatt reopened its schools almost immediately. Aussage von V. H., September 7, 1964, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2684, 52. Aussage von K. D., December 7, 1964, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2682, 91-92.

⁶⁹⁸ Sonderkommando R reported on these initiatives to the Romanian civil administration in early 1942. Verzeichnis über die in den deutschen Schulen des B.K. XVIII eingesetzten Lehrer, January 23, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 20, Fond 2361, Opis 1s, Ed. Hr. 7, 147-150. SS-Unstf. Liebl an den Prefäkten Oberst Loghin Berezovka / Betrifft: Bestätigung der Bürgermeister und Lehrer, February 6, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 20, Fond 2361, Opis 1s, Ed. Hr. 7, 107. Liste der Lehrer die in den deutschen Gemeinden im Rayon Ontowo Kadinzova des BK 13 arbeiten, n.d., USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 18, Fond 2359, Opis 1, Ed Hr 42, 1-2. Lehrer im Bereich Worms / BK-XIV, January 20, 1941, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 20, Fond 2361, Opis 1s, Ed. Hr. 7, 152.

⁶⁹⁹ Rundanweisung Nr. 43 / Betr.: Anmeldungen von Schulneulingen, June 20, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 87.

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁰¹ German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 6 June - 5 July 1943, July 9, 1943, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 3.

for example, Hoffmeyer was compelled to order a special course in Landau for all illiterate ethnic German youths from the ages of fourteen to eighteen. The primer that Sonderkommando R selected for the class, *Sei Deutsche (Be German)*, was tellingly titled.⁷⁰² Similarly, Siebert ordered his subordinates to report all “blind, deaf-dumb, or idiotic” students to headquarters in Landau.⁷⁰³

Sonderkommando R controlled the content of ethnic German lessons very carefully. In November 1942, the unit’s commanders banned their subordinates from obtaining pedagogical materials independently.⁷⁰⁴ Sonderkommando R’s precise curriculum remains unclear from the available records. Nevertheless, an undated book purchase order highlights the general thrust of the unit’s efforts. In addition to requisitioning pens, pencils, and paper, Sonderkommando R also ordered 2,200 copies of *Mein Kampf (My Struggle)*, 1,000 copies of Philipp Bouhler’s *Kampf um Deutschland: Ein Lesebuch für die deutsche Jugend (The Struggle for Germany: A Reader for German Youth)*, and 200 copies of Alfred Rosenberg’s *Parteiprogramm (Party Program)* as general instruction materials. In addition to nearly 20,000 copies of the apparently desperately needed elementary German-language reader *Sei Deutsch*, some of the unit’s other purchases included a sizable number of texts produced by racial medicine specialists, including Ernst Dobers and Martin Stämmeler. To ensure that local ethnic German youths were not overwhelmed by this weighty material, Sonderkommando R ordered 3,000 copies of the songbook *Lieder unseres Volkes (Songs of*

⁷⁰² Rundanweisung Nr. 76, November 7, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 49-50.

⁷⁰³ Rundanweisung Nr. 43 / Betr.: Anmeldungen von Schulneulingen, June 20, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 87. A year later, the unit banned handicapped Volksdeutsche children from local schools. Stabbefehl Nr. 107, May 24, 1943, BB, R 59/66, 65.

⁷⁰⁴ Rundanweisung Nr. 75, November 6, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 50.

our People). As a further indication of the linguistic difficulties that confronted the unit's educational efforts, Sonderkommando R bought 50 copies of *Unterrichtsmethodik in mehrsprachigen Schulen (Instructional Methods for Multilingual Schools)*.⁷⁰⁵

While Sonderkommando R had a reasonably clear, if unimaginative picture of its desired curriculum, it was far less certain about the teaching staff that it had at its disposal. At the height of its operation in Transnistria, some 22,000 pupils had enrolled in the unit's more than 200 schools.⁷⁰⁶ Sonderkommando R lacked the resources to deploy sufficient numbers of teachers to staff a school system of this size, so it was forced to make do with local instructors who had worked for years in the Soviet school system. Given the politically sensitive position of teachers under both Soviet and Nazi rule, the fact that most instructors had served under the Soviet regime automatically made them suspect in Sonderkommando R's eyes. As Görlich has noted recently, local Volksdeutsche functionaries who served under both regimes, such as teachers, had to reformulate radically the ideological content of their work to satisfy their new masters.⁷⁰⁷ Prior to reopening the region's schools in fall 1941, local Bereichskommandoführer and ethnic German mayors screened area teachers before authorizing them to teach.⁷⁰⁸ Initial efforts to weed out Volksdeutsche instructors who maintained an affinity for the Soviet regime failed to assuage Sonderkommando R's commanders. A half year later, Hoffmeyer continued to complain to Alexianu about the fact that many of the region's instructors had received their training in "Bolshevik teaching

⁷⁰⁵ Lieferung von Schulmaterial für volksdeutsche Siedlungen, n.d., NARA, T175/72/2589176-77.

⁷⁰⁶ Zusammenstellung: der aufgebauten kulturellen Einrichtungen vom Sonderkommando "R," n.d., NARA, T175/72/2589167.

⁷⁰⁷ Görlich, "Volkstumspropaganda und Antisemitismus in der Wochenzeitung 'Der Deutsche in Transnistrien' 1942-1944," 107.

⁷⁰⁸ Aussage von J. S., October 9, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 12.

seminars.”⁷⁰⁹

To ensure that local Volksdeutsche teachers acquired the appropriate National Socialist *Weltanschauung*, Sonderkommando R implemented both short and long-term solutions. Initially, the unit identified promising local instructors and sent them for continuing education training in Germany. In late spring 1942, the unit dispatched ten ethnic German instructors to study in Berlin.⁷¹⁰ A further forty ethnic German teachers joined them later that summer to take part in a month-long training course.⁷¹¹ Perhaps to instill them with the necessary sense of martial urgency, some of the teachers received pistols and ammunition for the trip, which a number of them failed to return in a timely fashion.⁷¹²

Perhaps because this solution proved cumbersome, however, Sonderkommando R decided to train most Volksdeutsche instructors onsite in a series of SS-run teacher training institutes. This task fell to SS-Sturmbannführer Götz, a long-time Nazi party member and professional *völkisch* writer, whose research trips to Germanophone communities during the interwar period included lengthy sojourns to both Palestine and the United States.⁷¹³ A fêted author, in September 1941, Götz received a personal summons from Himmler to assist the

⁷⁰⁹ Sonderkommando der Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle / O.U., den 16. März 1942. / An den Zivilgouverneur von Transnistrien, Herrn Professor Alexianu, / Tiraspol in Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-42*, vol.2, 986.

⁷¹⁰ German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 1st May-30th June 1942, July 17, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 12.

⁷¹¹ Aussage von R. P., October 18, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 45. German Police Decodes Nr. 2 Traffic: 7.10.42, October 11, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 36, 6.

⁷¹² Rundanweisung Nr. 68, September 30, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 59.

⁷¹³ Götz published travelogues about his journeys prior to the war. See, for example, Karl Götz, *Der Deutsche in Palästina, Für Jugend und Volk*, (Langensalza: J. Belts, 1932). Karl Götz, *Brüder über dem Meer: Schicksale und Begegnungen*, (Stuttgart: J. Engelhorn, 1938).

VoMi in overseeing its educational policy in the occupied Soviet Union.⁷¹⁴ In his capacity as *Inspekteur für Bildungs- und Kulturarbeit in Transnistrien* (Inspector for Educational and Cultural Work in Transnistria), Götz supervised the retraining of Volksdeutsche instructors in both Transnistria and the Reichskommissariat Ukraine. As Götz's primary base of operations was in Prischib in German-occupied Ukraine, day-to-day oversight of Sonderkommando R's continuing education program for ethnic German teachers was the responsibility of SS-Obersturmführer Fritz Dankert, a thirty-nine-year-old teacher from Magdeburg.⁷¹⁵ Based first in Odessa and then relocated to the more centrally situated town of Selz, Transnistria's *Lehrerbildungsanstalt* (Teacher Training Institute) attempted to peel back years of suspected Soviet contamination through an intensive retraining program that exposed the largely sequestered participants to a heavy dose of National Socialist ideological instruction.⁷¹⁶ Whether or not these efforts succeeded is unclear. Any failures, however, were not for lack of effort on Sonderkommando R's part. The unit supported the institute with a 125,000 Reichsmark grant.⁷¹⁷ So strong was the desire to salvage these teachers for the Nazi cause that, even after the unit evacuated Transnistria, Götz reestablished the institution in Lubrandau in the Warthegau and operated it until the Waffen-SS drafted the institute's able-

⁷¹⁴ SS Offizier Akte Karl Götz, NARA, RG 242 / A 3343 / A 3343 / SSO-021A.

⁷¹⁵ SS Offizier Akte Fritz Dankert, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SSO-035, 1001-17. Aussage von O. D., July 25, 1967, BAL, B162/2309, 25-26. Aussage von M. K., March 8, 1962, BAL, B162/2292, 11. Aussage von F. B., November 26, 1962, BAL, B162/2299, 144.

⁷¹⁶ Aussage von J. H., April 1, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 30. Aussage von K. G., BAL, B162/2304, 227. Aussage von L. S., October 3, 1962, BAL, B162/2300, 148-149. Aussage von M. G., September 12, 1962, BAL, B162/2302, 179-180.

⁷¹⁷ German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 29 June - 28 July 1943, August 10, 1943, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 4.

bodied instructors in October 1944.⁷¹⁸

Sonderkommando R's final attempt to mobilize Transnistria's ethnic German children was to establish a National Socialist youth organization, the *Deutsche Jugend* (The German Youth). Modeled on the *Hitler Jugend*, the Deutsche Jugend was a distinctly uncooperative cooperative enterprise between Sonderkommando R and the Office of the Reichsjugendführer. As noted in chapter two, Sonderkommando R's commanders guarded the SS's autonomy in Transnistria jealously and attempted to limit the number of non-SS personnel deployed to the region, who might introduce competitive chains of command and thereby threaten the unit's independence. The creation of the Deutsche Jugend posed precisely such a challenge to Sonderkommando R's authority. Hoffmeyer repeatedly fought against the deployment of Hitler Jugend personnel, who were responsible for establishing the youth movement. In mid-1942, for example, Hoffmeyer "strongly disapproved" of the immediate deployment of Hitler Jugend workers to occupied Ukraine and advised the Office of the Reichsjugendführer that the Deutsche Jugend should be created only after the Bereichkommandos "are fully organised."⁷¹⁹ Tensions appear to have continued between the two organizations for months.⁷²⁰ Because of Sonderkommando R's recalcitrance, earnest efforts to establish the Deutsche Jugend in Transnistria did not begin until early 1943, and likely stunted the youth movement's growth. In March 1943, Sonderkommando R's headquarter in Landau ordered its staff to organize ceremonies to induct local children into

⁷¹⁸ Aussage von E. E., November 19, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 152. Aussage von R. P., October 18, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 45.

⁷¹⁹ German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 1st May-30th June 1942, July 17, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 12.

⁷²⁰ German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 1st July-31st July 1942, August 11, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 8.

the Deutsche Jugend the following month.⁷²¹ Anecdotally, the youth movement's organization and ideological content seem to have been similar to that of the Hitler Jugend in Germany. Participation in the Deutsche Jugend was mandatory for all youths ages ten to fourteen year old.⁷²² To provide more intense ideological instruction, Sonderkommando R's commanders ordered their subordinates to create a summer camp for the movement in May 1943.⁷²³ The Deutsche Jugend depended particularly heavily on area Volksdeutsche for its staffing needs. It trained area ethnic German men and women to serve as *Ortsjugendführer* and *Ortsmädführerinnen* (Local Youth Leaders) and deployed them to Volksdeutsche communities in rural Transnistria.⁷²⁴ Despite the continued scarcity of clothing, in April 1943, Sonderkommando R ordered all local Deutsche Jugend leaders to wear uniforms.⁷²⁵ Seven months later, the unit ordered the area's *Bereichsjugendführer* (Area Youth Leaders) and Ortsjugendführer to train with the Selbstschutz.⁷²⁶ While the Deutsche Jugend presented Hoffmeyer's command with an opportunity to engage the portion of the region's Volksdeutsche population that it recognized correctly as most receptive to its ideological agenda, the unit's greedily guarded autonomy ultimately stymied this effort.

Conclusion: Hoffmeyer's Volksgemeinschaft

Sonderkommando R's multifaceted efforts to mobilize local Volksdeutsche for the

⁷²¹ Rundanweisung Nr. 98, March 21, 1943, BB, R 59/66, 18.

⁷²² Stabbefehl Nr. 103, April 24, 1943, BB, R 59/67, 95.

⁷²³ Stabbefehl Nr. 105, May 12, 1943, BB, R 59/67, 72.

⁷²⁴ Aussage von J. S., January 29, 1966, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-004, Band 7, 1259-1260. Aussage von A. K., October 10, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 18-19.

⁷²⁵ Stabbefehl Nr. 102, April 19, 1943, BB, R 59/67, 100.

⁷²⁶ Stabbefehl Nr. 120, December 9, 1943, BB, R 59/67, 5.

National Socialist cause met with mixed results. On the one hand, the unit's initial attempts to curtail Romanian intrusions into and theft from local ethnic German communities effectively limited Romanian involvement in the region's Volksdeutsche affairs. It also provided Hoffmeyer's subordinates with an entrée to reengineer the ethnic composition of Transnistria's Volksdeutsche settlements—a move that permitted the unit to administer local ethnic Germans more effectively and to secure a demographic basis for the Third Reich's long-term influence in the area. On the other hand, Sonderkommando R's propaganda initiatives were less potent. Despite the energy with which the unit developed a propaganda apparatus in Odessa, the fact that Sonderkommando R focused its attention on local ethnic German youngsters suggests that Hoffmeyer's subordinates remained disappointed with the ideological commitment of many adult Volksdeutsche, most of whom had been socialized prior to or during Soviet rule. While Sonderkommando R developed an impressive Volksdeutsche education system that devoted specific attention to retraining ethnic German teachers to become competent National Socialist instructors, its fights with other German agencies delayed the implementation of a local Nazi youth movement and undercut its efficacy.

Sonderkommando R's efforts to improve the material position of local Volksdeutsche was by far the unit's most successful attempt to win the "hearts and minds" of the region's ethnic Germans. Under Soviet rule, authorities had targeted local German-speakers disproportionately for expropriations because of their substantial land ownership prior to 1917. A loosening and in some cases elimination of collective agriculture promised to roll back decades of Soviet power and to undo what many area Volksdeutsche regarded as one of the Russian Revolution's most pernicious consequences. Similarly, local ethnic Germans

snapped up the imported personal effects of murdered Jews with such alacrity that after the war former residents made no effort to mask the universally known provenance of what many of them called their new “Jewish clothing.” The opportunity to acquire substantial personal property constituted the unit’s most fruitful attempt to secure local Volksdeutsche support for the National Socialist enterprise in Transnistria.

Materialist explanations for German support for the Nazi regime and its genocidal programs have received recent scholarly attention. Götz Aly’s seminal study has argued that popular access to stolen Jewish property cemented widespread support for the Third Reich in Germany.⁷²⁷ While Aly’s attempts to downplay ideology as a causal factor remain problematic, his focus on the material dimensions to National Socialism’s popularity among Germans has merit. Evidence from Sonderkommando R’s efforts to enrich local Volksdeutsche in Transnistria confirms many of Aly’s findings and suggests that cupidity may have played an even greater factor in securing ethnic German support for the Nazi project in the region. Notwithstanding this parallel, it is important to contrast the infinitely greater amount of property that Sonderkommando R proffered to Transnistria’s Volksdeutsche with the material goods that the Nazi regime offered to German living in the Reich. In Germany, local residents rarely depended on the Nazi regime, and particularly its genocidal projects, to provide them with the bare necessities. This was not the case for Transnistria’s ethnic Germans. Years of Soviet rule and successive waves of expropriations had left Transnistria’s Volksdeutsche one of, if not the poorest, groups of ethnic Germans that the VoMi had encountered. The reason why flea-ridden bloodstained clothing from the Third Reich’s victims proved so attractive to the region’s ethnic Germans was because no better

⁷²⁷ Aly, *Hitler’s Beneficiaries*.

garments were available to them. In contrast to Reich Germans, Transnistria's ethnic German often depended on the Nazi regime for the means of survival. It should thus come as little surprise that access to these goods contributed to Volksdeutsche support for the Nazi project in a more profound way than for Reich Germans, whom Nazi authorities could offer comparatively far less. Even if individually the spoils of genocide were modest, Transnistria's Volksdeutsche were comparatively among the primary beneficiaries of the *Volksgemeinschaft*.

CHAPTER VI: POLICING THE METROPOLIS: GERMANS, “VOLKSDEUTSCHE,” AND ROMANIANS IN ODESSA

On the morning of October 21, 1941, the custodian of Odessa's Museum of Western Civilization summoned twenty-three-year-old Eugenie Anisimova and her middle-aged mother to lead an unusual and most demanding tour group. Having fled the besieged metropolis weeks earlier to their former residence in suburban Odessa, the two women had returned to their bombed-out apartment in the recently occupied city. Homeless, the pair had sought refuge with the museum's caretaker, an old family friend. Unable to communicate with the delegation of SS and Wehrmacht officers who queued for admission, the Russian-speaking janitor hoped that the two Volksdeutsche women would help disarm the menacing visitors by granting them a German-language tour. Although ostensibly inspecting the building for booby traps, the visit's true purpose became clear as the Germans began loading paintings, rugs, and even a golden saddle into their vehicles. At the conclusion of the tour-cum-robbery, the group's leader, SS-Obersturmführer Siebert, thanked the two women and complimented their excellent German.⁷²⁸ Hearing of their dire situation, Siebert advised Anissimoff and her mother to register for support at the local Bereichkommando in a former music conservatory on Novovlaskaia Street.⁷²⁹

⁷²⁸ SS Offizier Akte Klaus Siebert, NARA, RG 242, A3343 SSO-135B, 483-551.

⁷²⁹ Aussage von E. S., Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 5, 725. 50 000 Juden aus Odessa / Tatsachenbericht von W. V., 1957, BAL, B162/2295, 130.

The following evening, October 22, a Soviet time bomb destroyed the Romanian military's general headquarters in Odessa's former NKVD building. In retaliation, Romanian forces unleashed an orgy of violence against the city's Jews. Likely discouraged by the recent events from venturing outdoors, Anisimova proceeded to the Bereichkommando three days later. Upon entering the former music school's foyer, Anisimova passed the flag-draped casket of the unit's former commander, SS-Untersturmführer Walter Güldner—a casualty of the recent explosion—whose body was lying in state.⁷³⁰ After paying her respects, Anisimova proceeded to the unit's Volksdeutsche registration office. Taking Siebert's advice to downplay the fact that her Russian father, Nikolai Anisimov, had been a tsarist army officer, she used her mother's maiden name and registered as Eugenie Beck. As she would do until 1945, Beck omitted reference to her two-year marriage to a Jewish scientist during the late 1930s. Captivated by the attractive, educated, young woman's polyglot skills, the Bereichkommando's "Volksdeutsche classifier," SS-Oberscharführer Erich-Meinert Claasen, issued her a Volkstumsausweis and hired her as his assistant.⁷³¹ During the next four years Beck's responsibilities expanded from classifying Odessa's denizens, to serving as an interpreter for the SS, to working for the VoMi's propaganda apparatus—to even participating in counterinsurgency deployments.⁷³²

This chapter reconstructs Sonderkommando R's efforts to identify local ethnic Germans, like Beck, and to marshal them as a bulwark of Germandom in Odessa. Its aims

⁷³⁰ RuSHA Akte Walter Güldner, NARA, RG 242, A3343 RS B5393, 2426-652.

⁷³¹ SS Offizier Akte Erich-Meinert Claasen, NARA, RG 242, A3343 SSO129, 11-15.

⁷³² Aussage von E. S., November 12, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 5, 725. Einbürgerungsantrag Eugenie Beck, NARA, RG 242, A3342 EWZ50 A037, 2110-2132.

are two-fold. First, it reconstructs the VoMi's attempts to mobilize local Volksdeutsche as a demographic counterclaim to long-term Romanian designs in the city—the only significant urban area in Transnistria. Second, and more centrally, it probes how the Third Reich struggled to layer its demographic plans over the Soviet Union's multiethnic reality at the local level.⁷³³ This chapter argues that the friction between the VoMi's racial fantasies and Odessa's ethnic multiplicity moved Sonderkommando R's personnel to murder even when doing so fell outside of their bailiwick and superior orders discouraged them. Charged by their superiors with "culling" racially "pure" Volksdeutsche from one of the Soviet Union's most cosmopolitan cities—a task that local reality would hamstring—Sonderkommando R's staff used innovative, if counterproductive, mechanisms to identify Odessa's ethnically German denizens. Unable to guard access to the Nazi racial community through classification, local SS officials emulated their colleagues' genocidal campaign in the surrounding countryside by deploying a miniature death squad to catch and murder suspected Volksdeutsche imposters in Odessa. Armed with their own terror apparatus, Sonderkommando R's Bereichkommando in Odessa exploited its purview over Volksdeutsche matters to contest the formal control of their Romanian allies.

Bereichkommando XXV in Odessa

The staff that Siebert assigned to Odessa's Bereichkommando XXV—the largest and most elaborate of his subunits—mirrored Sonderkommando R's hodgepodge composition discussed in chapter two. After the bombing of the Romanian military headquarters

⁷³³ For an examination of comparable German policies elsewhere in occupied Ukraine see Andrej Angrick, "Power Games: the German Nationality Policy (*Volkstumspolitik*) in Czernowitz before and during the Barbarossa Campaign," *Dapim: Studies on the Shoah* 24, (2010): 89-135.

mentioned above, Siebert replaced Güldner with SS-Untersturmführer Hans-Joachim Goerbig, both a longtime National Socialist and an experienced VoMi officer.⁷³⁴ A member of the NSDAP since 1929 and of the SS since 1938, his superiors seconded him to the VoMi at the beginning of the war. Except for a brief stint in the Wehrmacht in 1940, over the next two years Goerbig participated in all of the VoMi's major "resettlement" campaigns to relocate Volksdeutsche from East-Central and Eastern Europe to German-occupied Poland. When the SS reassigned him from his duties registering Volksdeutsche in Poland's General Government to the newly-established Sonderkommando R, the thirty-year-old Goerbig numbered among the VoMi's veterans.⁷³⁵

For Goerbig's deputy in Odessa, SS-Unterscharführer Erich-Meinert Claasen, service with Sonderkommando R provided a jumpstart to a lackluster military career. A convinced Nazi who conceded his political loyalties to the West German police even in the 1960s, Claasen had joined the SS Division *Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler* (Adolf Hitler Bodyguard Division) in 1934.⁷³⁶ After participating in the invasion of Poland in 1939, Claasen's battlefield career ended in 1940, when he was wounded in Arras, France, and transferred to a dead-end posting in one of the SS *Germania* Division's reserve battalions. Following friends' advice that service with the VoMi could be a ticket to a commission, Claasen transferred there in October 1940 and took part in the population transfers of ethnic Germans

⁷³⁴ German Police Decodes Nr 2 Traffic: 26.1.43, February 2, 1943, BNA, HW 16, Piece 37, Part 1, 2.

⁷³⁵ SS Offizier Akte Hans-Joachim Goerbig, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SSO-019A, 64-65. RuSHA Akte Hans-Joachim Goerbig, NARA, RG 242, A3343, RS B5213, 930-50. Aussage von H. J. G., August 1, 1962, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-001, Band 2, 102.

⁷³⁶ Aussage von E. M. C., August 6, 1962, BAL, B162/2293, 173.

from the Baltic, Bessarabia, and Bukovina. A “real ‘Siegfried’-guy,”⁷³⁷ as one of his Volksdeutsche subordinates later described him, the twenty-five-year-old Claasen hoped that service in the East would fast track his SS career.⁷³⁸

As was the case with Sonderkommando R in general, Bereichkommando XXV’s rank-and-file were on average both older and less ideologically committed to National Socialism. For example, thirty-seven-year-old Herbert Kirschstein, who had floated through various food service and hotel jobs during the Weimer Republic, joined the VoMi because it permitted him to avoid military service. While managing a restaurant near Berlin’s Tiergarten in September 1941, Kirschstein bemoaned a possible Wehrmacht draft notice to one of his regular customers, a VoMi member. On his patron’s recommendation, Kirschstein volunteered for what he later described as “the lesser evil.”⁷³⁹ Starved for personnel, the VoMi overlooked the fact that Kirschstein was neither a Nazi party nor an SS member and had no experience with Volksdeutsche matters.⁷⁴⁰ Within weeks the VoMi deployed him to Transnistria as an SS-Unterscharführer.⁷⁴¹ Although Kirschstein’s colleagues later grouched

⁷³⁷ Aussage von E. F., December 15, 1966, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-004, Band 8, 1361.

⁷³⁸ Claasen correctly judged the advancement opportunities that a VoMi career afforded. Along with other SS non-commissioned officers, Claasen received a commission as an Untersturmführer in early 1943. From April to August 1944 he trained at the SS *Junkerschule* (Officer Training Academy) in Bad Tötz. Betr.: Ernennung der Angehörigen des Rußland-Kommandos des Hauptamtes Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle zu Fachführern der Waffen-SS in SS Offizier Akte Fritz Dankert, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SSO-135, 1018. SS Offizier Akte Erich-Meinert Claasen, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SSO129, 11-13. Aussage von E. M. C., August 6, 1962, BAL, B162/2293, 171.

⁷³⁹ Verantwortliche Vernehmung von E. A. H. K., June 4, 1962, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-001, Band 1, 120.

⁷⁴⁰ Sonderkommando R’s personnel limitations were so severe that in February 1942 VoMi headquarters in Berlin warned that there were no available personnel to deploy to Ukraine. German Police Decodes: 25.2.42, February 28, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 46, 2.

⁷⁴¹ Aussage von H. K., January 28, 1963, BAL, B162/2301, 122.

about his primitive grasp of Volksdeutsche affairs, limited education, and “waiter’s manners,” within a few months he was spearheading the unit’s death squad.⁷⁴²

Everyday Life in Bereichkommando XXV

At least initially, VoMi aid attempted to remedy legitimate hardships that Odessa’s Volksdeutsche faced. Arriving in Odessa immediately after the Romanian Army in mid-October 1941, Bereichkommando XXV’s staff encountered a once-thriving Black Sea metropolis that had undergone violent changes in the preceding months. The city’s two-month siege and Soviet evacuation took a toll on its local population. In addition to the physical damage caused by military operations, the Soviet government had evacuated much of the city’s industrial and human capital as well as rendered its port inoperable. By October 1941, Odessa’s remaining residents—a mere half of the prewar population of 600,000—faced dire prospects even before the harsh winter of 1941-42 precipitated a food shortage. According to fragmentary postwar testimony, prior to quitting the city the NKVD executed a number of ethnic German men and attempted to dynamite the prison.⁷⁴³

Although not targeted as a potentially hostile group, ethnic Germans’ suffering compounded under Odessa’s new Romanian rulers. At least initially the Romanians interred all men of military age. In many instances this included Volksdeutsche who had endured weeks of Soviet captivity. Moreover, Romanian troops plundered Volksdeutsche property as that of everyone else during the first weeks of occupation. Front-row witnesses to the Romanian Army’s murderous campaign against the Jews both in Odessa and in the suburb of

⁷⁴² Aussage von E. M. C., August 6, 1962, BAL, B162/2293, 176. Aussage von E. S., November 12, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 5, 738.

⁷⁴³ Dallin, *Odessa, 1941-1944*, 51. Aussage von N. R., November 7, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 5, 706.

Dalnik, Volksdeutsche had few illusions about their new overlords.⁷⁴⁴ As one ethnic German woman explained a generation later: “The VoMi shielded [us] from the Romanians. We were therefore very grateful to the Germans and the VoMi in Odessa and happy to be finished with Russian rule.”⁷⁴⁵ An embattled population without other prospects for relief, Odessa’s Volksdeutsche welcomed the SS’s much-needed aid.

One of the most pressing difficulties was that of food distribution. Given wartime inflation and food scarcity—particularly during the occupation’s first brutal winter—the city’s Volksdeutsche desperately needed VoMi victuals.⁷⁴⁶ During the winter of 1941 inflation was so severe that Transnistria’s senior Wehrmacht commander, Lieutenant General von Rothkirch, voiced concerns to his Romanian allies about the ability of German soldiers to supply themselves with food on the open market.⁷⁴⁷ To placate von Rothkirch, Romanian administrators augured that “with the evacuation of the Jewish population, the market will hopefully be controlled.”⁷⁴⁸ Notwithstanding Romanian optimism, the following summer, even after the supply situation stabilized somewhat, economic advisors at the German Embassy in Bucharest were still grumbling to Transnistria’s Romanian administrators that “in

⁷⁴⁴ Reference to Romanian violence litters the postwar German testimony of former Odessians. See, for example, Aussage von L. W., n.d., BAL, B162/2291, 30-31.

⁷⁴⁵ Aussage von F. E., August 27, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-002, Band 4, 573.

⁷⁴⁶ Dallin, *Odessa, 1941-1944*, 135-37, 201.

⁷⁴⁷ Verbindungsstab der Deutschen Wehrmacht für Transnistrien Ia. / an den Zivilgouverneur von Transnistrien Herrn Minister Professor Alexianu Tiraspol, December 25, 1941, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1084, 16.

⁷⁴⁸ Der Zivilgouverneur an den Kommandanten des Verbindungsstabes der Deutschen Wehrmacht für Transnistrien Herrn Generalleutnant v. Rothkirch und Panten in Tiraspol, January 8, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1083, 20.

Odessa the price for groceries . . . are two to five times as high as in Bucharest.”⁷⁴⁹

To remedy this crisis, Sonderkommando R established an elaborate, independent infrastructure for feeding the Odessa’s Volksdeutsche. The bearer of a Volkstumsausweis had easy access to German ration cards, redeemable at Odessa’s two Volksdeutsche grocery stores as well as its butcher shop, bakery, and oil and flour mills, each of which was managed by a Volksdeutsche proprietor.⁷⁵⁰ The SS apparently provisioned Odessa so well from SS-administered ethnic German farms in the surrounding countryside that it was necessary to hire a full-time worker to make crates just for the foodstuffs that Bereichskommando XXV’s staff smuggled back to Germany.⁷⁵¹

The SS also facilitated Odessa’s Volksdeutsche in acquiring apartments previously owned by the city’s Jews.⁷⁵² Although in postwar statements many Volksdeutsche claimed that the SS had simply “issued” them apartments, Beck noted that, in many instances “the unit merely helped ethnic Germans keep apartments they had themselves procured.”⁷⁵³

Bereichskommando XXV’s efforts to reallocate Odessa’s prime real estate to the city’s

⁷⁴⁹ Deutsche Gesandtschaft / Der Sonderbeauftragte für Wirtschaftsfragen / an Herrn Professor Gheorghe Alexianu Gouverneur von Transnistrien, July 8, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1088, 180.

⁷⁵⁰ Rundanweisung Nr. 15, January 15, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 127. Aussage von E. S., November 12, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 5, 739. Aussage von H. O., February 1, 1966, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-004, Band 7, 1268. Aussage von W. O., January 3, 1965, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-004, Band 7, 1179.

⁷⁵¹ Aussage von E. S., November 12, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 5, 739-40.

⁷⁵² Aussage von E. P., August 23, 1962, BAL, B162/2298, 21.

⁷⁵³ Aussage von W. B., September 5, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-002, Band 4, 627. Aussage von E. S., November 12, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 5, 737. Aussage von J. G., July 30, 1962, BAL, B162/2297, 33. Aussage von P. M., August 29, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-002, Band 4, 582. As Dallin notes, Odessa’s residents often squatted in vacant Jewish apartments. Dallin, *Odessa, 1941-1944*, 113.

Volksdeutsche dovetailed with Romanian efforts to murder the city's Jews. In mid-February 1942, for instance, three homeless Volksdeutsche petitioned the city's Romanian prefect to "kindly place three Jewish apartments at our disposal."⁷⁵⁴ Perhaps to streamline the process the VoMi encouraged local ethnic Germans to denounce the few Jews who remained in their apartments after ghettoization and deportation in late 1941 and early 1942. After Romanian officials arrested the Jews, the SS stepped in to reward the ethnic German informer with the deportees' apartment.⁷⁵⁵ Area Volksdeutsche snapped up this property so quickly that in September 1942 the SS bent to Romanian pressure and ordered ethnic Germans to pay rent for their purloined apartments to, and to "purchase" their household furnishing from, the Romanian administration.⁷⁵⁶

Third, as discussed in chapter five, like their colleagues in rural Transnistria, Bereichkommando XXV's members enriched local Volksdeutsche by giving them the personal effects of murdered Jews.⁷⁵⁷ Subordinated to the VoMi's Wirtschaftsgruppe, rather than to Bereichkommando XXV, the SS administered a warehouse in Odessa that served as a clearing center for clothing and other personal items that German authorities sent by train

⁷⁵⁴ Eugen Fritz / Heinrich Fetzer / Josef Fetzer / an den Chef der Präfektur, Herrn Wiltshensku, Odessa, February 17, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 18, Fond 2359, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 42, 13.

⁷⁵⁵ Aussage von F. F., September 4, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-002, Band 4, 620-21.

⁷⁵⁶ Romanian authorities began complaining about Volksdeutsche acquiring apartments in Odessa in early 1942. Der Gouverneur an Kommandanten der Volksdeutschen Mittelstelle Herrn Oberführer Hoffmeyer in Landau / Betr.: Eigenmächtige Wohnungsrequisitionen durch V.M. in Odessa, January 26, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1084, 99. Rundanweisung Nr. 67, September 8, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 61. Dallin, *Odessa, 1941-1944*, 209.

⁷⁵⁷ German Police Decodes Nr 2 Traffic: 13.2.43, February 24, 1943, BNA, HW 16, Piece 37, Part 1, 2. Protokoll doprosa / A. M. G., September 20, 1944, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2902, 45. 50 000 Juden aus Odessa / Tatsachenbericht von W. V., 1957, BAL, B162/2295, 27.

from occupied Poland.⁷⁵⁸ Although in postwar interrogations some erstwhile Volksdeutsche asserted that their new clothing had come from German donors, many of them fondly remembered their “good Jewish clothing,” some of which Bereichkommando XXV distributed to its Volksdeutsche employees for Christmas in 1941.⁷⁵⁹ Beyond providing for the basic needs of its ethnic German charges in Odessa, the SS ensured that local Volksdeutsche shared in the ill-gotten fruits of the Third Reich’s genocide.

In addition to breaking the routine of life in occupied rural Ukraine, Odessa’s VoMi leisure institutions provided German SS personnel with access to indigenous female companions. Müller’s early February 1942 request for “eight capable, young, good looking girls for casino and domestic work” from the SS in Nikopol captures Sonderkommando R’s attitude toward local women.⁷⁶⁰ Odessa’s VoMi personnel labored to staff recreational centers with eligible ethnic German women, who proved easy targets of the SS’s advances. In his capacity as manager of the *Deutsches Eck* (German Corner) pub, Kirschstein selected “capable, young, good looking” ethnic German women to work as servers and maids when they appeared to register with the VoMi.⁷⁶¹ Once on their payroll, Bereichkommando XXV’s

⁷⁵⁸ Aussage von E. P., August 23, 1962, BAL, B162/2298, 21. In 1942, Sonderkommando R deployed the Selbstschutz from rural Transnistria to guard the warehouse complex in Odessa. Vernehmungsniederschrift von L. D., July 21, 1962, BAL, B162/2297, 51.

⁷⁵⁹ Aussage von A. B., October 12, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-002, Band 4, 652. Aussage von A. J., September 3, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-002, Band 4, 601. Aussage von F. F., September 4, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-002, Band 4, 615. Aussage von M. R., September 2, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-002, Band 4, 593. Aussage von O. G., October 19, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-002, Band 4, 688.

⁷⁶⁰ German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 15th January- 16th February 1942, March 17, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 12.

⁷⁶¹ Aussage von T. J., December 7, 1965, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-004, Band 7, 1164. As other members of Bereichkommando XXV selected young Volksdeutsche women to work as servers when they appeared at the unit’s office for registration, placing these

personnel frequently solicited their local female employees for sex.⁷⁶² Kirschstein, for example, offered one of his female workers a pair of nylon stockings if she were “to be nice to him in the evening.”⁷⁶³ Unfortunately for him, the proposal made little sense to a woman who was unfamiliar with nylons, and she declined the offer.⁷⁶⁴ The woman later stated to the Hamburg police that, while cleaning his room the following morning, she discovered that Kirschstein had spent the night with two women for whom his charms were more evident.⁷⁶⁵ “Orgies” and “‘amusements’ with local girls” were, as a local ethnic German described them, a part of the SS’s *Alltag* in Odessa.⁷⁶⁶

Finding Odessa’s Volksdeutsche

Given the SS’s efforts to underpin and to Nazify local Volksdeutsche, the question remains who among Odessa’s residents should partake in these heady endeavors? The SS, somewhat surprisingly, had little idea. Even though the VoMi had had extensive practice relocating ethnic Germans from earlier population transfers, it proved unable to conceive viable litmus tests for a category as slippery as ethnic identity.⁷⁶⁷ Previous experience led the SS to use factors that included ancestry and language skills, as well as cultural and political

women in proximity to German SS personnel appears to have been an unofficial policy for the unit. Aussage von O. G., October 19, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-002, Band 4, 683.

⁷⁶² Ibid., 687.

⁷⁶³ Aussage von O. G., October 19, 1943, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-002, Band 4, 687.

⁷⁶⁴ Ibid., 683.

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid., 687.

⁷⁶⁶ Aussage von F. F., September 4, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-002, Band 4, 613.

⁷⁶⁷ For a discussion of the VoMi’s population transfers prior to operation Barbarossa, see Lumans, *Himmler Auxiliaries*, 131-204.

orientation, in an otherwise nebulous scheme that relied on *Gestalt*. Prior to the invasion of the Soviet Union, the VoMi knew, or at least thought that it knew, an ethnic German when it saw one.

Despite Himmler's efforts to codify classification criteria in March 1941, the established methods for discerning individuals of German ethnicity disintegrated on the other side of the Soviet frontier.⁷⁶⁸ On December 28, 1941, Hoffmeyer circulated the first of many staff orders on how to classify Transnistria's Volksdeutsche population. Inspired by, but explicitly separate from, the multi-tiered categories of the *Deutsche Volksliste* (German People's List) used to classify Volksdeutsche first in occupied Poland, Hoffmeyer's new schema jettisoned criteria other than ancestry.⁷⁶⁹ Siebert articulated why Sonderkommando R developed uniquely simplified Volksdeutsche criteria for Transnistria a year later in a follow-up staff order. As he explained:

The preconditions for registering persons of German ethnicity in the former Soviet territories are noticeably different than what has been experienced in the German Eastern Territories. The Volksdeutsche in the Soviet Union were never able to participate in politics because every political activity meant death or at least deportation and exile. The cultural activity of individuals of the German ethnicity was likewise standardized and prescribed by the Soviet regime.⁷⁷⁰

The VoMi's realization that its standard Volksdeutsche identification criteria were ill-suited for use within the pre-1939 boundaries of the Soviet Union left Sonderkommando R in Transnistria with an ad hoc and diluted classification schema.

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid., 244.

⁷⁶⁹ Rundanweisung Nr. 11 / Betrifft [sic] namentliche Erfassung und Registrierung aller Volksdeutschen in Transnistrien, December 28, 1941, BB, R 59/66, 132.

⁷⁷⁰ Rundanweisung Nr. 89 / Betr.: Stellungnahme zu dem Entwurf des Reichskommissars für die Ukraine II a-2 vom 3.11.42 / Aufnahme der Volksdeutschen in der deutsche Volksliste, December 15, 1942, BB, R59/66, 32-33.

For Sonderkommando R Odessa's Volksdeutsche remained especially suspect. Even before arriving in the city, the SS had concluded that the situation of local ethnic Germans was "catastrophic."⁷⁷¹ The origins of this perception were four-fold. First, as prewar Odessa had had the highest proportion of Jews of any Soviet city, the SS suspected that earlier interaction between the city's Volksdeutsche and Jews had eroded the racial "purity" of local ethnic Germans.⁷⁷² Second, in rural Transnistria many Volksdeutsche affiliated with the Soviet state or in "mixed marriages" with local Jews had anticipated harsh treatment at the hands of the Germans and had voluntarily evacuated with the Red Army. Odessa's two-month siege, by contrast, had prevented a similar escape.⁷⁷³ Third, unlike Volksdeutsche in rural Transnistria, Odessa's ethnic Germans had avoided earlier SS efforts to murder what it considered racially and politically "undesirable" elements. Whereas in the Transnistrian countryside Einsatzgruppe D had murdered perhaps hundreds of remaining Volksdeutsche "communists" or members of "mixed race" marriages with Jews, the city's ethnic Germans were spared the SS's first fatal selections.⁷⁷⁴ Lastly, in the first days of the Romanian occupation, *Sicherheitsdienst* (Security Service, SD) personnel attached to the Romanian Special Intelligence Service (SSI) had distributed provisional Volksdeutsche identification papers to Odessians without checking to see if the recipients met any of the SS's criteria.

⁷⁷¹ Aussage von E. M. C., August 6, 1962, BAL, B162/2293, 171.

⁷⁷² Völkl, *Transnistrien und Odessa*, 24. German officials often feared that contact with Jews in Eastern Europe had deluded the racial purity of local Volksdeutsche. Bergen, "The Nazi Concept of 'Volksdeutsche' and the Exacerbation of Anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe, 1939-45," 573.

⁷⁷³ Given that successful voluntary Volksdeutsche evacuation ahead of advancing German forces left little record, much of the evidence for this flight is circumstantial. Nevertheless, both West German and Soviet postwar testimony indicates that these evacuations occurred. See, for example, Protokol doprosa / Fet Ivan, May 29, 1948, USHMM, RG-38.018M, Reel 79, 3765-66. Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von A. B., August 21, 1962, BAL, B162/2296, 187.

⁷⁷⁴ Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*, 254-94.

Arriving on the SD's heels, Bereichkommando XXV's staff had to rubber stamp—quite literally—these temporary ID cards to extricate Volksdeutsche from Romanian custody.⁷⁷⁵ In Odessa, the SS thus confronted an exceptionally suspect local Volksdeutsche population.

Rather than offering guidelines on how to proceed, Bereichkommando XXV's superior orders only underscored its suspicion of Odessa's Volksdeutsche. To prevent further Volksdeutsche "contamination," the SS in Landau banned ethnic Germans in rural Transnistria from migrating to the city.⁷⁷⁶ As for Volksdeutsche already in the metropolis, Sonderkommando R's leaders could only wring their hands. Hoffmeyer's December 1941 guidelines, for example, explicitly ordered Bereichkommando XXV *not* to use Sonderkommando R's new Volksdeutsche classification schema in Odessa.⁷⁷⁷ Barred from employing Sonderkommando R's new Volksdeutsche identification guidelines, Bereichkommando XXV's staff developed, under Claasen's guidance, its own fly-by-night criteria that, in his words, were "not implemented completely systematically."⁷⁷⁸ Not subject to the VoMi's guidelines, the Volksdeutsche ID cards that Claasen distributed remained valid only in Odessa. According to Sonderkommando R's regulations, Volksdeutsche who registered with the VoMi's Odessa office and then moved to rural Transnistria were to be reevaluated and have permanent record of their residence in the city.⁷⁷⁹ While the VoMi

⁷⁷⁵ Aussage von E. M. C., August 6, 1962, BAL, B162/2293, 174.

⁷⁷⁶ Reichsführer-SS Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle / Der Verbindungsführer beim Zivilgouverneur von Transnistrien / an das Zivilgouvernement von Transnistrien Verwaltungsdirektion Tiraspol / Betr.: Fahrten der Volksdeutschen ohne Passierschein, August 3, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1088, 140.

⁷⁷⁷ Rundanweisung Nr. 11 / Betrifft [sic] namentliche Erfassung und Registrierung aller Volksdeutschen in Transnistrien, December 28, 1941, BB, R 59/66, 137.

⁷⁷⁸ Aussage von E. M. C., August 6, 1962, BAL, B162/2293, 174.

⁷⁷⁹ Rundanweisung Nr. 31, April 7, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 103.

remained convinced that it could identify ethnic Germans in East-Central and Eastern Europe, and after a fashion even in rural Transnistria, it considered the candidates in Odessa so questionable that it failed to offer the city's SS personnel any guidelines on how to proceed.

The material privileges that Bereichkommando XXV afforded Odessa's Volksdeutsche and the SS's inability to translate its racial fantasies into an operational definition of a *Volksdeutscher* invited many Odessians to apply for a Volkstumsausweis. Bereichkommando XXV's staff was terrified by the prospect of Jews passing as Volksdeutsche to avoid deportation and murder. As an anonymous February 1942 denunciation sent to the VoMi's Odessa office warned: "In our city there are still very many Jews with German and Russian passports . . . Above all pay attention to cleansing the city . . . Volksdeutsche . . . because at most 50 percent of them are Germans and the rest are Jews."⁷⁸⁰ While the informant blamed the Jews' German-sounding surnames and accents for their ability to slip into the category, the reality was probably more prosaic. As Bereichkommando XXV's staff suspected—probably correctly—Romanian authorities pilfered Volksdeutsche identity papers and sold them to Jews and other eager customers on the black market.⁷⁸¹ Even if the number of Odessa's Jews cloaked as Volksdeutsche remained small, they constituted a perpetual boogiemans for local SS officials. In his postwar testimony, for example, Goerbig noted that while many Volksdeutsche inhabited Odessa, "60 percent of them were Jews."⁷⁸² Experience identifying, relocating, and evaluating the racial

⁷⁸⁰ Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-42*, 1145.

⁷⁸¹ Aussage von P. M., August 29, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-002, Band 4, 583.

⁷⁸² Aussage von H. J. G., August 1, 1962, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft

“worth” of other Volksdeutsche groups failed to provide Bereichkommando XXV’s staff with a viable means of identifying Odessa’s Volksdeutsche. It did, however, equip it with a deep suspicion of local ethnic Germans and a rabid fear of Jewish “infiltration.” Even if local VoMi officials could not fashion a definition of an ethnic German, then their experience told them that their initial selections had failed.

Dissatisfied with the results of its preliminary efforts to identify Volksdeutsche, Bereichkommando XXV hit upon an ingenious solution: if it could not find the city’s ethnic Germans, then it would simply hire local employees who could. Although retained as administrative support staff, the VoMi’s local employees—who were overwhelmingly local Volksdeutsche women—soon received expanded responsibilities that included interviewing and classifying the more than 8,000 Odessians⁷⁸³ who responded to Bereichkommando XXV’s newspaper, placard, and loudspeaker invitations to apply for Volksdeutsche status.⁷⁸⁴ When the SS deployed its new classification scheme is unclear, but within weeks of retaining her services, Claasen assigned Beck to begin selecting Volksdeutsche for him. In drawing the crucial distinction between Odessa’s Jews and Volksdeutsche, the VoMi granted its female helpers considerable latitude. As Edith Herrlich, Beck’s successor as Claasen’s secretary, later recounted: “an acquaintance of mine, a teacher named Else A., applied for a

Landgericht NSG 0589-001, Band 2, 98.

⁷⁸³ Absent Bereichkommando XXV’s internal documents, it is impossible to determine how many ethnic Germans Sonderkommando R identified in Odessa. Völkl estimates that between 7,580 and 9,016 Odessians successfully registered with Bereichkommando XXV as Volksdeutsche. Völkl, *Transnistrien und Odessa*, 88. Based on the numbering of Volksdeutsche identity cards occasionally included in 1944 ethnic German naturalization applications, this estimate appears plausible. Johannes Volk, for example, received Volkstumsausweis number 6,686. Einbürgerungsantrag Johannes Volk, July 25, 1944, NARA, A3342-EWZ50-I075, 1298. According to the Russian Empire’s 1897 census, Odessa was home to 9,900 Germans, or 2.6 percent of the city’s population. Völkl, *Transnistrien und Odessa*, 24.

⁷⁸⁴ Aussage von H. E. K., March 18, 1966, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-004, Band 8, 1377.

Volkstumsausweis from Claasen. Because Claasen construed the last syllable of her surname ‘son’ as the Jewish name ending ‘sohn,’ she was not going to receive a Volkstumsausweis. It was also the case that she had a slightly curved nose. Since I knew her parents from the Baltic, I could verify that she was not of Jewish ancestry. She therefore received the ID card.”⁷⁸⁵ As Herrlich’s anecdote demonstrates, while Claasen and other SS officials were present during the selection process, the unit’s female Volksdeutsche employees often remained the ultimate arbiters of “Germanness” in Odessa.

Recruiting its Volksdeutsche classifiers from the initial candidates who applied for a Volkstumsausweis, the VoMi had significant choice in whom to hire as a Volksdeutsche evaluator.⁷⁸⁶ In addition to being women, Bereichkommando XXV’s interpreter-classifiers fit a three-point profile. First, because of their job’s multilingual requirements, Bereichkommando XXV’s interpreters frequently had university training, making them better-educated than most of the unit’s Reich German personnel. Second, like many Soviet Volksdeutsche, they had suffered under Soviet rule. And third, despite the fact that most interpreters had lived in the region for some time and maintained a command of the area’s ethnic topography, many of them retained familial ties to other Volksdeutsche groups.

Like Beck, Claasen’s second assistant, Herrlich, typified these trends. Born in Moscow and a longtime local resident, the thirty-four-year-old’s parents were members of Riga’s Baltic German bourgeoisie, who moved to Odessa after her father’s German employer transferred him there in 1908. Attending Odessa’s German-language primary school,

⁷⁸⁵ Aussage von E. F., December 15, 1966, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-004, Band 8, 1361.

⁷⁸⁶ Aussage von M. S., November 7, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 5, 714. Aussage von N. R., November 7, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 5, 707-08.

Herrlich then studied at the short-lived Germanophone Lyceum that German occupiers established during their brief control of the city at the end of the First World War. With the Russian Revolution, Civil War, and concomitant closing of Odessa's German schools, Herrlich enrolled in a two-year pedagogical course at Odessa's Institute for Literature and Language and embarked on a teaching career. Shortly after she married in 1930, Soviet authorities arrested both her husband and her father, who died in prison the following year. Following her spouse into exile in Poltava, where new circumstances frayed their relationship, she returned to Odessa. They divorced in 1935. Working as a teacher in Odessa until the city's occupation in 1941, Herrlich registered with Bereichkommando XXV and "from its first days" served on its staff.⁷⁸⁷ Capable, unemployed, and embittered, Herrlich was eager to help the VoMi identify the city's Volksdeutsche.

Retaining members of a suspect population to define its own limits proved disastrous for the amorphous category's integrity. Bereichkommando XXV's Volksdeutsche assistants used their new authority to assist fellow Odessians navigate the VoMi's complex and lethal classification quagmire. In addition to mistranslating and vouching for a candidate's ethnic credentials, Bereichkommando XXV's Volksdeutsche helpers divulged confidential selection guidelines to applicants. Volksdeutsche with Jewish spouses profited from insider information on a key loophole in Bereichkommando XXV's classification criteria. Although officially barred by Hoffmeyer from applying Sonderkommando R's Volksdeutsche classification procedure to Odessa, Claasen and his staff eventually did precisely that.⁷⁸⁸

According to Hoffmeyer's instructions, Sonderkommando R's personnel were to distribute a

⁷⁸⁷ Einbürgerungsantrag Edith Herrlich, June 30, 1944, NARA, A3342-EWZ50-C074, 1281-32. Quoted on frame 1232.

⁷⁸⁸ Aussage von E. M. C., August 6, 1962, BAL, B162/2293, 174.

Volkstumsausweis to Volksdeutsche with two “purely” ethnic German parents and to Volksdeutsche who lived with “a purely foreign race or predominately foreign race individual.”⁷⁸⁹ In the latter case, Hoffmeyer directed his subordinates “to decide on a case to case basis” according to their “overall impression” of the family.⁷⁹⁰

When, for example, the SS ordered Beck’s former English instructor, an Australian-born ethnic German, to register his family at the VoMi’s Odessa office, he asked Beck how to proceed. Apparently denounced by a local informant, Beck’s former teacher feared revealing his Jewish wife and half-Jewish son to the SS. Aware that Jewish relatives would doom his application, Beck suggested that he present his Russophone wife as an ethnic Russian.⁷⁹¹ With a gentile “foreign race” spouse, the man stood a good chance of presenting a positive “overall impression” at the interview and receiving a Volkstumsausweis that would shield his family from murder. By helping their non-German and even Jewish acquaintances obtain ethnic German identity cards, the VoMi’s female helpers sabotaged the SS’s efforts to identify Odessa’s Volksdeutsche—the precise task that the SS had recruited them to perform.

Despite the SS’s dependence on its Volksdeutsche interpreters, postwar testimony indicates that they were not above suspicion. Beck’s rapid advancement in the VoMi from Claasen’s translator to Goerbig’s secretary to Hoffmeyer’s interpreter, combined with her haughtiness toward both Volksdeutsche and low-ranking SS personnel, chaffed her

⁷⁸⁹ Rundanweisung Nr. 11 / Betrifft [sic] namentliche Erfassung und Registrierung aller Volksdeutschen in Transnistrien, December 28, 1941, BB, R 59/66, 132.

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid., 132.

⁷⁹¹ Aussage von E. S., November 12, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 5, 746.

coworkers.⁷⁹² Her colleagues began spreading rumors about her Jewish former husband—now allegedly an NKVD officer—and her half-Jewish child hidden at her family's former summer residence in nearby Lustdorf. Kirschstein took these rumors seriously enough to hunt for the imaginary child in suburban Odessa while Goerbig, Beck's protector, was away.⁷⁹³

Notwithstanding these reservations, the unit's female employees remained indispensable to the SS for romantic reasons. In contrast to ubiquitous casual liaisons between the unit's German personnel and local Volksdeutsche women, Odessa's VoMi administrators maintained long-lasting relations with the unit's office staff.⁷⁹⁴ Soon after starting as his secretary, for example, Beck began a very public affair with the married Goerbig.⁷⁹⁵ She was not only his frequent guest at high-level social events at Odessa's German Consulate, but she even accompanied him to official functions, such as the opening of the Deutsches Haus.⁷⁹⁶ Beck ordered a local jeweler to smelt gold rubles into two ersatz wedding rings that she presented to Goerbig in 1942.⁷⁹⁷ After the Germans and many of the

⁷⁹² Aussage von O. G., October 19, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-002, Band 4, 687.

⁷⁹³ Aussage von E. S., November 12, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 5, 735. Kirschstein confirmed the embellished rumor concerning Beck's former husband, but denied searching for the child. Verantwortliche Vernehmung von E. A. H. K., February 9, 1965, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 6, 935.

⁷⁹⁴ Among local Volksdeutsche women Kirschstein in particular developed a reputation as a womanizer. Aussage von A. G., August 30, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-002, Band 4, 588. Aussage von O. G., October 19, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-002, Band 4, 687.

⁷⁹⁵ Aussage von A. J., September 3, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-002, Band 4, 601.

⁷⁹⁶ Photos that Beck presented to the Hamburg police show her accompanying Goerbig to a series of social functions at the German Consulate and the Deutsches Haus. Lichtbildmappe I gg. Goerbig u.a., Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-007, Beiakte 3.

⁷⁹⁷ Aussage von E. S., November 12, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft

ethnic Germans evacuated Odessa in March 1944, Goerbig tracked Beck down in VoMi's Gymnasialstrasse Resettlement Camp (*Umsiedlungslager*) in Ostrowo, Poland, and whisked her off to a romantic getaway in Vienna, where they conceived a child.⁷⁹⁸ Similarly, after her stint as Claasen's assistant, Herrlich began a relationship with her supervisor, the head of Sonderkommando R's accounting office, SS-Oberscharführer Hans Franck.⁷⁹⁹ The two married after the war.⁸⁰⁰ Kirschstein's distain for Beck did not extend to Bereichkommando XXV's other female interpreters. Soon after deploying to Transnistria with the unit, he began a relationship with Ingeborg Hirsh, the multilingual daughter of the prewar German Vice Consul to Kishinev (Chişinău) and sole Reich German secretary assigned to Bereichkommando XXV.⁸⁰¹ When Hirsch and the still-married Kirschstein evacuated Odessa, she was four months pregnant.⁸⁰² Focused on matters of the heart, the VoMi's SS staff overlooked—either intentionally or unintentionally—continued abuses of its ad hoc identification procedures by its Volksdeutsche interpreters.

Although retaining local women who resembled the Baltic Germans that Bereichkommando XXV's staff had encountered in earlier assignments reassured the unit's

Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 5, 751-52. According to wartime documentation, SS-Unterscharführer Franck's duties included liaising with other German units in Odessa. Abschrift / Fernspruch / an: Verbindungsstab der Deutschen Wehrmacht für Transnistrien, April 5, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1085, 169.

⁷⁹⁸ Aussage von E. S., November 12, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 5, 728-29.

⁷⁹⁹ Abschrift / Fernspruch / Verbindungsstab der Deutschen Wehrmacht für Transnistrien, April 5, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1085, 169. German Police Decodes No. 1 Traffic: 22.5.44, May 30, 1944, BNA, HW 16, Piece 41, 2.

⁸⁰⁰ Aussage von E. F., December 15, 1966, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-004, Band 8, 1360.

⁸⁰¹ RuSHA Akte Herbert Kirschstein, NARA, RG 242, A3343, RS-C5436, 1132, 1142, 1190.

⁸⁰² Ibid., 1132.

German personnel, it also granted the VoMi's female employees the opportunity to participate in and guide the SS's murderous ethnic classification enterprise at the grassroots level. Focusing on predominately male local auxiliaries in the Soviet Union, recent research has largely overlooked the important role that local women played in the Nazi occupation regime. As scholars like Harvey have noted, German women were important agent of Nazi Germanization plans in the East—a position that expanded their freedom of action beyond Third Reich's gendered constraints.⁸⁰³ As Lower's recent research indicates, this expanded latitude permitted some German women stationed in the East to murder.⁸⁰⁴ While there is no evidence that Volksdeutsche women attached to Bereichkommando XXV killed, their language skills and familiarity with Odessa's ethnic topography afforded them exceptional input in the SS ethnic classification process. Area Volksdeutsche women played a significant role in identifying "authentic" ethnic Germans in need of aid and Volksdeutsche "imposters" to face the SS's brutality. Nevertheless, as the above examples demonstrate, Bereichkommando XXV's female helpers used their influence over ethnic German classification to privilege their friends and acquaintances even when doing so willfully undermined their SS superiors. Confronted with the untidy realities of the city's ethnic multiplicity, Bereichkommando XXV underpinned its embattled ethnic classification efforts with local Volksdeutsche women that it permitted participate in and ultimately to undermine its broader demographic project.

⁸⁰³ Harvey, *Women and the Nazi East*, 4.

⁸⁰⁴ Lower, "Male and Female Holocaust Perpetrators and the East German Approach to Justice, 1949–1963."

Bereichkommando XXV's Descent into Violence

Unable to distinguish Volksdeutsche from the rest of the city's population either themselves or through local intermediaries, the VoMi's Odessa office emulated Sonderkommando R's other Bereichkommandos and began murdering racially suspect Odessians caught applying for or carrying a Volkstumsausweis. Bereichkommando XXV's decision to solve its classification quagmire through murder was distinct from Sonderkommando R's mass killing of Jews in rural Transnistria, which is addressed in chapters seven and eight. Rather, Bereichkommando XXV's involvement in the VoMi's carnage in rural Transnistria was tangential. Although aware of their colleagues' crimes, Odessa's VoMi office lacked both the personnel and the authority to participate in the killing.⁸⁰⁵ As initial Romanian deportations surprised VoMi officials in rural Transnistria, it is unlikely that Bereichkommando XXV knew about the deportations until they were already underway. Goerbig and his staff's role was limited to facilitating subsequent negotiations between Hoffmeyer and Alexianu in which the two may have discussed murdering Jews.⁸⁰⁶ While not directly implicated in the killing, the murders signaled to Bereichkommando XXV's staff that using violence to overcome local obstacles to its plans was now Sonderkommando R's *modus operandi*.

Bereichkommando XXV's killing operations evolved from its efforts to excise

⁸⁰⁵ Beck testified that Hoffmeyer presented members of Bereichkommando XXV with photographic evidence of Sonderkommando R's crimes in rural Transnistria. The photos were allegedly taken by SS-Untersturmführer Georg Bauer, Sonderkommando R's official photographer. Aussage von E. S., November 12, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 5, 734. SS Offizier Akte Georg Bauer, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SSO 040, 45324-5. German Police Decodes Nr 2 Traffic: 6.10.42, October 10, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 36, 2.

⁸⁰⁶ Although Beck testified that she interpreted for Hoffmeyer during his negotiations with the Romanians, she denied that the murder of Jews was a topic of discussion. Aussage von E. S., November 12, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 5, 734.

Romanian influence from Odessa's Volksdeutsche affairs. As discussed earlier, in rural Transnistria Sonderkommando R's personnel contested the authority of the local Romanian civil administration. In Odessa, this conflict assumed a different, albeit no less acrimonious form. There, the VoMi's dozen Reich German staff members administered thousands of Volksdeutsche spread throughout a major city under foreign occupation. Unable to concentrate its ethnic Germans geographically or field a militia unit like Bereichkommandos in the surrounding countryside, Bereichkommando XXV lacked the strength to deter Romanian interference in its affairs, to say nothing of challenging Romanian authorities.⁸⁰⁷ With the Germans at their weakest and the Romanians at their strongest, Odessa became a lightning rod for tensions between the two allied powers.

Despite high-level directives urging restraint, pervasive Romanian retaliation against local Volksdeutsche prompted Goerbig to establish a special detachment to contest specific instances of perceived Romanian meddling.⁸⁰⁸ Well-connected via telephone hotline at the VoMi's Odessa command post, Bereichkommando XXV's self-styled Judicial Section (*Rechtsabteilung*) and responsible Court Officer (*Gerichtsoffizier*) afforded Volksdeutsche round-the-clock protection from the city's Romanian occupiers.⁸⁰⁹ Assigned to the post, Kirschstein—the unit's self-proclaimed “gofer” (*Dienstmädchen*)—later conceded that these

⁸⁰⁷ As Goerbig noted, Bereichkommando XXV's staff attempted to concentrate Volksdeutsche-related institutions near the St. Pauli-Kirche. Aussage von H. J. G., August 24, 1962, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-001, Band 2, 499.

⁸⁰⁸ Aussage von H. J. G., August 24, 1962, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-001, Band 2, 95. Verantwortliche Vernehmung von E. A. H. K., February 9, 1965, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 6, 919. Aussage von P. M., August 29, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-002, Band 4, 1268-70.

⁸⁰⁹ Aussage von O. G., October 19, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-002, Band 4, 686. Aussage von P. A., August 1, 1962, BAL, B162/2297, 24.

elevated titles were a bit pompous for a one-man operation housed in a backroom marked with a cardboard sign.⁸¹⁰ Kirschstein nevertheless had his hands full. As he later noted: “the Romanian police often looked for an excuse to rip off Volksdeutsche ID cards, food, and vehicles.”⁸¹¹ In instances of simple attempted robbery, Kirschstein confronted the Romanian perpetrators directly. As Pauline Zimmermann later recounted: “Sometime in the summer of 1942 Romanian officers attempted to take away my concert grand piano. After notifying the [Ethnic] German Liaison Office [Kirschstein] came and prevented its removal. [Kirschstein] admonished the Romanians that they were not permitted to set foot in my apartment again. He then attached a sign to the apartment door indicating that no one was to enter my apartment again.”⁸¹² Perhaps in retaliation for the continued Romanian theft of Volksdeutsche property, Bereichkommando XXV’s staff—possibly under Kirschstein’s supervision—reportedly began carjacking Romanian employees. As a local tow truck driver for Odessa’s Romanian administrators complained to Wehrmacht investigators in early March 1942, while transporting a commandeered car back to the garage for service “he was chased out of the [tow] truck by German soldiers and the truck with the car attached was driven into the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle’s courtyard.”⁸¹³ In the event that Odessa’s

⁸¹⁰ Verantwortliche Vernehmung von E. A. H. K., February 9, 1965, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 6, 923. Kirschstein served as Bereichkommando XXV’s Court Officer until Walter Vahldieck’s assumed the position in mid-1943 and Kirschstein continued as his assistant. Aussage von H. J. G., August 1, 1962, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-001, Band 2, 95. Aussage von H. K., January 28, 1963, BAL, B162/2301, 121.

⁸¹¹ Ibid.

⁸¹² Aussage von P. A., August 1, 1962, BAL, B162/2297, 24. Kirschstein circulated a certificate of ownership concerning Zimmermann’s piano to Odessa’s Romanian occupiers in May 1942. Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle SS-Sonderkommando BK XXV, Odessa / Bescheinigung, May 13, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 18, Fond 2359, Opus 1, Ed. Hr. 42, 70.

⁸¹³ When interviewed Claasen denied his command’s responsibility for the theft and a subsequent *Feldgendarmerie* search of the VoMi’s motor pool failed to turn up the missing truck. Verbindungsstab der

Romanian authorities arrested Volksdeutsche on real or trumped up charges, Kirschstein intervened in Romanian court proceedings and boasted that he was even able to obtain stays of execution for condemned Volksdeutsche.⁸¹⁴ Whether Kirschstein wielded such authority is unclear—as Beck later noted, he was “a poser.”⁸¹⁵ Be that as it may, as the unit’s Court Officer Kirschstein ran interference with Romanian officials on matters ranging from securing food shipments to obtaining buildings for Volksdeutsche use from the Romanian housing administration.⁸¹⁶

Realizing in the spring of 1942 that their efforts to distribute ethnic German identification cards only to Odessa’s “real” Volksdeutsche had failed, Goerbig and his colleagues decided to expand Kirschstein’s purview to include murdering racially suspect applicants.⁸¹⁷ Whether Goerbig’s superiors consented to Bereichkommando XXV’s decision to murder or whether this is another example of the SS’s “on the spot” decision-making in the East remains unclear.⁸¹⁸ Although distinct from Sonderkommando R’s mass shootings in the

Deutschen Wehrmacht für Transnistrien / an dem Zivilgouverneur von Transnistrien / Betr.: Wegnahme eines LKW’s am 7.3.42 durch deutsche Wehrmachtsangehörige, April 21, 1944, USHMM, RG 31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1086, 45-46.

⁸¹⁴ Verantwortliche Vernehmung von E. A. H. K., June 4, 1962, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-001, Band 1, 136. Wartime documentation suggests that Romanian military authorities tried Volksdeutsche in Odessa for serious offenses. Übersetzung der rumänischen Schriftschstücke [sic], n.d., RG-31.004M, Reel 20, Fond 2361, Opis 1s, Ed. Hr. 7, 278.

⁸¹⁵ Aussage von E. S., November 12, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 5, 739.

⁸¹⁶ Aussage von F. F., September 4, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-002, Band 4, 621.

⁸¹⁷ Kirschstein testified that Goerbig authorized his actions. Verantwortliche Vernehmung von E. A. H. K., June 4, 1962, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-001, Band 1, 141. Beck confirms that Goerbig would have had to authorize Kirschstein’s involvement. Aussage von E. S., November 12, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 5, 735.

⁸¹⁸ Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building*, 8.

surrounding countryside, Bereichkommando XXV's staff presented its local initiatives as a component of the VoMi's mass murder in rural Transnistria.⁸¹⁹ As Kirschstein embellished in his 1944 RuSHA autobiography, his duties included "the liquidation of Jews in the Odessa area."⁸²⁰ At precisely the time that the large-scale murder of Jews in the Transnistrian countryside concluded, Bereichkommando XXV's personnel began pursuing racially suspect Odessians.

The VoMi's initial murders in Odessa targeted Jews who had obtained a Volkstumsausweis illicitly. Its first documented killing occurred in early March 1942, shortly after Kirschstein doubled his staff by recruiting Friedrich Hummel, a twenty-year-old ethnic German from nearby Michaelsfeld, as his assistant.⁸²¹ Apparently on the lookout for Volksdeutsche imposters, Claasen detained "a red-haired, unshaven, medium-sized, Jewish-looking man" when he appeared at the VoMi's office with a Volkstumsausweis.⁸²² After a brief staff meeting, Goerbig ordered Kirschstein to imprison the man in a temporary basement detention cell for interrogation the next morning. Overnight the man escaped Kirschstein's flimsy dungeon, only to be recaptured by a VoMi patrol the following day.⁸²³

⁸¹⁹ Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*, 254-294.

⁸²⁰ RuSHA Akte Herbert Kirschstein, NARA, RG 242, A3343, RS C5436, 1138.

⁸²¹ According to Friedrich Hummel's 1944 Wehrmacht application for German citizenship, he began working for the Wehrmacht in Odessa on March 1, 1942. EWZ Wehrmacht Akte Friedrich Hummel, NARA, A3342-EWZ-W-H025, 1957. As the VoMi's Volksdeutsche auxiliaries received SS uniforms and provisional ranks in late 1942, their EWZ files frequently refer simply to Wehrmacht or Waffen-SS service to represent accurately their time in grade. Given that the United States Embassy in Bonn requested information from the International Tracing Service about Hummel in April 1989, it appears that he came to the attention of the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Special Investigations but was not brought to court. Central Name Index Card for Friedrich Hummel, International Tracing Service Digital Archive, April 10, 1989, Central Name Index, 0.1, 25290894, USHMM.

⁸²² Aussage von E. S., November 12, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 5, 744.

⁸²³ Verantwortliche Vernehmung von E. A. H. K., June 4, 1962, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12

The man's subsequent questioning was brutal. As Kirschstein later described, during interrogations he frequently pummeled suspects with his fists and rubber hoses.⁸²⁴ Satisfied that the man was a Jew, Bereichkommando XXV's staff decided to murder him.

On Goerbig's orders, Kirschstein and Hummel loaded the man into a captured Soviet staff car to transport him to what would become the unit's preferred execution site. Although Hummel and Kirschstein described their Jewish victim as a Russian to conceal their racial motives for the killing—motives considered sufficiently “base” as to carry murder charges in West Germany—their postwar testimony provides the most vivid account of what transpired.⁸²⁵ As Hummel recounted: “Kirschstein ordered me to keep an eye on the Russian and to guard him during the drive. For this reason I was armed with a Russian percussion revolver. Kirschstein drove the car past Odessa's main train station and in the direction of the sanitarium that had housed the NKVD headquarters prior to the war. At a side entrance to the sanitarium Kirschstein stopped the car.”⁸²⁶ As Kirschstein continued: “Hummel, the Russian and I got out. As Hummel looked for the SD shooting pit, I followed [him] with the

Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-001, Band 1, 125. Verantwortliche Vernehmung von E. A. H. K., February 9, 1965, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 6, 918. Aussage von H. K., January 28, 1963, BAL, B162/2301, 126.

⁸²⁴ Verantwortliche Vernehmung von E. A. H. K.” February 9, 1965, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 6, 930.

⁸²⁵ Hummel later conceded to his interviewers that their “Russian” victim was, in fact, a Jew. Aussage von F. H., May 25, 1964, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 5, 897. Although Hummel's admission met the criteria for a murder charge in West Germany, as Canadian citizen and permanent resident of the United States, he remained beyond the jurisdiction of German authorities. CM-1 File for Friedrich H., International Tracing Service, DP Record Collection, 1951, Envelope H-1380. While Hamburg prosecutors concluded that there was sufficient evidence to try Kirschstein on four counts of manslaughter (*Todschlag*), the expiration of the statute of limitations prevented prosecutors from bringing charges. 147 JS 35 / 67 / Vfg., December 21, 1967, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-004, Band 8, 1. Kirschstein's continued denial of racial motives behind the killings apparently dissuaded prosecutors from bringing murder charges against him.

⁸²⁶ Ibid., 894.

Russian. The Russian sensed that he was about to be shot. As he walked next to me he hit me with his right hand. Due to the blow I lurched to the side. As I drew my pistol the Russian was already 30 to 40 meter away and running. I fired at him, who despite the shots ran farther. Hummel heard my shots. He knelt on the ground and fired with his elbow propped up. . . . The Russian was hit by a bullet and fell to the ground. I fired a final shot in his chest through his heart.”⁸²⁷ Prior to returning to Bereichkommando XXV’s headquarters Hummel and Kirschstein took turns posing with the body for photographs, which Kirschstein showed to his friends and relatives a few weeks later while home in Berlin on leave for Easter.⁸²⁸

By the time that Kirschstein returned to Odessa in April 1942, murder had become routine and applied also to women and children who “had obtained an ID card fraudulently.”⁸²⁹ Although Bereichkommando XXV’s primary targets were Jewish Volksdeutsche “imposters,” the SS also targeted gentiles who attempted to benefit from privileged Volksdeutsche status. After repeatedly arresting a local woman for impersonating an ethnic German without adequate proof to act, for example, Kirschstein finally obtained evidence of her Jewish ancestry and had her arrested.⁸³⁰ As Rudolf S., an NSKK member

⁸²⁷ Aussage von H. K., January 28, 1963, BAL, B162/2301, 127. Although in their postwar interrogations both men confirmed the general pattern of events, Hummel denied firing on the man. Aussage von F. H., May 25, 1964, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 5, 896.

⁸²⁸ Verantwortliche Vernehmung von E. A. H. K., June 4, 1962, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-001, Band 1, 126. Aussage von H. K., January 28, 1963, BAL, B162/2301, 130. Aussage von F. H., May 25, 1964, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 5, 894. Betr: Verbrechen gegen die Menschlichkeit. / Beschuldigte: H. K., April 16, 1962, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-006 / Sonderband 1, 3. Aussage von R. S., January 29, 1963, BAL, B162/2301, 130-31.

⁸²⁹ Verantwortliche Vernehmung von E. A. H. K., February 9, 1965, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 6, 921.

⁸³⁰ Aussage von R. S., January 29, 1963, BAL, B162/2301, 132.

seconded to Bereichkommando XXV in mid-1942, recounted: “On the day of her interrogation I watched from a neighboring room as Kirschstein brutally beat her with a rubber truncheon. The next morning she was yanked into a car to be liquidated outside of Odessa. Along with NSKK-Scharführer Erwin Nießner⁸³¹ I drove behind them and witnessed Kirschstein murder the woman through a shot to the neck (*Genickschuß*). Around the location of the murder there were several large open graves that were already partially filled with corpses. The woman’s body was kicked into one of the graves and doused with gasoline from a container that they had brought with to incinerate the body immediately. The arrival of a motorized field police patrol (*Feldgendarmarie*), however, prevented the cremation. The members of the field police fired warning shots to announce their arrival and yelled to Kirschstein: ‘don’t shoot, the woman is a Romanian.’ Kirschstein responded that it was already too late.”⁸³² As the woman’s death demonstrates, posing as Volksdeutsche could prove deadly to Jews and non-Jews alike.

To provide the necessary manpower for expanded operations, the VoMi’s fledgling terror apparatus recruited additional young Volksdeutsche men. Among the new hires was Kirschstein’s “right hand,” twenty-seven-year-old Johannes Volk.⁸³³ As his Volksdeutsche coworkers noted after the war, Volk had earned a deservedly “bad reputation” prior to joining

⁸³¹ SS Offizier Akte Erwin Niessner, NARA, RG 242, A3343 SSO 350A, 512-13. German Police Decodes Nr 2 Traffic: 6.10.42, October 10, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 36, 2. GML Nr. 140, n.d., BNA, HW 16, Piece 60, 126.

⁸³² Aussage von R. S., May 9, 1962, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-001, Band 1, 102.

⁸³³ Aussage von E. F., December 15, 1966, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-004, Band 8, 1363. Aussage von P. W. G. S., February 9, 1967, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-004, Band 8, 1389.

the unit.⁸³⁴ Born in Baden, an ethnic German enclave 60 kilometers north of Odessa, Volk attended German-language school until the age of thirteen or fourteen, when he enrolled in a movie projector operator course in nearby Selz. After working as a projectionist for a traveling cinema troop and in a state-run fruit store, Volk became Baden's postmaster in 1938. Presumably because of his assumed reliability as a state employee, the Soviet officials exempted him from deportation in August 1941.⁸³⁵ During its sweep of the area a few weeks later, Einsatzgruppe D recruited the polyglot Volk—one of the area's few remaining ethnic German men—to serve as an interpreter. According to the testimony of Einsatzgruppe D's former members, by the time that it reached Sevastopol Volk's unit was taking part in the mass shootings.⁸³⁶ Based on Volk's German naturalization application from 1944, he acclimatized to the new Nazi order. Not only did he list his religious affiliation in Nazi terminology as "deistic," (*gottgläubig*) but he also named his second son, born in February 1942, Adolf.⁸³⁷ Returning from his Crimean deployment to Baden, Volk relocated to Odessa in search of work.⁸³⁸ Impressed by his track record as one of the Third Reich's killers, Kirschstein recruited Volk for the VoMi's terror apparatus.⁸³⁹ Clad as an SS-

⁸³⁴ Aussage von L. L., October 15, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-002, Band 4, 667.

⁸³⁵ Aussage von J. V., June 23, 1965, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 6, 1025-26.

⁸³⁶ According to postwar testimony Volk served with Einsatzgruppe D's Einsatzkommando 11b in Sevastopol. Beschuldigtenvernehmung von H. J. F., July 7, 1966, BAL, B 162/1060, 2656. Aussage von O. H. D. N., February 19, 1968, BAL, B 162/1062, 3190.

⁸³⁷ Einbürgerungsantrag Johannes Volk, July 25, 1944, NARA, A3342-EWZ50-I075, 1286. E/G Karte Johannes Volk, July 25, 1944, NARA, RG 242 / A3342-EWZ57-U100, 1572.

⁸³⁸ Volk testified that he moved to Odessa around Christmas 1941. Aussage von J. V., June 23, 1965, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 6, 1026.

⁸³⁹ Ibid., 1027.

Unterscharführer and armed with both a pistol and a submachine gun, for the duration of Odessa's occupation Volk reprised his role as one of Nazi Germany's henchmen.⁸⁴⁰

Assisted by an experienced group of Volksdeutsche killers, in the fall of 1942 Bereichkommando XXV further overstepped its mandate and pursued criminals, who in the midst of a breakdown of law and order, began preying on the city's Volksdeutsche.⁸⁴¹ Although aware that criminal matters fell under Romanian jurisdiction, given its acrimonious conflict with Odessa's Romanian occupiers Bereichkommando XXV's Judicial Section doubted that their allies would take action against the alleged perpetrators.⁸⁴² Resolved to stamp out crimes against Volksdeutsche themselves, Bereichkommando XXV launched a punitive campaign against Odessa's criminals. For example, after hearing that a pair of Russians had kidnapped a young Volksdeutsche woman, raped her, and stolen her clothes, Kirschstein and his staff apprehended the culprits.⁸⁴³ As Kirschstein later recounted: "since the two of them refused to confess in the beginning, I admit that I hit them during the

⁸⁴⁰ Einbürgerungsantrag Johannes Volk, July 25, 1944, NARA, A3342-EWZ50-I075, 1291. Listing his wartime activities as Baden's postmaster until his 1944 evacuation to Poland, Volk applied for Displaced Person status in February 1949 and ultimately immigrated to Canada. CM-1 File for Johannes Volk, February 24, 1949, International Tracing Service Digital Archive, CM/1 Files Germany, 3.2.1.1, 79891081-79891083, USHMM. Also see DP-2 Card Johannes Volk, International Tracing Service Digital Archive, DP-2 Card File, 3.1.1.1, 69749660, USHMM. DP-2 Card Magdalene Volk, International Tracing Service Digital Archive, DP-2 Card File, 3.1.1.1, 69749730, USHMM. DP-2 Card Adolf Volk, International Tracing Service Digital Archive, DP-2 Card File, 3.1.1.1, 69749661, USHMM. According to a Tracing and Documentation request card in the International Tracing Service's Central Name Index, Johannes Volk was the subject of a Tracing and Documentation request on May 18, 1993. It is plausible that the Canadian Department of Justice submitted the inquiry during the course of one of its investigations. As the Canadian Department of Justice's internal records remain inaccessible to scholars and as the International Tracing Service's Tracing and Documentation file for Volk will remain sealed until May 18, 2013, it is impossible to determine the requester at this time. Central Name Index Card for Johannes Volk, International Tracing Service Digital Archive, Central Name Index, 0.1, 53442522, USHMM.

⁸⁴¹ Völkl, *Transnistrien und Odessa*, 35.

⁸⁴² Aussage von E. A. H. K., June 4, 1962, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-001, Band 1, 141.

⁸⁴³ Aussage von E. A. H. K., February 9, 1965, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 6, 131-32.

interrogation. What I later found out was hair-raising. Incensed by their outrageous crimes, I drove with them to the outskirts of Odessa. . . . At a dip near the catacombs I shot both Russians from behind. The bodies were left at the entrance to the catacombs.”⁸⁴⁴ Committed to expanding the VoMi’s sovereignty over Odessa’s Volksdeutsche affairs, Bereichkommando XXV refused to tolerate common criminals threatening the city’s Volksdeutsche.

Perhaps nothing typifies the VoMi’s determination to use its authority over Volksdeutsche affairs in Odessa to expand its influence in the city more than its 1943 anti-partisan mission against Soviet forces in the city’s catacombs. Some 200 kilometers in length and with over 160 entrances, Odessa’s catacombs provided the ideal lair from which Soviet agents could launch a sustained underground campaign against the city’s occupiers.⁸⁴⁵ Although quasi-dormant after mid-1942, Soviet partisans in Odessa’s catacombs remained a thorn in the side of the city’s occupiers that Romanian forces only periodically engaged.⁸⁴⁶ When a young Volksdeutsche woman appeared at Bereichkommando XXV’s command post with a fantastic story about her service with the city’s subterranean fifth column, Goerbig and his colleagues pounced on the opportunity to resolve Odessa’s partisan problem.

As Beck later recounted, the very pregnant former medical school student had conceived a child with her Russian husband, a Red Army lieutenant stationed in the catacombs. In exchange for prenatal care in Odessa’s VoMi-run hospital, her husband agreed to surrender and work as a double agent. Reinforced with Sonderkommando R personnel from Landau, the entirety of Bereichkommando XXV’s staff—including its Volksdeutsche

⁸⁴⁴ Ibid., 131.

⁸⁴⁵ Dallin, *Odessa, 1941-1944*, 221.

⁸⁴⁶ Ibid., 227.

auxiliaries, Hummel and Volk—cordoned off Sobornaia Ploshchad', the prearranged location for the Red Army lieutenant's surrender. So as not to spook the man by the sight of uniformed SS personnel, Goerbig assigned Beck to accompany the woman to the meeting point and to wait with her for her husband on a park bench. When the man arrived, they proceeded to Bereichkommando XXV's headquarters. Under the supervision of Odessa's chief Abwehr officer, Lieutenant Colonel Johannes Schindler,⁸⁴⁷ the Soviet officer used his arranged frequency and codes to spread misinformation to his Red Army superiors, who recognized the ruse.⁸⁴⁸ Although unsuccessful, Bereichkommando XXV's foray into anti-partisan measures underscores the unit's effort to use its limited authority over Volksdeutsche matters as an entrée to expanded influence in Odessa.⁸⁴⁹

While the VoMi's Lilliputian terror apparatus inserted the SS into the bailiwick of Odessa's Romanian occupiers, its efforts to police "Germandom's" boundaries were ineffective. As the VoMi prepared to evacuate Odessa in early March 1944, Bereichkommando XXV's staff implemented a final selection that ironically attempted to punish Odessians who denied being Volksdeutsche. Relaying the evacuation order through its local ethnic German precinct captains (*Obmänner*), the VoMi commanded all

⁸⁴⁷ Oberkommando des Herres / Herres-Personalamt Personalakte für Schindler, Johannes, NARA, RG 242, A-3356, Reel 743.

⁸⁴⁸ Aussage von E. S., November 12, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 5, 748-49. Independently, Kirschstein confirmed Bereichkommando XXV's anti-partisan mission. Verantwortliche Vernehmung von E. A. H. K., February 9, 1965, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 6, 927-28.

⁸⁴⁹ Bereichkommando XXV's counterinsurgency operation in Odessa's catacombs was not the first German involvement in flushing out partisans. In December 1941, the Wehrmacht offered their Romanian allies technical assistance in locating and capturing Soviet subterranean forces—an offer that Odessa's Romanian administrators accepted in early 1942. Verbindungsstab der Deutsche Wehrmacht für Transnistrien Abt. Ia / Betr.: Reinigung Odessas von Partisanen, December 17, 1941, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1083, 130. Dallin, *Odessa, 1941-1944*, 227.

Volksdeutsche to report to the city's German school with their luggage for evacuation to Poland. As one of the evacuees later testified: "it was made clear to us that those who did not follow the order would be shot."⁸⁵⁰ Anecdotal evidence suggests that the VoMi carried out its threat.⁸⁵¹ When Odessa's Volksdeutsche baker refused to separate from his ethnically Russian wife and evacuate with the Germans, for example, Bereichkommando XXV's death squad allegedly gunned him down.⁸⁵² Threatening the city's denizens who resisted evacuation as Volksdeutsche undermined the SS's mission to identify Odessa's ethnic Germans by diluting the category's racial and political "purity." Given that ethnic German status provided Odessa's residents with an opportunity to flee the Soviet advance, escaping the city as a *Volksdeutscher* proved attractive to many Odessians who might not otherwise have chosen to be identified as such. As the evacuees were to settle German-occupied Poland, impressing reluctant and often suspect Volksdeutsche into evacuation transports merely further threatened the Nazi population project. Confronted with an ethnic reality that the VoMi could not control, Bereichkommando XXV's increased coercion became self-sabotage.

Conclusion

Bergen has noted that "the essential tenuousness of the concept [of 'ethnic

⁸⁵⁰ Aussage von J. G., July 30, 1962, BAL, B162/2297, 39. Other postwar testimony confirms this draconian evacuation order. Aussage von L. L., October 15, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-002, Band 4, 668.

⁸⁵¹ Dallin notes that the SS's evacuation of ethnic Germans from Transnistria was partially involuntary. Dallin, *Odessa, 1941-1944*, 243.

⁸⁵² Aussage von F. F., September 4, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-002, Band 4, 615. Aussage von J. G., July 30, 1962, BAL, B162/2297, 40. Another witness testified that the man mutilated his hand to avoid evacuation. Aussage von L. L., October 15, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-002, Band 4, 668.

Germanness'] contributed to the production of anti-semitism in Eastern Europe.”⁸⁵³ This same tenuousness also shaped the VoMi’s bloody attempts to “make” and “unmake” Volksdeutsche in Odessa. The city’s ethnic German denizens presented the SS with tantalizing prospects for a future German outpost to challenge long-term Romanian influence in southern Ukraine’s *entrepôt*. Dispatching its largest and most sophisticated Bereichkommando in Transnistria, Sonderkommando R attempted to succor Odessa’s Volksdeutsche. Nevertheless, the SS feared that Odessa’s fluid ethnic boundaries threatened its entire demographic project by degrading the racial “worth” of the city’s Volksdeutsche denizens. To identify members of the *Volksgemeinschaft* in Odessa, the SS, aided by local Volksdeutsche women, undertook an extensive, but ultimately failed ethnic classification campaign. Unable to separate Volksdeutsche from their fellow Odessians through classification, the VoMi, again assisted by local ethnic Germans, expanded earlier efforts to frustrate area Romanian authorities to murder systematically suspected Volksdeutsche “imposters.” Staffed with personnel for operations against local criminals and partisans, Odessa’s VoMi officers used their purview over Volksdeutsche affairs to insert German influence into the bailiwick of the city’s Romanian occupiers. Not only did the VoMi’s expanded activities fail to dislodge Romanian influence, but using coercion to police Germandom’s boundaries in retreat threatened to dilute further the “purity” of the city’s ethnic German population by encouraging even reluctant residents to flee with the SS.

Beyond recovering a previously understudied dimension to the history of the German occupation of the Soviet Union, an analysis of VoMi ethnic German policy in Odessa, and

⁸⁵³ Doris L. Bergen, “The Nazi Concept of ‘Volksdeutsche’ and the Exacerbation of Anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe, 1939-45,” 570.

especially the practice of Volksdeutsche classification there, highlights three features of Sonderkommando R's operations in Transnistria. First, disregarding superior orders to maintain good relations with the Third Reich's Romanian allies, local SS officials used their authority over ethnic German matters to expand dramatically German influence in Odessa. Second, when confronted with a local ethnic reality that proved exceptionally difficult to classify even in comparison to earlier, tortured SS Volksdeutsche registration efforts elsewhere, the VoMi selected murder as a technique to police Germandom's imaginary boundaries in the city. And lastly, Bereichkommando XXV's rapid evolution from Nazi Volksdeutsche welfare agency, to ethnic classification unit, to death squad provided opportunities for area residents, and particularly local women, to contribute to, and in some instance to steer the "machinery of destruction" at the grassroots level.

**CHAPTER VII: FROM MOBILIZERS TO KILLERS: SONDERKOMMANDO R
AND THE MASS MURDER OF TRANSNISTRIA'S JEWS, DECEMBER 1941-
APRIL 1942**

When interviewed in September 1944 by the deputy head of the Second Counterintelligence Division of SMERSH attached to the Second Ukrainian Front in Romania, SS-Obersturmführer Assmann explained Sonderkommando R's purpose to his Soviet interrogators. According to Assmann, while "Sonderkommando R . . . arrived on September 15-16 . . . in Transnistria under the pretext of aiding the territory's 135,000 [ethnic] Germans and improving their daily existence," the unit's true purpose was to insert "punitive SS forces in Transnistria for the mass extermination of Soviet citizens, particularly Jews."⁸⁵⁴ While Assmann's undoubtedly coerced interrogation exaggerates the degree to which the VoMi initially regarded mass murder as part of Sonderkommando R's responsibilities, his statement nevertheless captures the unit's rapidly changing mission during the winter of 1941-42. Within the span of a few weeks, Sonderkommando R evolved from a Volksdeutsche agency tasked with mobilizing and caring for area Volksdeutsche into a killing unit responsible for the murder of tens of thousands of Jews. Why and how did an organization that was barely staffed and equipped to manage Transnistria's Volksdeutsche settlements begin killing Jews in Romanian-occupied territory? By recovering the

⁸⁵⁴ Protokol doprosa / A. M. G., September 20, 1944, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2902, 30.

antecedents, implementation, and conclusion of Sonderkommando R's participation in the mass murder of Jews in Transnistria during late 1941 and early 1942, this chapter addresses precisely this question.

Sonderkommando R's role in mass murder was an unanticipated consequence of the Third Reich's alliance with Romania. Despite its established anti-Semitic track record, Antonescu's Romania pursued murderous anti-Semitic policies that frequently complemented but also periodically collided with Nazi Germany's aims and timetable. One key difference was conceptual. For Germany, the Final Solution meant the continental eradication and ultimately murder of all European Jewry. For Romania, solving the Jewish "question" meant eliminating Jews from territory that it claimed and controlled. So long as Jews disappeared from its sphere of influence, Romania's leadership cared little about their fate. In southeastern Europe, these parallel wars against the Jews precipitated a shoving match between the two allied powers over the fate of area Jews—a conflict in which Sonderkommando R became a frontline unit. While the VoMi, and particularly Hoffmeyer's command, relished projecting its authority in Transnistria, German authorities understood the area fundamentally as a Romanian occupation zone. As such, from the German perspective, it was Romania's responsibility to pull its weight in the Final Solution and to solve the Jewish "problem" in the region without impinging on German interests. Intent on clearing Jews from Romanian-controlled territory, the Antonescu regime regarded Transnistria as an intermediary deportation destination for Jews from Bessarabia and Bukovina prior to their planned eventual expulsion into German-occupied Soviet territory. German refusal to permit their Romanian allies to deport Jews farther east into the Reichskommissariat Ukraine derailed Romanian plans and created a bottleneck of Jewish deportees in northeastern

Transnistria—the epicenter of the VoMi’s efforts to succor and to Nazify the Black Sea Germans.

While conflicting German and Romanian policies on how to solve the Jewish question lay the dry tinder for Sonderkommando R’s participation in mass murder, the initial spark that ignited the murderous conflagration came from a typhus outbreak among Jewish prisoners in the region. In anticipation of being able to deport Jews into German-occupied Ukraine, during the fall of 1941 Romanian authorities had concentrated Jewish expellees from Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Transnistria in camps and ghettos along the Bug River. Owing to the abhorrent sanitary conditions in these facilities, many of the prisoners contracted typhus, and the epidemic threatened to spread to the surrounding population—a prospect that terrified Sonderkommando R. In cooperation with local Romanian authorities, Sonderkommando R decided to deploy its Selbstschutz to assist the Romanians in murdering local Jewish inmates. As part of this initial wave of killing, Sonderkommando R’s ethnic German militiamen gunned down some 25,000 Jewish inmates at the Bogdanovka (Bogdanivka) camp on the Bug River’s right bank during late December 1941 and early January 1942. In anticipation of killing techniques later used at German extermination centers in occupied Poland, the Selbstschutz incorporated both cremation and Jewish forced laborers into the killing process to solve concrete obstacles that the perpetrators faced.

While this shooting operation was underway, Romanian expulsions of Jews into northeastern Transnistria intensified. Concerned that the increasing number of Jews housed in facilities around Odessa constituted both a security threat and a public health hazard in a militarily sensitive area, Antonescu ordered his local commanders to remove Jews from the city’s immediate environs. Still hopeful that future Jewish deportations into German-

controlled territory might yet be possible and aware that Hoffmeyer's command had become a most willing partner in mass killing, local Romanian authorities began deporting more Jews from the Odessa area into northeastern Transnistria. Hoffmeyer and his subordinates responded to this resurgent epidemic threat by again mustering local ethnic German militiamen to murder Jews. A detailed examination of Selbstschutz units in Bereichkommando XI based in Rastatt, which were both the most active and remain the best documented, reveals not only the scale and brutality of Volksdeutsche involvement in mass killing operations, but also how local commanders refined the tactics that they had developed at the Bogdanovka camp. These killings continued until Romania scaled back its deportation in the face of mounting German diplomatic pressure and decreasing Romanian enthusiasm for mass murder. By the time that Romanian deportations ceased in the spring of 1942, Sonderkommando R's militiamen had murdered close to 50,000 Jews.

Romania and the Holocaust

Romanian involvement in the Holocaust has been the subject of considerable historical research by Jean Ancel, Dennis Deletant, and Radu Ioanid, among other scholars.⁸⁵⁵ While the Romanian state's fluid anti-Semitic policies remain the topic of recent and ongoing study by Romanian specialists, the outline of the country's simultaneous, yet separate war against the Jews is clear. Historically, Romania's anti-Semitic track record, like that of many of its Eastern European neighbors, was well-established. In contrast to France, which granted Jews full civil rights in 1791 or the German Empire, which emancipated Jews at its inception in 1871, Romania did not grant full civil equality to Jews until after the First

⁸⁵⁵ Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-42*; Deletant, "Ghetto Experience in Golta, Transnistria, 1942-1944." Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*.

World War, when the conflict's victors forced Romania to make this concession in exchange for territorial gains. During the interwar period, preexisting traditional Christian anti-Judaism, perpetuated by the Romanian Orthodox Church, reinforced economic anti-Semitic sentiment directed against the country's Jews, who were overrepresented in the Romanian middle class relative to their proportion of the population. Romanian's territorial expansions into previously Habsburg lands in Transylvania and northern Bukovina and the formerly Russian province of Bessarabia at the conclusion of the First World War further exacerbated anti-Semitism. The majority of Jews who inhabited these territories were Yiddish, Hungarian or Russian-speaking, which fueled Romanian fears that unassimilated ethnic minorities, and especially Jews, were diluting the ethnic purity of the expanded Romanian state. Anti-Semitism remained a prominent feature of interwar Romanian political discourse and constituted a key platform for the two contemporary political parties, the Christian National Defense League and the League of the Archangel Michael (later known as the Iron Guard). This discourse found expression in Romanian state policy during the early 1940s. In August 1940, the Romanian government under King Carol II emulated the 1935 Nürnberg Laws in Germany and enacted Law No. 2650, which circumscribed social interactions between Jews and gentiles and codified a more expansive definition of who was a Jew than its German model. After territorial losses following the Second Vienna Award forced Carol II to abdicate the following month, Antonescu's new Legionary State pursued further anti-Semitic measures based on National Socialist policies in Germany. During his first six months in office, Antonescu implemented measures that included expropriating Jews of their property for redistribution to the country's gentiles, conscripting Jews for forced labor service, and limiting Jewish access to education and healthcare. Within the span of less than a year,

Romania erected a wall of anti-Semitic legislation that it had taken the Nazi regime the better part of a decade to build in Germany. Among Germany's present and future allies, Romania appeared, by early 1941, to be particularly receptive to German entreaties to participate in the Final Solution.

Despite what the Nazis correctly regarded as auspicious anti-Semitic foundations, Romanian anti-Semitic policies differed from those of the Third Reich in both content and chronology. Unlike Nazi Germany, Romania maintained a double standard in that authorities regarded those deemed to be assimilated Romanian Jews differently from those viewed as unassimilated foreign Jews from newly-acquired territories. For Romania, like neighboring Hungary and Bulgaria, the decisive factor was culture, not race. While Romania pursued expropriatory and discriminatory measures against assimilated Jews in the Regat—the 1859 boundaries of the principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia—it did not target these Jews for annihilation. By contrast, Romanian authorities sought to remove or murder allegedly foreign Jews living in Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, whom they viewed as alien and therefore a threat to the expanded Romanian state. During the war, this distinction led to the absurd situation in which the leaders of Romania's Jewish community, such as Dr. Wilhelm Filderman, continued to meet with high-level members of the Romanian government in Bucharest as Romanian military and police forces were murdering thousands of Jews in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union—a situation that German authorities found unfathomable.

The Romanian government's appetite for pursuing anti-Jewish measures peaked and declined with Germany's military fortunes. Although anti-Semitic pogroms had punctuated the leadership struggle between Antonescu and the Iron Guard in early 1940, Romanian anti-

Jewish violence took full form following the invasion of the Soviet Union, in which Romania had agreed to participate to make good its recent territorial losses. At Iași, on the border between the Regat and Bessarabia, which Soviet forces had occupied the previous year, Romanian forces unleashed a multiday pogrom during which more than 4,000 Jews perished. This pattern repeated itself as the Romanian military advanced into Bessarabia, Bukovina, and the Soviet Union's pre-1939 border territories. In Kishinev, during July 1941, Romanian forces and their German counterparts systematically shot many of the city's Jewish denizens and deported the survivors. Romanian anti-Jewish violence reached its peak a few months later, when, following the destruction of the Romanian military headquarters in Odessa in late October 1941, Romanian forces in the city shot and burned to death up to 25,000 Jews, whom the Romanians blamed for the explosion. Although Romanian mass killing of Jews escalated well into 1942, the Romanian government's appetite for anti-Semitic violence waned during the latter half of 1942 as prospects of total German victory faltered. In fall 1942, for example, Antonescu postponed indefinitely the implementation of an agreement that had been reached with Germany to deport Jews from the Regat to Operation Reinhard's clandestine killing centers in Poland. During 1943 and early 1944, Romanian authorities not only suspended deportations of Jews and Roma to Transnistria, which they had previously pursued with great enthusiasm, but they began to permit the deportees to return to Romanian-controlled territory. The coordinated mass killing campaign that Transnistria's Romanian civil administrators pursued with Sonderkommando R's assistance during the winter of 1941-42 thus constituted the high watermark of a pattern of Romanian anti-Jewish violence that tracked carefully with the ebbs and flows of Germany's military position.

While Romanian and German authorities pursued similarly intense anti-Semitic

campaigns during the first year of Operation Barbarossa, the two allies differed significantly on what the Jewish problem was and how it might be solved. Although by summer 1941 the Nazi regime had not yet decided to kill all of European Jewry, the Third Reich had anticipated murdering initially a portion and eventually all Soviet Jews whom its forces encountered. Prior to the invasion, German planners proposed killing the region's Jews through an unspecified combination of starvation and exposure in Arctic Russia. As the geographic requirements of this plan became infeasible, German authorities changed to a policy of immediate and total mass killing perpetrated by mobile shooting squads.⁸⁵⁶ By contrast, as Vladimir Solonari's recent study highlights, the goals of Romanian anti-Semitic policies were more limited. To eliminate what they considered inassimilable ethnic minorities and to solidify their control over the provinces of Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, which the Soviet Union had wrested from their country in 1940, Romania's leaders enacted a program of ethnic cleansing designed to eliminate Jews and other allegedly troublesome minorities, such as Roma, from the historic borders of Greater Romania.⁸⁵⁷ Deportation deep into the Soviet Union and, according to Antonescu, preferably across the Ural Mountains, constituted the most attractive means to this end for the country's rulers.⁸⁵⁸ Provided that Jews from the recently reacquired provinces of Bessarabia and northern Bukovina disappeared, it mattered little to Romanian authorities if they reached their destination or if Romanians, Germans, or their local auxiliaries murdered them along the way. Whereas by mid-summer 1941 Germans plans envisioned murdering Soviet Jews

⁸⁵⁶ Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution*, 103.

⁸⁵⁷ Vladimir Solonari, *Purifying the Nation: Population Exchange and Ethnic Cleansing in Nazi Allied Romania* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

⁸⁵⁸ Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 142.

outright and regarded deportation and ghettoization as stopgap measures, Romanian policies, notwithstanding intense killing operations, such as those in Kishinev and Odessa, continued to prefer deportation to mass shooting.

These contradictory initiatives came to a head shortly after the beginning of the invasion of the Soviet Union. In late July 1941, after German and Romanian forces had driven the Red Army out of Bessarabia and northern Bukovina and pushed across the Dniester River into the Soviet Union's pre-1939 borderlands, Romanian authorities in the two reoccupied provinces began deporting local Jews into the occupied Soviet Union. The German Eleventh Army, whose rear area was the intended destination of the Romanian Jewish transports, objected vociferously that these uncoordinated expulsions constituted an unanticipated security risk and refused to accept the deportees. German objections and Romanian remonstrations reached Antonescu, who explained to Manfred von Killinger, the German ambassador to Bucharest, that his subordinates were merely acting in accordance with the Third Reich's anti-Jewish policies that Hitler had revealed to him during a state visit to Munich in early June. According to Antonescu, it was the Wehrmacht, not the Romanians, that was preventing the execution of Hitler's orders by refusing to accept the Jewish deportees. As high-level negotiations between the Romanians and the Germans progressed and as area Romanian authorities continued to push Jews across the Dniester River into the German Eleventh Army's operational area, local German commanders tasked Einsatzgruppe D with removing the nearly 30,000 Jewish deportees, who had already reached the army's rear area on the Dniester River's left bank. On or about August 20, 1941, Einsatzgruppe D spearheaded a reverse deportation that aimed to return the Jewish expellees to Romanian-controlled territory. Despite localized Romanian resistance, Einsatzgruppe D

drove more than 27,000 Jews back into Romanian-controlled territory and murdered more than 1,200 deportees, who were physically unable to keep up with the transport.⁸⁵⁹ Six months later, when Romania and Germany were once more at loggerheads about deporting Jews across the Bug River, Romanian authorities again combined unilateral deportations with diplomatic prevarication. This time, however, Sonderkommando R assisted Romanian authorities in murdering the Jewish deportees.

Subsequent German and Romanian diplomatic agreements about the administration of occupied Soviet Union provided the Romanians with territory that simultaneously facilitated continued Jewish deportations from Bessarabia and northern Bukovina and yet left combustibles to be reignited in the foreseeable future. Shortly after Einsatzgruppe D successfully repelled Romanian deportations across the Dniester River, the August 30, 1941, Treaty of Tighina declared the territory between the Dniester and Bug Rivers a Romanian occupation zone. Although the treaty permitted the German military to station liaison and logistical units in the region, the accord granted the Romanians a free hand in the area, which included the option to ramp up deportations from Bessarabia and Bukovina. Antonescu was so eager to expand earlier deportations that, even before the two powers formalized the treaty, he instructed the Romanian Army and Alexianu to begin preparations for the large-scale expulsion of Jews from Bessarabia and northern Bukovina into Transnistria. For Antonescu, however, Transnistria was merely an intermediate destination, where Romanian authorities were to concentrate the Jews of Bessarabia and northern Bukovina before their

⁸⁵⁹ Andrej Angrick, "The Escalation of German-Rumanian Anti-Jewish Policy after the Attack on the Soviet Union," *Yad Vashem Studies* 26 (1998): 231-232.

eventual expulsion deeper into the Soviet Union.⁸⁶⁰ Despite the fact that the Treaty of Tighina countenanced this possibility, section seven of the agreement held that “the deportation of Jews across the Bug is currently not possible . . . they [the Jews] must therefore be placed in concentration camps and put to work until operations are complete and a deportation to the East is possible.”⁸⁶¹ This agreement nevertheless set the stage for a future showdown between the allied powers regarding when would be the appropriate time to transport surviving Jews from Transnistria into German-occupied Soviet territory. As murdering Jews would occupy German authorities in the region for much of the next three years, they had little interest in importing additional Jews, whose murders they regarded as the responsibility of their Romanian counterparts. Likewise, given the Romanian focus on ethnic cleansing as a tool to create an ethnically pure Greater Romania—as opposed to Germany’s continent-wide murderous ambitions—and the Romanian desire to enlist German support in achieving this aim, the Romanian government had every reason to seek the speedy removal of Jews across the Bug River. While in the short-term the Treaty of Tighina alleviated tensions between German and Romanian authorities over Jewish deportations into German-controlled territory, it merely delayed an eventual showdown between the two allies.

Romanian Jewish Deportation to the Bug River

The Romanian decision in late 1941 to deport Odessian Jews to the right bank of the Bug River, the cusp of the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, was the latest in a series of rolling Romanian Jewish deportations. Of the some 315,000 Jews who inhabited Bessarabia and

⁸⁶⁰ Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-42*, vol. 1, 56.

⁸⁶¹ Vereinbarungen über die Sicherung, Verwaltung und Wirtschaftsauswertung der Gebiete zwischen Dnjestr und Bug (Transnistrien) und Bug und Dnjepr (Bug-Dnjepr-Gebiet), August 30, 1941, NARA, T120/3132/E510834.

northern Bukovina prior to the invasion, approximately 125,000 Jews fled with or were deported by Soviet authorities, leaving roughly 190,000 Jews under Romanian and German control in the region.⁸⁶² Romanian preparations to deport Bessarabia and northern Bukovina's remaining Jews started shortly after the provinces' occupation by Romanian and German forces early in the campaign. In early October 1941, less than six weeks after the Treaty of Tighina had designated Transnistria as a Romanian occupation zone, Antonescu ordered the wholesale expulsion of Jews from Bessarabia and northern Bukovina across the Bug River and into Transnistria.⁸⁶³ Romanian authorities detained local Jews and incarcerated them in either makeshift ghettos or transit camps, such as those in Secureni, Edineți, Mărsulești, and Vertujeni.⁸⁶⁴ Bessarabia and northern Bukovina's occupiers gave little thought to public hygiene or to provisioning these facilities. Perpetual theft by Romanian guards exacerbated the already dire living conditions of the growing number of Jewish captives. Ioanid estimates that of the 190,000 Jews that Romanian authorities sought to deport to Transnistria, only 125,000 Jews survived long enough to cross the Dniester River between 1941 and 1942. The territories' remaining 65,000 Jews were either murdered on the spot by Romanian and German forces or died as a result of the deplorable living conditions that their Romanian captors had created for them as they awaited deportation to Transnistria.⁸⁶⁵

While Romanian deportations emptied Bessarabia and Bukovina of their Jewish

⁸⁶² Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 172-173.

⁸⁶³ Ibid., 142, 155.

⁸⁶⁴ Ibid., 172-174.

⁸⁶⁵ Ibid., 174.

populations, these coordinated expulsions increased dramatically the number of Jews in Transnistria. Based on the admittedly problematic 1939 Soviet census, the portion of southern Ukraine designated as Transnistria by the Treaty of Tighina had a Jewish population of 311,000, of whom more than 200,000 Jews lived in Odessa and accounted for approximately a third of the city's population.⁸⁶⁶ As in Bessarabia and Bukovina, Soviet authorities had relocated (either voluntarily or involuntarily) a sizable portion of the local Jewish population to the Soviet interior. Informed estimates suggest that Soviet officials removed between one third and one half of the region's Jews prior to the arrival of German and Romanian forces.⁸⁶⁷ Soviet authorities were unable to maintain this rate of evacuation in Odessa, which remained under siege by invading forces from August to October 1941. Much of the city's large Jewish population was thus unable to flee ahead of the Red Army's retreat.⁸⁶⁸ Ironically, the number of local Jews who made good their escape roughly equaled the number of Jews whom Romanian authorities deported to Transnistria. By dint of their country's own policy of coordinated Jewish expulsion, at the start of the occupation Romanian officials administered territory whose total number of Jews remained virtually unchanged from 1939.

Transnistria's Romanian occupiers made two incorrect assumptions that ultimately doomed Romanian attempts to solve its Jewish "problem" through the continuous expulsion of Jews yet deeper into the Soviet Union. First, Romanian planners, Antonescu included,

⁸⁶⁶ Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-42*, vol. 1, 17.

⁸⁶⁷ Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 177.

⁸⁶⁸ Dallin argues convincingly that Soviet authorities placed greater emphasis on dismantling and removing Odessa's industrial base and port facilities than on evacuating local residents. Dallin, *Odessa, 1941-1944*, 34.

assumed that the Treaty of Tighina's prohibition against the deportation of Jews across the Bug River and into German-occupied Ukraine was a temporary restriction. Given the success of the renewed German advance into the Soviet Union in September and October 1941, the commensurate expectation of imminent victory, and the fact that the earlier ban on expelling Jews across the Dniester River had evaporated quickly, the Romanians believed quite plausibly through the fall of 1941 that deportation would still solve their Jewish "problem." Second, Romanian authorities had anticipated that the majority of Transnistria's Jews would flee prior to the occupation, leaving only a few local Jews in the area.⁸⁶⁹ These Jews, the Romanians concluded, could be expelled farther east along with the newly arrived Jewish deportees from Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, thereby making Transnistria also *judenrein*. Owing to the German refusal to open its portion of occupied Ukraine to Jewish deportees and the unexpectedly large number of local Jews who remained in Transnistria, Romanian anti-Jewish policy in the region was flawed from its very inception—a reality that would have dire consequences for area Jews.

Based on these presuppositions, during the fall of 1941 Romanian authorities began to incarcerate both local Jews and Jewish deportees in a series of temporary concentration camps and ghettos located strategically near the Bug River so that once German authorities green lighted a resumption of expulsions, the facilities' prisoners could be spirited into German-occupied territory.⁸⁷⁰ Transnistria's Romanian civil administrators forced tens of thousands of Jews into camps and ghettos that, even by the undeniably low standards of wartime Romania, were abysmal. Beyond the notorious lack of concern by Romanian

⁸⁶⁹ Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-42*, 63.

⁸⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 56.

authorities for the welfare of their Jewish captives, the facilities were designed neither to house the number of Jewish inmates that Romanian authorities imprisoned, nor to be in use for more than a short period of time. Jewish inmates in Romanian captivity in Transnistria suffered from an acute lack of sanitation and what food Romanian authorities made available to them was frequently unfit for human consumption.⁸⁷¹ As Deletant, who has studied Transnistria's Jewish ghettos and concentration camps, plausibly suggests, their conditions were worse than comparable sites of internment in German-occupied Poland. Whereas in occupied Poland, German authorities frequently established ghettos in cities with large preexisting Jewish populations that provided an infrastructure on which Jews could draw for support, their Romanian counterparts created concentration camps and ghettos in proximity to likely points of departure for subsequent deportation. Similarly, while Polish Jews ghettoized in their home towns could live off saved resources, Jewish deportees to Transnistria arrived in the region destitute. During the winter of 1941-42, Transnistria's ghettos thus had a mortality rate that was more than twice as high as that of the Warsaw ghetto.⁸⁷² The collision of Romanian plans to expel a more limited number of Jews across the Bug River within a matter of weeks or months collided with the realities of German allies, who had no plans to open their occupation zone to Jewish deportees from Transnistria, and an unexpectedly large remaining local Jewish population. The result was what Raul Hilberg described as a "prolonged disaster."⁸⁷³

⁸⁷¹ Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 202-217.

⁸⁷² In comparison to the Warsaw ghetto, which had a 12 to 15 percent mortality rate, during the winter of 1941-42, Transnistria's ghettos had a 30 to 50 percent mortality rate. Deletant, "Ghetto Experience in Golta, Transnistria, 1942-1944," 28.

⁸⁷³ Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 283.

The German Fear of Epidemic Typhus

Sonderkommando R's involvement in the mass murder of Jews in coordination with the Romanian military and civil administration constituted a departure from the unit's established tasks of succoring the region's Volksdeutsche and mobilizing them for the National Socialist cause. While Hoffmeyer's subordinates used brutal and frequently murderous tactics to police the region's Volksdeutsche settlements for the Nazi regime's racial or political opponents, these localized killings were a far cry from the mass shootings that Sonderkommando R perpetrated during the winter of 1941-42. In principle, Einsatzgruppe D's sweep through southern Ukraine during the summer of 1941 had been the German contribution to the murder of the region's Jews—an enterprise that, by the fall of 1941, the Nazi regime regarded as an exclusively Romanian affair. Why did Sonderkommando R, a unit whose personnel remained mired in what was periodically a low-level conflict with Transnistria's Romanian rulers, agree to assist their Romanian counterparts in murdering Jews when established German precedent dictated that the Romanians alone were responsible for solving the region's Jewish "problem"?

The decision of Sonderkommando R's commanders to cooperate with the Romanians in the mass murder of Jews in rural Transnistria was both a consequence of a deep-seeded German perception that Jews were carriers of communicable disease and an incremental response to the escalation of Romanian Jewish deportations. Both Romanian and German authorities—including Sonderkommando R—recognized that the Romanian policy of ghettoizing Jews along the Bug River created the perfect environment for the outbreak of epidemics, especially typhus. During the fall of 1941, typhus erupted throughout Romanian ghettos in Transnistria and reached such proportions that, by December 1941, it was a

frequent topic of discussion between Alexianu and Antonescu.⁸⁷⁴ The typhus epidemic that raged among Transnistria's Jewish prisoners posed not simply a public health hazard to the region's other residents, but also fueled established German anti-Semitic fears that Jews were especially prone to spreading the disease. According to German medical assumptions that predated the Nazis, because of their alleged poor hygienic habits Jews were often infested with body lice that carried the typhus-causing *Rickettsia* bacteria.⁸⁷⁵ For many German physicians, the medical term for typhus, *Fleckenfieber* (spotted fever), quickly evolved into *Judenfieber* (Jew fever).⁸⁷⁶ To combat this public health hazard, German medical personnel in occupied Poland were among the first to advocate ghettoization as a means of quarantining the supposedly infectious Jews from the rest of the population.⁸⁷⁷ Given the appalling overcrowding, lack of sanitation, and scarcity of food, typhus became what Hilberg described as "the ghetto disease par excellence."⁸⁷⁸ German authorities created a "self-fulfilling prophecy" whereby supposedly diseased Jews were placed in a situation that was guaranteed to make them contract typhus.⁸⁷⁹ Limited typhus outbreaks in Breslau, Dresden, and Nürnberg during the winter of 1940-41, which German authorities attributed to forced laborers and prisoners of war from Eastern Europe, reinforced the German medical assumption that there was a connection between typhus and supposedly racially inferior

⁸⁷⁴ Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-42*, 89, 224.

⁸⁷⁵ Christopher R. Browning, "Genocide and Public Health: German Doctors and Polish Jews, 1939-1941," in *The Path to Genocide: Essays on Launching the Final Solution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 148. Paul Julian Weindling, *Epidemics and Genocide in Eastern Europe, 1890-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 273.

⁸⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷⁷ Browning, "Genocide and Public Health," 149.

⁸⁷⁸ Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 272.

⁸⁷⁹ Browning, "Genocide and Public Health," 152.

peoples.⁸⁸⁰ As German authorities in the German-occupied Poland escalated ghettoization under the guise of disease control measures, they aggravated the situation in which their racist fears became medical reality.

During Operation Barbarossa, typhus prevention measures became inexorably linked with mass murder. Even prior to the invasion, the German Army's medical staff was concerned with the Wehrmacht's susceptibility to typhus.⁸⁸¹ In light of the fact that the German Army was to operate in the western Soviet Union, and precisely in the area of a 1921 typhus epidemic, the German military's medical staff anticipated that the region's inhabitants would have a higher natural immunity to typhus than German soldiers from the typhus-free Reich.⁸⁸² Although neither Hitler, nor the German General Staff initially shared these concerns, during the winter of 1941-42 typhus prevention became a German military priority.⁸⁸³ Disease control assumed two forms. First, German personnel attempted to exterminate the bacteria-carrying lice that spread typhus. The Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories, for example, constructed a series of delousing stations and the German Army issued strict guidelines for their soldiers' personal hygiene.⁸⁸⁴ Second, the SS in particular had orders to murder suspected typhus carriers under the pretext of a proactive public health campaign.⁸⁸⁵ Regardless of the fact that high rates of typhus infections among Jews and Slavs were a byproduct of German policies, the connection between genocide and

⁸⁸⁰ Weindling, *Epidemics and Genocide in Eastern Europe*, 271.

⁸⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 284.

⁸⁸² *Ibid.*, 286.

⁸⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 288.

⁸⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

public health was rapidly becoming the SS's standard operating procedure in the occupied Soviet Union by the winter of 1941-42.

During 1941 and 1942, German forces stationed in Transnistria, including Sonderkommando R, remained highly sensitive to the issue of typhus. As a report from the British Radio Code and Cypher School noted, during late December 1941 and January 1942 “the prevention of typhus continues to occupy the [German] authorities both at home [in the Reich] and in Russia.”⁸⁸⁶ A May 1, 1942, report circulated to the Wehrmacht's agricultural advisors attached to the Romanian Prefectures in Transnistria described typhus as the region's “most important epidemic.”⁸⁸⁷ The memo bemoaned the fact that local medical supplies were woefully inadequate to combat the disease.⁸⁸⁸ It also informed the region's German agricultural advisors that, as per an agreement with local Romanian authorities, “in urban areas with Jewish dwellings Jews will be sought out and made responsible for carrying out special disease prevention measures.”⁸⁸⁹ For their part, Sonderkommando R's Bereichskommandoführer were to report instances of Volksdeutsche contracting typhus to the unit's commanders at regular staff meetings.⁸⁹⁰ In an April 1, 1942, staff order, Siebert reminded his subordinates that “if new cases of typhus have appeared since the last notification deadline ([the] B[ereichskommandoführer] meeting on March 3, 1942), the

⁸⁸⁶ German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 16th December - 15th January 1941, February 14, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 9.

⁸⁸⁷ Meldung des Sonderführers Neurath / an den Landwirtschaftlichen Berater beim Gouverneur Transnistrien beim Verbindungsstab der Deutschen Wehrmacht für Transnistrien, May 1, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1086, 46.

⁸⁸⁸ Ibid., 47.

⁸⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁹⁰ Rundanweisung Nr. 31, April 7, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 103.

number of sick, their gender, previous place of residence and current whereabouts (at home, in a hospital, etc.) are to be forwarded [to Landau]. Deaths are obviously also to be reported.”⁸⁹¹ As late as February 1943, VoMi headquarters in Berlin regarded the issue of typhus as so important that it notified Sonderkommando R’s headquarter in Landau that six ethnic Germans had contracted typhus in Zhytomyr and that two of them had succumbed to the illness.⁸⁹² Even before Romanian-imposed conditions in camps and ghettos along the Bug River precipitated a typhus epidemic, German authorities stationed in Transnistria, including Sonderkommando R, were primed to understand typhus both as a serious public health hazard and as a component of the Jewish question.

Sonderkommando R’s Decision to Murder

Before attempting to reconstruct the specific circumstances in which Sonderkommando R’s leaders decided to intensify their own anti-Jewish measures in response to a change in Romanian policies, it is necessary to acknowledge some of the difficulties inherent in this undertaking. Reconstructing the decision-making process in which Sonderkommando R opted to participate in the mass murder of Jews during the winter of 1941-42 is challenging for four reasons. First, although the general outline of the escalation of Romanian anti-Jewish violence from deportation to mass killing during December 1941 is clear, future research by Romanian specialists on the topic may add new detail to Romanian decision-making surrounding the killings, particularly on the local level in Transnistria.⁸⁹³ Second, with a number of important exceptions, few of Sonderkommando

⁸⁹¹ Ibid.

⁸⁹² German Police Decodes Nr 2 Traffic: 8.1.43, January 21, 1943, BNA, HW 16, Piece 37, Part 1, 1.

⁸⁹³ Although scholars, such as Vladimir Solonari, are working on this issue, at present Ancel’s detailed overview of the Holocaust in Transnistria provides the most detailed description of Romanian decision-making

R's wartime records on the subject survive. Postwar testimony strongly suggests that prior to and during its retreat Sonderkommando R destroyed some or most of its internal records and presumably gave special attention to eradicating documents that implicated the unit in mass murder.⁸⁹⁴ Third, postwar testimony by the unit's officers on this issue is particularly unreliable. Key leaders, such as Hoffmeyer and Müller, committed suicide in August 1944 after Soviet forces had captured them in Romania.⁸⁹⁵ Other high-ranking members of the unit, such as Siebert, refused to speak to West German investigators, a tactic that successfully hamstrung the initial criminal probe.⁸⁹⁶ The handful of accessible protocols of Soviet interrogations of Sonderkommando R's leaders during and immediately after the war, such as those of Assmann, typically portray the unit as a specially created death squad—an assertion that the bulk of the available historical record suggests is highly implausible. Lastly, many of the available wartime and postwar records about Sonderkommando R's decision to participate in the killings are contradictory. Evidence gathered by West German and by

during this period.

⁸⁹⁴ A wartime notation in Gerhard Wolfrum's SS officer file indicates that Sonderkommando R was unable to evacuate all of its files from Landau during its withdrawal in March 1944. Given the length of the unit's preparations to withdraw, it appears likely that its commanders ordered the destruction of key documents that could not be evacuated. Brief von SS-Obersturmführer Wolfrum an den SS-Obersturmbannführer Brückner, November 24, 1944, in SS Offizier Akte Dr. Gerhard Wolfrum, NARA, RG 242, A 3343, SSO 001C, 728. In addition to intentional document destruction, much of Sonderkommando R's equipment and many of its records appear to have been destroyed during its withdrawal from the region. In her April 1944 request for expedited permission to marry, Ingeborg Hirsch complained that "all of our command's large pieces of luggage," which contained her fiancée's records, were lost during the retreat. Brief von Ingeborg Hirsch an das RuSHA, April 28, 1944, in RuSHA Akte Herbert Kirschstein, NARA, RG 242, A 3343-RS-C5436, 1143. According to unconfirmed postwar testimony by a former ethnic German resident of Transnistria who evacuated with Sonderkommando R in mid-1944, the remainder of Sonderkommando R's records were transported to SS-Untersturmführer Erich von Fircks's recently acquired family estate in the Warthegau. There, former members of the unit attempted unsuccessfully to destroy the records before Soviet forces closed in. Aussage von V. S., April 14, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 56-57.

⁸⁹⁵ Protokół doprosa / A. M. G., September 20, 1944, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2902, 34.

⁸⁹⁶ During Siebert's 1963 interview with the West German police, he telephoned his attorney during a lunch break and refused to answer further questions. Aussage von K. S., October 30, 1963, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2690, 77.

Soviet investigators, for example, provides competing chronologies as to when Sonderkommando R's commanders decided to assist the Romanians in murdering Jews in rural Transnistria. What follows is thus an effort to reconstruct the decision-making process of Sonderkommando R's leaders based on incomplete and frequently incongruous evidence.

Sonderkommando R's involvement in the mass shooting of Jews in rural Transnistria during the winter of 1941-42 has been the subject of past historical inquiry. Although the issue was peripheral to their central research interests, both Ancel and Angrick have touched on it, drawing primarily on Romanian and German sources, respectively.⁸⁹⁷ While the general outlines of Sonderkommando R's initial participation in the mass shooting of Jews in rural Transnistria appears largely accurate, a careful examination of previously unused wartime German documents as well as wartime and postwar Soviet investigative records suggests two new insights into the killings. First, German involvement appears to have begun earlier than suspected. And second, Sonderkommando R's midlevel leadership responded to events on the ground with frequently little or at best delayed input from the unit's commanders.

As Ancel and Angrick have recognized, during December 1941 and January 1942, Transnistria's Romanian administrators successfully exploited Sonderkommando R's fears that typhus-carrying Jews posed an immediate public health hazard to the region's ethnic Germans and enlisted the unit's assistance in mass murder. While both scholars aptly note that early January 1942 marked the beginning of an intense period of cooperative mass shooting operations between Romanian and German-led forces in the region, based on compelling Soviet investigative records, it appears that Sonderkommando R's initial shooting

⁸⁹⁷ Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-42*, 292-338; Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*, 254-294.

deployments began in mid-December 1941 around and eventually at the Bogdanovka concentration camp. Established under the authority of Colonel Modest Isopescu, the Romanian Prefect of Golta (Pervomaisk) on the Bug River's right bank some 45 kilometers northwest of Nikolaev, the Bogdanovka concentration camp appeared well-suited as a location at which to house Jewish expellees before pushing them into the German-occupied Reichskommissariat Ukraine—a prospect that Romanian authorities believed would happen in short order. Romanian civil administrators created the camp on the site of a former collective farm (*sovkhos*) by relocating the farm's predominately ethnically Ukrainian inhabitants to the nearby village of Bogdanovka. Under the guard of Romanian gendarmes and their Ukrainian auxiliaries, Romanian authorities began deporting Jews from Bessarabia, northern Bukovina, and elsewhere in Transnistria to the camp.⁸⁹⁸ Upon arrival, Romanian authorities confiscated the inmates' remaining valuables and food. Bogdanovka's guard staff systematically denied their Jewish captives food and water and interdicted efforts by local residents to provide the camp's prisoners with sustenance.⁸⁹⁹ The camp's density was appalling. Its inmate population of 1,000 in September 1941 increased more than fifty fold by the end of the year.⁹⁰⁰ According to a report generated by the Soviet Extraordinary State Commission immediately after the Red Army reoccupied southern Ukraine, the camp's more

⁸⁹⁸ Akt No. 49, October 10, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 75, 203.

⁸⁹⁹ Protokol / Samoil Isakovich Soifer, May 10, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 77. Protokol / Stoioga Pavl, May 10, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 71. Protokol / Nunershein Petr, May 10, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 72. Protokol / Litvinanko Nadzhda, May 10, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 73. Pokazala Vera Pavlovna Nabanets, May 1, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 71.

⁹⁰⁰ Protokol / Nunershein Petr, May 10, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 72. Protokol / Samoil Isakovich Soifer, May 10, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 77.

than 56,000 residents were housed in and around the farm's former outbuildings. Initially, inmates were simply left outdoors to fend for themselves.⁹⁰¹ As the winter cold set in, the camp's Romanian guards moved some prisoners under shelter. In some instances the camp's administrators housed 2,000 inmates in a pigsty designed to hold just 200 animals.⁹⁰² Despite this overcrowding, Romanian authorities apparently gave no thought to sanitation or hygiene, with predictable consequences. At Bogdanovka, Romanian authorities created precisely the conditions that not only lead to death by starvation, but also fueled the spread of disease and especially epidemic typhus. If, as Ancel has described, Golta was the "kingdom of death," then the Bogdanovka camp was its capital.⁹⁰³

By December 1941, it had become clear to the camp's Romanian administrators—and indeed to Romanian officials throughout northeastern Transnistria—that disease among Jewish prisoners had reached epidemic proportions and that expulsion across the Bug River anytime in the immediate future was an increasingly dim prospect. Unable to wait for eventual deportation, Isopescu enlisted Sonderkommando R's assistance in murdering the Bogdanovka camp's inmates. Precisely how this transpired is unclear from the available German and Soviet documentation. Owing to wartime document destruction and a postwar conspiracy of silence among suspected surviving German perpetrators, West German prosecutors were unaware of the Bogdanovka camp's existence—let alone Sonderkommando R's involvement in the murder of its inmates—until years into their investigation, when

⁹⁰¹ Akt, May 2, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 44. Protokol / Litvinanko Nadzhda, May 10, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 73.

⁹⁰² Protokol / Samoil Isakovich Soifer, May 10, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 77.

⁹⁰³ Ancel, *Transnistria 1941-42*, 447.

Soviet authorities shared fragmentary Extraordinary Commission Report material with their German counterparts.⁹⁰⁴ Any explanation as to why Sonderkommando R opted to participate in this initial mass killing operation must therefore remain speculative. There are, however, two likely possibilities: either the local Bereichkommandoführer, whose Volksdeutsche militia forces participated in the killing, ordered the operation on his own authority or Sonderkommando R's senior leadership directed the mission.

Owing to Sonderkommando R's organizational culture and practice as well as the uncharacteristic independence of the local Bereichkommandoführer, who supervised the participation of the Selbstschutz in the shootings, it is possible that one of the unit's midlevel leaders organized the killing operation independently. As discussed earlier, for Sonderkommando R, "on the spot" decision making was both an organizational ethos and a practical necessity.⁹⁰⁵ Operating frequently in geographically remote Volksdeutsche population centers with only rudimentary means of communicating with their superior in Landau, Bereichkommandoführer were expected to operate largely on their own. Although an operation of this size would ordinarily have required superior orders to carry out, it is conceivable that Sonderkommando R's midlevel leaders could have ordered the start to such an operation and then sought ex post facto approval from their superiors when it became convenient to do so.⁹⁰⁶

The possibility that the local Bereichkommandoführer authorized the mass killing

⁹⁰⁴ Verfügung, April 4, 1969, BAL, B 162/2311, 1-2.

⁹⁰⁵ Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building*, 8.

⁹⁰⁶ For a similar example of low level German officials deciding independently to begin murdering Jews, see Jürgen Matthäus, "Jenseits der Grenze: Die ersten Massenerschießungen von Juden in Litauen (Juni-August 1941)," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 44 (1996), 101-118.

initially or entirely independently of his supervisors in Landau is all the more likely because the local SS commander enjoyed unique independence and powerful patrons outside of the VoMi. SS-Obersturmführer Rudolf Hartung, who supervised the Selbstschutz's murder spree at the Bogdanovka camp, remains one of Sonderkommando R's most mysterious officers. Despite (or perhaps because of) Hartung's involvement with the Nazi party in Berlin, neither a Nazi party card nor an SS officer file exists for him, and his suicide in Berlin in April 1945 robbed investigators of the opportunity to interview him.⁹⁰⁷ What little can be reconstructed about his biography comes from statements that his family, former colleagues, and erstwhile Volksdeutsche subordinates gave about him to investigators after the war. Hartung was born in Bucharest in 1905 and spent much of the interwar period living in Galicia. To avoid a draft notice from the Polish Army, Hartung relocated to Berlin in 1926. An early member of the Nazi party, in 1934 he joined the staff of Nazi party's Gauleitung in Berlin, which the Minister of Propaganda, Josef Goebbels, headed.⁹⁰⁸ Perhaps due to his previous experience in Eastern Europe, Hartung's superiors seconded him to Hoffmeyer's population transfer operations beginning in 1939.⁹⁰⁹ Although part of the VoMi unit prior to his transfer back to Berlin's Gauleitung in 1943,⁹¹⁰ Hartung maintained close connections with his former superiors, who, following his deployment to Transnistria, provided his command with privileged access to scarce equipment, such as hunting rifles for his SS subordinates and

⁹⁰⁷ Hartung's former secretary in Berlin testified after the war to his probable suicide to avoid capture by Soviet forces. Aussage von L. K., November 1, 1966, BAL, B162/2306, 270-272.

⁹⁰⁸ Aussage von E. H., March 22, 1966, BAL, B162/2306, 41.

⁹⁰⁹ Hartung's service is referenced in a 1942 request that he be promoted. German Police Decodes Nr 2 Traffic: 12.12.42, January 15, 1943, BNA, HW 16, Piece 37, Part 1, 2. Aussage von E. H., March 22, 1966, BAL, B162/2306, 41.

⁹¹⁰ Ibid.

unique light colored dress uniforms for his Volksdeutsche militiamen.⁹¹¹ Despite a noticeable speech impediment caused by a severe overbite,⁹¹² Hartung was a cunning linguist, whose mastery of Russian fueled a number of wild rumors that he was alternatively the son of a White officer who was exiled after the Revolution,⁹¹³ a former German spy in the Soviet Union,⁹¹⁴ and an erstwhile NKVD agent.⁹¹⁵ He was so comfortable in the language that upon taking up his command as Bereichskommandoführer in Rastatt in September 1941, he joked in Russian with a local resident that SSSR (USSR) should stand for “sakhlar stoit sto rublei” (sugar costs one hundred rubles).⁹¹⁶ Hartung’s sense of humor was apparently lost on many of his Volksdeutsche charges. Like other Bereichskommandoführer, he had a well-deserved reputation for beating local ethnic Germans.⁹¹⁷ As one of Rastatt’s former residents recounted, “Hartung was generally known as a swine. He was the worst of them all.”⁹¹⁸ A committed National Socialist, whose rising star in Berlin’s Gauleitung promised him career opportunities after his stint in the East, Hartung was both inclined and uniquely positioned to exercise his autonomy in spearheading Sonderkommando R’s initial foray into mass murder. While it is unclear whether or not he did so, his biography certainly helps to explain why his command embraced the unit’s “dirty work,” as he allegedly described his duties to his wife in

⁹¹¹ Verantwortliche Vernehmung von W. J. G. P., June 29, 1971, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2703, 128.

⁹¹² Aussage von E. H., March 22, 1966, BAL, B162/2306, 41.

⁹¹³ Protokol doprosa / A. M. G., September 20, 1944, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2902, 52.

⁹¹⁴ Aussage von E. A., August 18, 1964, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2684, 29

⁹¹⁵ Aussage von E. S., October 17, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 37-38.

⁹¹⁶ Aussage von F. F., April 13, 1967, BAL, B162/2307, 476.

⁹¹⁷ Aussage von A. R., September 26, 1963, BAL, B162/2302, 294.

⁹¹⁸ Aussage von G. K., September 18, 1963, BAL, B162/2302, 281.

a letter home.⁹¹⁹

A second possibility supported by available, albeit circumstantial evidence is that the unit's senior leadership, and perhaps Hoffmeyer, coordinated the shooting operations with Isopescu in mid-December 1941. Sheremet Karp, one of the few survivors of the Bogdanovka camp, recounted to representatives of the Soviet Extraordinary State Commission after liberation that on December 18, 1941, two German officers arrived at the camp, examined the terrain, and photographed both the inmates and the nearby ravine, where the mass shooting began a few days later.⁹²⁰ Despite the fact that after the war Bauer, Sonderkommando R's official photographer, explicitly denied having taken any photos of mass shooting sites during his deployment to Transnistria, other postwar testimony contradicts his assertion.⁹²¹ Beck, the secretary and mistress of Odessa's Bereichkommandoführer, later testified that Bauer had not only photographed execution sites, but also presented his snapshots to his fellow SS officers.⁹²² As Bauer was frequently a member of Hoffmeyer's entourage, it is plausible, although admittedly speculative, that the two German officers whom Karp observed touring the Bogdanovka camp immediately prior to the shootings were Hoffmeyer and Bauer on a reconnaissance mission.⁹²³ If Hoffmeyer or one of his immediate subordinates had examined the site before the unit deployed members of the Selbstschutz to assist the Romanians in the killing, then it would suggest that Isopescu or perhaps Alexianu

⁹¹⁹ Aussage von E. H., March 22, 1966, BAL, B162/2306, 41.

⁹²⁰ Pokozal / Karp Karneevich Sheremet, May 10, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 75.

⁹²¹ Aussage von G. B., December 13, 1966, BAL, B162/2307, 330.

⁹²² Aussage von E. S., November 12, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 5, 734.

⁹²³ Aussage von F. M., October 9, 1967, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2699, 4.

coordinated the killing directly with Sonderkommando R's commanders in Landau.

Regardless of whether or not Sonderkommando R's initial cooperation with Romanian authorities in murdering Jews was a result of the initiatives of a midlevel SS officer or a consequence of decisions that the unit's senior leaders took, during December 1941 Hoffmeyer's command assisted Golta's Romanian occupiers in murdering Jews in and around the Bogdanovka concentration camp. Sonderkommando R had only a handful of German personnel in proximity to Golta, of whom more than half were NSKK members, whose commitment to the Nazi project and its murderous agenda their SS superiors rightly questioned. Blocked by treaty from transferring additional personnel from German-occupied Ukraine—in the unlikely event that other potential killers had been available—Sonderkommando R deployed members of the ethnic German Selbstschutz from nearby Bereichkommando XI based in Rastatt. While the structure, collective biography and decision-making context of the ethnic German militia force that operated in and around Rastatt is covered in the following chapter, it is important here to highlight that Sonderkommando R's decision to deploy an auxiliary force of local Volksdeutsche was a reflection of the unit's ad hoc participation in the mass murder of Jews in Romanian-controlled territory. A ragtag irregular force that was barely capable of fulfilling its intended role of projecting Sonderkommando R's influence in its running confrontations with Romanian authorities numbered among Hitler's least prepared and most unanticipated executioners.

Sonderkommando R's Inaugural Killing Operation at the Bogdanovka Camp

The Selbstschutz's initial foray into mass murder began in mid-December 1941 with a series of killing operations designed to cordon off the Bogdanovka camp before German and

Romanian forces murdered the camp's prisoners. It appears that even after Romanian and German authorities reached at least a tentative agreement to murder Jews at the Bogdanovka camp, Romanian gendarmes and their Ukrainian auxiliaries continued to march columns of Jewish prisoners to the Bogdanovka camp in a quixotic effort to facilitate their expulsion into the Reichskommissariat Ukraine that was increasingly unlikely to occur. Rather than permit the Jews to reach the facility and thus exacerbate its overcrowding and the typhus epidemic that Romanian administrators and Sonderkommando R planned to contain, local Romanian and German commanders diverted these transports to area Volksdeutsche settlements en route to the Bogdanovka camp. There, Romanian gendarmes and their Ukrainian auxiliaries transferred their Jewish prisoners to ethnic German militia forces that Hartung controlled. Under the careful supervision of Hartung and his immediate German subordinates, who circulated peripatetically to intercept the Romanian Jewish transports and to mobilize their ethnic German subordinates, members of Bereichkommando XI's hastily organized Selbstschutz shot hundreds of these newly-arrived Jews within their own communities.⁹²⁴

According to Soviet investigative records, the joint Romanian and German killing operation at the Bogdanovka camp began in mid-December 1941. On December 13 or December 14, Isopescu visited the camp in a final effort to collect any remaining valuables from its prisoners prior to the start of the mass shootings. He ordered local Ukrainian residents in the nearby village of Bogdanovka to bake bread, which his subordinates sold to emaciated camp residents at the exorbitant price of five rubles per half kilogram. According to Boris Nilimov, one of the camp's inmates, Isopescu transferred the bread sale's proceeds

⁹²⁴ Protokol doprosa / Kokha Floriana, October 14, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8639-8640.

back to Golta before departing the camp.⁹²⁵ A few days later, on December 18 or December 19, the Romanian gendarmerie, which was guarding the camp, sealed the entrances to two large pigsties in which they had housed more than 2,000 of the camp's more infirm prisoners and set them alight, incinerating all but a few of the inmates.⁹²⁶ The following day, a detachment of 60 Selbstschutz members, whom Hartung had mustered from the towns of Rastatt, München, Michialovka, Mariankova and Leninental as well as the collective farms of Neu-Amerika and Bogandovka, arrived at the Bogdanovka camp by horse and buggy.⁹²⁷ Many of these men were fresh from the recent killing deployments that Hartung had led against transports to the Bogdanovka camp.⁹²⁸

On December 21, the mass killing operations commenced at the Bogdanovka camp. Owing to the fact that survivors frequently failed to differentiate Romanian from German-led perpetrators and that the rank-and-file Volksdeutsche killers, whom Soviet authorities interviewed after the war were not privy to arrangements between Hartung and his Romanian counterparts, it is possible only to speculate on how Romanian and German authorities coordinated the joint operation.⁹²⁹ While survivors were clear that the 60 Volksdeutsche

⁹²⁵ Pokazal / Boris Filipovich Nilimov, May 10, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 74.

⁹²⁶ Ibid.

⁹²⁷ Protokol doprosa / Ionusa Aleksandra, April 3, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8445.

⁹²⁸ Pokozal / Karp Karneevich Sheremet, May 10, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 75. Karp indicated that the detachment's commander was named Gitchel' (pronounced Hitchel'). It appears that he misunderstood Hartung's name. According to interviews that the KGB conducted with former Selbstschutz members during the 1960s, it is evident that Hartung was in command. See, for example, Protokol doprosa / Kokha Floriana, October 10, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8597-8598.

⁹²⁹ Neither the camp's surviving inhabitants nor the handful of former Selbstschutz members interrogated after the war were privy to these arrangements. Nevertheless, the Selbstschutz's participation that is well documented in Soviet records suggests that Ancel underestimates German participation in the killings. Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-42*, 124-127.

militiamen and the roughly 70 Romanian policemen and Romanian-led Ukrainian auxiliaries all participated in the shootings, the role of forces under Romanian command is more opaque because Soviet authorities did not focus on their participation as heavily after the war.⁹³⁰ It is plausible that Romanian-led forces operated in tandem with Hartung's militiamen. Prior to the beginning of the killings, German or more likely Romanian authorities culled the camp for able-bodied Jews capable of assisting the perpetrators with body disposal during the killing and segregated more than a hundred young men to serve in the so-called "labor brigade" (*rabochaia brigada*).⁹³¹ As he had done in previous smaller-scale deployments, Hartung divided his militiamen into three roughly equal squads, possibly organizing these teams around the local militia units in which each of his militiamen served. The first squad rounded up groups of 40 to 50 Jews, often driving them out of their cramped accommodations in the former farm's outbuildings and gunning down prisoners who were too infirm to move. The second Selbstschutz squad guarded the prisoners during the one and a half kilometer forced march from the camp to the ravine that German authorities had allegedly scoped out a few days earlier.

Approximately 30 meters behind the ravine near the right bank of the Bug River, the final squad of ethnic German militiamen received the Jewish inmates, forced them to undress to their undergarments, and collected any remaining valuables that Isopescu's earlier cupidity had not already stripped from them. Members of the Selbstschutz led the condemned in groups of 25 to 30 individuals to the edge of the ravine. There, the militiamen and at times

⁹³⁰ Pokazal / Boris Filipovich Nilimov, May 10, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 74.

⁹³¹ Ibid. The handful of these men who survived the shootings and several years of captivity until being liberated by Soviet forces were among the only survivors of the Bogdanovka camp.

the Jewish members of the labor brigade, bludgeoned the captives into the ravine. Under the supervision of Hartung and his German subordinates, the militiamen in groups of five and six fired their rifles at their victims at the bottom of the ravine from a distance of three to five meters, taking aim at the base of their victims' skulls as their German superiors had instructed them to do. Between volleys, as the militiamen reloaded the five-round clips at an ammunition box some 10 meters behind the firing line, members of the Jewish labor brigade began stacking the corpses into a pyre.⁹³² The killings continued with such speed that members of the labor brigade found themselves working in pools of blood up to their knees, which Soviet investigators later described as "a river of blood."⁹³³

When the number of corpses at the bottom of the ravine reached a critical mass capable of fueling a sustained fire, the perpetrators ignited the pyre, presumably using gasoline as an accelerant. As the fire burned, the members of the Selbstschutz arranged their Jewish victims at the edge of the inferno and shot them so that their bodies tumbled directly into the blaze. The operation's commanders ordered members of the labor brigade to stoke the fire by throwing the bodies of victims that had not fallen directly into the flames onto the fire. The putrid stench of burning flesh was so pungent that local residents on both sides of the Bug River could have had little doubt as to the fire's origin.⁹³⁴ The shootings continued from December 21 through Christmas Eve, when the Selbstschutz and their Romanian-led counterparts broke for Christmas and at least some of the militiamen returned home to

⁹³² Protokol doprosa / Kokha Floriana, March 3, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8831.

⁹³³ Akt, May 2, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 51.

⁹³⁴ Protokol doprosa / Kokha Floriana Frantsevicha, June 3, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8953.

celebrate.⁹³⁵ The killing recommenced three days later on December 27 and continued into the first week of 1942 with declining intensity.⁹³⁶ According to the findings of the Soviet Extraordinary State Commission, by the conclusion of the main killings at the Bogdanovka camp on January 15, 1942, German and Romanian forces had murdered some 52,000 Jews—virtually the camp’s entire prisoner population.⁹³⁷

The German and Romanian killing operation at the Bogdanovka camp was at once conventional and yet innovative. On the one hand, Hartung and his Romanian colleagues applied a template for mass shootings that German and to a lesser extent Romanian forces elsewhere in the Soviet Union—including Einsatzgruppe D during its earlier deployment to southern Ukraine—had developed. On the other hand, the use of cremation and Jewish slave labor for body disposal anticipated, at least in embryo, procedures that German authorities would deploy in their clandestine extermination centers in occupied Poland. While it may appear fruitful to trace these continuities, cremation and use of Jewish laborers to feed pyres near the Bogdanovka camp appears to have been an extemporaneous response to the obstacles that Romanian and German forces faced in murdering the camp’s prisoners. Mass cremation proved attractive to German and Romanian authorities at the Bogdanovka camp for two practical reasons. First, as German and Romanian forces cooperated in the operation to prevent the spread of typhus, body burning promised to stop the epidemic. Second, in the middle of the unusually severe winter of 1941-42, burial, the other option for body disposal,

⁹³⁵ Protokol / Stoioga Pavl, May 10, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 70. Nilimov stated that the shooting recommenced on December 28, 1941. Pokazal / Boris Filipovich Nilimov, May 10, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 74.

⁹³⁶ Ibid.

⁹³⁷ Akt, May 2, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 53.

was impractical, as it would have been extraordinarily difficult, if not impossible for the killers to excavate a mass grave without heavy equipment. The Romanian and German decision to cremate the bodies of their victims at the Bogdanovka camp was a response to the specific situational pressures that they faced.

The German and Romanian use of Jewish forced laborers to stoke the pyres was a similar solution to the acute manpower shortage that the perpetrators faced at Bogdanovka. With perhaps 130 shooters to kill more than 50,000 Jews, the operation's Romanian and German leaders had to mobilize every available source of manpower—including Jewish laborers. From the available records, it is unclear why the killing operation's leaders did not draw more heavily on local Ukrainians from the town of Bogdanovka to provide logistical support for the murders. That local Ukrainians had attempted to succor the camp's inmates during fall 1941 perhaps suggested to Romanian authorities that they might be uncooperative in the killing operation. Alternatively, it is possible that the mass shooting's Romanian and German orchestrators depended on Jewish forced labor simply because the number of potential victims permitted them to find Jews who, despite the inhumane conditions in which they had been housed, were still physically fit enough to perform the necessary heavy labor of stoking the fire. The ethnic German militia assigned twenty-nine-year-old Petr Nunershein, one of the few survivors of the Bogdanovka camp, to the labor brigade for precisely this reason. Nunershein hailed from Kamianka, a town in extreme southwestern Ukraine, and Romanian authorities had deported him and his family to the Bug River's right bank relatively late in December 1941. His transport was not intercepted by Bereichkommando XI's Selbstschutz in the surrounding countryside and he arrived in one of the last forced marches to the Bogdanovka camp on December 16, a mere five days before

the shooting operation began.⁹³⁸ Although Nunershein's Romanian and Ukrainian guards had pilfered his food and water en route, as a recently arrived inmate in the Bogdanovka camp, Nunershein had yet to succumb fully to the camp's deadly overcrowding and lack of sanitation and food. On December 23, the Selbstschutz removed Nunershein and his family from the pigsty in which they had been imprisoned and marched them to the shooting site at the nearby ravine. As Nunershein and his family were waiting to proceed to the shooting line, an ethnic German militiaman asked him about his occupation. When Nunershein replied that he was a barber, the militiaman pulled him aside and assigned him to the labor brigade. Nunershein watched as the Selbstschutz gunned down his mother, his wife, and their five-year-old son. Nunershein was then made to throw their corpses onto the pyre.⁹³⁹ As Nunershein's tragic case underscores, German and Romanian authorities at the Bogdanovka camp deployed Jewish forced laborers opportunistically because Jews, like members of the Selbstschutz, were a manpower pool of last resort.

Sonderkommando R's participation in the killings at the Bogdanovka camp marked both the beginning of the unit's involvement in the mass killing of Jews in rural Transnistria and perhaps the most concentrated participation of Soviet Volksdeutsche in the Holocaust. Within the span of little more than three weeks, German and Soviet estimates suggest plausibly that Hartung's 60 militiamen murdered more than 25,000 Jews.⁹⁴⁰ Assuming that

⁹³⁸ Nunershein later indicated that local residents, whom he had passed during his family's forced march to Bogdanovka, warned him that he was likely to be murdered near the Bug River. Protokoll / Nunershein Petr, May 10, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 72.

⁹³⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁴⁰ Establishing the number of Jews that Bereichkommando XI's Selbstschutz murdered at the Bogdanovka camp is difficult to do with any precision. The existing German and Soviet estimates were made years after the shooting. Nevertheless, both Soviet and German estimates are remarkably consistent. The 1944 Soviet State Extraordinary Commission summary report concludes that German and Romanian-led forces murdered between 52,000 and 54,000 Jews at the camp. Akt, May 2, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6,

Romanian and Ukrainian forces under the command of Hartung's Romanian allies killed a roughly comparable number of Jews at the camp, then the number of victims in this operation exceeded those of Babi Yar a few months earlier, in which German forces shot more than 33,000 Jews. In spite or rather perhaps because of the intensity of these killings, it appears that Sonderkommando R regarded its operations at the Bogdanovka camp as the limit to its unexpected participation in the mass murder of Jews in rural Transnistria. With the spread of epidemic typhus no longer a threat, Hoffmeyer and his subordinates returned to the established German position that murdering the region's Jews was the exclusive responsibility of Transnistria's Romanian occupiers. Local Romanian authorities, however, seem to have drawn the opposite lesson from the operation. Having established that the German fear epidemic typhus could move Sonderkommando R to assist in the mass murder of Transnistria's Jews, Romanians authorities concluded, quite correctly, that this same anxiety could be mobilized to secure German support for subsequent killing operations.

Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 53. Protokol / Litvinanko Nadzhda, May 10, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 73. During the 1960s, suspected former Selbstschutz members recounted to the KGB that they had each shot 30 Jews per day during their deployment to the Bogdanovka camp. Protokol doprosa / Kokha Floriana, October 13, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8611. If, as the Soviet Extraordinary State Commission report indicates, Hartung mustered 60 militiamen and deployed them to the Bogdanovka camp for 14 days over the course of late December 1941 and early January 1942, then it is conceivable that the Selbstschutz murdered around 25,000 Jews. Alexander Jonus, one of the former militiamen, estimated that he and his compatriots murdered approximately 30,000 Jews at the Bogdanovka camp. Protokol doprosa / Ionusa Aleksandra, June 2, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8537. The estimate that the Selbstschutz murdered between 25,000 and 30,000 Jews at the Bogdanovka camp is supported by wartime and postwar German sources. According to the marginalia on a May 12, 1942, letter from the German Foreign Office to the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories, the ethnic German auxiliary police murdered at least 28,000 Jews. Abschiebung von rumänischen Juden am Bug, May 12, 1942, NARA, T120/3132/E510806. If Franz Rademacher's notation referred simply to the killings at the Bogdanovka camp, then it is similar to later Soviet estimates. Likewise, in his 1957 blackmail letter, Walter Vahldieck estimated that Hartung had orchestrated the murder of 36,000 Jews, approximately 20,000 more victims than Liebl, a neighboring Bereichkommandoführer who had not deployed to the Bogdanovka camp. 50 000 Juden aus Odessa / Tatsachenbericht von W. V., 1957, BAL, B162/2295, 26. The murder of 16,000 Jews under Liebl's command is confirmed by Soviet counterintelligence records. Protokol doprosa / A. M. G., September 20, 1944, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2902, 51. A former ethnic German resident of Transnistria offered a similar estimate of 17,000 to 18,000 victims to the West German police in 1962. Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von N. E., January 16, 1962, BAL, B162/2290, 184.

The Intensification of Romanian Deportations

Hartung and his Romanian counterparts could not have augured that Transnistria's Romanian rulers would again attempt to enlist Sonderkommando R's assistance in the mass murder of Jews during early 1942 because the origins of this second wave of killing were the result not of local circumstances, but a consequence of a radicalization of Romanian anti-Jewish policy. During the winter of 1941, Romanian military setbacks during the campaign in southern Ukraine moved Romanian authorities to intensify their anti-Jewish measures—a move that exacerbated the increasingly unviable policy of concentrating Jewish deportees near the Bug River in preparation for future, but perpetually postponed expulsion farther into the Soviet Union. In contrast to their German allies, who intensified their anti-Jewish measures amid the “euphoria of victory,” during 1941 and early 1942, Romanian authorities sharpened their anti-Jewish policies in response to the Romanian military's disappointing performance against the Red Army.⁹⁴¹ German and Romanian forces crossed the Dniester River on July 15, 1941, and, in just over two weeks, the German-led *Blitzkrieg* had overran the entirety of what would become Transnistria with the exception of Odessa and its suburbs.⁹⁴² Insistent that the Romanian army prove its mettle against Soviet forces, Antonescu ordered the Romanian Third and Fourth Armies to attack Odessa without German assistance. The assault began on August 18, but it soon became bogged down. Romania was forced to seek German assistance, which arrived on September 24. Despite heavy casualties on both sides, the Soviet command did not evacuate by sea until October 16, thereby denying

⁹⁴¹ Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution*, 309-330.

⁹⁴² Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-42*, 19.

the Romanian army its quick, decisive victory.⁹⁴³ After two months of combat, the badly mauled Romanian army entered the city and pillaged the region's entrepôt. During the initial days of the occupation, Romanian forces vented their frustration by murdering as many as 8,000 civilians, and targeting specifically some 70,000 Jews remaining in the city, who had been unable or were unwilling to flee with retreating Soviet forces.⁹⁴⁴

Romanian authorities ramped up anti-Jewish measures after a Soviet-planted bomb destroyed the Romanian General Staff headquarters, located in the former NKVD building, on October 22. In addition to killing more than 50 Romanian soldiers and a handful of German officers, including Sonderkommando R's first Bereichkommandoführer in Odessa, the bomb claimed the life of General Ion Glogojanu, Odessa's new Romanian military commander. To add insult to injury, the Romanian military had received creditable intelligence indicating that the building was booby trapped prior to the explosion, and yet took no preventative action.⁹⁴⁵ As an illustration of the degree to which, at least in the fall of 1941, the Romanian government regarded the removal of Jews from its sphere of influence as an integral component of its campaign against the Soviet Union, Romanian forces exacted revenge for their own incompetence against the city's Jews. Based on fantastic claims that Odessa's Jews had triggered the bomb by remote control, on Antonescu's orders the Romanian army rounded up many of the city's Jews and, over the course of the next three days, savagely murdered between 18,000 and 25,000 men, women, and children in nearby

⁹⁴³ Ibid., 90.

⁹⁴⁴ Ibid., 183, 120.

⁹⁴⁵ Ibid., 186.

suburban Dalnic.⁹⁴⁶ In the weeks that followed the massacre, Romanian forces deported a further 35,000 Jews from the city to a series of camps and ghettos on Odessa's environs and to detention facilities in the Golta District, such as the Bogdanovka camp.⁹⁴⁷

Even after the murder of tens of thousands of Jews in and around Odessa, for Transnistria's Romanian occupiers the continued presence of Jews near the city constituted a twofold military threat—the first real and the second wholly imagined. On the one hand, as at their concentration camps along the Bug River's right bank, Romanian authorities remained concerned about the spread of epidemic typhus among Jewish prisoners incarcerated near Odessa.⁹⁴⁸ As a central artery for supplying Romanian forces both in the region and fighting alongside the Wehrmacht deeper in the Soviet Union, southern Transnistria was key to the Romanian war effort. Although purely a product of Romanian ghettoization and deportation policies, the alarming spread of typhus among Jewish prisoners housed along the Romanian military's central supply route alarmed the Romanian leadership, which feared that infection might spread to Romanian personnel stationed in and transiting through the area.⁹⁴⁹ On the other hand, Romanian authorities remained convinced that Jews constituted a security threat to their forces. To the Romanian military and civil administration, the destruction of the Romanian military headquarters in Odessa in late October 1941 served as a reminder not of the failures of Romanian counterintelligence, but of the continued threat that the city's Jewish civilians posed to Romanian rule. In late 1941,

⁹⁴⁶ Ibid., 188-203. Ioanid provides a slightly higher estimate of 25,000 Jewish victims at Dalnic. Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 182.

⁹⁴⁷ Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-42*, 186.

⁹⁴⁸ Ibid., 224.

⁹⁴⁹ Ibid., 89.

the Romanian SSI reported that the Red Army was planning a landing behind the front near Odessa and that the city's Jews would likely operate as a fifth column for Soviet forces—a report the Antonescu took seriously.⁹⁵⁰ For both Romanian occupation authorities in and around Odessa and for the Romanian leadership in Bucharest, the continued presence of Jews in the Romanian military's central supply route constituted an increasingly intolerable danger.

These fears came to a head during a December 16, 1941, cabinet meeting in Bucharest. Following a report on the situation of Odessa's Jews that Alexianu had submitted to the cabinet, Transnistria's governor described the current state of Romanian Jewish policy in and around the city. Downplaying the typhus epidemic that raged among Odessa's increasingly ghettoized Jews, Alexianu emphasized his own plan of putting able-bodied Jews to work and imprisoning the rest of the city's Jews in the former Soviet naval base near Ochakov.⁹⁵¹ Obviously frustrated by what he regarded as a lack of progress on the Jewish question and the continued threat that he suspected that the Jews posed to the Romanian military, Antonescu admonished Alexianu that:

The Germans want to bring all the Yids from Europe to Russia and settle them in specific areas, but it will take time until this is actually carried out. What will we do with [the Jews] in the meantime? Wait for a decision that affects us? Guarantee their safety? Pack them into the catacombs! Throw them into the Black Sea! But get them out of Odessa! As far as I'm concerned, a hundred can die, a thousand can die, they can all die!⁹⁵²

At Antonescu's behest, immediately after the cabinet meeting Alexianu ordered the

⁹⁵⁰ Ibid., 226.

⁹⁵¹ Ibid., 223-224.

⁹⁵² Quoted in Ibid., 226.

Romanian Third Army, stationed in Odessa, to begin deporting Jews.⁹⁵³

Alexianu and his subordinates selected the northern Ochakov and southern Berezovka districts as deportation destinations for Jews housed in concentration camps and ghettos around Odessa. These destinations had two likely advantages for the Romanians. First, like the Bogdanovka camp, they were comparatively close to the Bug River and could facilitate further expulsion to the Reichskommissariat Ukraine—a solution to the Jewish “problem” that, at least publicly, Alexianu still regarded as imminent in December 1941. Despite damage to the region’s rail network during the opening months of the campaign, connections between Odessa and Berezovka remained largely intact, a fact that would speed the deportation of Jews out of the militarily sensitive corridor around Odessa.⁹⁵⁴ As the typhus epidemic among Jewish prisoners had halted deportations to Golta, the northern Ochakov and southern Berezovka districts may have appeared to Alexianu and his subordinates as the next best place to relocate Jews in preparation for a subsequent deportation farther east.⁹⁵⁵ Second, although speculative, it seems highly probable that local Romanian authorities selected these deportation destinations precisely because they were a geographical focus of the VoMi’s efforts to mobilize area Volksdeutsche. Sonderkommando R’s participation in the murder of prisoners at the Bogdanovka camp, which during late December 1941 was still ongoing, likely underscored to local Romanian leaders that the fear of epidemic typhus could be used to secure the unit’s participation in mass murder even in the face of established German precedent that dictated that the Romanians were alone responsible for the murder of

⁹⁵³ Ibid., 227.

⁹⁵⁴ Ibid., 292.

⁹⁵⁵ Ibid., 228-29.

Jews in territory that they occupied.⁹⁵⁶ The killings at the Bogdanovka camp appear to have provided Alexianu and his subordinates with a strategy that they applied to subsequent deportations from Odessa.

The Romanian deportations of Jews into rural northern Transnistria began in early January 1942 and caught Sonderkommando R by surprise.⁹⁵⁷ Despite the fact that Sonderkommando R's Bereichkommando XXV was located in Odessa, Goerbig, the local Bereichkommandoführer, failed to catch wind of the deportations and to warn his superiors in Landau. The first indication that Hoffmeyer's command had about the Romanian deportations from the area around Odessa to rural Transnistria came shortly after New Year 1942, when SS-Untersturmführer Bernhard Streit, the Bereichkommandoführer based in Worms, reported an influx of Jewish deportees into VoMi-controlled territory.⁹⁵⁸ As one of his former comrades recounted after the war, Streit appeared at the unit's headquarters in Landau and reported that "tens of thousands of Odessa Jews were marching through his territory in a northeasterly direction. Hundreds of them lay [dying] along the route from hunger and hypothermia."⁹⁵⁹ Fearing that the Jewish deportees might "infiltrate" Volksdeutsche settlements in his Bereichkommando, Streit inquired about how to proceed.⁹⁶⁰ Aware that Hartung and his militia forces were still carrying out a mass shooting operation at the Bogdanovka camp and likely suspecting that the newly arrived Jewish deportees also

⁹⁵⁶ Ancel suggests that "the convoys transported to Berezovka and Veselinovo were not directed immediately to the German villages there; rather, these Jews were marched straight to the Bug with the aim of getting them to the other side, come what may." Ibid., 309. Although Ancel's hypothesis is plausible, it perhaps underestimates the degree to which Romanian authorities anticipated a German reaction.

⁹⁵⁷ Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-42*, vol. 1, 247.

⁹⁵⁸ SS Offizier Akte Bernhard Streit, NARA, RG 242, A 3343, SSO 166B, 1347-1348.

⁹⁵⁹ 50 000 Juden aus Odessa / Tatsachenbericht von W. V., 1957, BAL, B162/2295, 26.

⁹⁶⁰ Ibid.

were infected with typhus, Streit's superiors ordered him to use all necessary force to prevent the deportees from reaching the region's ethnic German settlements.⁹⁶¹

Over the following weeks, Sonderkommando R's leaders opted to expand Bereichskommando Rastatt's initial participation in mass shooting at the Bogdanovka camp into the unit's standard operating procedure. They came to this decision as part of a consultative process, the precise contours of which remain unclear. According to postwar German sources, which historians such as Angrick have used to reconstruct this decision making process, Hoffmeyer contacted Einsatzgruppe D and requested that it return to Transnistria to shoot the Jewish deportees.⁹⁶² Citing the restrictions imposed on German forces in Transnistria by the Treaty of Tighina, SS-Standartenführer Otto Ohlendorf, the unit's commander, refused. Hoffmeyer then traveled to Berlin, where he met with either Himmler⁹⁶³ or with Lorenz and his deputy, SS-Standartenführer Walter Ellermeyer.⁹⁶⁴ While in Berlin, Hoffmeyer learned about the Nazi regime's decision to murder European Jewry and received orders for Sonderkommando R to emulate Einsatzgruppe D's earlier murderous

⁹⁶¹ In 1957, Walter Vahldieck, the author of the account, attempted to blackmail his former comrades Gerhard Wolfrum and Wilhelm Stutzmann for the sum of 20,000 Deutschmark. SS Offizier Akte Wilhelm Stutzmann, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SSO-169B, 662. Urteil gegen den Kaufmann Walter Paul Vahldieck, April 10, 1958, BAL, B162/2295, 23. While Vahldieck contended that Wolfrum issued Streit orders on how to proceed, this appears unlikely given Wolfrum's position in the unit. Given the unit's typical chain of command, it is far more likely that Siebert issued Streit his initial orders on how to handle the Jewish deportees. Even after admitting to attempted blackmail, Vahldieck testified that the information included in the report was true. Aussage von W. V., August 30, 1957, BAL, B162/2295, 6.

⁹⁶² 50 000 Juden aus Odessa / Tatsachenbericht von W. V., 1957, BAL, B162/2295, 26-27.

⁹⁶³ During her 1966 interview, Hoffmeyer's wife recounted to the West German police that her husband had received the order for Sonderkommando R to expand its killing operations from Himmler directly. Aussage von A. H., April 22, 1966, BAL, B162/2306, 92-93. To cover his own involvement as Hoffmeyer's direct superior, Lorenz suggested improbably that Hoffmeyer enjoyed a close relationship with Himmler. Vernehmung von Werner Lorenz, April 16, 1973, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2787, 102.

⁹⁶⁴ Vahldieck advanced the latter version. 50 000 Juden aus Odessa / Tatsachenbericht von W. V., 1957, BAL, B162/2295, 26-27. Angrick, "The Escalation of German-Rumanian Anti-Jewish Policy after the Attack on the Soviet Union," 233-234.

sweep through the region by killing the Jews whom the Romanians were in the process of expelling from the Odessa area.⁹⁶⁵

Although this explanation is generally plausible, it is one that is not well-supported by circumstantial evidence from available fragmentary wartime German records. It seems highly unlikely that Hoffmeyer met with Himmler personally to discuss the matter before ordering his subordinates to conduct further mass shooting operations in rural Transnistria. Based on Himmler's day planner, not only is there no evidence that he met with Hoffmeyer during December 1941 or January 1942, but there is also no record of a face-to-face meeting between the two men until early April 1942—an appointment for which Hoffmeyer had to wait more than four months.⁹⁶⁶ Likewise, despite the fact that Sonderkommando R had used its police band radio transmitters in Landau both to contact Einsatzgruppe D⁹⁶⁷ and to notify the unit's superiors about Hoffmeyer's travel plans, neither an alleged appeal to Ohlendorf's command, nor a last-minute trip by Hoffmeyer to Berlin during December 1941 or January 1942 appears in messages that British signals intelligence intercepted.⁹⁶⁸ Rather than a quick visit to Berlin to confer with his superiors about how to respond to the latest spate of Romanian Jewish deportations, intercepted German radio traffic indicates that Hoffmeyer traveled to Bucharest in early January 1942 for six days of "urgent conferences" with his Romanian counterparts.⁹⁶⁹ While the summit's agenda cannot be reconstructed from the

⁹⁶⁵ 50 000 Juden aus Odessa / Tatsachenbericht von W. V., 1957, BAL, B162/2295, 26-27.

⁹⁶⁶ Peter Witte, et. al, eds., *Der Dienstkalender Heinrich Himmlers 1941/42* (Hamburg: Christians, 1999), 524.

⁹⁶⁷ German Police Decodes: 30.11.41, December 19, 1941, BNA, HW 16, Piece 32, 3.

⁹⁶⁸ German Police Decodes: No. 2 Traffic: Addenda to G.P.D. 891 (20.6.42), August 13, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 46, 1.

⁹⁶⁹ German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 16th December -

decoded messages, it is clear that Hoffmeyer's decision to travel to Bucharest invoked the ire of his superiors, who chastised him for not having consulted with SS-Obergruppenführer Hans-Adolf Prützmann, the High SS and Police Leader for the Reichkommissariat Ukraine prior to the trip.⁹⁷⁰ That the Office of the Reichsführer SS called Hoffmeyer on the carpet for having overstepped his authority suggests that, at least as of early January 1942, he had not yet communicated with his superiors in Berlin. While it is conceivable that Hoffmeyer eventually traveled to Berlin to consult with the VoMi's leadership, previously unexamined records suggest that, when confronted with the unexpected arrival of additional Jews in northeastern Transnistria, Hoffmeyer's initial impulse was to seek clarification from Bucharest rather than to confer with other responsible German authorities.

In Hoffmeyer's absence, Romanian forces continued to deport Jews by rail to Berezovka and then on foot in forced marches northeast in the direction of Voznesensk on the Bug River. In addition to Bereichkommando XIV based in Worms under Streit, who had reported the initial expulsions, Bereichkommandos XI and XX, based in Rastatt and Lichtenfeld, respectively, lay in the immediate path of the deportations. With Hartung still supervising the final stages of the mass killing operation at the Bogdanovka camp, responsibility for intercepting Romanian-guarded Jewish transports fell to Streit and his counterpart in Lichtenfeld, SS-Untersturmführer Liebl, whose command posts were both closer to the railheads in Berezovka. Although their neighboring commander Hartung had spearheaded the shootings at the Bogdanovka camp, initially both Streit and Liebl appear to

15th January 1942, February 14, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 3.

⁹⁷⁰ Ibid. Given Vahldieck's relatively low post in the unit and the fact that he may not have been informed about Hoffmeyer's travel plans, it is plausible that he assumed that Hoffmeyer's destination was Berlin rather than Bucharest. 50 000 Juden aus Odessa / Tatsachenbericht von W. V., 1957, BAL, B162/2295, 26-27.

have reacted far more cautiously and interpreted their orders to mean that they were simply to interdict the Jewish deportees before they reached the area's Volksdeutsche settlements. To this end, initially both commanders ordered militiamen under their command simply to stop the Jewish deportees from transiting through local Volksdeutsche settlements.⁹⁷¹ There are two possible explanations for Streit and Liebl's apparent reluctance to begin murdering the Jewish deportees without explicit orders to do so. First, that neither SS officer enjoyed Hartung's high-level patronage may have made both officers reticent to exceed their orders for fear of running afoul of their superiors.⁹⁷² Second, and more likely, they may have misunderstood the beginning of wholesale Romanian deportations from Odessa's environs to rural Transnistria as simply a continuation of earlier Romanian ghettoization efforts—initiatives that a November 1941 agreement permitted the Romanian civil administration to pursue.⁹⁷³ On January 9, 1942, for example, Liebl demanded from the Romanian prefecture in Berezovka that “Jews not be driven through the German town of Kartekai.”⁹⁷⁴ Still apparently unaware of Romanian aims, Liebl warned his counterpart that “beginning today I will post Selbstschutz guards, who will stop the marches.”⁹⁷⁵ Without clear orders on how to deal with the Jewish deportees or unusually independent midlevel officers who demonstrated enthusiasm for killing Jews, at first Sonderkommando R's Bereichkommandoführer

⁹⁷¹ Aussage von P. W., October 21, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 72. Aussage von P. S., May 25, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 155.

⁹⁷² Although both Streit and Liebl were Nazi party members, it is apparent from their personnel files that neither man enjoyed Hartung's connections. SS Offizier Akte Bernhard Streit, NARA, RG 242, A 3343, SSO 166B, 1347-1348. SS Offizier Akte Franz Liebl, NARA, RG 242, A 3343, SSO 260A, 1596-1600.

⁹⁷³ Verordnung Nr. 23, November 11, 1941, NARA, T120/3132/E510822-25.

⁹⁷⁴ SS-Unstf. Liebl an den Prefäkten Oberst Loghin Berezovka / Betr.: Juden, January 9, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 20, Fond 2361, Opis 1s, Ed. Hr. 7, 104.

⁹⁷⁵ Ibid.

responded cautiously to Romanian deportations.

Sonderkommando R's Second Wave of Killing

That Sonderkommando R's midlevel leaders deployed their Volksdeutsche militia forces to murder the Jewish expellees shortly after the conclusion of Hoffmeyer's trip to Bucharest suggests not only that Hoffmeyer coordinated the mass shootings with his Romanian counterparts during his visit, but also that he had received the necessary authorization to proceed from his superiors in Berlin by the second week of January 1942. Within days, Selbstschutz units from Bereichkommandos in Lichtenfeld, Rastatt, and Worms began to murder the Jewish deportees in coordination with local Romanian authorities. Reconstructing individual shooting operations within each of the three Bereichkommandos is infeasible both because of the number of deployments in which each Selbstschutz unit participated and because of the limitations of postwar investigative records. From January through April 1942, Volksdeutsche militia units in all three Bereichkommandos conducted dozens of individual shooting deployments of varying magnitudes, ranging from approximately 150 to 1,000 victims each. Absent wartime German records, which Sonderkommando R probably haphazardly maintained at the time and likely destroyed at the war's end, it is difficult to document individual shooting operations with any precision. Moreover, postwar statements that suspected perpetrators and occasionally survivors gave to West German and Soviet investigators provide the most detailed accounts of the killings and yet suffer from two limitations. First, postwar testimony rarely distinguishes one murder operation from another. And second, the historically useful information available in postwar testimony frequently is shaped by the questions that investigators posed. One consequence of this bias is an uneven geographic focus in postwar testimony that provides far greater

information about the activities of militia units that Hartung commanded, because of their earlier operations at the Bogdanovka camp, than about neighboring Selbstschutz formations subordinated to Bereichkommandos based in Lichtenfeld and Worms. Given this documentary imbalance and the fact that militia units from all three Bereichkommandos operated in a similar fashion, what follows is an effort to provide a sense of this phase of Sonderkommando R's involvement in the mass shooting of Jews in rural Transnistria by focusing on the Selbstschutz's crimes in Bereichkommando XI near Rastatt.

As in other Bereichkommandos, mass shootings spearheaded by Bereichkommando XI's Selbstschutz primarily during January and February 1942 were merely the conclusion of a killing process that had begun with murderous Romanian expulsions from camps and ghettos on Odessa's outskirts. Romanian deportations during early 1942 were an effort not simply to remove the Jews from the militarily sensitive area around Odessa, but also to ensure that as few Jews as possible reached their destinations in the surrounding countryside. Weakened and frequently ill with typhus because of the conditions in which their Romanian captors had housed them, the Jewish deportees frequently were in fragile health even prior to deportation. Transit to Berezovka in overcrowded, poorly ventilated, unheated cattle cars during the exceptionally frigid month of January 1942—when temperatures reached as low as -30 to -35 degrees Celsius—further endangered the deportees.⁹⁷⁶ Upon arriving in Berezovka, Romanian gendarmes and their Ukrainian helpers unloaded the surviving expellees and led them on forced marches designed to kill as many of the prisoners as possible through starvation and exposure. Many of these marches merely went in circles to increase the prisoners' exposure to the elements. The deportees' lack of clothing surprised

⁹⁷⁶ Aussage von R. S., September 17, 1964, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2671, 69.

even some of their suspected murderers. As one alleged Selbstschutz member recounted after the war, the deportees “were partially without shoes, ragged, and physically completely finished.”⁹⁷⁷ As at the Bogdanovka camp in late 1941, during these death marches Romanian authorities systematically prevented local residents from providing their Jewish prisoners with food and water.⁹⁷⁸ Romanian-led guards either simply abandoned or shot any deportee who was physically unable to continue on the march. Local Volksdeutsche later recounted seeing corpses strewn along the sides of the road.⁹⁷⁹ Even before handing their prisoners over to Sonderkommando R’s Selbstschutz, Romanian authorities had subjected their Jewish prisoners to murderous conditions designed to kill as many of them as possible.

Owing to the limitations of the available records, it is unclear whether or not Selbstschutz units under Hartung’s command began mass shooting operations in Bereichkommando XI at the same time or slightly later than their counterparts in Bereichkommandos XIV in Worms and XX in Lichtenfeld. It appears, however, that following the conclusion of mass shooting operations at the Bogdanovka camp, Hartung and his German subordinates deployed their Volksdeutsche militiamen to murder recently arrived Jewish prisoners almost immediately.⁹⁸⁰ Although it is evident that Hartung and his subordinates applied and even refined the killing techniques that they had honed at the

⁹⁷⁷ Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von J. F., January 17, 1962, BAL, B162/2290, 170-171.

⁹⁷⁸ Aussage von M. R., May 26, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 89.

⁹⁷⁹ Aussage von L. G., May 14, 1962, BAL, B162/2292, 142.

⁹⁸⁰ According the findings of the 1944 Soviet Extraordinary State Commission investigation, the killings at the Bogdanovka camp wound down during the second week of January 1942, although members of the Jewish labor brigade continued to cremate victims’ corpses into February 1942. Akt, May 2, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 53-54. After the end of operations at the Bogdanovka camp, former militiamen testified that they deployed in other, local killing operations. Protokol / D.T. Drozov, April 26, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8985, 8906.

Bogdanovka collective farm, this new escalation of Romanian deportations presented Hartung and his subordinates with a new series of challenges. Unlike at the Bogdanovka camp, at which the Selbstschutz's victims were neatly concentrated and Sonderkommando R merely had to deploy its killers, the Jewish deportees who arrived in Bereichkommando XI under Romanian-led guard in forced marches from the Berezovka rail depot during early 1942 had to be intercepted, guarded for up to several days, transported to a preselected killing site, and ultimately murdered. Despite the scale of the mass shooting deployments to the Bogdanovka camp, the Selbstschutz's subsequent killing operations in Bereichkommando XI were logistically far more complex and placed far greater manpower demands on Hartung and his staff. Bereichkommando XI's German personnel responded to these difficulties by increasing dramatically the number of ethnic German militiamen assigned to participate in the killing operations. Whereas at the Bogdanovka camp Hartung deployed roughly 60 militiamen to murder the Jewish inmates, during subsequent local killing operations, he mustered over 250 Selbstschutz members.⁹⁸¹ For earlier deployments at the Bogdanovka camp, Hartung and his subordinates could draw on militia units based in Volksdeutsche settlements near the Bug River and appear, at least anecdotally, to have assigned relatively young ethnic German men to the killing missions. To interdict Romanian Jewish marches, which could appear throughout his bailiwick, Hartung deployed Volksdeutsche militiamen from all of his territory's major ethnic German population centers. Occasionally, this meant that Hartung called up all able bodied ethnic German men of military age in a particular locality. Sonderkommando R's manpower needs for its localized mass shooting operations

⁹⁸¹ Pokozal / Sheremet Karneevich Karp, May 10, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 75. Akt, May 2, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 48. Protokół doprosy / A. M. G., September 20, 1944, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2902, 52.

during early 1942 precipitated an exceptionally high level of Volksdeutsche involvement—either directly or indirectly—in the Holocaust in the region.

German and Romanian authorities appear to have coordinated these expulsions into Bereichkommando XI very poorly if at all. Jewish deportees arrived under Romanian and Ukrainian guard—often to the surprise of local ethnic Germans—at the town of Rastatt, its daughter settlement Klein Rastatt, Gradovka,⁹⁸² Michialovka, München, and at the Neu Amerika collective farm (*sovkhos*).⁹⁸³ Local Volksdeutsche riders informed Hartung and his Rastatt-based staff about the arrival of each transport, and Bereichkommando XI's German personnel darted from settlement to settlement to intercept the deportees, muster the local militiamen, and begin the killing process.⁹⁸⁴ In contrast to Sonderkommando R's operations at the Bogdanovka collective farm, the beginning of this second phase of killing was characterized not by a stationary mass shooting operation, but by arduous and hurried treks across a frozen countryside locked in the grip of an exceptionally harsh winter.

After intercepting the Romanian-led Jewish deportation marches, Bereichkommando XI's militiamen imprisoned the deportees for up to several days prior to murder. As at the Bogdanovka collective farm, Bereichkommando XI's militiamen converted the outbuildings

⁹⁸² When the shootings occurred in January and February 1942, Gradovka was a predominately ethnically Ukrainian village. After March 1943, Sonderkommando R transferred local residents to the Bogdanovka collective farm (*kolkhoz*) and relocated ethnic German residents to Gradovka, renaming the town Neustadt (New City). Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von L. B., January 16, 1962, BAL, B162/2290, 164. Protokol doprosa / Kokha Floriana Frantsevicha, February 7, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8772.

⁹⁸³ Protokol doprosa / Ionusa Aleksandra, April 3, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8445.

⁹⁸⁴ Hartung and his subordinates were almost always present at mass shooting operations. Protokol doprosa / Ionusa Alexandra, November 3, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 9014. Protokol doprosa / Kokha Floriana, October 13, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8610. Given that Sonderkommando R depended on local riders to communicate, particularly in winter when automobile transportation was unreliable, mounted messengers appear to have been the only way for local residents to notify Bereichkommando XI's staff about the arrival of a Jewish transport. German Police Decodes Nr 2 Traffic: 21.12.41, January 6, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 32, 2.

of former collective farms into makeshift prisons that Selbstschutz sentries guarded.⁹⁸⁵ To contain the spread of typhus, the militiamen selected structures that were typically some distance from the nearest ethnic German settlement.⁹⁸⁶ For Hartung and his underlings, imprisonment prior to murder served two purposes. First, it permitted Bereichkommando XI's staff to assemble a critical mass of both victims and shooters. As Hartung and his colleagues had learned during their operations at the Bogdanovka camp, a large-scale killing operation was a more economical use of finite manpower than a series of smaller deployments, particularly when the perpetrators had to travel some distance during winter. Romanian gendarmes and their Ukrainian auxiliaries often escorted relatively small groups of 50 to 100 Jews from Berezovka into Bereichkommando XI.⁹⁸⁷ As it was impractical to gun down these smaller transports as they arrived, local Selbstschutz units frequently assembled prisoners from four or five transports before organizing a mass shooting operation. The delay that imprisoning the Jews afforded also allowed Hartung and his subordinates to muster militiamen from neighboring Volksdeutsche settlements to assist in the killings.⁹⁸⁸ Occasionally, Bereichkommando XI's staff ordered their local ethnic German helpers to transport their new Jewish captives from one makeshift prison to another, either on foot or by

⁹⁸⁵ Aussage von V. H., September 7, 1964, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2684, 53-54. Aussage von N. R., November 3, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 99. Aussage von L. V., October 8, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 4-5.

⁹⁸⁶ Aussage von M. B., June 10, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 196.

⁹⁸⁷ Romanian Jewish transports appear to have had an average size of 50 to 100 prisoners. Aussage von V. A., November 19, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 147. Witnesses and suspected perpetrators reported shooting deployments that targeted between 150 and 1,000 Jewish prisoners. Aussage von G. K., September 18, 1963, BAL, B162/2302, 286. Aussage von M. B., June 10, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 195.

⁹⁸⁸ For larger shootings operations, Selbstschutz units deployed for multiday shooting missions to neighboring towns, villages, and collective farms. Aussage von V. H., September 7, 1964, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2684, 53-54.

sled and wagon, to even out the ratio of intended victims to available perpetrators.⁹⁸⁹ Short-term incarceration was thus a tactic that Bereichkommando XI's staff employed to streamline the killing process and to stretch the capabilities of a comparatively small manpower pool.

Second, and equally if not more importantly to the perpetrators, temporary imprisonment created prime conditions under which they could rob their Jewish victims prior to murder. Volksdeutsche militiamen deployed to guard these hastily organized prisons routinely pledged to release their Jewish captives in exchange for valuables.⁹⁹⁰ In this respect, Sonderkommando R emulated Romanian authorities at the Bogdanovka camp, where Isopescu sold bread to starving Jewish prisoners at exorbitant prices to strip them of their remaining property immediately before the start of the mass shooting operation. Impetus for this theft came from Bereichkommando XI's German personnel, who profited from the robbery. Hartung and his staff's lust for Jewish valuables was legendary among local ethnic Germans. According to Eugen A., a suspected Selbstschutz member from Rastatt, Hartung and his German subordinates "were always after the Jews' gold."⁹⁹¹ This greed found expression even after the conclusion of shooting operations. As Josef F., a seventeen-year-old resident of Rastatt later recounted: "I saw how the SS men pulled rings off the victims' fingers and rummaged through what little food the victims had brought with because they knew from experience that some of the Jews had baked their gold pieces into cakes and bread."⁹⁹² Hartung's office contained a cabinet that, according to another Rastatt resident,

⁹⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁹⁰ Aussage von F. F., April 13, 1967, BAL, B162/2307, 478. Aussage von V. H., September 7, 1964, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2684, 53-54.

⁹⁹¹ Aussage von E. A., August 18, 1964, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2684, 32.

⁹⁹² Aussage von J. F., September 20, 1963, BAL, B162/2302, 300.

was crammed full of jewelry and gold coins that the militiamen had stripped from their Jewish victims.⁹⁹³ Hartung later passed many of these items, including “a man’s pocket watch [and] a gold wrist bracelet,” to his wife in anticipation of “difficult times” ahead and as parting gifts to his secretary at the Gauleitung in Berlin during April 1945.⁹⁹⁴ In one of the most macabre episodes of the postwar West German investigation, during a police interview Hartung’s wife produced a wedding band, engraved with date 1933, which she had received from her husband at the war’s end and which their daughter continued to wear as jewelry during the mid-1960s.⁹⁹⁵

Anecdotal evidence suggests that Hartung’s cupidity was representative of that of Sonderkommando R in general. Hartung and his colleagues’ haul was so large that they shared at least a portion of their ill-gotten gains with their superiors in Landau. One of Hartung’s fellow SS officers later stated that Bereichskommando XI’s staff “delivered a massive quantity of gold rubles, watches, rings, and chains to headquarters” in Landau.⁹⁹⁶ In addition to these valuables, Hartung and his fellow local commanders also forwarded gold fillings to their superiors. Hoffmeyer allegedly instructed Niessner,⁹⁹⁷ the dental technician whose NSKK superiors had seconded him to Sonderkommando R, to open a practice for the

⁹⁹³ Aussage von V. A., November 19, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 148.

⁹⁹⁴ Aussage von E. H., March 22, 1966, BAL, B162/2306, 44. Aussage von L. K., November 1, 1966, BAL, B162/2306, 272.

⁹⁹⁵ Aussage von E. H., March 22, 1966, BAL, B162/2306, 44. According to West German investigators, who examined the ring during their interview, it was engraved with the numbers “33.” Aussage von E. H., August 3, 1966, BAL, B162/2306, 170.

⁹⁹⁶ 50 000 Juden aus Odessa / Tatsachenbericht von W. V., August 14, 1957, BAL, B162/2295, 133.

⁹⁹⁷ SS Offizier Akte Erwin Niessner, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SSO-350A, 512.

unit.⁹⁹⁸ At his office in Landau, Niessner smelted both fillings and 10 ruble gold pieces to use as dental gold for Sonderkommando R's German personnel.⁹⁹⁹ An array of Germans, ranging from SS officers to German Red Cross nurses, availed themselves of the opportunity to repair their inferior dental work at no cost.¹⁰⁰⁰ SS-Oberscharführer Friedrich Marx, the unit's paymaster, kept the remainder of stolen Jewish valuables, which was either ill-suited or not needed for Niessner's services, in a large wooden chest, which Sonderkommando R sent to Ellermeyer in Berlin for safekeeping during the unit's 1944 withdrawal from Transnistria.¹⁰⁰¹ Despite the perpetual complaints that Germans lodged against their Romanian allies for corruption, for Sonderkommando R, no less than their Romanian counterparts, robbery became both a motivation and a reward for murder.

As the next step in the killing process underscored, Sonderkommando R's German staff members were not the only direct beneficiaries of these mass shootings. When local Selbstschutz units had assembled a sufficiently large number of Jewish inmates in their makeshift prisons, the militiamen summoned their German superiors, and typically Hartung personally, to oversee the operation.¹⁰⁰² Selbstschutz guards escorted groups of Jews from their temporary jails to predetermined killing sites. There, ethnic German sentries instructed their Jewish victims to strip to their underwear and collected their clothes, shoes, and

⁹⁹⁸ 50 000 Juden aus Odessa / Tatsachenbericht von W. V., August 14, 1957, BAL, B162/2295, 134.

⁹⁹⁹ Aussage von E. N., October 20, 1967, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2699, 47-48.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Aussage von F. M., October 9, 1967, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2699, 6. Aussage von R. F., BAL, August 8, 1967, B162/2309, 63. Aussage von F. W., October 13, 1967, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2699, 25. Aussage von J. K., August 17, 1967, BAL, B162/2309, 80.

¹⁰⁰¹ Aussage von F. M., October 9, 1967, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2699, 5. Aussage von O. H., August 15, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 236.

¹⁰⁰² According to former militiamen, Hartung personally participated in the shootings, including those of children. Protokol doprosa / Ionusa Alexandra, November 3, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 9014.

remaining personal items.¹⁰⁰³ Selbstschutz members, who were the primary beneficiaries of this theft, appear in some cases to have begun dividing up their spoils in the middle of killing operations.¹⁰⁰⁴ Hartung not only tolerated robbery but encouraged Volksdeutsche militiamen under his command to keep stolen Jewish property.¹⁰⁰⁵ Local ethnic Germans were particularly keen on acquiring what they regarded as luxury items from their urban and more affluent victims. Shoes, leather boots, gold coins, suits, and even women's undergarments became prized possessions for the killers.¹⁰⁰⁶ The amount of property that this robbery netted for Bereichkommando XI was so large that Hartung simply could not give it all away to the executioners and was forced to warehouse many of the items in Rastatt. Franz F., who lived next to the impromptu warehouse, described its contents: "On the neighboring farm, there was a cow barn, approximately 10 x 8 m[eters] in size, which was full of articles of clothing that had come from the [Jewish] victims. A member of the Selbstschutz stood guard there through the night. Photos and identification papers from the victims lay on the field in front of the barn and children picked them up and played with them."¹⁰⁰⁷ To ensure that no hidden valuables had escaped him, Hartung selected a couple of old ethnic German women to search through the items in the cow barn and to surrender any discovered valuables to him.¹⁰⁰⁸ Except for the most choice pieces, which he and his fellow Germans kept for themselves or

¹⁰⁰³ Protokol doprosa / A. M. G., September 20, 1944, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2902, 52. Aussage von V. H., September 7, 1964, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2684, 53-54.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Aussage von J. S., October 9, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 15-16.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Protokol doprosa / Ionusa Aleksandra, June 1, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8510, 8528.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Protokol doprosa / Renner Yakov Yakovich, May 20, 1948, USHMM, RG-38.018M, Reel 79, 3701. Protokol doprosa / Ionusa Aleksandra, May 29, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8510.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Aussage von F. F., April 13, 1967, BAL, B162/2307, 478.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Aussage von E. K., March 3, 1965, BAL, B162/2303, 321-322.

which Bereichkommando XI sold in local stores, Hartung ordered the Selbstschutz to distribute the remaining clothes to area Volksdeutsche.¹⁰⁰⁹ In Bereichkommando XI, greed shaped the involvement of German and ethnic German perpetrators alike.

Hartung and his German subordinates instructed their Volksdeutsche militiamen to murder the Jewish deportees in one of two ways. The first represented a continuation of the tactics that Hartung's command had developed during deployments to the Bogdanovka collective farm and the second was an opportunistic effort to correct problems with precisely those procedures. Initially, Bereichkommando XI's militiamen escorted their victims from barns in which they had been held to shooting pits some distance from Rastatt. A so-called "cadaver pit," (*Kadavargrube*) which local residents had used prior to the war to discard the carcasses of their dead cattle, roughly two kilometers from Rastatt, was a choice execution site because it required little excavation.¹⁰¹⁰ The Selbstschutz also dug out other naturally occurring hollows to reach the desired depth for a mass grave.¹⁰¹¹ Once at the murder site, Bereichkommando XI's Selbstschutz members selected the few still physically robust male Jewish prisoners to assist them by building a pyre in the pit using a combination of gasoline or straw as accelerants.¹⁰¹² With these preparations in place, the militiamen forced their victims to strip down and hand over their property. Selbstschutz members then gunned down

¹⁰⁰⁹ Protokol doprosa / Ionusa Aleksandra, May 29, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8510. Protokol doprosa / Ionusa Aleksandra, March 6, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8370-8371.

¹⁰¹⁰ Aussage von M. B., June 10, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 196. Aussage von K. D., December 7, 1964, Staatsarchiv Münster, 92.

¹⁰¹¹ Aussage von N. R., November 3, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 98-99.

¹⁰¹² Protokol doprosa / A. M. G., September 20, 1944, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2902, 52. Aussage von N. A., June 30, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 132.

groups of between five and 20 Jews at a time with aimed shots to the base of the skull.¹⁰¹³

The Selbstschutz's Jewish forced laborers then threw the victims' corpses on to the fire. As one group of militiamen shot, a second group of Selbstschutz members transported the next group of victims to the shooting pit—a procedure that continued until all of the Jewish captives had been murdered. The militiamen then shot their forced laborers and incinerated their bodies before returning home with their stolen Jewish property.¹⁰¹⁴

Nikolaus R., a local Rastatt resident and suspected Selbstschutz member, described one of these shooting operations to West German investigators more than two decades later:

In Rastadt [sic], roughly 500 to 600 Jews were housed in the cow barn at the fork in the road to München and Neu-Rastadt [Klein Rastadt]. . . . From a distance of about 600 meters I witnessed hundreds of [Jews] shot on a hill north of Rastadt [sic]. I could tell that these people had to strip naked. They were brought to a specially dug pit and shot. When the wind blew in the right direction, one could hear the screams and whimpers of these people clearly. The mass executions at this place continued for many days and each time several hundred Jews were shot. One evening after an execution I was standing near the pit and saw that it was 5 x 6 meters in size and had a depth of 15 meters. In the pit a kind of grate had been constructed and under the grate a fire burned constantly. The victims fell onto the grate and burned up. One could clearly see charred human remains in the pit.¹⁰¹⁵

Despite the assembly line model for these mass shootings, the militiamen periodically failed to kill all of their victims and encountered survivors. As R. continued:

As I was standing next to the pit with a group of people a completely naked Jew jumped out and attempted to flee. [Georg E., a local militiaman] yelled in the direction of the Selbstschutz's headquarters that Jews were still running around here. . . . After about 10 minutes Eugen G. [another militiaman] appeared with a rifle. There was snow on the ground and the Jew did not get far, having lain down from exhaustion. He kneeled and begged for his life. Georg E. took G.'s rifle and shot the

¹⁰¹³ Aussage von E. S., October 17, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 40.

¹⁰¹⁴ According to a former suspected Selbstschutz member, the ethnic German militia permitted some Jewish prisoners to purchase a position on the labor brigade and thereby to stave off murder, albeit very temporarily. Aussage von V. H., September 7, 1964, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2684, 53-54.

¹⁰¹⁵ Aussage von N. R., November 3, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 98-98.

Jew right there. E. and G. then strapped a belt around his neck and dragged him the 50 meters back to the pit and threw him in.¹⁰¹⁶

In another instance, while sorting through their victims' clothing, Rastatt's Selbstschutz members discovered a live infant in a rucksack that they had taken as booty. According to one ethnic German witness, "one of the SS officers [present] stated that he wanted to shoot or to bludgeon the child to death, whereupon one of his colleagues said that he should not strain himself and rather throw the child onto the pyre alive, which he did."¹⁰¹⁷ In another instance, a Jewish prisoner escaped, overpowered his would-be killer, and wounded a militiaman in the leg with his captured rifle before being gunned down by other Selbstschutz members.¹⁰¹⁸ Mass shootings near the town of Rastatt were a gruesome and occasionally dangerous affairs that required both German and Volksdeutsche perpetrators to carry out mopping up operations even after the conclusion of their primary killing deployments.

In the series of initial shooting operations near Rastatt, Hartung's command applied the tactics that it had used during its earlier deployments at the Bogdanovka camp. In other parts of Bereichkommando XI, however, it adapted its procedures to correct a problem in the killing process that had become acute since the end of this operation—namely that these types of mass shootings were a highly inefficient use of Sonderkommando R's scarce ammunition. Notwithstanding the fact that at the Bogdanovka camp less than 100 Selbstschutz members had gunned down perhaps 25,000 Jews in less than a month of sustained shooting operations, the militiamen expended an extraordinarily large quantity of ammunition. Sonderkommando R was simply not equipped for this type of an operation and

¹⁰¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰¹⁷ Aussage von J. F., September 20, 1963, BAL, B162/2302, 300.

¹⁰¹⁸ Aussage von F. F., April 13, 1967, BAL, B162/2307, 478-479.

certainly not for one of this size. As a unit tasked with mobilizing southern Ukraine's ethnic Germans, the VoMi had issued its German personnel small arms for personal defense.¹⁰¹⁹ To supply the Selbstschutz, a move that VoMi planners apparently had not anticipated, Sonderkommando R had distributed both old hunting rifles, some of which had been confiscated from local non-Germans, and a mishmash of captured Soviet firearms.¹⁰²⁰ Referred to in the unit's staff orders as "junk rifles," (*Shrotflinten*) some of these weapons were so decrepit that Sonderkommando R's leaders instructed their subordinates to inspect and confiscate defective firearms from local ethnic Germans.¹⁰²¹ Selbstschutz weapons were in such short supply that militiamen frequently had to share rifles, which they had to sign in and out of local armories to perform guard duty.¹⁰²² In some instances, no rifles were available and Sonderkommando R armed its Volksdeutsche militiamen with clubs.¹⁰²³ The dearth of ammunition also limited Selbstschutz firearms training.¹⁰²⁴ The lack of safety instruction contributed to foolish accidents.¹⁰²⁵ When militiamen did obtain ammunition, they were so careless that Siebert had to issue strict guidelines on firearms safety.¹⁰²⁶ Sonderkommando R's Selbstschutz was as limited by ammunition constraints as it was in the

¹⁰¹⁹ Aussage von F. D., November 27, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 207.

¹⁰²⁰ Sonderkommando R scrambled to find weapons for the Selbstschutz in October 1941. Rundanweisung Nr. 5, October 13, 1941, BB, R 59/66, 148.

¹⁰²¹ Rundanweisung Nr. 8, n.d., BB, R 59/66, 142. Stabbefehl Nr. 115, August 28, 1943, BB, R 59/67, 35.

¹⁰²² Vernehmungsniederschrift von J. S., July 31, 1962, BAL, B162/2296, 108.

¹⁰²³ Aussage von J. E., August 20, 1962, BAL, B162/2302, 170.

¹⁰²⁴ Aussage von O. F., November 17, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 130.

¹⁰²⁵ See, for example, Aussage von P. H., September 10, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 281.

¹⁰²⁶ Rundanweisung Nr. 39 / Betr.: Schießübungen des Selbstschutzes, April 22, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 93.

skills necessary to use its weapons.

Highly exceptionally, during their operations at the Bogdanovka camp, Hartung's militiamen did not want for weapons. Armed with captured Soviet rifles, one of the militiamen later recounted that during the operation he had had a seemingly limitless supply of cartridges, which he and his fellow killers carried in their pockets and brought with them in ammunition chests.¹⁰²⁷ Where Hartung and his staff obtained this additional armament is unclear. It seems unlikely that Bereichkommando XI could have fielded such well-armed militiamen independently, given the unit's overall lack of weapons. It is possible that Hartung drew on stores of captured Soviet weapons and ammunition in Landau, from German forces on the Bug River's left bank, or from Romanian authorities in Golta.¹⁰²⁸ Regardless of where Hartung obtained what by Sonderkommando R's standards was a dizzying armory, the rate at which Volksdeutsche militiamen under his command depleted their supply of ammunition during their operations at the Bogdanovka camp was unsustainable. The unit's orders to reduce ammunition consumption during 1942 are illustrative. In March 1942, when, in the wake of its most intense mass shooting operations, Sonderkommando R was able to reevaluate its ammunition supply, Hoffmeyer ordered local Bereichkommandoführer to rein in firearms use and chided his men for wasting rounds "in pointless shootings."¹⁰²⁹ While he noted that "German and Russian rifle ammunition is available in sufficient quantities," Hoffmeyer warned his subordinates that "the supply of

¹⁰²⁷ Protokol doprosa / Ionusa Alexandra, November 1, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 9002.

¹⁰²⁸ Of these, the first appears to be the most plausible. Sonderkommando R allegedly mustered Volksdeutsche youths to collect unexpended and discarded munitions. Aussage von E. E., November 19, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 152.

¹⁰²⁹ Einheit Feldpost Nr. 10528 / Betr.: Munitionsverbrauch und Gebrauch von Schußwaffen, March 14, 1942, BB, R 59 / 66, 111.

pistol ammunition is very limited and [that] there is no possibility of expanding or supplementing [it].”¹⁰³⁰ The same was also true of sub-machine gun ammunition, which Hoffmeyer ordered his staff to use “strictly sparingly.”¹⁰³¹ He concluded by forbidding his staff members from expending more than 10 rounds each, after which they would be charged one Reichsmark per cartridge.¹⁰³² Sonderkommando R’s participation in mass shooting operations in rural Transnistria, and especially its role in the killings at the Bogdanovka camp, merely exacerbated the unit’s ammunition shortage.

In response to mounting pressures to curtail ammunition use and to compensate for the comparatively few militiamen that Bereichkommando XI had at its disposal to murder newly arrived Jewish deportees, Hartung’s command streamlined its tactics to economize both its cartridge consumption and its personnel needs. Rural Ukraine’s infrastructure provided Hartung and his subordinates with precisely the facilities necessary to make the killing process more efficient. Large brick lime kilns dotted southern Ukraine’s countryside. As they had through western and central Europe from the Middle Ages through the end of the nineteenth century, lime kilns were a primary means of making lime, a chemical with myriad uses, ranging from mortar to fertilizer. A lime kiln was essentially a bricked-in shaft with three sections. The center of the shaft was a combustion chamber in which either wood or charcoal burned at high temperature. Limestone, a common sedimentary rock in southern Ukraine, was then dropped through the top of the furnace. When heated, limestone produced lime, which fell through to the lowest of the three chambers for easy collection. Under

¹⁰³⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰³¹ Ibid.

¹⁰³² Ibid.

Hartung's command, the Selbstschutz transformed these previously innocuous furnaces into crematoria.

Whereas in Rastatt, Klein Rastatt, and München the absence of lime kilns meant that Bereichkommando XI's militiamen had to rely on mass shootings in front of open air pyres, at the town of Gradovka and the Neu Amerika collective farm (*sovkhoz*), the existence of lime kilns provided Hartung and his subordinates with the infrastructure for an alternate killing method.¹⁰³³ Perhaps in consultation with local Volksdeutsche, Hartung determined that these kilns made excellent crematoria because, unlike open air pyres, they were already built and burned hotter, making body disposal both quicker and less demanding on his scare manpower pool. Gradovka appears to have been a choice killing location because its two furnaces permitted the militiamen to stagger their use.¹⁰³⁴ While one furnace could be used for body burning, the second could be cleaned and prepared for service. The twin kilns, which had a roughly five to six meter diameter and a depth of six to eight meters, were recessed into a hill outside of town, presumably because this configuration made it easier to transport limestone to the top of the furnace.¹⁰³⁵ Gabriel K., a Rastatt resident and suspected Selbstschutz member, described one of the initial shooting operations at the Gradovka lime works:

¹⁰³³ There is evidence that Bereichkommando XI used lime kilns at the Neu Amerika collective farm for the same purpose. Aussage von V. A., November 19, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 147. Aussage von E. S., October 17, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 38. Outside of Bereichkommando XI, lime kilns were also used as crematoria in Speyer and at Sucha Verba in Bereichkommando XX based in Lichtenfeld. Aussage von R. W., October 15, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 30. Aussage von K. E., February 16, 1965, BAL, B162/2303, 314. Aussage von H. Z., November 5, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 110. Aussage von A. L., April 4, 1962, BAL, B162/2292, 45.

¹⁰³⁴ Aussage von V. H., September 7, 1964, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2684, 53-54.

¹⁰³⁵ Aussage von F. H., July 2, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 143. A similar configuration is described in Soviet records. Protokol doprosa / Renner Yakov Yakovich, May 28, 1948, USHMM, RG-38.018M, Reel 79, 3703.

I remember an instance in which roughly 150 to 200 Jews were shot at the lime works. The victims had to strip to their underwear and had to leave their valuables in a particular place. I still remember that it was winter and bitter cold. The women and children also had to undress. The shootings proceeded in the same way as had been the case in Rastadt [sic] before. [After being shot] the victims fell forward into the lime works' furnace. The bodies that did not fall directly into the furnace were thrown into the furnace by their Jewish fellow sufferers. These scenes played out like a conveyer belt. I can confirm that [during January and February 1942] several thousand Jews were killed in this fashion.¹⁰³⁶

As shootings at the Gradovka lime works continued, Hartung and his subordinates introduced two additional refinements to the killing process that further economized Selbstschutz manpower and ammunition. First, perhaps because as the winter progressed and the militiamen could find progressively fewer able bodied Jews to assist them with body disposal, they began to recruit local ethnic Ukrainians, either voluntarily or forcibly, to assist with body disposal.¹⁰³⁷ Second, Bereichkommando XI's German and Volksdeutsche perpetrators eventually positioned a machine gun at the top of the lime kilns and used it rather than their rifles to gun down their victims.¹⁰³⁸ This innovation reduced ammunition consumption because, unlike in shootings in front of open-air pyres, the perpetrators had to be far less precise. Any victim thrown into the furnace dead or alive was unable to survive the kiln's intense heat. The shootings and body incinerations at the Gradovka lime works represented an evolution in hastily devised killing tactics that Hartung and his subordinates first deployed at the Bogdanovka camp a few weeks earlier.¹⁰³⁹

¹⁰³⁶ Aussage von G. K., September 18, 1963, BAL, B162/2302, 285-286.

¹⁰³⁷ Although H. identified these additional prisoners as Russians, they identified themselves almost certainly as ethnic Ukrainians. Aussage von F. H., July 2, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 144.

¹⁰³⁸ Protokol doprosa / Renner Yakov Yakovich, May 28, 1948, USHMM, RG-38.018M, Reel 79, 3703.

¹⁰³⁹ Anecdotally, it appears that militia units subordinated to Bereichkommando XX in Lichtenfeld employed similar tactics. Aussage von J. N., February 24, 1965, BAL, B162/2303, 337.

As their Volksdeutsche militia became a more expert group of killers, Hartung and his German staff began deploying their Selbstschutz units outside of VoMi-administered localities—an effort that grew from isolated mass shootings into an attempt to control Romanian deportations into Bereichkommando XI. Rather than permitting Romanian authorities to transport Jewish deportees to Bereichkommando XI's strongholds for the Selbstschutz to murder, Hartung increasingly brought the Selbstschutz to the Jewish deportees. As early as the shootings at the Bogdanovka camp, Bereichkommando XI had dispatched some of its more seasoned militia units to conduct autonomous operations against Jewish expellees in nearby towns and villages, such as Velikovka and Anetovka.¹⁰⁴⁰ Over the course of the shooting operations in Bereichkommando XI, Hartung ordered his militiamen against targets in both Domanevka and Mostovoi—regional centers that Romanian forces used as staging areas for final forced marches into VoMi-administered territory.¹⁰⁴¹ Thanks to survivor testimony, the outlines of the Selbstschutz's missions to Mostovoi can be reconstructed. Apparently dissatisfied with continued Romanian deportation directly into local Volksdeutsche communities, Hartung deployed Selbstschutz units to intercept Romanian transports at the rail terminus in Berezovka. Local Romanian officials, who had not received prior warning of this policy change, refused to violate their standing orders to transport their Jewish prisoners in the direction of the Bug River and rebuffed German demands that the Jews be handed over in Berezovka.¹⁰⁴² It appears, however, that local

¹⁰⁴⁰ Protokol doprosa / Kokha Floriana Frantsevicha, February 27, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8803.

¹⁰⁴¹ On Domanevka see, Protokol doprosa / Ionusa Aleksandra, May 29, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8519. Protokol doprosa / Kokha Floriana, October 14, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8626.

¹⁰⁴² Aussage von R. S., September 17, 1964, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2671, 69.

Romanian and German authorities quickly reached a compromise, whereby the Romanian gendarmerie and their Ukrainian auxiliaries marched their prisoners north to the town of Mostovoi, some five kilometers to the west of Rastatt. There, Hartung and his subordinates took control of the prisoners and incarcerated them temporarily in Mostovoi's previously abandoned fortress, a capacious one-story structure with imposing towers.¹⁰⁴³ One of the prison's few surviving inmates later testified that "traces of criminal acts" were readily apparent from the walls, which were spattered with blood and covered with polyglot inscriptions that previous inmates had scratched to warn newly arrived prisoners of their impending demise.¹⁰⁴⁴ Typically, the Selbstschutz transported Jewish prisoners from the fortress to be murdered at either Rastatt, or likely more often to Gradovka, which was both closer to Mostovoi and had lime kilns to streamline the killing process.¹⁰⁴⁵ In some instances, perhaps when a backlog of victims made removal to either Gradovka or Rastatt impractical, Hartung's ethnic German militia murdered the deportees directly at the fortress.¹⁰⁴⁶ As the capabilities of Bereichkommando XI's killers expanded, so too did their commander's desire to influence how and where their victims arrived to their deaths.

Based on admittedly imprecise, yet fairly consistent postwar estimates by West German and Soviet investigators, militiamen under Hartung's command murdered more than 10,000 Jews in mass shooting operations in and around Bereichkommando XI, in addition to the some 25,000 Jews that some of his Selbstschutz units gunned down at the Bogdanovka

¹⁰⁴³ Aussage von M. K., July 29, 1969, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2786, 137.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Aussage von R. S., September 17, 1964, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2671, 69.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Survivors, who escaped from the fortress, did not accompany the victims on the final leg of their journey and therefore simply stated that the Selbstschutz murdered them near Rastatt. Aussage von R. S., September 17, 1964, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2671, 69-70.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Aussage von M. K., July 29, 1969, Staatsarchiv Münster, 137.

camp.¹⁰⁴⁷ These murders were public. The sheer number of victims meant that no local resident in this part of Transnistria plausibly could claim ignorance about the murders. In some localities, the entire adult male population participated, if sometimes indirectly, in the killings. Many, if not all area denizens benefited mightily from the theft of the personal effects of the Selbstschutz's Jewish victims. The sight of these open air shootings and particularly pyres used to cremate the bodies of the Jewish deportees were even visible from the air. Upon return to their base at Martinvoka (Martinivs'ke) to the northeast of Rastatt, a Luftwaffe squadron of trimotor Junkers Ju-52 transport aircraft overflew one of the pyres. The pilots later drove to Rastatt to see the killing first hand and, according to at least one witness, took a turn at shooting Jews.¹⁰⁴⁸ For area Volksdeutsche, the perpetual reminder that they lived at the epicenter of the Holocaust in Transnistria was the smell. Even former residents, who implausibly denied direct knowledge let alone involvement in the killings, recounted the "bestial smell" of burning flesh and hair that wafted into the region's Volksdeutsche communities from Rastatt's pyres and from Gradovka's lime works.¹⁰⁴⁹ Josef F., a former resident of Klein Rastatt, may well have been telling the truth when he claimed

¹⁰⁴⁷ During his interrogation by Soviet counterintelligence in 1944, Assmann estimated that Selbstschutz units under Hartung and Liebl's command murdered more than 15,000 Jews near Berezovka. Protokoll doprosa / A. M. G., June 7, 1945, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2902, 100-101. In his 1957 blackmail report, Vahldieck estimated that Hartung's command gunned down 36,000 Jews and Liebl's 16,000. 50 000 Juden aus Odessa / Tatsachenbericht von W. V., 1957, BAL, B162/2295, 26. If one were to assume that Hartung's units murdered 25,000 Jews at the Bogdanovka camp, then it appears that his command killed 11,000 Jews in localized killing operations.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Zeugeschaftliche Vernehmung von N. E., January 16, 1962, BAL, B162/2290, 184. Aussage von V. H., September 7, 1964, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2684, 54-55. Aussage von M. B., June 10, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 195-196.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Aussage von J. T., October 16, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 36. Aussage von M. E., May 19, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 113. Aussage von V. A., November 19, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 147. Aussage von G. B., January 12, 1965, BAL, B162/2303, 178. Aussage von F. W., October 13, 1967, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2699, 23. Aussage von F. H., July 2, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 143-144. Aussage von E. K., March 3, 1965, BAL, B162/2303, 321.

that “these things were simply not discussed among us.”¹⁰⁵⁰ There was little need to converse about events that were undeniably “a very open secret.”¹⁰⁵¹

Under Hartung’s command mass murder and robbery reached a magnitude that not only helped to propel the killings, but ultimately undercut the central reason why Sonderkommando R began shooting operations in Romanian-occupied Transnistria. As mentioned above, the unit’s original mission was not to murder Jews, but rather to mobilize local Volksdeutsche for National Socialism. Hoffmeyer’s command took on this additional murderous responsibility as a disease prevention measure, designed to avert the spread of epidemic typhus to the region’s Volksdeutsche settlements. Sonderkommando R tasked its Bereichkommandoführer and their Selbstschutz units with murdering the Jewish deportees simply because they were the only available personnel who could carry out a mission of this scale. By dangling the personal effects and particularly the clothing of Jewish deportees before local militiamen as an enticement to participate in mass shooting operations, however, Hartung and his fellow Bereichkommandoführer created precisely the circumstances that facilitated the spread of typhus—the very threat that the killings were designed to prevent. Either ignorant of or more likely unconcerned with the fact that bacteria carried on parasites embedded in their victims’ clothes was the primary means of contagion, Hartung and his colleagues’ greed fueled the spread of typhus. As statements that former militiamen gave to both Soviet and West German investigators indicate, from the very beginning of operations militiamen who pilfered and wore unwashed clothing from their Jewish victims became

¹⁰⁵⁰ Aussage von J. F., September 20, 1963, BAL, B162/2302, 298.

¹⁰⁵¹ Aussage von L. N., August 16, 1963, BAL, B162/2302, 290.

infected and spread the disease to the region's Volksdeutsche settlements.¹⁰⁵² Rather than preventing the disease, mass murder and robbery facilitated infection and thereby sabotaged the central aim of Sonderkommando R's plunge into mass murder.

German Diplomatic Pressure and the End of Mass Killing

Despite the fact that Sonderkommando R's mass killings in rural Transnistria failed to contain typhus, the unit stopped murdering Jews in large-scale operations only when Romanian authorities ceased to hand their deportees over to the unit to be killed. To understand this change in Romanian policy, it is necessary to return to high level negotiations between Romania and Germany and how best to solve the Jewish "problem," a discussion that ironically had little to do with Sonderkommando R.

Beginning in mid-January 1942, Romanian occupation authorities ramped up deportations from the Odessa area, in which, with one exception, at least one and as many as three trains departed daily from Sortirovka station to northeastern Transnistria during the next six weeks. Given the harsh winter and the poor quality of coal that the Romanians had available to fire their locomotives, this rate of deportation is particularly impressive.¹⁰⁵³ Just as Romanian deportations intensified during the first week of February 1942 (three transports departed on February 2, two on February 3, and two on February 4) German civil administrators on the opposite bank of the Bug River began protesting the deportations.¹⁰⁵⁴

¹⁰⁵² Reconstructing the number of militiamen who contracted typhus is not possible from the available records. Based on postwar testimony from some of the most heavily implicated perpetrators, this was a fairly common way to contract the disease. See, for example, Protokol doprosa / Kokha Floriana Frantsevicha, March 7, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8838. Aussage von J. N., February 24, 1965, BAL, B162/2303, 338. Aussage von F. V., June 24, 1970, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2702, 85. Aussage von A. W., April 23, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 80.

¹⁰⁵³ Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-42*, 247.

¹⁰⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 259-60.

Apparently unaware of Sonderkommando R's decision to assist Romanian authorities in murdering Jews in northeastern Transnistria, on February 9, 1942, Generalkommissar Erwald Oppermann in Nikolaev called his patron and fellow Königsberger Reichskommissar Erich Koch in Rowno by radio telephone and complained that "a large number of Jews, who are hardly being properly buried, are dying daily" on the opposite bank of the Bug.¹⁰⁵⁵ In Oppermann's view, "this impossible situation will pose a great danger for the ethnic German villages in Transnistria and for the bordering area of the Reichskommissariat Ukraine."¹⁰⁵⁶ Four days later, Oppermann again complained to Koch that the Romanians had deported 6,500 Jews to the west bank of the Bug immediately opposite his station in Nikolaev, and that in nearby Voznesensk the Romanians had delivered an additional 8,000 Jews "without sufficient security."¹⁰⁵⁷ Individual groups of Jews had apparently attempted to cross the border into the Reichskommissariat Ukraine.¹⁰⁵⁸ According to a Romanian border patrol officer, Oppermann reported, the Romanians were deporting up to an additional 60,000 Jews toward the Bug.¹⁰⁵⁹ He reiterated that unless the deportations stopped, typhus would be a serious threat both to the German military as well as to the Transnistria's Volksdeutsche settlements.¹⁰⁶⁰ Acknowledging that their Romanian allies were "practically deporting" Jews in violation of the Tighina Treaty, Koch authorized Oppermann to keep a 50 kilometer swath

¹⁰⁵⁵ Funkspruch Gen. Komm. Nikolajew Oppermann an der Reichkomm. Ukr. Rowno, February 9, 1942, NARA, T120/3132/E510845.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Funkspruch Gen. Komm. Nikolajew Oppermann an der Reichkomm. Ukr. Rowno, February 12, 1942, NARA, T120/3132/E510844.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Ibid.

of the Bug River's west bank clear—an order with which their Romanian counterparts refused to comply.¹⁰⁶¹ Koch was apparently so concerned about the threat of typhus from Jewish deportees, that he ordered his subordinate to operate in territory that, according to the Tighina Treaty, fell inside of the Romanian occupation zone.

Why both Oppermann and Koch remained in the dark about Sonderkommando R's participation in the killing remains unclear. There are, nevertheless, two likely possibilities. First, given Sonderkommando R's drive to maintain its institutional independence in Transnistria, it is possible that that unit refused to inform other German agencies, and especially the Sipo-SD and German civil administration in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, about its activities in the region as a matter of principle. Sonderkommando R, which operated in both the Reichskommissariat Ukraine and in Transnistria, enjoyed an exceptional degree of administrative autonomy, particularly in Romanian-controlled territory. In principle, Himmler had removed Sonderkommando R from the VoMi's chain of command and subordinated it directly to himself, essentially creating his private Volksdeutsche affairs units in Ukraine.¹⁰⁶² In the field, the reality was more complicated—an ambiguity that led to friction between both the Sipo-SD and the German civil administration. In matters related to security and policing, Hoffmeyer was to report to the local Higher SS- and Police Leader in an arrangement that was sufficiently ambiguous that it precipitated seemingly endless

¹⁰⁶¹ Koch an Generalkommissar Oppermann / Fernschreiben, Rowno, February 20, 1942, NARA, T120/3132/E510838. Telegrama an Generalkommissar [sic] Oppermann Nikolajev [sic], February 27, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1084, 249.

¹⁰⁶² Lorenz, for example, claimed that Himmler removed Hoffmeyer from his chain of command and subordinated Sonderkommando R to the Higher SS- and Police Leader. Vernehmung von Werner Lorenz, April 16, 1973, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2787, 102. As such a position did not exist for Transnistria, Hoffmeyer reported directly to Himmler.

internal discussions about the limits of Sonderkommando R's authority.¹⁰⁶³ In the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, Hoffmeyer's relationship with the civil administration was still more unclear and proportionately more acrimonious. Both organizations regarded Volksdeutsche affairs as being within their portfolios and tussled over issues, such as the control of ethnic German schools.¹⁰⁶⁴ Similarly, in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, the civil administration and Sonderkommando R competed over quality ethnic German personnel, who were in great demand.¹⁰⁶⁵ As British signals intelligence concluded in 1943: "The connection between Vomi and the civil administration under the Ost-Ministerium in Ukraine is not sharply defined, their respective fields of activity often overlap and there appears to be a complete lack of co-operation bordering on hostility between the two organizations."¹⁰⁶⁶ As Lower has noted, with the exception of carrying out the Nazi regime's anti-Jewish policies, in German-occupied Ukraine interagency cooperation was abysmal.¹⁰⁶⁷

Sonderkommando R's conflicts with both the Sipo-SD and the German civil administration in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine were absent in Transnistria because neither organization operated in the region. As a Romanian occupation zone, Transnistria

¹⁰⁶³ See, for example, SS- und Polizeigericht XVIII in Kiew an den SS-Richter beim Reichsführer-SS und Chef der Deutschen Polizei SS-Obersturmbahnführer Bender, February 15, 1942, BAL, B162/2292, 130. Der SS-Richter beim Reichsführer-SS und Chef der Deutschen Polizei Feldkommandostelle an den Höhern SS- und Polizeiführer Rußland-Süd SS-Obergruppenführer u. General der Polizei Prützmann / Kiew, February 20, 1942, BAL, B162/2292, 131.

¹⁰⁶⁴ German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 1 November - 31st December 1942, January 1, 1943, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 7. Information on the work of the Volksdeutschemittelstelle [sic] gained from GPD, August 1, 1943, BNA, HW 16, Piece 58, Part 1, 4.

¹⁰⁶⁵ German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 1 November - 31st December 1942, January 1, 1943, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 7.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Information on the work of the Volksdeutschemittelstelle [sic] gained from GPD, August 1, 1943, BNA, HW 16, Piece 58, Part 1, 4.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building*, 70, 83.

had no Higher SS- and Police Leader. Hoffmeyer therefore had no immediate superiors in the region and reported directly to Himmler and indirectly to his VoMi superiors in Berlin, including Lorenz.¹⁰⁶⁸ Similarly, in Transnistria, Sonderkommando R had to compete not with German civil administrators, but with their Romanian counterparts. Challenging local Romanian authorities proved far easier for Sonderkommando R because, in contrast to German civil administrators in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, Hoffmeyer's command simply ran roughshod over the Romanians. Absent local oversight and with only weak supervision from Berlin, in Transnistria Hoffmeyer's command enjoyed exceptional autonomy—an independence that the unit guarded jealously. It seems unlikely that Sonderkommando R would have involved a competing organization, whose jurisdiction did not extend to Transnistria, in the sole region where Hoffmeyer's command could operate without outside interference. If Hoffmeyer had objected to increases in non-SS personnel under his command in Transnistria, then it is improbable that he would have voluntarily shared information about his unit's activities with rival German agencies, let alone ones that Sonderkommando R at least regarded as unaffected by its actions.

Aside from Hoffmeyer's natural disinclination to cooperate with other German bureaucracies in Ukraine, a second reason why Hoffmeyer did not inform his colleagues in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine's civil administration may have been because he was physically unable to do so. According to British signals intelligence, Hoffmeyer became so seriously ill in early February 1942 that his staff had him airlifted from Novo Archangelsk, a

¹⁰⁶⁸ Hoffmeyer remained at least partially under Lorenz's command. During the evacuation of Transnistria's Volksdeutsche, for example, Lorenz chastised Hoffmeyer for failing to report in. German Police Decodes No. 1 Traffic: 18.4.44, BNA, HW 16, Piece 40, 3.

town near Uman, to Kiev for treatment.¹⁰⁶⁹ The precise nature of Hoffmeyer's malady is unclear and he returned to work later that year without any apparent lasting effects. The timing of his illness—at the height of Sonderkommando R's mass shooting operations in Transnistria—and the fact that its onset was not referenced in his personnel file or by his wife during her West German police interview, raises the possibility that Hoffmeyer's affliction was psychological, rather than physical. As an officer without any apparent experience in dispensing mass violence, it is conceivable that Hoffmeyer bent under the pressure of leading a mass killing operation. Regardless of the cause of his illness, the fact that Hoffmeyer had become so gravely ill by early February 1942 indicates that he was in no position to communicate effectively with German units elsewhere in Ukraine. Given that Hoffmeyer personally was the central pipeline for contact between Sonderkommando R's forces in Transnistria and the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, his incapacity temporarily severed links between the VoMi's headquarters in Landau and German units stationed elsewhere in the occupied Soviet Union. Either because of Hoffmeyer's disinclination or inability to do so, Sonderkommando R failed to communicate its participation in the mass murder of Jews in northeastern Transnistria with German officials elsewhere in Ukraine.

Regardless of why Sonderkommando R failed to communicate its activities to the German civil administration in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, as the situation escalated both German and Romanian sides applied lessons that they had learned during their diplomatic skirmish over Romanian expulsions across the Dniester river some six months earlier. Without a clear understanding of the role that Hoffmeyer's command was playing in the killings across the Bug River, Koch intensified his efforts to stop Romanian deportations

¹⁰⁶⁹ Teleprinter Message, 7.2.42, n.d., BNA, HW 16, Piece 54, 6.

into northeastern Transnistria. He shared his concerns with the German Interior Ministry and the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories, which in turn asked the Foreign Office to intervene with Bucharest.¹⁰⁷⁰ Although the Foreign Office quickly forwarded these complaints up the chain of command, Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop concluded on February 13, 1942, “that the imprecise claims of a local commander are not sufficient cause for diplomatic intervention.”¹⁰⁷¹ Likely cognizant of the ultimately futile diplomatic wrangling over Romanian efforts to expel Jews from Bessarabia and Bukovina into the German Eleventh Army’s rear area toward the beginning of Operation Barbarossa, the Foreign Office was initially gun shy and unwilling to revisit this topic with its Romanian allies. From the Foreign Office’s perspective, there was little reason to burn through good will when, as before, the situation was likely to resolve itself on the ground.

Despite the Foreign Office’s reluctance, after continued complaints from the Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories, which included copies of reports penned by local German officials testifying to the perceived severity of the problem, it eventually raised the issue with the Romanian government in late March 1942.¹⁰⁷² According to Ambassador von Killinger’s report to the Foreign Office on March 26, 1942, he broached the issue with Mihai Antonescu, the vice president of the Council of Ministers. During their meeting, the latter had assured von Killinger that although he would seek a mutually convenient solution to the

¹⁰⁷⁰ Although it is unclear when Koch’s office contacted the Foreign Office, given that Unterstaatssekretär (Under State Secretary) Martin Luther forwarded a memo to Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop on February 11, 1942, the Foreign Office must have received these complaints almost immediately. Vortragsnotiz, February 11, 1942, NARA, T120/3132/E510849.

¹⁰⁷¹ Büro RAM, February 13, 1942, NARA, T120/3132/E510850.

¹⁰⁷² Karl Leibbrandt forwarded the appropriate materials to the Foreign Office on February 19, 1942. Brief von Leibbrandt an das Auswärtiges Amt, February 19, 1942, NARA, T120/3132/E510847.

problem, because “he was not informed about the details,” he would first have to consult his subordinates.¹⁰⁷³ Given that Mihai Antonescu was a member of the Romanian Council of Ministers and, as indicated by his extensive postwar testimony, intimately familiar with Romania’s Jewish deportations, it appears that his excuses to von Killinger were merely an effort to stall German requests while Alexianu completed the rest of the Odessa expulsions.¹⁰⁷⁴ Like the German Foreign Office, the Romanian leadership drew on the earlier diplomatic row over Jewish deportations across the Dniester. As Mihai Antonescu and his compatriots correctly concluded from this previous episode, continued diplomatic negotiations benefited only them because they bought valuable time. As before, either German policy might change or, at the very least, the delay would permit events on the ground to unfold, including Sonderkommando R’s continued participation in the shootings. This supposition proved correct and Sonderkommando R sustained its killing operations, with declining intensity, until the spring of 1942.

Why Romanian expulsions of Jews from the area around Odessa to northeastern Transnistria tapered off after February 1942 is not entirely clear and in need of further investigation by Romanian specialists. It appears, however, that two factors were at work. First, German diplomatic pressure, which continued well into early June 1942, may have influenced the Romanian leadership’s decision to halt further deportation.¹⁰⁷⁵ Second, and perhaps most importantly, the deportations had succeeded in their original goal of clearing

¹⁰⁷³ Verschiebung von rumänischen Juden in die besetzten Ostgebiete, March 26, 1942, NARA, T120/3132/E510804.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Ancel highlights Mihai Antonescu’s familiarity with Romanian deportation policy in his postwar statements. Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-42*, 87-88.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Der Chef der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD an das Auswärtiges Amt, / z.Hd. von Herrn Konsultssekretär Engelke, June 8, 1942, NARA, T120/3132/E510795.

Jews from the militarily sensitive region near Odessa. Just as the start of Sonderkommando R's killings was a response to the rate of Romanian deportations, so too was its conclusion.

Conclusion

The description of Sonderkommando R as a unit designed “for the mass shooting of Soviet civilians, and particularly Jews” that Soviet counterintelligence attributed to one of the unit's midlevel officers reflects accurately the unit's rapid evolution into a killing force from December 1941 until the spring of 1942. Rather than by design, Sonderkommando R's mission changed from mobilizing area ethnic Germans to killing Jews en masse in response to situational pressures created by friction between Germany and Romania's competing anti-Jewish policies. The primary goal behind the Antonescu regime's anti-Semitic policies was to eliminate Jews from the Romanian sphere of influence. To this end, Antonescu and his subordinates followed the most convenient possible interpretation of German plans—namely that Jews simply would be deported to the east and thus cease to be Romania's problem. This understanding propelled Romanian expulsions of Jews first across the Dniester river in August 1941 and then a policy of Jewish deportation to and internment in northeastern Transnistria, which Romanian authorities regarded as an ideal point of departure for a future expulsion across the Bug River and into the Reichskommissariat Ukraine that, in the fall of 1941, appeared months, if not weeks away. While this plan suited Romanian goals perfectly, simply expelling Jews into the German occupation zone failed to satisfy Nazi plans for the continent-wide elimination of Jews. With the Nazi regime already set to murder a significant portion of Soviet Jewry from the beginning of Operation Barbarossa, it made little sense for German authorities to accept more Jews into the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, when their forces there were already shooting Jews at a feverish pace. From the Third

Reich's perspective, Transnistria's Jews were Romania's problem alone and German authorities shelved plans to permit the Romanians to expel Jews into German-occupied Ukraine indefinitely.

Unable to deport Jews across the Bug River and unwilling to stop expulsion to its right bank, the Romanians unwittingly created the perfect conditions to enlist German support in solving their Jewish "problem." As the concentration camps and ghettos along the Bug River, which Romanian authorities intended as brutal way stations before immediate deportation farther east, became permanent, conditions for the facilities' inmates plummeted and epidemic typhus broke out. Fearing that the disease might spread to local ethnic German communities and thereby jeopardize its entire undertaking in Transnistria, Sonderkommando R, the only available German unit, partnered with local Romanian authorities to murder prisoners at the Bogdanovka camp just across the Bug River from the Reichskommissariat Ukraine. Before these killings had concluded, local Romanian authorities accelerated deportations, predicated on alleged military necessity, from Odessa's environs into the heart of Sonderkommando R's operations in the region. Effectively, Romania brought its Jewish "problem" to Hoffmeyer's doorstep. Confronted with a potentially even more serious threat to the welfare of local ethnic Germans, Sonderkommando R's leaders resolved, relatively independently, to expand the Selbstschutz's operations at the Bogdanovka camp into a systematic effort to intercept and murder Jewish deportees as Romanian authorities expelled them to the area. These deportations continued until a combination of German diplomatic pressure, initiated by German occupation officials in Ukraine who were uninformed of Sonderkommando R's role in the killings, and a drought of victims halted these expulsions in the spring of 1942. Within the span of less than four months, Sonderkommando R's

militiamen murdered nearly 50,000 Jews.

Sonderkommando R's involvement in the mass murder of Jews in rural Transnistria from December 1941 until spring 1942 is remarkable not simply because of its scale and brutality, but also because of the alacrity with which both Hoffmeyer's German personnel and their Volksdeutsche militiamen embraced mass murder. As a third-rate unit designed to mobilize area ethnic Germans—a pet project of Himmler's, but one of no military significance—Hoffmeyer's superiors had assigned him men whom the Nazi regime regarded not only as unfit for combat, but, in some instances, as unsuited even to murder unarmed civilians. The involvement of rank-and-file killers in the Selbstschutz is even more puzzling. Having lived under Nazi rule for less than four months at the start of the killings and organized in formations that appeared barely adequate to fend off marauding Romanian troops, Transnistria's ethnic German militiamen were among the least prepared and most randomly selected killers that Nazi Germany ever fielded in its war against the Jews. Yet, as a detailed examination of crimes of militia units subordinated to Bereichkommando XI in Rastatt indicates, these perpetrators not only answered the Nazi regime's call to genocide, but implemented, refined, and expanded their killing operations until they ran out of victims. Why these killers behaved as they did is the subject of the final chapter.

CHAPTER VIII: TRANSNISTRIA'S *SELBSTSCHUTZ* AND THE HOLOCAUST

Shortly before Christmas 1941 militiaman Johann Pastushchenko chose to become one of the Third Reich's mass murderers. A member of Bereichkommando XI's Selbstschutz unit based at the Bogdanovka collective farm (*kolkhoz*),¹⁰⁷⁶ Pastushchenko belonged to the group of militiamen that Hartung deployed in the initial joint killing operations with Romanian-controlled forces near the Bug River. As he recounted one of his initial crimes to Soviet interrogators in the late 1960s:

In the guard barracks Johann Büchler [the local militia commander] told me that the sick Jews housed in the stable at the Comintern collective farm needed to be shot. I walked over to the stable and saw people lying in various places. I asked all of them why they had fallen behind the column and were in the stable. A man answered me: "We are sick and cannot move. Do with us what you want." After that I fired my rifle and first shot the man and then the women and little girl. Today I cannot remember who I shot first: the five women or the little girl. I shot them in the head. The people were in a helpless condition and offered no resistance.¹⁰⁷⁷

Born in 1916 in Vygodna near Odessa, Pastushchenko was an unlikely *Volksdeutscher*. His Ukrainian father, Demia Pastushchenko, had married his mother, Anastasiia Martin, in Poltava Oblast' in 1905. Pastushchenko's family relocated to Odessa oblast' after the 1917 Russian Revolution and eventually received land on a collective farm. With the death of Pastushchenko's father in the early 1920s, his upbringing became the purview of his German-

¹⁰⁷⁶ It is crucial to distinguish the Bogdanovka *sovkhos*, the site of the Romanian concentration camp where Bereichkommando XI participated in mass shooting operations, and the Bogdanovka *kolkhoz*, a smaller multiethnic settlement some fifteen kilometers southwest of the Bug River.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Protokół doprosa / Pastuschenka Ivana, March, 16, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 1040-41.

speaking mother, who dutifully had her son baptized a Roman Catholic. After completing four years of German-language elementary education near Vygoda, he and his mother moved to the Germanophone Neudorf settlement on the Bogdanovka collective farm some 60 kilometers northwest of Nikolaev in the early 1930s. After completing a year-long training course as a veterinary assistant, Pastushchenko became the farm's veterinarian and in 1935 married Elaneria Ebenal, a widowed member of the settlement's dominant clan.¹⁰⁷⁸ What convinced a twenty-five-year-old half Ukrainian to murder sick women and children in the service of the Third Reich—a regime with which he had had virtually no contact until a few months earlier? This chapter aims to answer precisely this question by probing the motivations of the members of the Selbstschutz to participate in mass murder during the winter of 1941-42.

Although scholars have devoted a tremendous amount of attention to Holocaust perpetrators, with the exception of some recent works, much of this inquiry has focused on analyzing the behavior of German killers. During the decades immediately following the Second World War, social scientists probed the psychology of individual perpetrators and the ways in which institutions and situational dynamics shaped their actions.¹⁰⁷⁹ Importing many of these insights into their analysis, historians have examined the behavior of an array of German perpetrators during the past thirty years.¹⁰⁸⁰ This rich empirical base has yielded a

¹⁰⁷⁸ Einbürgerungsantrag von Johann Pastuschenko, 1944, NARA, RG 242, A3342-EWZ50-G019, 110-22. Protokol doprosa / Pastuschenka Ivana, April 28, 1967, USHMM, RG 38.018M, Reel 17, 8485-88. Protokol doprosa / Pastuschenka Ivana, March 16, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8394-95.

¹⁰⁷⁹ On the psychology and sociology of individual perpetrators see Kelley, *22 Cells in Nuremberg*. Gilbert, *Nuremberg Diary*; Adorno, et. al., *The Authoritarian Personality*. For analysis of broader social structures on perpetrators see Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*; Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. More recently see Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*. Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect*.

¹⁰⁸⁰ For an overview of this broad field, see Gerhard Paul's introductory essay in Gerhard Paul, *Die Täter der Shoah: fanatische Nationalsozialisten oder ganz normale Deutsche?*

nuanced, albeit general model for analyzing perpetrators that considers ideological, cultural, situational, and dispositional factors.¹⁰⁸¹ As historical inquiry into German perpetrators has reached maturity, scholars also have begun to recognize the important role that non-Germans played in carrying out the Holocaust. This insight has become particularly apparent as part of research on the Holocaust in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁸² While current and ongoing study of indigenous perpetrators in the occupied Soviet Union has recovered a significant amount of historical information on local participation in the Holocaust, scholars have yet to devote more than cursory attention to explaining why area gentiles took part in genocide.¹⁰⁸³ Insofar as scholars have begun to address the role of Soviet Volksdeutsche in the Holocaust in the occupied Soviet Union, the scholarly focus on historical reconstruction is particularly pronounced.¹⁰⁸⁴

This chapter contributes to research on perpetrators from the Soviet Union, and

¹⁰⁸¹ See Browning, "Ideology, Culture, Situation, and Disposition. Holocaust Perpetrators and the Group Dynamics of Mass Killing."

¹⁰⁸² Perhaps most significantly, recent and forthcoming monographs, such as those of Omer Bartov, Kate Brown, Shimon Redlich, and Timothy Snyder, have contextualized the Holocaust within Eastern Europe's cultural multiplicity. See Omer Bartov's forthcoming study on the East Galician town of Buczacz. Brown, *A Biography of No Place*; Shimon Redlich, *Together and Apart in Brzezany: Poles, Jews, and Ukrainians, 1919-1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002); Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations*.

¹⁰⁸³ Focusing on the complicity of the predominantly Slavic local police in Belarus and Ukraine, for example, Bernhard Chiari, Martin Dean, and Dieter Pohl have examined the crucial contribution of non-German Holocaust perpetrators in the Soviet Union. Chiari, *Alltag hinter der Front*; Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust*; Pohl, "Ukrainische Hilfskräfte beim Mord an den Juden."

¹⁰⁸⁴ Scholars who address Soviet ethnic German perpetrators, such as Jean Ancel, Andrej Angrick, and Wendy Lower, note the prominent part that Volksdeutsche played in the Final Solution, but focus their studies on Reich German or Romanian occupation officials, rather than on ethnic Germans themselves. Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-42*; Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*; Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building*. Moreover, several recent articles by Martin Dean and Wendy Lower raise important broader questions about the role of Soviet ethnic Germans in the Holocaust. Dean, "Soviet Ethnic Germans and the Holocaust in the Reich Commissariat Ukraine, 1941-1944;" Lower, "Hitler's 'Garden of Eden' in Ukraine: Nazi Colonialism, Volksdeutsche, and the Holocaust, 1941-44."

specifically ethnic Germans, by analyzing why Transnistria's militiamen, such as Pastushchenko, murdered Jews with such apparent enthusiasm when Sonderkommando R mustered them during the winter of 1941-42. It is divided into four parts. The first section contextualizes the Selbstschutz's crimes by recovering the organization's institutional history. Focusing on Sonderkommando R's efforts to marshal area Volksdeutsche to participate in the Holocaust, this portion discusses how Transnistria's ethnic German militia evolved from a rudimentary self-defense force into a sophisticated killing organization. Using wartime and postwar sources, the chapter's second section recovers the backgrounds of the Selbstschutz's members by constructing a prosopography of militiamen subordinated to Bereichkommando XI—the most heavily implicated of Sonderkommando R's militia units. The third section provides a case study of the initial killing deployment of one of Bereichkommando XI's militia units to explore the specific dynamics of the Selbstschutz's participation in the Holocaust. The chapter concludes by using information gathered from all three sections to outline the constellation of motivations that moved the militiamen to commit murder. While a handful of universal antecedents, especially social psychological pressures that commonly shape the dynamics of individual behavior within groups, operated powerfully on the Selbstschutz's members, the roots of their genocidal violence lay in situational factors—many of which Hoffmeyer's subordinates manipulated, both wittingly and unwittingly, to encourage ethnic German participation in the Holocaust. By employing a flimsy, yet surprisingly potent propaganda campaign against the “Judeo-Bolshevik” enemy and by offering local Volksdeutsche exceptional material incentives to participate in mass murder, Sonderkommando R helped to create circumstances in which a population with little history of anti-Jewish violence fielded some of the Holocaust's most brutal murderers.

The Selbstschutz

Transnistria's Volksdeutsche Selbstschutz was an organization that traced its lineage to prewar indigenous ethnic German self-defense formations. During the Revolutions of 1905 and 1917 as well as the Russian Civil War, area non-Germans attacked and pillaged their German-speaking and historically wealthier neighbors. In response to each of these threats, area Volksdeutsche created local self-defense forces that they based in major towns to deter would-be marauders.¹⁰⁸⁵ In some instances, and particularly during the Russian Civil War, area ethnic German militia units cooperated with local non-Germans to defend their communities against outside aggression.¹⁰⁸⁶ While no militia force existed under Soviet rule, the Wehrmacht recreated these units during the summer of 1941 to combat continued Romanian army attacks on area Volksdeutsche settlements.¹⁰⁸⁷ When Einsatzgruppe D passed through the area during its peripatetic killing deployment, it inherited and supported these earlier Wehrmacht-created ethnic German militia units.¹⁰⁸⁸ In at least a few instances, Einsatzgruppe D appears to have recruited members of the units to exhume mass graves during killing operations in area Volksdeutsche settlements.¹⁰⁸⁹ Despite this entrée to the

¹⁰⁸⁵ Fleischhauer, *Die Deutschen im Zarenreich*, 375.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Roemmich, "Die evangelische Kirche in Russland in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart," 254.

¹⁰⁸⁷ It is unclear whether the German army, which had equipped and trained these militia forces during 1918, was cognizant of the fact that it had assisted earlier iterations of the region's ethnic German militia. Aussage von F. W., November 19, 1962, BAL, B162/2299, 166.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Aussage von K. T., December 6, 1962, BAL, B162/2300, 69. British signals intelligence confirms that assisting Volksdeutsche militia forces elsewhere in the Soviet Union was Einsatzgruppe D's standard operating procedure. German Police Decodes Nr. 2 Traffic: 12.10.42, October 16, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 36, 4.

¹⁰⁸⁹ There was a personnel overlap between Volksdeutsche whom Einsatzgruppe D tasked with assisting its shooting operations and member of the Selbstschutz. See, for example, Aussage von F. V., June 24, 1970, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2702, 82. It is likely, but admittedly speculative, that Einsatzgruppe D used membership in these early militia units as a basis for recruiting helpers.

Holocaust, Transnistria's Volksdeutsche Selbstschutz was not one of Sonderkommando R's creations, but rather a recent iteration of a decades-old local organization whose primary function—quite legitimately—was defensive.

Upon taking up its assignments in rural Transnistria, Sonderkommando R expanded the Selbstschutz dramatically in both size and mission. The unit's commanders ordered their Bereichkommandoführer to enlarge the often modest militia units that the Wehrmacht and Einsatzgruppe D had created in larger Volksdeutsche settlements and to establish new units in smaller localities, where earlier German forces had not operated. Absent superior orders on whom to recruit for militia service, Bereichkommandoführer grew their Selbstschutz forces in an ad hoc fashion that varied both within and among Bereichkommandos. In general, Bereichkommandoführer labored to ensure that between eight and 10 Selbstschutz members guarded each VoMi-administered locality.¹⁰⁹⁰ While the initial kernel of personnel came from existing militia forces that the Wehrmacht and Einsatzgruppe D had organized, during the fall of 1941 Bereichkommandoführer went on a recruitment drive. Sonderkommando R appears to have favored young ethnic German men in their late teens and twenties, perhaps because they regarded them as less influenced by Soviet rule.¹⁰⁹¹ Owing to the large number of Volksdeutsche men whom Soviet authorities had deported to the country's interior prior to the arrival of German and Romanian forces, sometimes it proved impossible to fill even the early Selbstschutz's modest ranks with men from this age cohort. In some cases, Bereichkommandoführer had to recruit men up to the age of 40 and, particularly in smaller

¹⁰⁹⁰ Aussage von J. F., March 27, 1962, BAL, B162/2292, 29-30. Aussage von K. Z., November 19, 1962, BAL, B162/2299, 108-109. Vernehmung von J. B., November 15, 1962, BAL, B162/2299, 254. Protokol doprosa / Fet Ivan, May 22, 1948, USHMM, RG-38.018M, Reel 79, 3753-3754.

¹⁰⁹¹ Aussage von E. P., July 16, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 192. Aussage von J. R., August 24, 1962, BAL, B162/2302, 7.

localities, Sonderkommando R had to muster all of the settlements' able-bodied ethnic German men.¹⁰⁹² Postwar accounts by former militiamen are replete with statements indicating that their participation in the Selbstschutz had been mandatory.¹⁰⁹³ In some instances, this may have been the case. Nevertheless, the comparatively small number of ethnic German men required to staff Sonderkommando R's militia units, relative to Transnistria's total Volksdeutsche population, suggests strongly that in many instances militia service was voluntary.

It may also have been relatively easy for Sonderkommando R to recruit its first militiamen because the expanded Selbstschutz's mission differed little from that of earlier home-grown irregular forces that local Volksdeutsche historically had formed in times of crisis. During the fall of 1941, the initial catalyst for Sonderkommando R to beef up the region's Volksdeutsche militia forces remained continued Romanian theft. Earlier efforts by the Wehrmacht and Einsatzgruppe D to interdict Romanian raiding parties had failed because neither organization had remained on site for long enough or been able to devote sufficient resources to stamping out Romanian banditry. That task had fallen to Sonderkommando R, which, like many of the area's Volksdeutsche residents, regarded it as one of its utmost priorities. By assisting local residents to develop an indigenous militia force, during the first weeks and months of its deployment to Transnistria, Sonderkommando R assumed the role played by earlier German units, including ones that had operated in the area at the end of the First World War. Local Volksdeutsche would have not only recognized this pattern of

¹⁰⁹² Aussage von G. S., March 2, 1962, BAL, B162/2292, 6. Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von J. D., August 13, 1962, BAL, B162/2296, 159.

¹⁰⁹³ Aussage von J. S., April 13, 1962, BAL, B162/2292, 53. Protokol doprosa / Kokha Floriana, October 8, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8580.

German assistance, but also had every reason to cooperate, because these militias were all that stood between their property and the Romanian military's sticky fingers. To area Volksdeutsche, the Selbstschutz was a desirable organization to join during the fall of 1941.

In the latter half of 1941, Transnistria's Volksdeutsche Selbstschutz was a ragtag local police force. In each ethnic German settlement, the eight to 10 local militiamen reported to an area resident, whom the responsible Bereichkommandoführer had designated the local militia commander or *Selbstschutzzführer*.¹⁰⁹⁴ Sonderkommando R appears to have selected Selbstschutzzführer not only based on their presumed ideological reliability, but at least anecdotally, on previous Red Army service.¹⁰⁹⁵ Each Selbstschutz unit established a local command post that was frequently next to the seat of municipal government, the *Bürgermeisteramt*.¹⁰⁹⁶ Transnistria's ethnic German militia units were initially badly clothed, armed, and trained. With the exception of the local militia commanders, for whom Sonderkommando R periodically provided surplus Wehrmacht tunics, Selbstschutz members had no uniforms.¹⁰⁹⁷ The best that Sonderkommando R's personnel could do to clothe their militiamen was to outfit them with homemade white armbands marked with swastikas.¹⁰⁹⁸

¹⁰⁹⁴ Aussage von E. T., May 20, 1965, BAL, B162/2304, 69. Aussage von J. E., November 17, 1962, BAL, B162/2299, 263. Aussage von K. U., January 28, 1963, BAL, B162/2301, 143. Protokol doprosa / Fet Ivan, May 22, 1948, USHMM, RG-38.018M, Reel 79, 3753. Protokol doprosa / Fet Ivan, May 29, 1948, USHMM, RG-38.018M, Reel 79, 3766. Protokol doprosa / Renner Yakov Yakovich, July 1, 1948, USHMM, RG-38.018M, Reel 79, 3726.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Protokol doprosa / Fet Ivan, May 18, 1948, USHMM, RG-38.018M, Reel 79, 3749.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Aussage von F. V., June 24, 1970, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2702, 83-84. Aussage von F. D., November 27, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 206.

¹⁰⁹⁷ German Police Decodes No. 1 Traffic: 9.3.43, March 17, 1943, BNA, HW 16, Piece 37, Part 1, 1. Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von D. R., n.d. BAL, B162/2290, 136. Aussage von B. B., November 13, 1962, BAL, B162/2300, 54.

¹⁰⁹⁸ German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 29 June - 28 July 1943, August 10, 1943, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 4. Protokol doprosa / Ionusa Aleksandra, May 29, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8504. Protokol doprosa / Kokha Floriana, October 8, 1966, USHMM, RG-

As discussed in detail in chapter seven, Sonderkommando R relied on obsolete and often defective hunting rifles and Soviet firearms that German and Romanian forces had captured during the invasion.¹⁰⁹⁹ Training for these early militia units was virtually non-existent. In some cases, the local Bereichkommandoführer, or more often an SS or NSKK non-commissioned officer assigned to his command, offered area militiamen rudimentary instruction on basic military skills during occasional clinics.¹¹⁰⁰ In other instances, Bereichkommandoführer provided Volksdeutsche militiamen with no instruction whatsoever.¹¹⁰¹ Until Sonderkommando R's mass shooting operations during the winter of 1941-42, Transnistria's Selbstschutz was barely capable of fulfilling its assigned tasks of guarding sensitive infrastructure and conducting nighttime patrols to ward off Romanian attacks.¹¹⁰²

As the threat of continued Romanian pilfering abated during the fall of 1941, thanks in part to the Selbstschutz's vigilance, Sonderkommando R's Bereichkommandoführer began to deploy militiamen under their command to perform two additional missions—one external and the other internal. No longer content simply to command a reactive force that intercepted Romanian raiding parties, as chapter five discusses, many Bereichkommandoführer used their militia forces to bring the fight to the Romanians. The militiamen became foot soldiers in Sonderkommando R's ongoing struggle with Romanian

31.018M, Reel 17, 8579. Aussage von M. B., June 10, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 193. Aussage von J. S., March 17, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 8.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Rundanwesiung Nr. 5, October 13, 1941, BB, R 59/66, 148. Protokol doprosa / Ionusa Aleksandra, May 28, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8504.

¹¹⁰⁰ Aussage von I. F., July 27, 1962, BAL, B162/2300, 102.

¹¹⁰¹ Protokol doprosa / Fet Ivan, May 29, 1948, USHMM, RG-38.018M, Reel 79, 3766.

¹¹⁰² Aussage von J. H., September 9, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 278.

forces stationed in Transnistria. At roughly the same time, as addressed in chapter three, many of Transnistria's Bereichkommandoführer launched a parallel campaign to root out the Third Reich's racial and political enemies within Transnistria's Volksdeutsche settlements. As with Sonderkommando R's struggle against Romanian control in the region, local ethnic German militiamen contributed integral manpower to this expanded mission. During the fall of 1941, the Selbstschutz, an organization designed initially to thwart marauding Romanian troops, evolved into a manpower pool that Hoffmeyer's subordinates had begun to dip into to meet the personnel needs of the unit's expanded agenda well before the beginning of shooting operations at the Bogdanovka camp.

The Selbstschutz's expanded role in Sonderkommando R's enterprise in Transnistria during the fall of 1941 had two implications for the region's ethnic German militia. First, Sonderkommando R deployed Transnistria's Selbstschutz units unequally and devoted significantly greater attention and resources to more active formations. Based on surviving evidence, it appears that the most heavily engaged militia units during late 1941 were based in larger ethnic German enclaves. The reasons for this were twofold. On the one hand, Sonderkommando R had stationed its Bereichkommandos in more sizeable Volksdeutsche settlements. Nearby militiamen logically became the first ethnic Germans that Sonderkommando R's staff tapped to man new missions against Romanian forces and internal enemies. On the other hand, Sonderkommando R's leaders may have concentrated their campaign against racially and politically suspect local residents in larger locales because they concluded that bigger towns, which during Soviet rule had served as administrative centers, had attracted local residents of Jewish origin as well as those individuals suspected of "communist" collaboration. Selbstschutz formations in larger

Volksdeutsche settlements thus became frontline units in Sonderkommando R's dual internal and external campaigns.

Establishing differences among individual Selbstschutz units, and particularly between more and less active militia forces is difficult. Owing to the fact that postwar investigators honed in on the most heavily implicated Selbstschutz units, little information about less involved ethnic German militia formations exists. Nevertheless, based on fragmentary information, it is apparent that during the fall of 1941 Sonderkommando R diverted the lion's share of its meager armament and haphazard training efforts to frontline Selbstschutz units in major Volksdeutsche communities, where militiamen might be mobilized. In contrast to militia units in larger ethnic German settlements, Selbstschutz detachments in smaller localities were exceptionally poorly armed, often depending not on firearms but rather on clubs.¹¹⁰³ Training for militia units in these small settlements was even less impressive. In the relatively rare instances in which Sonderkommando R bothered to teach basic tactics to these more remote militia forces, Selbstschutz members from more active units, whom German authorities had trained only a few months earlier, alone supervised drills.¹¹⁰⁴ During the first few months of their existence, Transnistria's Selbstschutz units varied tremendously in both activity and the resources that Sonderkommando R devoted to them.

The second outcome of Sonderkommando R's efforts to curtail Romanian authority and to root out suspected internal political enemies was that, during the fall of 1941, a handful of Transnistria's militiamen acquired expertise in carrying out the Nazi regime's

¹¹⁰³ Aussage von G. E., May 23, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 84.

¹¹⁰⁴ Aussage von J. F., March 27, 1962, BAL, B162/2292, 29-30. Aussage von J. A., December 4, 1962, BAL, B162/2301, 100.

violent agenda. Prior to December 1941, at least some of Sonderkommando R's militia forces had evolved from simple self-defense units into violent and at times murderous instruments of the Nazi regime's policies. While numbering perhaps a few dozen Volksdeutsche spread throughout Transnistria, the members of Sonderkommando R's most active Selbstschutz units had experience in projecting German authority beyond their hometowns and in assisting in the murder of individuals—and often their neighbors—whom their German superiors had declared to be the Third Reich's enemies. At the Bogdanovka camp at the end of 1941, at least a handful of these seasoned Selbstschutz members would form the backbone of Sonderkommando R's foray into mass killing.

As noted in chapter seven, Hoffmeyer's command deployed its Selbstschutz units to murder Jewish deportees in northeastern Transnistria in what it perceived as an act of last resort. Confronted with a potentially catastrophic public health crisis, Sonderkommando R mustered its militia forces first to the Bogdanovka collective farm and then in the region surrounding the Berezovka rail terminus not because of the Selbstschutz's proven abilities, but rather because the unit lacked any other personnel to murder the Jewish expellees. These new assignments taxed both the militiamen's capabilities and ultimately the Selbstschutz's organizational structure, training, and weaponry.

In response to the militia's new role, during the winter of 1941-42, Sonderkommando R radically revamped its Selbstschutz forces. To staff the killing operations at the Bogdanovka camp, Hartung deployed roughly 60 militiamen, who constituted all or virtually all of the Selbstschutz members that Bereichkommando XI had at its disposal. These units were of unequal quality. Some Selbstschutz detachments had already acquired weeks, if not months of experience in enforcing Sonderkommando R's brutal and at times murderous rule

in area Volksdeutsche settlements. In other instances, Hartung and his staff mustered Selbstschutz units from remote Volksdeutsche communities, with whom Bereichkommando XI had maintained little contact during the fall of 1941. While Hartung's command was able to deploy a sufficient number of shooters to contribute to a joint killing operation at a facility where Romanian authorities had already concentrated and imprisoned their Jewish victims, the Selbstschutz's capabilities were inadequate to conduct more complex operations. This fact became apparent to the unit's Bereichkommandoführer, when Sonderkommando R decided to ramp up its killing operations in rural Transnistria—an undertaking that required it to field forces capable of interdicting, guarding, and ultimately murdering Jewish expellees in any one of three Bereichkommandos.

Sonderkommando R's response to expanded killing operations near Berezovka was to increase the Selbstschutz's size by mobilizing virtually all Volksdeutsche men of military age to participate in the militia. Recovering the precise process by which Sonderkommando R converted what had been a relatively limited ethnic German auxiliary police force into a mass organization is difficult from the existing records, as only fragmentary references in wartime documents related to this process have survived.¹¹⁰⁵ In their postwar testimony, many suspected militiamen drew a careful, and frequently overly nuanced distinction between “active” (*aktiv*) and “passive” (*passiv*) Selbstschutz formations.¹¹⁰⁶ As the names imply, the former were purportedly far more heavily involved in implementing Sonderkommando R's

¹¹⁰⁵ See, for example, Stabbefehl Nr. 102, April 18, 1943, BB, R 59/67, 99. Stabbefehl Nr. 109, June 22, 1943, BB, R 59/67, 59.

¹¹⁰⁶ Aussage von W. R., December 11, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 222. Aussage von E. A., August 18, 1964, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2684, 30. Aussage von G. M., September 7, 1964, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2684, 102-103.

policies, including the mass shooting of Jewish deportees.¹¹⁰⁷ Not surprisingly, most alleged militiamen classified themselves as members of the latter type of units.¹¹⁰⁸ Although many of these labels were self-serving, the ubiquity of this distinction and the fact that it remains consistent in statements that both West German and Soviet investigators collected suggests that Sonderkommando R created active and what might more accurately be termed reserve Selbstschutz formations to cope with its expanded manpower demands.¹¹⁰⁹ While in Bereichkommandos XI, XIV, and XX, this expansion was clearly a response to the specific personnel pressures that local commanders faced, the fact that other Bereichkommandos also attempted to beef up their Volksdeutsche militia forces suggests that Sonderkommando R's senior leadership directed their subordinates to take these steps.¹¹¹⁰ It is uncertain whether or not Sonderkommando R feared that Romanian authorities would expand their Jewish deportations into other areas of Transnistria and ordered an increase in the size of the Selbstschutz as a precautionary measure. Alternatively, Sonderkommando R's amplified manpower needs for more sophisticated deployments near Berezovka may have offered a convenient pretext for the unit to expand the militia, which was, after all, also a key weapon in its struggle against local Romanian authorities. In all likelihood, both factors played a role in Sonderkommando R's decision to enlarge its militia forces in Transnistria during the

¹¹⁰⁷ Aussage von E. A., August 18, 1964, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2684, 30.

¹¹⁰⁸ Aussage von G. M., September 7, 1964, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2684, 102-103.

¹¹⁰⁹ Protokol doprosa / Ionusa Aleksandra, May 29, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8504.

¹¹¹⁰ On Hoffnungsthal, see Aussage von J. A., December 4, 1962, BAL, B162/2301, 100. Aussage von J. F., November 29, 1963, BAL, B162/2301, 18. On Helenenthal, see Aussage von C. K., December 3, 1963, BAL, B162/2301, 37. On Katherinenthal, see Aussage von D. B., November 20, 1962, BAL, B162/2301, 76. On Landau, see Aussage von J. M., July 23, 1962, BAL, B162/2300, 4. Vernehmung von J. B., November 15, 1962, BAL, B162/2299, 253. On Mannheim, see Aussage von B. B., November 13, 1962, BAL, B162/2300, 54. On Mühlenbach, see Aussage von J. E., August 20, 1962, BAL, B162/2302, 170. On Speyer, see Aussage von C. B., December 16, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 241.

winter of 1941.

How precisely local Bereichskommandoführer established active duty and reserve militia forces is uncertain. Based on anecdotal evidence gleaned from postwar statements that former militiamen gave, during early 1942 it appears that throughout Transnistria Sonderkommando R ordered all able-bodied men to join the Selbstschutz.¹¹¹¹ Exemptions from militia service were rare and Sonderkommando R reserved these for Volksdeutsche whose alleged racial and political reliability excluded them from bearing arms in the Third Reich's service.¹¹¹² Younger ethnic German men who had gained earlier experience in localized killing deployments or, in the case of those attached to Bereichskommando XI, had participated in the shootings at the Bogdanovka camp, formed an active, hard core of this dramatically expanded militia force.¹¹¹³ Sonderkommando R assigned older Volksdeutsche men, whose age and greater degree of interaction with the Soviet regime prior to the war had made them less desirable recruits in German eyes during the fall of 1941, to reserve units.¹¹¹⁴ The active duty unit members served fulltime as German auxiliaries and continued to assist Sonderkommando R in its ongoing struggle with local Romanian authorities and in eliminating the Nazi regime's racial and political enemies. Their older, reserve colleagues, by contrast, maintained their previous jobs and could be mustered for special deployments at

¹¹¹¹ Former militia members later testified about Sonderkommando R's efforts to expand militia membership. Aussage von J. E., November 17, 1962, BAL, B162/2299, 264.

¹¹¹² Despite postwar claims by suspected militiamen, having served as a choir director appears to have been an implausible reason for an exemption from Selbstschutz service. Aussage von A. R., May 26, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 161. The Selbstschutz did, however, occasionally discharge teachers from service. Aussage von R. G., April 1, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 45.

¹¹¹³ Protokol doprosa / Kokha Floriana, February 20, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8787.

¹¹¹⁴ Aussage von G. M., September 7, 1964, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2684, 102-103.

the local militia command post's signal, which was frequently a volley of rifle fire.¹¹¹⁵ While the Selbstschutz's active duty formations appear to have been sufficient for most day-to-day operations, mass shootings in the area of Berezovka required area Bereichskommandoführer to deploy both active and reserve militia units. In some instances, Bereichskommandoführer may have detailed their more experienced active duty militiamen to conduct the actual shootings. In most large-scale killing operations, however, Bereichskommandoführer had little option but to use both active duty and reserve militia forces interchangeably.¹¹¹⁶ Evidence, while skeletal, suggests that both groups of militiamen performed equally effectively in these grisly missions.

In response to its dramatically increased militia force, Sonderkommando R redoubled its efforts at militia training. In contrast to earlier halfhearted and sporadic attempts to instruct militiamen under their commands, beginning in late December 1941 and early January 1942, Bereichskommandoführer throughout Transnistria began organizing mandatory training courses for local Selbstschutz members.¹¹¹⁷ Based typically near a Bereichskommando's headquarters, these instructional sessions usually lasted for several days and focused on basic military tactics and drills as well as weapons training.¹¹¹⁸ Perhaps most importantly, Bereichskommando staff used these training courses to provide Selbstschutz members with National Socialist ideological instruction that had been largely absent from earlier instructional regimens. Efforts at what amounted to very rudimentary indoctrination

¹¹¹⁵ Aussage von J. S., March 17, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 8.

¹¹¹⁶ Protokol doprosa / Ionusa Aleksandra, March 16, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8959.

¹¹¹⁷ Aussage von A. E., November 16, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 123-124. Aussage von A. K., April 22, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 68-69. Aussage von A. K., October 10, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 18. Aussage von E. R., August 29, 1967, BAL, B162/2309, 117. Aussage von J. R., May 5, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 103.

¹¹¹⁸ Aussage von K. U., January 28, 1963, BAL, B162/2301, 143.

served two purposes. On the one hand, it bolstered units that Sonderkommando R had deployed recently and unexpectedly to participate in the mass murder of Jewish deportees. On the other hand, it sought to integrate older Volksdeutsche militiamen, whom area German personnel may have suspected as having been more attached to and potentially compromised by their earlier interactions with Soviet power. Selbstschutz training during the winter of 1941-42 was designed as much to hone practical skills as it was to provide an ideological foundation for the ethnic German militia's new murderous role.

The so-called Day of National Rising (*Tag der nationalen Erhebung*), which marked the ninth anniversary of the Nazi regime's rise to power in Germany, became the capstone of Sonderkommando R's early efforts at indoctrination in the midst of its mass killings near Berezovka. Siebert ordered the area's Bereichkommandoführer to organize elaborate, fire-bathed ceremonies for all of Transnistria's Selbstschutz members, which were to commence simultaneously at 7 PM on January 30, 1942. Perhaps to appeal to local residents' religious convictions, the pageant's format resembled a high liturgical church service, complete with a confession of faith in National Socialism. Following an elaborate flag ceremony, which was eerily reminiscent of the procession of the cross at the beginning of the liturgy, local militiamen were to sing a medley of what Siebert termed "the songs of the nation."¹¹¹⁹ The Bereichkommandoführer was then to give a homily concerning the history of the National Socialist seizure of power, with particular attention to the "juxtaposition of National Socialism and Bolshevism."¹¹²⁰ Local commanders were to impress upon their

¹¹¹⁹ Rundsanweisung Nr. 17 / Betr.: Feier des Tages der nationalen Erhebung, January 20, 1942, BB, R 59 / 66, 125.

¹¹²⁰ Ibid.

Volksdeutsche subordinates the “duties and responsibility of the Selbstschutz.”¹¹²¹ Siebert then instructed his subordinates to complete the ceremony by ordering all militiamen to swear a personal oath to Hitler according to the following text: “As a carrier of German blood I swear to you, Adolf Hitler, the Führer of all Germans, to be true unto death, to do my best, and to be absolutely obedient to all of my superiors. So help me God.”¹¹²² Given the detail in which former militiamen recounted this ceremony to their West German and Soviet interrogators decades later, its pomp and circumstance must have been quite memorable.¹¹²³

Sonderkommando R appears to have continued extemporaneous ideological and practical Selbstschutz instruction during its early 1942 killing operations. As the unit’s involvement in mass shooting operations wound down, however, the sophistication and scale of its training efforts increased. There are two explanations for this apparent paradox. First, following the conclusion of major shooting operations in rural Transnistria, Sonderkommando R’s senior leaders and local commanders had time and resources to devote to continued militia training. Second, the Selbstschutz’s performance during these killing deployments may have underscored the militiamen’s potential to Sonderkommando R and convinced its leaders that area ethnic Germans were worth the added investment of time and

¹¹²¹ Ibid.

¹¹²² Ibid. British signals intelligence intercepted a slightly different oath that Siebert allegedly ordered all Volksdeutsche in Transnistria to take. It read: “I solemnly promise to be loyal to the Leader of all German peoples, Adolf Hitler; I pledge myself to unconditional obedience to all officials of the Reich set over me; I will serve my German people with all my powers, so help me God.” German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 15th January- 16th February 1942, March 17, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 12.

¹¹²³ See, for example, Aussage von E. T., May 20, 1965, BAL, B162/2304, 72. Aussage von K. U., January 28, 1963, BAL, B162/2301, 143. Aussage von P. H., September 10, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 280-281. Protokol doprosa / Ionusa Aleksandra, November 10, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 9018. Protokol doprosa / Ionusa Aleksandra, May 29, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8505. Protokol doprosa / Kokha Floriana, October 4, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8553. Although less frequently, even some of Sonderkommando R’s German staff remembered the ceremony. Verantwortliche Vernehmung von W. J. G. P., June 29, 1971, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2703, 127.

resources for subsequent instruction. No longer content to delegate training responsibilities, Sonderkommando R's leaders centralized the instructional process by creating Selbstschutz academies in larger ethnic German settlements, such as Hoffnungsthal, where the unit converted an abandoned Red Army barracks into a militia school.¹¹²⁴ The unit staffed these facilities with trainers from both Sonderkommando R's headquarters in Landau and the Wehrmacht Liaison Office for Transnistria (*Verbindungsstab der Deutschen Wehrmacht für Transnistrien*). During the training courses, which typically lasted from four to six weeks, Sonderkommando R provided its militiamen with military and, although less well-documented, presumably also ideological instruction.¹¹²⁵ At the conclusion of the training, Selbstschutz men who had arrived at the training unarmed often received captured Soviet rifles, which Sonderkommando R had scrounged together, as parting gifts.¹¹²⁶ Insofar as their trainers could provide them, graduates of these Selbstschutz academies also received at least parts of Wehrmacht uniforms, which Sonderkommando R had stripped of rank insignias prior to distribution.¹¹²⁷ The energy and resources that Sonderkommando R poured into Transnistria's Selbstschutz during 1942 is evident from both the disproportionate number of training schools and militiamen in the region. In the whole of occupied Ukraine, Sonderkommando R trained more than 12,500 Volksdeutsche militiamen at some 27 Selbstschutz academies. More than 7,000 of these militiamen and more than half of all

¹¹²⁴ Aussage von A. E., November 23, 1962, BAL, B162/2299, 130.

¹¹²⁵ In some instances, Sonderkommando R permitted militiamen to return home early if they demonstrated military training that they had received in the Red Army. See, for example, Aussage von A. K., April 22, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 68-69.

¹¹²⁶ Aussage von H. J., May 19, 1965, BAL, B162/2304, 62-63.

¹¹²⁷ Aussage von G. M., September 7, 1964, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2684, 102-103. Aussage von F. V., June 24, 1970, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2702, 83.

Selbstschutz training schools were in Transnistria.¹¹²⁸ Even accounting for the concentration of Volksdeutsche in Transnistria, this geographic focus is nevertheless telling. After Transnistria's Selbstschutz had proven its mettle during mass shooting deployments during early 1942, Sonderkommando R lavished the militia with as much attention as the painfully ill-equipped and understaffed unit could marshal.

Selbstschutz academies were not the final stage of Volksdeutsche training, but rather proving grounds designed also to identify and select more promising ethnic German candidates for subsequent instruction. Sonderkommando R recalled particularly adept, and generally young Volksdeutsche militiamen for multi-month training courses at elite Selbstschutz schools that the unit ran in conjunction with the Wehrmacht in Odessa, Nikolaev, and Gut Rauch, a converted collective farm in rural Transnistria.¹¹²⁹ These facilities were themselves feeder institutions. Initially, Sonderkommando R earmarked the graduates of these schools for active duty service in one of the unit's elite cavalry squadrons (*Reiterschwadronen*). As Sonderkommando R's cavalry squadrons were not the focus of postwar criminal probes into the unit's crimes, comparatively little information about these formations exists. Based on information from British signals intelligence, it is evident that the cavalry squadrons were active by mid-1942.¹¹³⁰ In Transnistria, anecdotal evidence suggests that the cavalry squadrons functioned as Sonderkommando R's rapid reaction force

¹¹²⁸ Selbstschutz, c.1942, NARA, T175/72/2589180.

¹¹²⁹ Aussage von H. S., July 6, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 152. Aussage von E. T., May 20, 1965, BAL, B162/2304, 69. Aussage von J. B., October 6, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 336. Aussage von H. S., September 30, 1966, BAL, B162/2306, 263-264.

¹¹³⁰ German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 1st May-30th June 1942, July 17, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 12.

and occasionally deployed to hunt for escaped Jewish prisoners.¹¹³¹ The unit's cavalry squadrons appear to have been one of the few German units to have operated in both Transnistria and the Reichskommissariat Ukraine.¹¹³² Both their large deployment area and high-caliber personnel made them a prime target for both the Sipo-SD and the Wehrmacht, which both attempted to wrest control of Sonderkommando R's cavalry squadrons.¹¹³³ While the Wehrmacht lost its bid to co-opt the units, it appears that, at least in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, Hoffmeyer had to share his authority over the detachments with the Higher SS- and Police Leader.¹¹³⁴ Sonderkommando R's cavalry squadrons remained active in Ukraine until 1944, when, after providing security for the VoMi's withdrawal from the region, Hoffmeyer's superiors compelled him to transfer their personnel to SS-Obergruppenführer Hans Fegelein in occupied Poland.¹¹³⁵

While building up Sonderkommando R's cavalry squadrons may have been Hoffmeyer's preference, Germany's declining military position in the occupied Soviet Union following the battle of Stalingrad prompted the unit to begin transferring its most able militiamen to the Waffen-SS.¹¹³⁶ Beginning in early 1943, Sonderkommando R began

¹¹³¹ Aussage von G. Z., May 19, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 107.

¹¹³² German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 1 August - 31st August 1942, September 7, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 20.

¹¹³³ G.C. & C.S. Air and Military History, Vol. XIII, The German Police, n.d., BNA, HW 16, Piece 63, 221-222.

¹¹³⁴ German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 1st July-31st July 1942, August 11, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 8.

¹¹³⁵ German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 1 - 30 May 1944, June 5, 1944, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, Part 2, 7. German Police Decodes No. 1 Traffic: 20.4.44, April 26, 1944, BNA, HW 16, Piece 40, 3. German Police Decodes No. 1 Traffic: 27.4.44, May 8, 1944, BNA, HW 16, Piece 40, 6. Aussage von J. R., August 24, 1962, BAL, B162/2302, 3.

¹¹³⁶ Siebert first warned Hoffmeyer of his possibility in October 1942. Addenda to G.P.D. 1094 (1.10.42 No 2 Tfc.), November 21, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 36, 4.

mustering young Volksdeutsche Selbstschutz members, including those upon whom it had devoted substantial resources and training, to appear before Waffen-SS medical examination boards in Landau.¹¹³⁷ Sonderkommando R then transferred Volksdeutsche recruits, who passed their preliminary physical examinations, to Odessa, where the Waffen-SS transferred them via Germany to Holland for basic training in artillery and cavalry units.¹¹³⁸

Although Sonderkommando R surrendered perhaps a quarter of the Selbstschutz's most promising personnel to the Waffen-SS during the first half of 1943, Transnistria's Volksdeutsche militia continued its operations in the region until the very eve of the German withdrawal in March 1944. Immediately prior to the evacuation, Sonderkommando R deployed Selbstschutz personnel to kill the unit's prisoners, whom the unit could not transport much less settle in occupied Poland.¹¹³⁹ During the retreat, Selbstschutz units, like the cavalry squadrons, provided security for the columns of Volksdeutsche refugees, whose evacuation route through southeastern Europe became increasingly more precarious as the Red Army approached.¹¹⁴⁰ The Waffen-SS drafted virtually all of the remaining militiamen upon their arrival in Poland.¹¹⁴¹ Sonderkommando R's ambitions to create an independent

¹¹³⁷ German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 7th March - 7th April 1943, April 8, 1943, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 4. Protokół doprosy / Ionusa Aleksandra, April 3, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8442-8443. Aussage von J. F., November 29, 1963, BAL, B162/2301, 19.

¹¹³⁸ German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 8 April - 8 May 1943, May 9, 1943, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 3. German Police Decodes Nr 3 Traffic: 21.4.43, May 9, 1943, HW 16, Piece 25, 2. German Police Section Weekly Report No. 9 for week ending 16.4.43, n.d., BNA, HW 16, Piece 69, 1. Aussage von J. F., November 29, 1963, BAL, B162/2301, 19. Protokół doprosy / Ionusa Aleksandra, May 29, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8506. Verantwortliche Vernehmung von G. E., April 25, 1962, BAL, B162/2292, 100-101. Vernehmungsniederschrift von L. H., August 7, 1962, BAL, B162/2296, 145. Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von R. F., August 10, 1962, BAL, B162/2296, 157.

¹¹³⁹ Aussage von H. J., May 19, 1965, BAL, B162/2304, 64-65. Aussage von W. M., May 24, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 148. Aussage von A. F., May 22, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 134.

¹¹⁴⁰ German Police Decodes No. 1 Traffic: 20.4.44, April 26, 1944, BNA, HW 16, Piece 40, 3.

¹¹⁴¹ Aussage von H. S., November 10, 1962, BAL, B162/2299, 116. Protokół doprosy / Ionusa

fighting force in Transnistria were ultimately sacrificed to mobilize men for frontline service as Germany's military fortunes waned.

While a departure from the Selbstschutz's established mission of guarding the region's Volksdeutsche settlements from external threats, the militia's participation in the mass murder of Jews in rural Transnistria during the winter of 1941-42 proved decisive in its institutional development. Prior to its role in the mass murder campaign, Sonderkommando R's leaders conceived of their militia forces as a small auxiliary force capable of assisting its personnel in projecting German influence in the region and ferreting out remaining internal enemies within local Volksdeutsche settlements. The voracious manpower needs that mass shooting operations created forced the unit's leaders to increase radically the Selbstschutz's size and to intensify ideological and military training for their militiamen. When the members of the Selbstschutz acquitted themselves well during the mass killing of Jewish deportees, Sonderkommando R devoted the resources necessary to distill ragtag irregulars into an effective fighting force that its German institutional competitors coveted. Although the German war machine's insatiable manpower needs in the midst of looming defeat ultimately hamstrung Sonderkommando R's plans, mass murder during the winter of 1941-42 remained the organization's defining event.

Ordinary Militiamen: A Collective Biography of Bereichkommando XI's Selbstschutz

Who were the men who served in Sonderkommando R's Selbstschutz? A collective biography of militiamen subordinated to Bereichkommando XI, the most heavily implicated and best-documented Selbstschutz unit in Transnistria, helps to answer this question.

Aleksandra, February 25, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8337. Protokol doprosa / Kokha Floriana, January 10, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8745.

Reconstructing the units' membership is a difficult undertaking, as no roster has survived the war and as Sonderkommando R does not appear to have maintained personnel files for its Selbstschutz members. Given the ad hoc fashion in which Hartung mustered his militiamen during late 1941 and early 1942, it is possible that Bereichkommando XI's staff either kept no militia roster or more likely maintained only an incomplete list of Selbstschutz members under its command. While no accessible wartime records about the militia's membership survive, it is possible to reconstruct a partial membership roll for Bereichkommando XI's Selbstschutz during the winter of 1941-42 by compiling an aggregate list of accused militiamen, whom witnesses, victims, and suspected perpetrators implicated in postwar interviews that West German and Soviet investigators conducted.¹¹⁴² This approach is admittedly problematic for two reasons. First, it assumes that the testimony, taken years after the events, is accurate enough to identify individual perpetrators. Although these accusations alone would have been inconclusive in some criminal proceedings—and indeed were during a decades-long investigation in Germany—the diversity of testimony helps to control for inconsistencies. That interviewees, interrogated years and thousands of kilometers apart by very different investigators with divergent procedural rules and agendas, frequently fingered the same area residents as militiamen bolsters the probability that these claims are accurate. Moreover, the fact that this information corresponds very closely to wartime Volksdeutsche registration records adds additional support to these postwar statements. The second difficulty with this approach is that membership in Bereichkommando XI's Selbstschutz alone illuminates little about a given militiaman's role in the killings. The scale of the

¹¹⁴² This is precisely the approach that West German investigators followed. *Einstellungsverfügung*, December 27, 1999, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2812, 11-18.

murder operations that Hartung supervised in Bereichkommando XI relative to the number of Selbstschutz members that he had at his disposal meant that virtually all militiamen had a hand in the killing. Nevertheless, aside from anecdotal evidence, it is difficult to determine whether a particular militiaman shot Jewish deportees only when carefully supervised by his German superiors or operated as an enthusiastic mass murderer who required little if any prompting to kill. While admittedly less than ideal, in the absence of comprehensive wartime records about Bereichkommando XI's militia membership, aggregating accused militiamen implicated in West German and Soviet investigative records provides the most fruitful way to reconstruct a partial list of the region's rank-and-file perpetrators.

Without personnel files for Selbstschutz members, recovering biographical information about the suspected militiamen constitutes another challenge. Nevertheless, the aggregate list of accused militiamen can be used to locate immigration records that the SS-run Einwandererzentrale (EWZ) generated in occupied Poland for ethnic Germans who had fled Transnistria with Sonderkommando R during March 1944. The EWZ's purpose was to screen Volksdeutsche "resettlers" to German-occupied Poland for their racial suitability as members of the Third Reich's planned demographic bulwark in the region. To this end, SS intake officers interviewed ethnic Germans as they appeared at EWZ offices to compile biographical information about the Volksdeutsche immigrants that would facilitate their racial classification according to the four-tiered categories of the Deutsche Volksliste. The EWZ generated a number of intake records, including two card indices, as well as more detailed, but often rarer complete application files (*Anträge*) organized by country of origin.¹¹⁴³ Particular care must be used in reconstructing biographical information about

¹¹⁴³ Although there is significant overlap between these three collections, records for some individuals

ethnic Germans using these records. On the one hand, the Nazi regime collected this information for the purpose of racial categorization, and analysis must account for the fact that the SS gathered and interpreted this data according to its narrow racial worldview. On the other hand, these records are uniformly non-uniform in the information that they contain. SS personnel created these records using an array of forms at offices throughout occupied Poland. Classifications in regard to the occupation, attitude, and particularly racial “purity” of Volksdeutsche often reflected the whims of SS intake officers, rather than systematic categorization guidelines. Notwithstanding these limitations, these records frequently provide the only surviving wartime biographical information about ethnic German men who likely participated in the mass killings that Bereichkommando XI spearheaded during the winter of 1941-42.

Using EWZ materials to recover biographical information about Selbstschutz members is challenging for two reasons—one of which is related to the collection’s organization and the second a product of peculiar naming practices in southern Ukraine’s Volksdeutsche villages. Owing to the fact that the massive collection is organized alphabetically by male head of household, it is infeasible to search for ethnic Germans by geographical area. As Selbstschutz membership did not constitute a criterion that EWZ intake officers used in determining the racial status of a particular ethnic German, intake personnel documented earlier militia service haphazardly.¹¹⁴⁴ Without searching for

appear in only one of them.

¹¹⁴⁴ Occasionally SS intake officers noted Selbstschutz membership in narrative personal histories for ethnic Germans. Antrag von Johann Gärtner, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ50, B91, 2878-2904. Antrag von Philipp Obenloch, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ50, G5, 1092-1114. Antrag von Johannes Reichert, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ50, G61, 1618-1640. Antrag von Jakob Thomä, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ57, T75, 2692-2703. In some instances, SS intake officers included Selbstschutz identification cards as proof of identity in naturalization applications. Antrag von Georg Hanecker, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ50, C47, 1988-2016.

individual names, there is thus no ready way to cull the collection for records about Selbstschutz members in Bereichkommando XI. Identifying individuals by name is itself difficult because many local Volksdeutsche in the region shared only a handful of common names. Within any given town, most residents had one of perhaps a dozen surnames. To make matters worse, in most ethnic German settlements relatives frequently shared the same names.¹¹⁴⁵ Sometimes local Volksdeutsche men had virtually identical biographical profiles. Postwar testimony, for example, accused two different ethnic German men, both named Jakob Thomä, of having served in München's Selbstschutz during its shooting deployments in early 1942. The two men were both born in 1918, were of identical height and build, and, based on photographs taken of the two men in 1944, shared a strong family resemblance. The only discernable difference between the two men was that they were born two and half weeks apart in December 1918.¹¹⁴⁶ Even controlling for the requirements for active and reserve militia membership—having been between the ages of 18 and 60 and having been present in the area in early 1942—locating the corresponding EWZ records for the accused militiamen is a painstaking process.¹¹⁴⁷ Despite these difficulties, of the nearly 300

Antrag von Franz Kniel, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ50, E21, 110-130. Antrag von Peter Mekler, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ50, F44, 626-652. Antrag von Jakob Nuss, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ50, G4, 2156-2184. Antrag von Eduard Redler, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ50, G58, 1198-1224. Antrag von Franz Thomä, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ50, I50, 402-428.

¹¹⁴⁵ In a classic example, Bereichkommando XI was home to four men named Franz Heck, all of who allegedly participated in shooting operations as part of the militia. E-G Karte von Franz Heck, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ57, L105, 972-980. E-G Karte von Franz Heck, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ57, L105, 984-994. Antrag von Franz Heck, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ50, C56, 2500-2502. E-G Karte von Franz Heck, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ57, L105, 998-1006. Also see, E-G Karte von Jakob Feininger, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ57, K56, 1898-1906. E-G Karte von Jakob Feininger, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ57, K56, 1888-1898. E-G Karte von Josef Fröhlich, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ57, K112, 1598-1604. E-G Karte von Josef Fröhlich, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ57, K112, 2182-2184.

¹¹⁴⁶ E-G Karte von Jakob Thomä, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ57, T75, 2692-2703. E-G Karte von Jakob Thomä, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ57, T75, 2704-2718.

¹¹⁴⁷ After the war, accused former militiamen offered wildly divergent, and often exculpatory

militiamen identified in postwar testimony as having served under Hartung's command during the mass shooting operations in Bereichkommando XI, it is possible to identify EWZ records for 89 or roughly 30 percent of the men with a high degree certainty.¹¹⁴⁸ Although providing only an incomplete picture, these records nonetheless paint a most vivid portrait of Bereichkommando XI's rank-and-file killers.

In terms of occupational and educational backgrounds as well as family life, alleged Selbstschutz members differed little from their non-German neighbors. The vast majority of alleged militiamen worked in agriculture. In 1944, SS intake officers classified 71 percent of the accused former Selbstschutz members as farmers.¹¹⁴⁹ The SS identified a further 10 percent as agricultural administrators, such as collective farm managers and bookkeepers, and roughly seven percent as former tractor operators at the region's Machine Tractor Stations. According to EWZ intake officers, skilled laborers, such as electricians and barbers, constituted a smaller, but nevertheless significant 10 percent of the former militiamen. Teachers and students enrolled in higher education courses beyond what was available locally made up only three percent of suspected perpetrators under Hartung's command. Even accounting for the fact that accused teachers had attended at least 10 years

descriptions of the age requirements for Selbstschutz service. The most plausible age cohort called up for militia service appears to have been local men aged 18 to 60. Aussage von J. S., August 13, 1962, BAL, B162/2292, 53.

¹¹⁴⁸ Postwar investigative records confirm wartime estimates of the number of militiamen under Hartung's command during early 1942. Whereas Hartung's fellow Bereichkommandoführer Assmann estimated that the former supervised roughly 250 Selbstschutz members, postwar West German and Soviet investigators identified 289 local ethnic German men, whom interviewees implicated conclusively in the mass murder of Jews during the early months of 1942. For a listing of the EWZ records consulted, see Appendix.

¹¹⁴⁹ The SS drew a distinction between *Landwirt* (farmer) and *Landarbeiter* (agricultural laborer). As all ethnic German farmers in the region had been part of collective farms during the 1930s and early 1940s, the basis for this distinction is unclear. Anecdotally, however, it appears that SS intake personnel may have distinguished agricultural laborers from farmers based on whether or not the ethnic German could make a strong claim to owning farmland.

of primary and secondary school, the unit's typical level of education was low. Suspected militia members had on average 4.3 years of elementary education in local German schools. Six percent of alleged militiamen had no formal schooling and, despite Sonderkommando R's educational initiatives, remained illiterate when SS intake officers registered them in occupied Poland in 1944. The accused militiamen married early and had large families. The mean and median marriage age for alleged Selbstschutz members about whom the EWZ registered this information was twenty-three years old. Ninety-two percent of accused militiamen were married and had, on average, four children. Hartung's militiamen were, in terms of occupation, education, and family, the prototypical rural Soviet residents and differed little from their predominantly ethnically Ukrainian neighbors. Based on these criteria, Bereichkommando XI's militiamen were no more primed to participate in the Holocaust than were their non-German neighbors.

Although the men alleged to have served under Hartung differed little from other rural populations elsewhere in the occupied Soviet Union in some respects, confession distinguished the accused militiamen in Bereichkommando XI from most Soviet citizens. With one exception, all of the accused militiamen in Bereichkommando XI identified in EWZ records were Roman Catholic.¹¹⁵⁰ As scholars have long noted that the Catholic milieu operated as an immunization against National Socialism in Germany, it is tempting to latch on to Bereichkommando XI's Selbstschutz as a counterexample, underscoring disproportionate Catholic participation in the Holocaust.¹¹⁵¹ Doing so, however, would grant confession an inappropriate causal role in explaining the role of individual Selbstschutz units

¹¹⁵⁰ For the one likely exception see, E-G Karte von Peter Ackermann, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ57, I4, 1386-1396.

¹¹⁵¹ Kershaw, *Popular Opinion & Political Dissent in the Third Reich*, 331-357.

in mass shooting operations for two reasons. First, while almost all militia units were essentially mono-confessional, Volksdeutsche membership in the Selbstschutz was independent of denomination. On Sonderkommando R's orders, all ethnic German men aged 18 to 60, regardless of whether or not they identified themselves as Protestants or Catholics, had to serve in militia units located throughout the region's town and collective farms. During the nineteenth century, German-speakers had founded these settlements along strict confessional lines and their descendants' subsequent highly incestuous marriage and migration patterns ensured that, on the whole, Transnistria's Volksdeutsche enclaves remained largely segregated between Catholics and Protestants. Sonderkommando R's Selbstschutz units thus reflected the bifurcated religious affiliations of local ethnic Germans.

Second, Sonderkommando R assigned militia units to murder the Jewish deportees not because of their confessional composition, but rather because of other factors, notably their physical proximity to their Jewish victims. During the first wave of killing at the Bogdanovka camp, Bereichkommando XI's predominately Catholic militiamen spearheaded the unit's initial foray into mass murder. Their involvement in these early shooting missions can be attributed both to their units' propinquity to the camp and to their German commander, who had exceptional latitude to and likely exceptional interest in carrying out a shooting operation of that size. During the second wave of killing near Berezovka, Sonderkommando R mobilized militia units from Bereichkommandos XI, XIV, and XX—units that were again closest to the rail terminus from which Romanian forces were deporting Jews into the surrounding countryside. As before, the militiamen's confession played no role. Whereas militiamen in Bereichkommandos XI and XIV were Catholic, their counterparts in Bereichkommando XX were predominantly Protestant. That Catholic

militiamen were heavily implicated in the shootings in terms of both length of deployment and number of victims, and thus a greater focus of postwar investigations, was simply geographic accident.

The available evidence suggests that Selbstschutz units composed of Catholic and Protestant militiamen preformed no differently when their SS superiors ordered them to murder Jews. Given that recent scholarship has highlighted instances in which Catholic would-be perpetrators tended more often to evade participating in the murder of Jews in mixed Catholic and Protestant units, the fact that confession appears to have had no impact on how well Selbstschutz members carried out their genocidal duties is tantalizing.¹¹⁵² That the Selbstschutz operated in religiously homogenous units may have smoothed cooperation between militiamen based in neighboring communities that Sonderkommando R mustered for killing operations. Nevertheless, the relationship between confession and Volksdeutsche willingness to participate in the Holocaust in Transnistria is perhaps not analogous to instances involving would-be German perpetrators that scholars have examined. As discussed in chapter four, owing to repressive Soviet and Nazi religious policies, unlike Reich Germans, Transnistria's Volksdeutsche had enjoyed few recent opportunities to practice their faith openly or to commune with their fellow believers outside of southern Ukraine. Although evaluating the depth of religious conviction among ethnic Germans in Transnistria is difficult based on the available sources, it is evident that circumscribed opportunities for religious expression made the relationship between area Volksdeutsche and their faith very different from that of Reich Germans. At the very least, as Sonderkommando

¹¹⁵² Beorn, "Negotiating Murder: A Panzer Signal Company and the Destruction of the Jews of Peregruznoe, 1942," 204-205.

R recognized, the absence of religious leaders, let alone an independent Church hierarchy—which the unit denied both Catholics and Protestants through early 1942—hamstrung organized religious responses to the unit’s murderous agenda. While it is conceivable that Sonderkommando R’s religious policies may have deprived Transnistria’s ethnic Germans of a basis for resisting its murderous agenda, the evidence suggests that confession failed to shape the participation of Transnistria’s Volksdeutsche militiamen in the mass shooting of Jews.

More so than occupation, education, family structure, or religion, the distinguishing biographical feature of militiamen subordinated to Bereichskommando XI was their brutal encounter with Soviet power. Virtually all of Bereichskommando XI’s militiamen had suffered because of collectivization in rural Ukraine. Of the suspected militiamen identified in the EWZ materials, roughly a fifth had owned their own farms prior to 1917 and yearned for what they regarded fondly as the golden era of independent agricultural production. With the exception of all but the youngest fifth of the militiamen, who were born between 1921 and 1926, all Selbstschutz members under Hartung’s command would have remembered the confiscation of either their or their families’ farms between 1929 and 1931, when the Soviet regime pursued collectivization in the region. Notwithstanding a handful of ethnic Germans, whom Soviet authorities permitted to pursue higher education in cities like Odessa, beginning in the early 1930s the Soviet state had forced virtually all of Hartung’s militiamen to live and work on collective farms.¹¹⁵³ Soviet rule had transformed Bereichskommando XI’s Selbstschutz members from prosperous farmers to landless laborers. The Soviet regime had,

¹¹⁵³ Accused Selbstschutz member Michael Ehrmanntraut was a quintessential example of this exception. Antrag von Michael Ehrmanntraut, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ50, B36, 894-910.

in effect, created class enemies where none had existed previously.

For future Selbstschutz members, expropriation was the beginning of a continually declining standard of living. Aside from information about Soviet expropriation of ethnic German farmland during the late 1920s and early 1930s, which the SS appears to have collected to determine the amount of land to which the Volksdeutsche “resettlers” allegedly were entitled in occupied Poland, EWZ intake officers failed to keep systematic records about the lives of ethnic Germans under Soviet rule. Anecdotal evidence that can be pieced together from these wartime immigration files is nevertheless compelling. The declining quality of life during the 1920s and 1930s for future militiamen is apparent from their poor health and continued harassment by Soviet security forces. Likely owing to the effects of the 1932-33 famine, to which a significant number of area ethnic Germans succumbed, some accused members of Bereichkommando XI’s Selbstschutz appear to have been physically underdeveloped.¹¹⁵⁴ According to EWZ data, the militiamen had an average height of five feet six inches (169 centimeters) and an average weight of only 143 pounds (65 kilograms). The latter figure is particularly startling, as the SS took these measurements in 1944 after years of German policy aimed at granting Volksdeutsche privileged access to food. In addition to experiencing the likely effects of food shortages that Soviet agricultural policies precipitated, many future militiamen suffered from epidemic disease during the 1920s and 1930s. Even allowing for incomplete EWZ record keeping, which undoubtedly underrepresented earlier illnesses, 30 percent of the suspected militiamen suffered from

¹¹⁵⁴ As West German, let alone Soviet investigators rarely broached the issue of the 1932-33 famine, fragmentary evidence from postwar testimony suggest that the death toll may have been significant. See, for example, Vernehmungsniederschrift von A. D., July 18, 1962, BAL, B162/2296, 98. Aussage von G. M., October 9, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 11.

serious contagious diseases, such as typhoid and cholera, at some point between 1917 and 1941. No less than one-fifth of the alleged future Selbstschutz members contracted malaria during an epidemic that raged through the region during the mid-1930s. While perhaps not exceptionally so in comparison to their non-German neighbors, Soviet rule was a health hazard for Hartung's future militiamen.

Continued harassment by Soviet security forces, which both preceded and followed expropriation, constituted a perennial feature of the prewar lives of Selbstschutz members alleged to have been subordinated to Hartung's command. Josef Mayer, a suspected militiaman from the town of München, exemplified the types of repeated arrests that many of Bereichkommando XI's future Selbstschutz members endured under Soviet rule. As Mayer explained to EWZ intake officers in 1944, during the early 1920s Soviet authorities arrested him on two separate occasions as a class enemy. In 1924, Soviet security personnel again detained him for having provided an insufficient portion of his harvest to the state. Six years later, in 1930, local Soviet officials confiscated what remained of Mayer's land and compelled him to move onto a collective farm. In the midst of Ukraine's 1932-33 famine, Soviet authorities again arrested and imprisoned Mayer for two months for having sold bread on the black market.¹¹⁵⁵ Economic sabotage,¹¹⁵⁶ corresponding with friends and relatives in Germany,¹¹⁵⁷ and fascist espionage¹¹⁵⁸ were among the most common crimes for which Soviet authorities had arrested Bereichkommando XI's alleged Selbstschutz members.

¹¹⁵⁵ Antrag von Josef Mayer, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ50, F21, 756-800.

¹¹⁵⁶ Antrag von Josef Hirsch, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ50, D8, 1454-1470.

¹¹⁵⁷ Antrag von Josef Gärtner, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ50, B91, 2930-2964.

¹¹⁵⁸ Antrag von Johannes Thomä, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ50, I50, 550-576.

Penalized for these offenses, some future suspected militiamen endured months and even years of incarceration and exile in the Soviet Union.¹¹⁵⁹

While it may appear that Bereichkommando XI's militiamen bore the full brunt of the Soviet security apparatus, it is important to remember that they remained among the lucky ones. In contrast to many of their friends and relatives, accused militiamen had escaped permanent deportation to the Soviet interior either before the war or during its opening months. According to wartime German estimates, prior to the fall of 1941 Soviet authorities had deported some 17 percent of Transnistria's Volksdeutsche population—a figure in which male heads of household were overrepresented.¹¹⁶⁰ The deportees' absence served as a perpetual reminder to Hartung's alleged militiamen of the brutality of Soviet power and their highly tenuous position under Soviet rule.

As members of a socio-economically and increasingly ethnically suspect group, the alleged members of Bereichkommando XI's militia were not only the targets of Soviet repression, but were also largely excluded from the opportunities that the Soviet system afforded to at least some of their non-German neighbors. This pattern is apparent from both circumscribed employment opportunities and a low rate of military service. Anecdotally, future purported Selbstschutz members found that their ascribed class and ethnic backgrounds stunted their career prospects. Josef Schmidt, an ethnic German teacher from the town of München, was one of the few accused Selbstschutz members to have pursued education beyond the local elementary school, attending the Agricultural Technical Middle School in Landau from 1930 to 1932 and completing a four-year course on agricultural

¹¹⁵⁹ E-G Karte von Peter Ackermann, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ57, I4, 1386-1396.

¹¹⁶⁰ Zusammenstellung: der aufgebauten kulturellen Einrichtungen von Sonderkommando 'R,' n.d., NARA, T175/ 72/2589157, 2589167.

mechanization in Odessa. As he explained to his EWZ evaluators in a handwritten autobiography that he appended to his 1944 application for German citizenship, after completing his studies he began work as a technician at Landau's Machine Tractor Station, "but could not stay there long, because they wanted to remove me from the position as a class-enemy element . . . [and] . . . I had to leave the job."¹¹⁶¹ In addition to these career restrictions, future purported Selbstschutz members attached to Bereichkommando XI appear to have had an unusually low rate of service in the Red Army. Of the suspected militiamen about whom EWZ documentation exists, only seven percent of them served in the Soviet military during the 1920s and 1930s. To be sure, as the case of Johann Fett, an ethnic German militiaman originally from Michialovka, illustrates, some Selbstschutz members were Red Army veterans. Fett both served in Mongolia during the late 1930s and took part in the failed Soviet invasion of Finland during 1940.¹¹⁶² Nevertheless, presumably because increasing tensions with Nazi Germany during the latter half of the 1930s discouraged Soviet military officials from calling up the region's Volksdeutsche, those alleged future Selbstschutz members who did serve in the Red Army almost invariably did so before 1935. Deemed first class and then also national enemies by the Soviet regime prior to 1941, Hartung's suspected killers had been historically disenfranchised from the Soviet system by limited employment opportunities and exclusion from the Red Army, one of the Soviet Union's most powerful tools for integrating ethnic minorities into the post-revolutionary order.

For the accused Selbstschutz members in Bereichkommando XI, the preceding 15

¹¹⁶¹ Lebenslauf des Bürgers Josef Schmidt in Einbürgerungsantrag Josef Schmidt, 1944, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ50, H46, 2330.

¹¹⁶² Protokol doprosa / Fet Ivan, May 18, 1948, USHMM, RG-38.018M, Reel 79, 3749.

years of Soviet rule had ended in disaster. Virtually all of the alleged militiamen had experienced the brutality of collectivization first hand as either its targets or their sons. Members of a once privileged and prosperous minority, during the late 1920s and 1930s Hartung's future militiamen had been the targets of Soviet redistributive policies that had not only impoverished them, but, in forcing them to live and work on state-owned collective farms, had reshaped their traditional patterns of life radically. Like many of their non-German neighbors, Bereichkommando XI's accused Selbstschutz members suffered from malnutrition and disease as a consequence of flawed Soviet agricultural policies. Moreover, as a socio-economically and, increasingly, during the latter half of the 1930s, as an ethnically suspect population, Bereichkommando XI's accused Selbstschutz members had little chance to adapt to the new Soviet order. Constantly harassed by Soviet security services, denied career opportunities, and largely excluded from Red Army service, Hartung's suspected militiamen had been deprived of precisely the advancement opportunities that the Soviet system had proffered to other non-Russian minorities. Bereichkommando XI's killers, like the region's Volksdeutsche more generally, were, put simply, Stalin's victims.

Initiation to Mass Murder at the Bogdanovka Collective Farm: The Situational Dynamics of Volksdeutsche Participation in the Holocaust

To reconstruct the precise situational factors at play during Sonderkommando R's mass killing operations, it is useful to return to the Bogdanovka collective farm and reconstruct the context in which Pastushchenko and his fellow militiamen perpetrated their initial crimes. After setting up their sub-unit's central command post in the parsonage of Rastatt's abandoned Catholic church during October 1941, Hartung and his three

subordinates, SS-Untersturmführer Johann Stettler,¹¹⁶³ NSKK-Oberscharführer Walter Petersen,¹¹⁶⁴ and NSKK member Hans Gleich,¹¹⁶⁵ toured their Bereichkommando's three other Volksdeutsche villages and two collective farms.¹¹⁶⁶ When they arrived at the Bogdanovka collective farm some 12 kilometers north of Rastatt, the farm's prospects as a German bulwark in Ukraine appeared mixed. Perhaps due to its small size, the Bogdanovka collective farm's machinery and livestock had weathered both the Soviet retreat and Romanian pillaging.¹¹⁶⁷ From the Hartung's perspective, however, the farm's ethnic composition constituted a concern. During collectivization, Soviet authorities had formed the Bogdanovka collective farm from two distinct hamlets—one German and one Ukrainian. Although the predominately ethnically Ukrainian Comintern settlement and the largely Germanophone Neudorf village had enjoyed a degree of administrative autonomy during the Soviet period, the collective farm's ethnic boundaries remained fluid.¹¹⁶⁸

The multi-ethnic Ebenal family—the Neudorf settlement's dominant clan—typifies

¹¹⁶³ SS Offizier Akte Johann Stettler, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SS0 158B, 1297-1368.

¹¹⁶⁴ Although the protocol of Petersen's 1971 West German police interview provides valuable biographical information, only fragments of his SS personnel file survived. The majority of Petersen's SS officer file appears to have been burned. SS Offizier Akte Walter Petersen, NARA, RG 242, A3343, 510-521. Verantwortliche Vernehmung von W. J. G. P., June 29, 1971, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2703, 125-126.

¹¹⁶⁵ Very little information about Hans Gleich exists. As a likely member of the NSKK, his personnel information did not survive the war. His 1962 death prevented West German investigators from interviewing him. Verfügung über H. G., October 16, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 258. Gleich was promoted to the rank of SS-Obersturmführer and deployed to Crimea in April 1943. Stabbefehl Nr. 101, 10 April 1943, BB R 59/67, 104.

¹¹⁶⁶ Aussage von A. B., January 3, 1962, BAL, B162/2290, 155-56. Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von L. B., January 16, 1962, BAL, B162/2290, 165. Aussage von K. T., January 24, 1962, BAL, B162/2291, 141. Protokol doprosa / Ionusa Aleksandra, April 6, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8445. Protokol doprosa / Ionusa Aleksandra, June 1, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8525-26.

¹¹⁶⁷ Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von L. B., January 16, 1962, BAL, B162/2290, 164. Protokol doprosa / Kokha Floriana, January 11, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8858.

¹¹⁶⁸ Protokol doprosa / Kokha Floriana, October 1, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8546. Protokol doprosa / Kokha Floriana, October 10, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8590.

the village's permeable prewar ethnic borders. Numbering perhaps fifty in 1941, virtually all of the hamlet's denizens claimed membership in the family through either blood or marriage.¹¹⁶⁹ This extended family included members whom even their relations identified as being ethnically non-German. Pastushchenko, for example, had married into the family in 1935 and fathered several children.¹¹⁷⁰ Pastushchenko's brother-in-law, Alexander Orgiganov, the Comintern collective's ethnically Russian tractor driver, had likewise joined the family.¹¹⁷¹ Distant cousin Valdemar Hübner and his Russian wife Nina also lived in the German part of the Bogdanovka collective farm.¹¹⁷² Although the farm's existing infrastructure and German-speakers were tantalizing, Hartung and his colleagues recognized the need to identify the town's Volksdeutsche.

Doing so, however, proved easier said than done because, as discussed in chapter six, Sonderkommando R had no serviceable definition of who could be considered an ethnic German in Transnistria.¹¹⁷³ The absence of a working definition of a *Volksdeutscher* was a consequence of the VoMi's population transfers from Eastern Europe prior to the invasion of the Soviet Union. During these operations, Hoffmeyer and his subordinates registered and classified ethnic Germans seeking to relocate to Germany using the multi-tiered categories of the Deutsche Volksliste, which German authorities first had introduced in occupied Poland.

¹¹⁶⁹ A local resident estimated the collective farm's prewar population to be roughly 45. Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von L. B., January 16, 1962, BAL, B162/2290, 162.

¹¹⁷⁰ Einbürgerungsantrag von Johann Pastushchenko, 1944, NARA, RG 242, A3342-EWZ50-G019, 110-22.

¹¹⁷¹ Protokol doprosa / Ionusa Aleksandra, April 6, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8454. Protokol doprosa / Kokha Floriana, October 1, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8556.

¹¹⁷² Protokol doprosa / Kokha Floriana, October 1, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8555. Protokol doprosa Kokha Floriana, November 14, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8703.

¹¹⁷³ Rundanweisung Nr. 11 / Betrifft [sic] namentliche Erfassung und Registrierung aller Volksdeutschen in Transnistrien, December 28, 1941, BB, R 59/66, 132.

As most of the Deutsche Volksliste's classification criteria, such as "culture," depended on subjective evaluations by German intake officers, SS authorities placed emphasis on prewar political activities as a gauge of ethnic identity. While still problematic, outside of the Soviet Union this litmus test had some utility.¹¹⁷⁴ Ethnic Germans from Bessarabia, who had joined the crypto-fascist Erneuerungsbewegung, for example, were unlikely to have identified themselves as ethnic Romanians prior to 1940. As Hoffmeyer's subordinates quickly realized, however, within the pre-1939 border of the Soviet Union, local ethnic Germans had little opportunity to engage in activities that marked "Germanness" for the SS. Soviet authorities had regarded a perpetuation of pre-Revolutionary contact with Germany—let alone openly fascist activities—with the utmost suspicion. Soviet security forces had arrested and deported any would-be *Volksdeutscher* who could have met the SS's criteria long before the occupation. To make matters worse for the SS, the situation in Transnistria differed from earlier "resettlement" operations in that the incentives for local residents to deceive SS evaluators had increased. Although many non-German Eastern Europeans attempted to escape the gathering Soviet storm by posing as Volksdeutsche during VoMi-led operations in Eastern Europe, applicants at least demonstrated anti-Soviet credentials by seeking to relocate—a process that required them to sign over the bulk of their property in trust to the German state.¹¹⁷⁵ By contrast, in Transnistria, where prospective ethnic Germans were permitted to retain their property and could bank on preferential treatment from German authorities, faking Volksdeutsche credentials had little (at least initially apparent) cost to the

¹¹⁷⁴ Bergen, "The Nazi Concept of 'Volksdeutsche' and the Exacerbation of anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe, 1939-45;" Bergen, "The 'Volksdeutschen' of Eastern Europe, World War II, and the Holocaust: Constructed Ethnicity, Real Genocide;" Bergen, "The Volksdeutsche of Eastern Europe and the Collapse of the Nazi Empire, 1944-1945."

¹¹⁷⁵ Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, 169.

applicant.¹¹⁷⁶ Confronted by an alien local population whose historical divorce from Germany and limited opportunities for individual political expression blunted even the SS's crude ethnic classification tools, Hoffmeyer and Siebert could offer their subordinates little constructive guidance on how to proceed.¹¹⁷⁷ Sonderkommando R fielded personnel to identify Transnistria's ethnic Germans just as it articulated the difficulties of doing precisely that.

Absent superior orders on how to determine ethnicity, Hartung employed an efficient, albeit problematic method of identifying Volksdeutsche; he simply retained allegedly reliable local ethnic Germans to conduct the classification for him. In Neudorf, Hartung appointed Josef Faltis as mayor¹¹⁷⁸ and Johann Büchler as the local militia commander.¹¹⁷⁹ After acceding to Büchler's request that local residents Johann Kühlwein and Josef Hass serve as his deputies, Hartung fulfilled his orders to create an indigenous ethnic German militia to thwart marauding Romanian soldiers by instructing Faltis and Büchler to establish Neudorf's militia unit.¹¹⁸⁰ Why Hartung opted to create the militia in this obviously slipshod fashion is

¹¹⁷⁶ Bryant has argued convincingly that the prospect of Wehrmacht service dissuaded many of Prague's residents from seeking Volksdeutsche status. Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 53-55.

¹¹⁷⁷ Rundanweisung Nr. 89 / Betr.: Stellungnahme zu dem Entwurf des Reichskommissars für die Ukraine II a-2 vom 3.11.42 / Aufnahme der Volksdeutschen in der deutsche Volksliste, December 15, 1942, BB, R59/66, 32-33.

¹¹⁷⁸ During their postwar interviews, witnesses described the position of mayor differently to West German and Soviet investigators. In West German statements, witnesses termed the position as *Bürgermeister* (mayor), whereas in testimony to Soviet authorities they described the position as *starosta* (village elder), an equivalent pre-Revolutionary position that German occupation authorities revived in the Reichkommissariat Ukraine during the war.

¹¹⁷⁹ Romanian authorities, who occupied the Bogdanovka collective farm prior to Sonderkommando R's arrival, had named Faltis and Büchler to their posts. Protokol doprosa / Kokha Floriana, October 1, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8851.

¹¹⁸⁰ Protokol doprosa / Ionusa Aleksandra, March 6, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 9052. Protokol doprosa / Ionusa Aleksandra, March 9, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8308-10. Protokol doprosa / Kokha Floriana, October 1, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8552.

unclear. Given that, during the fall of 1941, Bereichskommandoführer appear to have focused their attention on organizing Selbstschutz units in larger Volksdeutsche localities, which might be deployed against the Romanians or alleged internal racial and political enemies, it is likely that Hartung regarded the Bogdanovka collective farm's remote militia unit as one of little importance. He was thus reluctant to devote his staff's time and energy to determine which local residents were eligible to serve in its ranks. By delegating the militia's creation to his Volksdeutsche subordinates, Hartung assigned members of a suspect group to define their own identities.

Local residents found militia membership highly desirable because their classification, or more accurately, their self-identification as Volksdeutsche entitled them to the bounty that the Third Reich promised cooperative ethnic Germans. First, in contrast to their non-German neighbors, the Bogdanovka collective farm's militiamen received expanded, choice garden plots.¹¹⁸¹ Given Sonderkommando R's ambivalence about ending collective agriculture, this expanded autonomy proved attractive to Neudorf's denizens, many of whom yearned for their pre-Revolutionary, autonomous land ownership.¹¹⁸² Second, on Hartung's orders Büchler confiscated the Bogdanovka collective farm's livestock and the local Atmecheskoi Machine Tractor Station's equipment—which had been shared with local Ukrainians—and distributed them exclusively to Selbstschutz members. As the tractors and teams of horses that each ethnic German militiaman received were the only means by which to plant crops in the coming spring, the SS's initial property distribution

¹¹⁸¹ Protokół doprosa / Kokha Floriana, March 9, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8378. On Sonderkommando R's decision to maintain collective agriculture see Dienstanweisung Nr. 2, September 22, 1941, BB, R59/66, 152. Rundanweisung Nr. 7, October 14, 1941, BB, R59/66, 143.

¹¹⁸² Sonderkommando R's decision not to end collective agriculture outright angered many area Volksdeutsche. See, for example, Rundanweisung Nr. 7, October 14, 1941, BB, R59/66, 136-37.

provided Neudorf's inhabitants with a glimpse of the new German-imposed racial hierarchy.¹¹⁸³ The SS planned to starve the farm's non-Germans to fatten local Volksdeutsche.

Given that militia membership was an avenue to privileged status, the multi-ethnic Ebenal family conspired to staff the local unit along familial, rather than ethnic lines. Faltis and Büchler's decision to include Alexander Orgiganov, the Comintern village's Russian tractor driver, in the militia underscores the pliability of the Third Reich's seemingly rigid ethnic categories at the local level. Word about the material advantages that militia membership and thus Volksdeutsche classification afforded permeated the incestuous enclave. As the two local leaders gathered to pen the unit's roster, Orgiganov's ethnic German wife Silvia burst into the unit's makeshift command post and beseeched her kinsmen to include her husband in the militia. Taking pity on their distant cousin and her family, Neudorf's local leaders included Orgiganov in the militia.¹¹⁸⁴ Accounting for as much as 20 percent of the Neudorf unit, the Ebenal clan's non-German family members compromised the SS's ethnic designs for the village.

Beyond the initial visit of Bereichkommando XI's staff and the subsequent initial property redistribution, the residents of the Bogdanovka collective farm maintained minimal contact with VoMi authorities during the subsequent six weeks. This changed during mid-December 1941 when, in anticipation of planned mass shooting deployments at the Bogdanovka camp, Hartung resolved to prevent subsequent Romanian Jewish transports

¹¹⁸³ On the distribution of livestock to militia members see Protokol ochnoi stavki, April 26, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8902. Protokol doprosa / Kokha Floriana Frantsevicha, March 9, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8842-43. On the distribution of agricultural machinery—presumably along similar lines—see Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von L. B., January 16, 1962, BAL, B162/2290, 64.

¹¹⁸⁴ Protokol doprosa / Ionusa Aleksandra, April 6, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8454.

from reaching the facility by diverting them to Volksdeutsche settlements, such as Neudorf, where local militia units were to murder them. This plan entailed mustering militiamen who, even by the Selbstschutz's undeniably low standards, had received the least attention from Sonderkommando R. During the fall of 1941, Hartung had deemed the Neudorf unit so isolated and unimportant that he had not bothered to select its members, let alone to train or arm them. Sonderkommando R picked Pastushchenko and his fellow militiamen from Neudorf to spearhead perhaps its inaugural mass killing deployment because they lived in the path of a Romanian Jewish transport on its way to the Bogdanovka camp.

The Neudorf militia's involvement in the Holocaust began in mid-December 1941.¹¹⁸⁵ Arriving on a bitterly cold December morning, Hartung sought out the two local leaders, Faltis and Büchler, as his SS subordinates unloaded the ammunition box stowed in their staff car. When Hartung found Faltis and Büchler, the two men probably suspected the reason for the SS's visit. The previous day Romanian troops and their Ukrainian auxiliaries had marched several hundred Jews—predominately women, children, and old men—through the Comintern settlement and incarcerated them in the horse stable and pigsty at the collective farm's western edge. At the conclusion of their brief meeting with Hartung, Faltis and Büchler mustered the unit. After the militia assembled at the farm's barnyard, Hartung addressed its eighteen members. Although postwar accounts confirm his ideological language and murderous orders, conflicting and often exculpatory statements make Hartung's words unclear. As far as can be reconstructed, however, Hartung commanded all militia

¹¹⁸⁵ Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von L. B., January 16, 1962, BAL, B162/2290, 165-66. Protokol doprosa / Kokha Floriana, October 1, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8484-85.

members without exception to participate in the shootings.¹¹⁸⁶

On Hartung's orders, Büchler divided the 18-man unit into three squads and began the bloody business of murder—a process that anticipated the tactics that the Selbstschutz would later deploy at the Bogdanovka camp. One six-man subunit relieved the local Ukrainian auxiliaries who had guarded the Jewish captives since the previous evening. Another squad escorted groups of 20 Jews from the farm's outbuildings, across the narrow bridge spanning the Bakshala River that divided the Ukrainian and German villages, and to the execution site, a gully at the collective farm's eastern border. There, the final six-man squad ordered the Jews to undress to their undergarments and collected remaining personal items in a bucket. Supervised and encouraged by Hartung and his SS personnel, the militiamen took up position less than three meters behind their victims and, as the SS had instructed them to do, fired at the base of the skull. As the victims tumbled into the ravine, Bereichkommando XI's German staff gunned down any survivors with sub-machine guns.¹¹⁸⁷ To reduce the physical and psychological strain on the killers, the SS rotated the three subunits at regular intervals so that each squad shot a roughly equal number of victims. By day's end, some two to three hundred Jews lay dead.¹¹⁸⁸

Following the conclusion of the shooting, the SS, the Volksdeutsche militiamen, and the Ukrainian auxiliaries who stood guard the previous night divvied up their spoils.¹¹⁸⁹

¹¹⁸⁶ Protokol doprosa / Ionusa Aleksandra, March 6, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8357-58. Protokol doprosa / Ionusa Aleksandra, March 9, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8374.

¹¹⁸⁷ Protokol doprosa / Ionusa Aleksandra, March 6, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8508-10.

¹¹⁸⁸ Protokol doprosa / Kokha Floriana Frantsevicha, January 11, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8723. Protokol doprosa / Ionusa Aleksandra, March 6, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8370. Protokol doprosa / Pastushenka Ivana, March 16, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8400-01.

¹¹⁸⁹ Protokol doprosa / M. A., June 7, 1945, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2902, 52. Protokol doprosa / Ionusa Aleksandra, April 6, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8450.

Although contrary to standing German orders, theft of Jewish property at Neudorf replicated the Third Reich's racial hierarchy in miniature. SS personnel received the valuables that their Romanian allies had not stripped from their victims. The SS then permitted the Volksdeutsche militiamen to select good quality clothing—such as winter coats and shoes—that they and their families sorely lacked. Lastly, the unit's Ukrainian helpers received the least desirable items.¹¹⁹⁰ As an indication of the improvised nature of the killing, in contrast to future deployments in which Selbstschutz members and their German superiors developed increasingly innovative means of body disposal, during this initial operation local militiamen appear simply to have left their victims' corpses uncovered in the pit.

Social Psychological Pressure, Anti-Bolshevism, Theft, and Status: The Motivations of Sonderkommando R's Militiamen

Scholarship on the Holocaust has long attempted to unlock what motivated perpetrators to kill. Specialists have argued convincingly that, for virtually any perpetrators, a constellation of factors shaped their decisions to murder. The explanatory weight that researchers grant to different factors thus varies from one group of killers to another.¹¹⁹¹ This chapter concludes by charting the specific array of factors that operated most powerfully on Sonderkommando R's militiamen during their participation in mass murder during the winter of 1941-42. It proceeds by evaluating motivations that scholars have most frequently deployed to explain perpetrator behavior, such as social psychological pressure and anti-Semitism, and then dissects the lesser studied, yet exceptionally potent factor of material gain. A careful analysis of these components suggests that while some of the seeds of

¹¹⁹⁰ Protokół doprosy / Ionusa Aleksandra, March 9, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8379-80.

¹¹⁹¹ Browning, "Ideology, Culture, Situation, and Disposition. Holocaust Perpetrators and the Group Dynamic of Mass Killing," 66.

genocide may have been homegrown, they were fertilized by Sonderkommando R's policies.

Scholars have identified a panoply of social psychological factors that shaped interpersonal relations within groups of Holocaust perpetrators and catalyzed mass murder.¹¹⁹² With a few exceptions, scholars have rarely applied these explanations to perpetrators from the Soviet Union and instead focused on recovering their role in the Holocaust.¹¹⁹³ While the constellation of factors varied depending on specific circumstances, these universal explanations have broad applicability, including in helping to explain the participation of Pastushchenko and his fellow militiamen during their first shooting deployment. Rather than enumerating all of the social psychological factors that acted upon the Bogdanovka collective farm's militiamen during their first mission, it is useful here to focus on two of them that operated exceptionally powerfully on the Selbstschutz members during their initial killing operation: obedience to authority and pressure to group conformity. In both instances it is fruitful to compare the Bogdanovka collective farm's ethnic German militiamen with Browning's now paradigmatic reconstruction of Reserve Order Police Battalion 101's first killing action in Józefów, Poland.

The situational pressures to obey murderous orders were far stronger for the Neudorf village's militiamen during their initial deployment than they were for Police Battalion 101 at Józefów the following year. Although Browning draws on the findings of Stanley Milgram's classic study as a partial explanation for Police Battalion 101's initial role in the Holocaust,

¹¹⁹² See, for example, Craig, Banks, and Zimbardo. "Interpersonal Dynamics in a Simulated Prison," Katz, *Ordinary People and Extraordinary Evil*; Kelman and Hamilton. *Crimes of Obedience*; Newman and Erber, eds. *Understanding Genocide*; Staub. *The Roots of Evil*; Waller. *Becoming Evil*.

¹¹⁹³ Dean suggests that social psychological pressures and group dynamics operated on non-German perpetrators in the occupied Soviet Union, but does not elaborate on this observation. Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust*, 76.

he identifies two structural discontinuities between the laboratory experiment and the 1942 mass shooting operation.¹¹⁹⁴ Neither of these differences existed for the members of Neudorf's militia in their first genocidal mission and both of these factors would have increased the tendency of would be perpetrators to comply with their orders. First, whereas Major Wilhelm Trapp, Police Battalion 101's commanding officer, proffered his subordinates an opportunity to stand aside without penalty, Hartung ordered all of his militiamen to participate in the shooting.¹¹⁹⁵ In contrast to their counterparts in Police Battalion 101, the Bogdanovka collective farm's militiamen had no officially sanctioned avenue to avoid murdering. Second, unlike Police Battalion 101's initial deployment, in which many of Trapp's men opted not to shoot when left unsupervised, Hartung's subordinates operated under the watchful eyes of their German superiors, who were omnipresent and cajoled their Volksdeutsche subordinates to continue killing during the entire operation.¹¹⁹⁶ The ways in which Bereichkommando XI's staff ordered the Bogdanovka collective farm's militiamen to carry out their initial mass shooting mission more closely paralleled Milgram's experiment than did Police Battalion 101's first killing deployment at Józefów.

Beyond these two structural differences, the members of the Bogdanovka collective farm's militia unit were biographically conditioned to comply with authority in ways that differed fundamentally from either Police Battalion 101's personnel or the American subjects of Milgram's 1960s experiment. Hartung's militiamen, like members of the Selbstschutz, in general, were more likely to obey their superiors because they understood the potentially dire

¹¹⁹⁴ Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*.

¹¹⁹⁵ Browning, *Ordinary Men*, 2.

¹¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 176.

consequences of directly challenging state authority. Both Soviet and Nazi rulers had reinforced this lesson. Under the Soviets, local administrators had targeted area ethnic Germans, and particularly those whom Sonderkommando R later mustered for militia service, first as class enemies and then as members of an ethnically suspect minority. This experience left militiamen under Hartung's command with little doubt about the hazards of running afoul of the establishment. If these encounters with Soviet power were an insufficient illustration, then the Red Army's vicious retreat through southern Ukraine during the summer of 1941—a withdrawal that precipitated at least the temporary deportation of virtually all area ethnic German men—provided the militiamen with a vivid reminder of the state's capacity to direct violence against its uncooperative citizens.

This is not to suggest that the only lesson about authority that local Volksdeutsche learned from their encounter with Soviet power was slavish compliance. Under Soviet rule, local ethnic Germans had myriad ways to withhold cooperation. A particularly popular method of evasion that many of southern Ukraine's ethnic Germans used was flight to another Volksdeutsche settlement elsewhere in the Soviet Union.¹¹⁹⁷ While, under Soviet rule, local ethnic Germans had a number of viable options to resist state and party authorities, direct confrontation was one that, from personal experience, most Volksdeutsche knew was prone to disaster.

The violent contours of German administration of Transnistria's Volksdeutsche settlements further reinforced this lesson. German authorities in Transnistria were no less brutal in their treatment of local residents whom they found objectionable than their Soviet

¹¹⁹⁷ See, for example, Aussage von G. K., February 16, 1962, BAL, B162/2291, 61. Aussage von P. W., January 31, 1962, BAL, B162/2291, 168.

predecessors and introduced violence that was, in general, far more public. Einsatzgruppe D's murderous sweep through Transnistria and Sonderkommando R's continued efforts to root out suspected racial and political enemies from area Volksdeutsche settlements provided local ethnic Germans with stark examples of Nazi brutality. That neither unit had focused exclusively on murdering local Jews and had also targeted area Volksdeutsche deemed by their neighbors or determined by German authorities to be "communists" underscored that area ethnic Germans could become targets of Nazi violence on behavioral rather than on exclusively racial grounds. Although, during the summer and fall of 1941, Nazi brutality had been concentrated in larger Volksdeutsche settlements, which were the foci of both Einsatzgruppe D and Sonderkommando R's operations, it seems unlikely that ethnic German residents in smaller hamlets, such as Neudorf, remained ignorant of the scale of German violence. If anything, the events of the preceding six months had illustrated to local Volksdeutsche the brutal lengths to which state authorities—both Soviet and Nazi—would go to achieve their ends and the possible consequences for local residents who opposed those aims.

How severe Hartung's militiamen judged the possible penalties for failing to obey their murderous orders is unclear from the available records. As scholars have long noted, after the war many accused German perpetrators defended their actions by claiming that they feared that they would have suffered dire and perhaps lethal punishment for failing to participate in the Holocaust. As no defendant has been able to demonstrate even one instance in which an alleged killer risked death for failing to carry out his or her murderous orders, specialists have aptly dismissed these postwar claims as mere prevarication.¹¹⁹⁸ In light of

¹¹⁹⁸ As Browning notes, "in the past forty-five years no defense attorney or defendant in any of the

this well-supported scholarly consensus, it is difficult to evaluate similar assertions that suspected militiamen and their relatives made to both West German and Soviet investigators.¹¹⁹⁹ In at least one permutation of Hartung's orders, prior to the start of the inaugural shooting deployment at the Bogdanovka collective farm, he threatened to execute any militiamen who failed to participate in the operation.¹²⁰⁰ Absent wartime records that demonstrate conclusively that Sonderkommando R shot Volksdeutsche militiamen for failing to murder Jews, a handful of postwar statements are insufficient evidence that German authorities explicitly threatened their ethnic German subordinates. Nevertheless, given the brutality of German rule in the region, it is possible that local Volksdeutsche understood this threat to be tacit. If Einsatzgruppe D and Sonderkommando R had been prepared to gun down ethnic Germans for alleged prewar collaboration with Soviet officials and would later do so for comparatively petty offenses, such as the drunken sale of German identification papers to local Ukrainians, then what might have happened if ethnic German militiamen had refused to obey Sonderkommando R's panicked orders to begin murdering Jews—an operation predicated on stopping the threat of epidemic? While Hartung may not have articulated the possible consequences for failing to participate in the Holocaust, it is unlikely that he or any of his fellow Bereichskommandoführer would have reacted as benignly as Police Battalion 101's Major Trapp did to his subordinates' decision not to participate in a

hundreds of postwar trials has been able to document a single case in which refusing to obey an order to kill unarmed civilians resulted in the allegedly inevitable dire punishment." Browning, *Ordinary Men*, 170. Also see Herbert Jäger, *Verbrechen unter totalitärer Herrschaft. Studien zur nationalsozialistischen Gewaltkriminalität* (Olten: Walter-Verlag, 1967), 71.

¹¹⁹⁹ Aussage von A. D., August 13, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 221. Aussage von H. H., June 30, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 131-132. Aussage von K. B., June 4, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 118.

¹²⁰⁰ Protokol doprosa / Ionusa Aleksandra, June 1, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8527-8528.

mass killing operation. In all likelihood, Hartung did not have to make explicit threats to back up his orders. Nothing in the backgrounds of his Volksdeutsche militiamen, particularly in light of their experiences during the previous six months, inclined them to test Hartung's lenience. A brutalized population under both Soviet and Nazi rule, southern Ukraine's Volksdeutsche militiamen were far more disposed than their German counterparts to obey orders to kill because they understood exceptionally, if not uniquely well the likely penalties for confronting authority directly.

In addition to an acute tendency to obey authority, the pressure to group conformity operated as an exceptionally powerful pressure on the Bogdanovka collective farm's militiamen during their first shooting mission. Highlighting the peer pressure that Police Battalion 101's members experienced during this preliminary deployment, Browning concludes convincingly that members of the unit "who did not shoot risked isolation, rejection, and ostracism—a very uncomfortable prospect within the framework of a tight-knit unit stationed abroad among a hostile population."¹²⁰¹ A comparable, albeit more intense pressure to group conformity likely functioned within the Bogdanovka collective farm's militia during its first set of mass murders during December 1941. The different compositions of both units of perpetrators had important implications for the pressure to conform that each group experienced. In contrast to the members of Police Battalion 101, who understood that their intimate affiliation with one another would last only until the war's end, the Bogdanovka collective farm's militiamen had to negotiate a set of familial relationships that existed independently of the conflict. Individual recalcitrance by a militiaman would have risked negatively impacting his immediate family in the eyes of the

¹²⁰¹ Browning, *Ordinary Men*, 185.

broader clan and potentially threatened the entire community in the eyes of the Germans. The members of the ethnic German militia unit, put simply, were closely linked to their potential accomplices—a situation in which the pressures to conform and participate were particularly profound. While research on Holocaust perpetrators from the Soviet Union has yet to consider comprehensively how social psychological factors influenced the decision of indigenous killers to participate in mass murder, the example of the first deployment of the Bogdanovka collective farm's Selbstschutz unit underscores the value of this vein of inquiry and suggests that specific historical circumstances may have intensified some social psychological pressures to participate in genocide.

Recent research on the Holocaust in the Soviet Union has placed great emphasis on the region's historically high level of indigenous anti-Semitism as an engine for driving the Holocaust at the grassroots level.¹²⁰² Analyzing the degree to which local anti-Jewish sentiment played a role in the Selbstschutz's participation in the Holocaust is a difficult undertaking. The primary sources for recovering this period, postwar West German and Soviet investigative records, do not capture prewar or wartime anti-Semitism very well. Interviewees, conscious that they were under suspicion for wartime crimes and acutely aware of the fact that naked anti-Semitism was part of the official postwar discourse of neither country, were careful to censor anti-Semitic statements from their testimony. The easiest way for former ethnic Germans to do so was often simply not to discuss their prewar interactions with Jews, tacitly suggesting to investigators that the two groups had maintained limited

¹²⁰² As Karel Berkhoff and Amir Weiner note, the region's indigenous anti-Semitism was a crucial engine for driving the Holocaust at the grassroots level. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*; Weiner, *Making Sense of War*. Similarly, in his case study of the Holocaust in Jedwabne, Poland, Gross points to the primary importance of local anti-Semitism in the decisions of Poles to murder their Jewish neighbors. Gross, *Neighbors*.

contact prior to the war. Although only a comparatively small number of postwar statements that former ethnic German residents gave to their interviewers mentioned local Jews, those that did frequently portrayed Jews as agents or protégées of the Soviet regime.

Volksdeutsche witnesses depicted this relationship in one of two ways. First, erstwhile ethnic Germans identified Jews as area communist party officials and collective farm administrators—the precise individuals responsible for enforcing Soviet rule at the local level and whose actions had been so injurious to Volksdeutsche.¹²⁰³ Second, many former residents remained convinced that during the summer of 1941 the Soviet state had taken special care to evacuate its loyal area Jewish citizens ahead of advancing German and Romanian forces.¹²⁰⁴ Whereas, in the words of one suspected militiaman, local Volksdeutsche celebrated the moment at which “Hitler freed us from the yoke” of Bolshevism, area ethnic Germans witnessed what they regarded as local Jews fleeing back to the safety of their Soviet masters.¹²⁰⁵ From the available records it is unclear whether or not either of these perceptions was based in reality. Given the region’s proximity to Odessa, a city with a historically large Jewish population, it is conceivable that Jews constituted a large and perhaps disproportionately large number of local Soviet officials in the region. It is also likely that many area Jews fled the German and Romanian advances under their own steam because they feared for their safety not as communists, but as Jews. In the minds of many ethnic Germans, however, at least some Jews had contributed to their socio-economic decline

¹²⁰³ Vernehmungsniederschrift von J. M., August 7, 1962, BAL, B162/2296, 142. Aussage von R. B., November 28, 1962, BAL, B162/2301, 47-48.

¹²⁰⁴ Aussage von J. G., November 26, 1962, BAL, B162/2299, 142. Vernehmungsniederschrift von W. H., July 24, 1962, BAL, B162/2296, 68. Aussage von H. D., December 16, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 238.

¹²⁰⁵ Lebens Lauf [sic] Redler Edmund geboren 21.1.23 in Rastadt in Einbürgerungsantrag Edmund Redler, 1944, NARA, A3342-EWZ50-G58, 1210.

and suffering under Soviet rule as agents of the state—a belief that poured the foundation for a very deadly reality.

Superficially, the association between Soviet power and local Jews that many ethnic Germans maintained even after the war appears analogous to the type of indigenous anti-Semitism that scholars have identified as a key engine for propelling pogroms in western Ukraine during the opening weeks and months of Operation Barbarossa.¹²⁰⁶ Despite some similarities, there were nevertheless two important differences. On the one hand, as discussed in first chapter, until the 1917 Russian Revolution area ethnic Germans had maintained historically good relations with their Jewish neighbors. As ethnic and religious minorities, who remained socio-economically and linguistically distinct from the majority of the population, Volksdeutsche and Jews shared similar experiences, including being targeted by their largely Slavic neighbors for periodic violence.¹²⁰⁷ In contrast to local Ukrainians, there is little evidence that area Volksdeutsche participated in anti-Jewish pogroms in the region during the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. The Black Sea Germans on the whole were not historic anti-Semites who also became anti-Soviets, but rather anti-Soviets who identified Jews as among their primary Soviet tormentors.

On the other hand, in contrast to the origins of some pogroms in western Ukraine, the perception that local Jews had contributed to their suffering under Soviet rule did not move Volksdeutsche to murder Jews independently at the start of Operation Barbarossa. Despite

¹²⁰⁶ See, for example, Jared McBride's recent work on Ukrainian violence against Jews in Olev'sk in Ukraine's Zhytomyr Oblast' during mid-1941. Jared McBride, "Eyewitness to an Occupation: Collaboration and the Holocaust in Olev'sk, Zhytomyr Region." John-Paul Himka has highlighted the centrality of anti-Semitism to the Ukrainian nationalist project. Himka, "The Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and the Holocaust."

¹²⁰⁷ Fleischhauer, *Die Deutschen im Zarenreich*, 375.

ample opportunity to vent their frustration on their Jewish neighbors during the brief interlude between Soviet and German rule, no evidence of Volksdeutsche participation in locally organized anti-Semitic violence exists. A likely reason for this absence of violence is that area ethnic Germans did not assign collective responsibility for their brutal encounter with Soviet power to all local Jews, but rather identified individuals Jews, whom they held responsible for the Soviet regime's evils. Given that many of these Jews had departed with Soviet forces before the occupation, there were few immediate targets for retribution. As one former area Volksdeutsche resident later explained, "before the war the bad Jews had already moved away."¹²⁰⁸ That Volksdeutsche assigned Jews individual as opposed to collective blame for their suffering helps to explain why Volksdeutsche often denounced only a portion of local Jews to Einsatzgruppe D and yet conspired to hide more thoroughly integrated Jews, whom area Volksdeutsche presumably considered less culpable of Soviet-era repression, from Sonderkommando R until well into 1942. In comparison to local residents in areas such as western Ukraine, the more nuanced way in which Transnistria's Volksdeutsche understood the alleged complicity of Jews in the Soviet regime shaped interactions between the two groups that, at least at the beginning of the occupation, were not marked by significant autonomous violence.

While the connection that local ethnic Germans established between many, or perhaps even most area Jews and Soviet power proved insufficient motivation to move them to commit mass murder independently, then it was nevertheless a bedrock upon which the Nazi regime could construct a propaganda campaign around the principle of "Judeo-Bolshevism." During the winter of 1941-42, Sonderkommando R's propaganda initiatives, which

¹²⁰⁸ Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von E. H., December 29, 1961, BAL, B162/2290, 146.

eventually grew to substantial proportions, remained in their infancy. What little is known about these early efforts, such as Siebert's detailed instructions for the January 1942 Selbstschutz swearing in ceremony, suggests that, as in its later programs, the unit's propaganda attempted to link anti-Semitism with anti-Bolshevism.¹²⁰⁹ Admittedly, Sonderkommando R's neophyte ideological instructional campaign appears flimsy and unconvincing. A handful of pep talks by SS commanders and the odd nocturnal ceremony would not have won over the "hearts and minds" of most listeners to the National Socialist justification for mass murder. Sonderkommando R's militiamen, however, were not most listeners. As members of a repressed socio-economic and ethnic minority under Soviet rule, local Volksdeutsche had little doubt about the ills of Soviet power. Many area ethnic Germans had also already begun to identify at least some of their Jewish neighbors with the Soviet system. All that Sonderkommando R's admittedly unimpressive propaganda efforts had to do was to provide a framework in which local Volksdeutsche expanded purported individual Jewish complicity in the crimes of the Soviet regime into a wholesale conflation of Jews with the Soviet system. A brutalized population anxious to revenge itself on its perceived Soviet enemies, local Volksdeutsche would have been a receptive audience for Sonderkommando R's unarguably paltry measures to help them bridge this conceptual gap. The fact that during 1942 area Volksdeutsche began revealing Jews, whom they and their neighbors had hidden from German authorities since the preceding summer, suggests that at least some of Transnistria's ethnic Germans were prepared, under Sonderkommando R's tutelage, to expand their hatred of the Soviet system to all Jews. The experience of

¹²⁰⁹ Görlich, "Volkstumspropaganda und Antisemitismus in der Wochenzeitung 'Der Deutsche in Transnistrien' 1942-1944."

Transnistria's ethnic Germans under Soviet rule primed them, perhaps more so than any of the Nazi regime's other indigenous helpers in the occupied Soviet Union, to embrace the notion of a war against "Judeo-Bolshevism." Although not historically especially anti-Semitic, Volksdeutsche suffering under Soviet rule was dry tinder for the match of Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda.

Variables like anti-Semitism and social psychological pressures, such as group conformity and obedience to authority, are not unique in explaining the violent behavior of the Bogdanovka collective farm's militia. To varying degrees, they played a role in shaping the decisions of any group of Holocaust perpetrators. Explanations for the complicity of local non-Germans in the Soviet Union would have to consider similar factors and probably would reach comparable findings about the propensity of the indigenous perpetrators to obey authority and the high level of local anti-Semitism. What then was exceptional about the involvement of Transnistria's Volksdeutsche militiamen in the Holocaust? The answer, in large measure, rests on the material rewards that Sonderkommando R proffered to local ethnic Germans, both directly and indirectly, for participating in the Holocaust.

In contrast to research on ideological or social psychological motivations, relatively little scholarship exists on the role that material gain played in propelling the Holocaust. There are a couple of reasons for this lacuna. First, as much of the research on Holocaust perpetrators has been based on the German example, scholars have justifiably focused on other, more germane antecedents to genocide, such as anti-Semitism. Only recently, as research on these causes has matured, have historians, such as Götz Aly and Martin Dean, raised the issue of theft of Jewish property.¹²¹⁰ Second, researchers have been cautious of

¹²¹⁰ Aly, *Hitler's Beneficiaries*; Martin Dean, *Robbing the Jews: the Confiscation of Jewish Property in*

providing a materialist explanation for the Holocaust for fear that doing so might perpetuate the anti-Semitic myth that all Jews were wealthy. While this issue must be treated delicately to avoid fueling this stereotype, simply avoiding this important issue fails to capture an important historical dimension to the Holocaust in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. As historians such as Radu Ioanid and Dean have underscored, theft of Jewish property characterized the Holocaust in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.¹²¹¹ In contrast to Holocaust victims from Western, Central, and East Central Europe, where theft and murder were typically chronologically discrete activities, in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union these crimes occurred virtually simultaneously. Moreover, the often comparative poverty of Eastern European and Soviet perpetrators was such that local gentiles valued the material inducements to participate in murder far more than did their German counterparts. Few German perpetrators stationed at extermination camps in occupied Poland, for example, participated in the killing process because they were angling to obtain the paltry personal effects of their victims. For killers from the rural Soviet Union, however, the access to scarce goods that taking part in the murders facilitated operated as a powerful inducement to commit genocide.

In this respect, the Volksdeutsche Selbstschutz's participation in the Holocaust in Transnistria was exceptional only because of the degree to which German authorities enabled its members' cupidity. Insofar as researchers have probed the materialist dimensions to the Holocaust in the Soviet Union, local residents usually robbed Jews with little or no involvement from German security forces that usually oversaw or encouraged these killing

the Holocaust, 1933-1945 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

¹²¹¹ Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 108-9; Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust*, 70-71.

operations.¹²¹² German killers, moreover, chastised their local helpers, and particularly their Romanian allies, for stealing their victims' property. Sonderkommando R's orientation toward the theft of Jewish possessions, however, was fundamentally different. As the example of the first killing operation that the Bogdanovka collective farm's militia perpetrated underscores, Sonderkommando R's German leaders not only tolerated, but aided in the theft of their victims' property. Although few of the Selbstschutz's killing missions can be reconstructed with this degree of detail, the available evidence suggests that robbery was not only a hallmark of all militia deployments, but shaped the ways in which Sonderkommando R carried out its mass shooting operations.

There are two reasons why Sonderkommando R's leaders proved eager to support the theft of Jewish property by their Volksdeutsche subordinates. First, Sonderkommando R's German staff was, even by the Third Reich's unarguably low standards, exceptionally greedy. As indicated by Siebert's robbery at Odessa's Museum of Western Civilization during October 1941, this corruption emanated from the unit's apex. Hoffmeyer and Siebert were apparently happy to share the spoils of the occupation and genocide with their German subordinates, who lapped up these ill-gotten gains with alacrity. The unit's senior leadership, after all, authorized Sonderkommando R's dentist to smelt down stolen Jewish dental gold for his practice. Despite knowing exactly where the gold originated, many and perhaps most of the unit's mid-level and rank-and-file personnel availed themselves of this material to repair their own dental work at no cost. Although the loose control that Sonderkommando R's headquarters in Landau exercised over its Bereichkommandoführer in rural Transnistria

¹²¹² Jared McBride, "Eyewitness to an Occupation: Collaboration and the Holocaust in Olevs'k, Zhytomyr Region."

meant that especially avaricious local commanders, such as Hartung, could siphon off a significant amount of Jewish property for their own use, cupidity nevertheless remained an integral component of the unit's institutional culture.

Second, during the winter of 1941-42, Sonderkommando R needed stolen Jewish property to secure a dominant material position for Transnistria's ethnic Germans. Although the reallocation of collective farms and other agricultural infrastructure granted area Volksdeutsche with a privileged socio-economic position, it did little to provide badly needed consumer goods to local German speakers. As German personnel stationed in the region later remarked, the condition and especially the quantity and quality of the clothing of most local Volksdeutsche was abysmal. During the winter of 1941-42, well before the VoMi began transporting stolen Jewish property from occupied Poland to distribute to local ethnic Germans in rural Transnistria, Sonderkommando R had no other source of raiment to give to local Volksdeutsche other than that which their Jewish victims were wearing at the times of their murders. While providing the militiamen with access to stolen Jewish property alone was insufficient to ameliorate the poverty of all local Volksdeutsche, it constituted an important first step. The seduction of simultaneously preventing the introduction of epidemic disease into Transnistria's ethnic German communities and taking a stab in providing area Volksdeutsche with much-needed possessions was so powerful that local commanders apparently gave no thought to the fact that Volksdeutsche robbery of clothing could, in fact, precipitate the outbreak of the very epidemic that the murders were designed to prevent.

Robbery operated as a powerful inducement for Transnistria's Volksdeutsche militiamen to participate in the Holocaust during the winter of 1941-42. Most obviously,

taking part in the killings permitted the militiamen to acquire among the most desirable clothing and personal effects for themselves and their families. Given that the Jews whom Romanian forces deported from Bessarabia, northern Bukovina, and Odessa typically were wealthier than their Volksdeutsche killers in rural Transnistria, this incentive was particularly powerful. Moreover, access to comparatively high quality Jewish clothing and personal effects also may have reinforced precisely the anti-Semitic stereotypes of a “Judeo-Bolshevik” conspiracy that were the focus of Sonderkommando R’s propaganda campaign. If, as Sonderkommando R had been attempting to impress upon area Volksdeutsche, Jews were behind a Soviet regime that had expropriated and brutalized area ethnic Germans, then the sudden appearance of Jews clad in superior garments may have seemed to some killers as evidence of a “Judeo-Bolshevik” cabal. For some local ethnic Germans, the Jewish deportees likely appeared not simply to have been more affluent, but, as the alleged architects of their expropriation, to have been the beneficiaries of a Soviet system that precipitated several generations of Volksdeutsche decline. Theft of Jewish property not only lubricated the Selbstschutz’s participation in the Holocaust, but the specific dynamics of this robbery may have reinforced one of the tenets of Nazi propaganda about the “Judeo-Bolshevik” enemy.

Privileged access to stolen Jewish clothing constituted one portion (and perhaps the least important though most immediate) of the material inducements that Sonderkommando R had for local Volksdeutsche to take part in the Holocaust. Membership in the Nazi racial community extended even more powerful structural material incentives to carry out mass murder. Sonderkommando R’s enterprise in Transnistria sought to underpin the Third Reich’s demographic claims to the region by helping local Volksdeutsche to achieve a

dominant socio-economic position in the area. Although the full dimensions of this project remained embryonic until later in 1942, the contours of these initiatives were already apparent to local ethnic Germans. Hartung's redistribution of previously shared property at the Bogdanovka collective farm during the fall of 1941 provided area Volksdeutsche with a stark illustration of German plans to enrich area ethnic Germans at the expense of their non-German neighbors as well as the clear material advantages of being identified by German authorities as Volksdeutsche.

The very pliability of the category of "ethnic German" provided Sonderkommando R, somewhat unwittingly, with powerful leverage to encourage the participation of area Volksdeutsche in the mass murder of Jews. Here again, the way in which Sonderkommando R formed the Bogdanovka collective farm's militia unit is illustrative. Even if Hartung and his colleagues failed to grasp the degree to which local leaders had packed the militia with non-Germans, the militiamen certainly did. While the members of the Bogdanovka collective farm's Volksdeutsche militia could not have anticipated the circuitous chain of events that prompted the SS to order them to murder when they formed the unit months earlier, once asked to kill they used the opportunity to take part in the Holocaust as a chance to verify their "Germanness." Although the militiamen were not privy to internal Sonderkommando R memoranda that grappled with the issue of how to classify the local population, they perceived, quite correctly, that failure to obey their murderous orders would have demonstrated an inadequate commitment to the National Socialist cause that for Sonderkommando R's staff defined "Germanness." Volksdeutsche recalcitrance would have invited Bereichkommando XI to reexamine the provisional boundaries of Germanness that it had allowed area residents to establish and could have uncovered the local conspiracy to

undermine the SS's ethnic categories. Exposure was a very real threat. In both Bereichkommando XI and elsewhere, Sonderkommando R's local commanders did not issue permanent ethnic German identity papers until April 1942, the precise point at which both Romanian deportations and Sonderkommando R's mass shootings wound down.¹²¹³ The high level of ethnic German complicity in the Holocaust smoothed the entry of the unit's members and their families into the *Volksgemeinschaft*. Had any would be ethnic German refused to dirty his hands in the Reich's service, he would almost certainly have doomed his application to join the Nazi racial community. It was thus the SS's inability to operationalize its definition of a *Volksdeutscher* in Transnistria that unintentionally equipped it with a powerful fulcrum to encourage a local Volksdeutsche participation in the Holocaust.

Conclusion

When Sonderkommando R arrived in Transnistria's Volksdeutsche settlements during the early fall of 1941, the region's ethnic Germans had little inkling that within a few short months their new German administrators would muster them to participate in the Holocaust. Were it not for a collision of German and Romanian anti-Jewish policies, Volksdeutsche involvement in the Holocaust in Transnistria would likely have been limited to fingering the handful of remaining Jews, whom local residents had identified with Soviet power, and assisting their new German overlords to enforce Nazi rule at the grassroots level. From the perspective of local ethnic Germans who had historically fielded homegrown militia forces for self-defense in times of crisis, nothing suggested before December 1941 that the

¹²¹³ Fragmentary ethnic German registration records from Bereichkommando XI are preserved in the 1944 German naturalization records that the SS generated for the region's Volksdeutsche when they arrived in German-occupied Poland. For example, Ludwig Braun, an ethnic German from München, another settlement under Hartung's command, received his Volkstumsausweis on April 10, 1942. "Einbürgerungsantrag von Ludwig Braun," 1944, NARA, A3342-EWZ50-A77, 793.

Selbstschutz under Sonderkommando R's control would be anything other than a local auxiliary police force—one, moreover, that promised to shield them from continued Romanian attacks. As Romanian assaults slackened during the fall of 1941, Sonderkommando R channeled the majority of the meager resources allocated to build the Selbstschutz to militia units in larger Volksdeutsche settlements, where their members could be used to enforce the Third Reich's repressive racial and political policies. Not only did this leave militia units in smaller Volksdeutsche settlements underdeveloped, but it illustrated to local ethnic Germans the Selbstschutz's relative unimportance to area VoMi administrators. Before its first killing deployments during December 1941, Sonderkommando R's Selbstschutz was little more than local muscle for its Nazification project.

Romanian deportations of Jews into northeastern Transnistria and Sonderkommando R's decision to counter the public health hazard that these expulsions posed to area Volksdeutsche caught local ethnic Germans, like their VoMi superiors, completely off guard. Hoffmeyer's subordinates mustered selected Selbstschutz units, which they expanded rapidly to fulfill the organization's growing role, not because of the enthusiasm that particular groups of militiamen demonstrated for the Nazi agenda, but rather because they were based en route to or near intended Romanian deportation destinations. To suggest that for local Volksdeutsche Sonderkommando R's entreaties to join the ranks of the Holocaust's most heavily involved perpetrators came out of the clear blue sky would be little exaggeration.

Why Sonderkommando R's militiamen, members of an ethnic minority that had maintained historically comparatively good relations with area Jews, participated so heavily in the Holocaust was a product of both indigenous historical factors and specific German policies, albeit not in equal measure. As a careful analysis of biographical information of

militiamen subordinated to the most heavily implicated Bereichkommando indicates, Soviet rule had been an unmediated disaster. All of the militia's members had seen either their or their family's property expropriated by Soviet authorities during the late 1920s and early 1930s and forced to work in collective agriculture. While this transition was not unique for local residents, it was acutely felt by area Volksdeutsche, whose historically disproportionate landholdings made them ready targets for collectivization. In contrast to the majority of their predominantly Slavic neighbors, however, area ethnic Germans were prevented first as class enemies and then as members of a suspect ethnic minority from integrating into the post-revolutionary Soviet order. This Soviet experience sharpened their receptivity to German orders to kill Jews in two ways. First, it conditioned area ethnic Germans to be particularly responsive to orders when placed in a situation in which the only option for non-compliance was to challenge directly state power. Nothing in this population's experiences under Soviet rule and none of its early and often brutal encounters with German forces suggests that confronting authority—much less in a crisis situation—would end positively.

Second, the militiamen's negative experiences with Soviet rule poured a solid foundation upon which Sonderkommando R could build a propaganda campaign against the "Jude-Bolshevik" enemy. Local Volksdeutsche did not require German propaganda to see "Bolshevism" as their primary enemy—several decades of Soviet rule had already driven that point home. From the fragmentary postwar evidence, it also appears that area ethnic Germans had begun independently to associate at least some local Jews with Soviet power. In all likelihood this perception had some basis in reality. In previously ethnically homogenous communities, Volksdeutsche would have regarded newly arrived Jews, and particularly any Jews in administrative positions, as agents of the Soviet state. Moreover,

many local Jews correctly predicted their fate under occupation and fled with the Soviet military—the very forces that had tormented area Volksdeutsche particularly during the retreat. German propaganda did not have to construct the notion of a struggle against the “Judeo-Bolshevik” enemy from scratch, but rather had merely to expand an indigenous association between some Jews and the evils of the Soviet system into a conflation of Jews and Soviet power. As evidenced by the disclosure during 1942 of local Jews, whom area Volksdeutsche had hidden until then from the Germans, it appears that, for at least some ethnic Germans, Sonderkommando R’s inarguably flimsy propaganda apparatus proved sufficiently persuasive.

More so than social psychological factors or German-guided anti-Semitism, the material inducements that Sonderkommando R proffered to cooperative Volksdeutsche constituted a quintessential and perhaps a prime reason why so many militiamen took part in the Holocaust. These incentives operated on two levels. First, and most immediately, participation in genocide permitted area Volksdeutsche to profit directly from the killing by acquiring the clothing and personal items that their victims were wearing immediately prior to the killing. Not only did VoMi-sponsored theft provide militiamen with much-needed garments, but the appearance of more urban and, on average, wealthier Jews, likely fueled Nazi anti-Semitic stereotypes of the Judeo-Bolshevik enemy responsible for the expropriation of Volksdeutsche property prior to the war.

Second, and perhaps more powerfully, participating in the killings was a way to clarify the ethnic status of individual militiamen and whole militia units. As the example of the Bogdanovka collective farm’s Selbstschutz indicates, both local German administrators, who had defined the boundaries of “Germanness” in only the loosest fashion, and area

Volksdeutsche, who had intentionally undermined the Third Reich's racial categories, grasped the tenuousness of Volksdeutsche status. Local ethnic Germans, who had witnessed the Nazi regime's brutality against area non-Germans and seen Sonderkommando R's first moves to improve the material status of Transnistria's Volksdeutsche, had little doubt about the material privileges that membership in Nazi Germany's racial community afforded them. They also understood that standing aside from the killings would do little to solidify their still inchoate ethnic position in the eyes of local German administrators. Given that Sonderkommando R did not conduct comprehensive ethnic classification until after the conclusion of its major killing operations in April 1942, this assumption proved correct. Volksdeutsche who had participated in the killings could demonstrate that they were entitled to the *Volksgemeinschaft*'s material rewards. Any ethnic German who had opposed the killings or had refused to participate would have been in the impossible position of having to justify his membership in the Nazi racial community despite having objected to taking part in the regime's dirty work. While the historical experiences of area Volksdeutsche communities under Soviet rule may have made local ethnic Germans receptive to Sonderkommando R's orders to participate and propaganda, the specific contours of VoMi rule in the region granted the unit powerful leverage over area Volksdeutsche to encourage their contribution to the Holocaust.

CONCLUSION

Sonderkommando R's Volksdeutsche project in southern Ukraine faded with German military fortunes in the Soviet Union. In contrast to the first eighteen months of the campaign, when German forces and their allies penetrated deep into the Soviet Union, the year 1943 was marked by a progressive series of defeats. The German Sixth Army's destruction at Stalingrad early that year was followed by a failed summer offensive at Kursk in August 1943. Between late August and October 1943, the Third and Fourth Ukrainian Fronts advanced some 200 kilometers to Nikopol and the Dnieper River's banks. Despite clear evidence by early 1943 that the German position in the Soviet Union was increasingly untenable, Hoffmeyer refused to organize the wholesale evacuation of Sonderkommando R's personnel and Volksdeutsche from occupied Soviet territory. Rather than concede defeat, Sonderkommando R's senior leaders maintained that Transnistria could still be held and directed Bereichskommandoführer in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine to relocate local ethnic Germans to the region, where the German military was beginning to usurp Romanian control.¹²¹⁴ As an illustration of Sonderkommando R's increasingly fanciful plans to continue its mission in the Soviet Union, Hoffmeyer ordered his subordinates to prepare quarters for thousands of Volksdeutsche from the Crimea and Halberstadt.¹²¹⁵ Romanian

¹²¹⁴ G.C. & C.S. Air and Military History, Vol. XIII, The German Police, c. 1945, BNA, HW 16, Piece 63, 222.

¹²¹⁵ German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 6th February - 8th

authorities in Transnistria had a far soberer assessment of their losing war against the Soviet Union. Having witnessed the defeat of the Romanian Third and Fourth Armies at Stalingrad earlier that year, in November 1943 they began the evacuation of Odessa by ordering key personnel to return to Romania.¹²¹⁶ Hoffmeyer responded to this move by grumbling to the German military that these measures were premature.¹²¹⁷ Having invested so much time and energy to mobilizing the largest population of Soviet ethnic Germans under Nazi control, Hoffmeyer and his subordinates were loath to abandon their Volksdeutsche enterprise in Transnistria, particularly when doing so meant that the unit's German personnel invariably would receive transfers to more hazardous postings at the front.

It was not until the very beginning of 1944, when the Red Army penetrated into central Ukraine, recaptured Kiev, and threatened rail and road connections between Transnistria and German-occupied Poland, that the VoMi resolved to relocate the region's Volksdeutsche.¹²¹⁸ In coordination with the Race and Settlement Main Office's SS-Obergruppenführer Richard Hildebrandt, Hoffmeyer agreed to transfer Transnistria's ethnic Germans to the Warthegau in German-occupied Poland, where they could continue to serve as the demographic building blocks for German territorial expansion. Hoffmeyer dawdled until the last possible moment to authorize the unit's withdrawal from Transnistria. Only in early March 1944, with the Red Army poised to retake Nikolaev on the Bug River's left

March 1943, March 7, 1943, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 5.

¹²¹⁶ Völkl, *Transnistrien und Odessa*, 96-97.

¹²¹⁷ Dallin, *Odessa, 1941-1944*, 239.

¹²¹⁸ German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 2 Jan – 20 Feb 1944, March 14, 1944, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 3-4.

bank, did Hoffmeyer green light Transnistria's evacuation.¹²¹⁹ The brutality that had characterized its two-and-a-half-year rule over Transnistria's Volksdeutsche also typified Sonderkommando R's flight from the region. Echoing the scorched earth policy that Soviet forces pursued during their retreat from southern Ukraine during the summer of 1941, Sonderkommando R planned to denude Transnistria of its German-speakers and whatever property that could be relocated to German-occupied Poland. Most local Volksdeutsche eagerly awaited evacuation. With memories of the brutal Soviet withdrawal from southern Ukraine still fresh as well as awareness of their own privilege and complicity in the ensuing German occupation, the majority of Transnistria's ethnic Germans understood that the return of Soviet power was imminent and would have dire consequences for them. Unsure that it could depend on individual Volksdeutsche initiative to clear Transnistria of German-speakers, Sonderkommando R threatened dire consequences for any reluctant ethnic Germans who failed to register for evacuation.¹²²⁰ Sonderkommando R also oversaw the relocation of thousands of horses and cattle that the unit had transferred to local ethnic Germans during the course of the occupation.¹²²¹ As a parting illustration of the unit's suspicion of politically or behaviorally unreliable Volksdeutsche, Sonderkommando R's final action prior to withdrawing from Transnistria was to order its Selbstschutz to gun down the Johannisfeld concentration camp's surviving inmates.¹²²²

¹²¹⁹ German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 1 Mar – 9 Apr 1944, April 14, 1944, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6.

¹²²⁰ Aussage von J. G., July 30, 1962, BAL, B162/2297, 39. Aussage von L. L., October 15, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-002, Band 4, 668.

¹²²¹ German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 1-30 June 1944, July 3, 1944, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, Part 2, 4.

¹²²² Aussage von A. F., May 22, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 134. Aussage von W. M., May 24, 1965, BAL, B162/2305. Aussage von K. E., November 23, 1962, BAL, B162/2301, 152-54.

Having waited until the eleventh hour to begin its retreat, Sonderkommando R's escape routes from Transnistria were limited. At the beginning of March 1944, it evacuated a small number of Volksdeutsche to Łódź by rail across a German-controlled bridgehead on the Dniester River. When the Red Army's advance cut this artery, Sonderkommando R was reduced to transporting the region's Volksdeutsche refugees overland by truck, wagon, and foot through Bessarabia and northern Bukovina. Although Selbstschutz units guarded these treks, the scale of this operation and the unit's antediluvian communications infrastructure precipitated a breakdown of command and control. Hoffmeyer simply lost track of the more than 70,000 ethnic Germans who crossed the Dniester River during March and April 1944. Owing to poor planning and inadequate sanitary facilities en route, many Volksdeutsche evacuees contracted communicable diseases. Sonderkommando R established its temporary headquarters in Galați in eastern Romania and attempted to corral its increasingly disorganized Volksdeutsche transports. There, in consultation with the Antonescu regime, Hoffmeyer drew on the playbook that his command had developed during its earlier Volksdeutsche "resettlement" campaigns in the region. As the VoMi had in 1940, Hoffmeyer sent more than a 100,000 Volksdeutsche by steamer up the Danube River to Belgrade, where they proceeded to German-occupied Poland.¹²²³ Hoffmeyer dispatched a smaller, but nevertheless significant transport of ethnic Germans along one of the Wehrmacht's primary supply lines overland to southeastern Hungary, where VoMi officials and the German Red Cross received the Volksdeutsche refugees and forwarded them to the Warthegau.¹²²⁴ By the

¹²²³ Extract from GPD 2650 No. 1 Traffic: 22.4.44, April 30, 1944, BNA, HW 16, Piece 69, 1. German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 1-30 May 1944, June 5, 1944, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, Part 2, 7.

¹²²⁴ G.C. & C.S. Air and Military History, Vol. XIII, The German Police, c.1945, BNA, HW 16, Piece 63, 222.

end of May 1944, the VoMi had relocated most Volksdeutsche from southeastern Hungary to German-occupied Poland. With the last of southern Ukraine's Volksdeutsche in the Reich, the VoMi decommissioned Sonderkommando R at its suburban Berlin headquarters in early July 1944.¹²²⁵

The war's final ten months were equally grim for Sonderkommando R's former German personnel and Transnistria's erstwhile Volksdeutsche residents. Hoffmeyer, whose performance during the evacuation Himmler praised "with my full recognition and thanks," received orders to return to Romania as head of a special SS unit to defend the Ploiești oil fields from rapidly advancing Soviet forces.¹²²⁶ Staffed with many of his former subordinates from Sonderkommando R—some of whom had served under his command since 1939—Hoffmeyer's new unit arrived in Romania in mid-July 1944. During his brief deployment, Hoffmeyer did little more than irk his superior Hildebrandt, who also served as the Higher SS and Police Leader Black Sea (*Höhere SS- und Polizeiführer Schwarze Meer*). Hildebrandt complained vociferously about Hoffmeyer's rudeness and insubordination.¹²²⁷ No sooner had Hoffmeyer's forces arrived in Romania, than increasing Soviet military pressure brought down the Antonescu regime and with it Romania's alliance with the Third Reich. The new Romanian government declared war on Germany and captured German personnel in the country as prisoners of war. This included Hoffmeyer and his subordinates. The Romanian military incarcerated Hoffmeyer and many of Sonderkommando R's former

¹²²⁵ Ibid., 231.

¹²²⁶ Der Reichführer-SS an SS-Obergruppenführer Lorenz, June 28, 1944, in SS Offizier Akte Horst Hoffmeyer, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SSO-109A, 1465.

¹²²⁷ Abschrift / Aktenvermerk / über Rücksprache Obergruppenführer u. General d. Pol. Hildebrandt mit SS-Brigadeführer u. General Major d. Pol. Hoffmeyer, July 24, 1944, in SS Offizier Akte Horst Hoffmeyer, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SSO-109A, 1430-31.

senior and midlevel commanders in the city of Craiova. There, much of the unit's former officer corps committed suicide with pistols that they had smuggled past their Romanian guards.¹²²⁸ Romanian authorities turned the handful of Sonderkommando R's surviving former officers over to SMERSH, which interrogated them.¹²²⁹ After a speedy trial, Soviet forces executed some of the SS officers and repatriated the others to West Germany only in the 1950s.¹²³⁰

After arriving in German-occupied Poland, ethnic Germans from Transnistria fared little better. Housed in often primitive VoMi resettlement camps near Łódź, Volksdeutsche from southern Ukraine underwent a final round of SS ethnic classification.¹²³¹ The SS finally registered Transnistria's Volksdeutsche according to criteria specified by the Deutsche Volksliste. The consequences of receiving permanent Volksdeutsche status became immediately apparent to the Black Sea Germans, as the Waffen-SS drafted virtually all able-bodied men. Many of them perished in the brutal fighting that typified the war's final months. Soviet authorities captured thousands of Transnistria's former ethnic Germans in Waffen-SS uniform and deported them to special NKVD penal camps in Central Asia, where they faced secret trials and executions. A similar future awaited the region's former Volksdeutsche, whom Allied forces captured and forcibly repatriated to the Soviet Union during 1945. Ethnic German civilians also faced compulsory return to the Soviet Union. In

¹²²⁸ Aussage von A. H., April 22, 1966, BAL, B162/2306, 91.

¹²²⁹ See, for example, Protokół doprosa / A. M. G., September 20, 1944, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2902, 28.

¹²³⁰ Aussage von A. P. W., February 20, 1968, BAL, B162/2309, 218-219.

¹²³¹ For a discussion of conditions in these facilities see Valdis O. Lumans, "A Reassessment of Volksdeutsche and Jews in the Volhynia-Galacia-Narew Resettlement," in *The Impact of Nazism: New Perspectives on the Third Reich and its Legacy*, ed Alan Steinweis and Daniel Rogers, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 81-99.

late 1944, with the Red Army advancing through central Poland, many recently arrived Black Sea Germans fled further west to avoid capture by Soviet forces and permanent deportation to the Soviet interior. Soviet authorities deported any former ethnic German residents that they captured to “special settlements” in the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic.

Volksdeutsche who avoided the Red Army filtered into the Allied occupation zones of Germany. A handful of Black Sea Germans, who were often the most heavily implicated in the mass killing of Jews in the occupied Soviet Union, later applied for Displaced Persons status and immigrated to North America, where, with varying degrees of success, they avoided detection by postwar investigators.¹²³² Most Black Sea Germans, however, remained in what would become the Federal Republic of Germany and, despite maintaining *Heimat* organizations, such as the Landsmannschaft der Deutschen aus Russland, integrated into postwar West Germany.

* * *

This dissertation, focused on Transnistria in southern Ukraine, the epicenter of Sonderkommando R’s mission to conquered Soviet territory, has explored a comparatively under-studied dimension to wartime Nazi efforts to secure *Lebensraum* in the occupied Soviet Union: the wartime mobilization of Volksdeutsche as the vanguard of planned German settlement in the region. Unable to populate conquered Soviet territory with Germans during the war, the Nazi regime marshaled local ethnic Germans for the National Socialist cause to stake a demographic claim to occupied Soviet territory. To implement its wartime Volksdeutsche policy, Himmler dispatched Sonderkommando R, a special VoMi unit, to the

¹²³² See, for example, Johannes Volk. CM-1 File for Johannes Volk, February 24, 1949, International Tracing Service Digital Archive, CM/1 Files Germany, 3.2.1.1, 79891081-79891083, USHMM.

occupied Soviet Union in July 1941. The region was home to the Black Sea Germans, whose 130,000 members were the largest population of Soviet Volksdeutsche to come under the control of Nazi Germany and its allies during the Second World War. Transnistria was also the venue in which Sonderkommando R had exceptional latitude to implement its plans. Unlike in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, where Sonderkommando R had to contend with often uncooperative and powerful German authorities, who frequently remained hostile to the SS's efforts to mobilize area Volksdeutsche, in Transnistria Hoffmeyer's command had to deal with the region's Romanian occupiers. Through a combination of high-level agreements and the willingness of the unit's local commanders to prosecute a low-intensity conflict with their Romanian counterparts, this exceptional situation proffered the SS a unique opportunity to enact its demographic fantasies in the occupied Soviet Union.

In Odessa and the surrounding countryside, Sonderkommando R launched an impressive campaign to mobilize the region's ethnic Germans as the biological building blocks of future Nazi territorial domination in the conquered Soviet Union. Sonderkommando R organized the region's ethnic German communities in anticipation of the militarized, agricultural settlements that the Nazi regime anticipated would someday dot the occupied countryside. Its first move was an ambitious and brutal program of murder and ethnic cleansing. Following on Einsatzgruppe D's earlier sweep through the region, Sonderkommando R identified and killed local Jews and the members of "mixed race" families as well as area Volksdeutsche whom their neighbors denounced as "communists." The unit then reorganized Transnistria's population by forcibly rearranging Volksdeutsche and Ukrainians to create ethnically homogenous Germanophone settlements, where none had existed previously. To fend off Romanian pillaging and to secure durable SS influence in the

area, Sonderkommando R established a small, yet potent ethnic German militia force to guard the region's Volksdeutsche communities from outside interference. The VoMi then channeled the region's scarce agricultural resources to local Volksdeutsche—an initiative that, much to the delight of area ethnic Germans, effectively ended collectivized farming and reversed the community's past decades of socio-economic decline. Hoffmeyer's subordinates supplemented these economic initiatives by importing massive quantities of clothing and other personal items from murdered Jews in occupied Poland to redistribute to Transnistria's Volksdeutsche. Having purged Transnistria's ethnic German communities of racially, politically or behaviorally “undesirable” individuals, Sonderkommando R enriched local members of the Nazi racial community.

Sonderkommando R's mission in Transnistria was not simply one of selective killing, ethnic cleansing, and targeted material support. It also sought to shape the ideological convictions of area Volksdeutsche. Without securing the support of area German-speakers for the National Socialist cause, the VoMi's efforts to mobilize them as a bulwark of “Germandom” in the occupied Soviet Union made little sense. Hoffmeyer and his subordinates labored to ensure that the Nazi worldview was the only one available to local Volksdeutsche. Dealing with a historically deeply religious people, Sonderkommando R had to wean the Black Sea Germans of their attachment to the Church for Nazi ideology to take root. To this end, Sonderkommando R brutally circumscribed organized Christianity among Transnistria's Volksdeutsche by repressing the Catholic Church's activities and deploying Protestant clergy with impeccable National Socialist credentials to ensure that religious expression took the appropriate, National Socialist form. In place of the Church, Sonderkommando R sought to secure the “hearts and minds” of Transnistria's Volksdeutsche

through an impressive propaganda apparatus and youth education program. Although limited by the resources at the unit's disposal, Sonderkommando R's newspaper, schools, and Nazi youth organizations labored to make Transnistria's Volksdeutsche into unflinching National Socialists.

Despite its unbridled ambition, Sonderkommando R's inability to establish the boundaries of "Germandom" in the region hamstrung the VoMi's efforts in Transnistria. The reasons for this were twofold. First, the unit's general understanding of who qualified as an ethnic German was poorly calibrated to local realities. During 1939 and 1940, much of Sonderkommando R's staff and most of its leadership corps had served as part of Hoffmeyer's Volksdeutsche "resettlement" operations in Eastern Europe. Over the course of these population transfers, the VoMi had developed a fly-by-night schema of ethnic classification that depended in large part on a prospective ethnic German's behavior, as measured by his or her historical affinity for National Socialism. In short, for the SS real Volksdeutsche were good Nazis and vice versa. As Sonderkommando R's staff rapidly realized, and as the unit's leaders readily admitted to their subordinates, these general criteria were badly suited to categorize the Black Sea Germans, who had a comparatively exceptional historical divorce from Germany and circumscribed opportunities for the type of prewar National Socialist activity that denoted "Germanness" for the SS. Spread thinly across Odessa and a vast expanse of surrounding countryside and without clear instructions on how to categorize a population that their superiors suggested could not be classified easily, Sonderkommando R's mid-level leaders frequently recruited supposedly reliable local ethnic Germans to identify the area's Volksdeutsche for them. Asking a suspect population to define its own boundaries, and thereby to identify who would benefit materially from Nazi rule,

courted abuse. Sonderkommando R's local helpers used the power to admit area residents to the *Volksgemeinschaft* to reward their non-German, and often their Jewish friends and relatives with this privileged status. In locales, such as Odessa, where local SS officials caught wind of these Volksdeutsche "imposters," Sonderkommando R reacted brutally and used violence and murder in a futile attempt to clarify what they regarded as the region's ethnic quagmire.

Second, Transnistria's would-be Volksdeutsche often failed to live up to the SS's expectations. Initially, Sonderkommando R's personnel believed that Einsatzgruppe D's sweep through the region during the summer of 1941 had murdered Jews and the members of "mixed race" marriages in Transnistria's Volksdeutsche settlements. In mid-1942, however, they discovered that local ethnic German communities had conspired to hide a handful of thoroughly integrated local Jews and their immediate relatives from the SS. While Hoffmeyer's subordinates ferreted out and murdered individuals who had eluded Einsatzgruppe D, the realization that area residents had undermined the Nazi project in the region shook Sonderkommando R's confidence in local ethnic Germans. Frustrated by their inability to classify a local population that continued to assist some area Jews and their relatives, Sonderkommando R's midlevel leaders tried to crush largely imagined ethnic German resistance to its National Socialist project in Transnistria. Absent clear guidelines from their superiors, many local SS commanders began to mete out increasingly harsh punishments to Transnistria's Volksdeutsche, which included incarceration, forced labor assignments, and even execution. This violence reached such proportions and became so destructive that Hoffmeyer, ever the aloof commander, sacked Sonderkommando R's senior officer in Transnistria and establish a concentration camp for the region's ethnic Germans to

rein in his subordinates. Everyday life under VoMi rule in Transnistria was a potentially dangerous one even for the area's Volksdeutsche.

In the midst of Sonderkommando R's progressively more brutal attempts to Nazify Transnistria's Volksdeutsche, local circumstances moved it to enlist area ethnic German assistance in implementing the Holocaust in the region. From the beginning of Operation Barbarossa, German and Romanian forces had engaged in a diplomatic and periodically physical shoving match over how to "solve" Transnistria's "Jewish problem." Romanian authorities preferred to deport the region's Jews farther eastward into German-occupied Soviet territory, where the Romanians believed that they would suffer a dire fate at German hands. The Germans, by contrast, regarded the murder of Transnistria's Jews as the primary responsibility of their Romanian allies, who formally occupied the region. Although accords between the two powers thwarted Romanian desires to relocate Jews across the Bug River to German-occupied Ukraine, nothing diminished the Romanian belief that Jews, many of whom they had deported into Transnistria with great enthusiasm, constituted a Soviet fifth column and a security threat. Believing that advances at the front would soon permit the removal of Transnistria's Jews deeper into the occupied Soviet Union, throughout late 1941 Romanian authorities concentrated Jewish prisoners in a series of camps along the Bug River's right bank. These facilities were located near the region's primary concentrations of ethnic Germans and the heart of Sonderkommando R's mission in Transnistria. When a typhus outbreak at one of the area's major Romanian concentration camps threatened to spread the disease to local Volksdeutsche, Sonderkommando R deployed its ethnic German militiamen to assist Romanian authorities in murdering the camp's prisoners during a multi-week shooting operation. As these killings were underway, the Romanian government

resolved that the continued presence of Jews near Odessa constituted an intolerable security threat and ordered their deportation in the direction of the Bug River. Having already plunged into mass murder and suspecting that these Jews also constituted an immediate health hazard to the region's Volksdeutsche, Sonderkommando R mustered its ethnic German militia forces to interdict and ultimately to murder the deportees. Although fully congruent with the Nazi regime's wider aims and practices, Hoffmeyer's command in Transnistria murdered tens of thousands of Jews at this particular time in this particular region for specific situational reasons and enlisted local Volksdeutsche assistance in genocide because it lacked other killers.

Why the Black Sea Germans agreed to participate in the Holocaust is a complicated question. Their role in mass murder constituted a departure from historically comparatively good relations with area Jews. In contrast to many residents of western Ukraine, during the summer of 1941 Transnistria's Volksdeutsche did not participate appreciably in pogroms. More so than deep historical anti-Semitism, the brutality of Soviet rule primed area Volksdeutsche to respond positively to Sonderkommando R's propaganda efforts to tie Jews to the Soviet regime—a connection that some local ethnic Germans had begun to make on an individual basis even prior to the invasion. The potency of the Nazi propaganda apparatus is evident from Volksdeutsche treatment of local Jews. In the fall of 1941, area ethnic Germans differentiated between a small number of thoroughly integrated local Jews, whom they had hidden from Einsatzgruppe D, and many other Jews, whom they regarded as responsible for Soviet repression and denounced to German authorities. By contrast, in mid-1942, local Volksdeutsche revealed surviving Jews, whom they and their neighbors had hidden from the SS for months during one of the Holocaust's most intense episodes, to Sonderkommando R.

Although Soviet violence had planted the seeds of Volksdeutsche anti-Semitism, they germinated under Sonderkommando R's meticulous gardening.

In addition to cultivating indigenous anti-Semitism, Sonderkommando R consciously and unconsciously brought powerful pressures to bear on the region's Volksdeutsche militiamen that encouraged their participation in the Holocaust. On the one hand, specific situational factors, such as operating in militia units that were extended families, and historical conditions, such as the brutality of Stalinist rule, sharpened the potency of universally applicable social psychological factors. The members of Transnistria's Volksdeutsche Selbstschutz thus responded to pressures to conform to group behavior and to obey authority very differently than most German perpetrators whom scholars have examined. On the other hand, the tenuousness of the category of "Germanness" in the region equipped Sonderkommando R with unique leverage to encourage Volksdeutsche complicity in the Holocaust. Area residents, whom prewar Soviet authorities had schooled in the local politics of property redistribution and agricultural production, were keenly aware of the material benefits of presenting themselves as Volksdeutsche to the SS. They were also acutely sensitive to the permeability of the boundaries of "Germanness" in the region because many of them had used control over ethnic classification to obtain property and security for their non-German and sometimes Jewish neighbors and relatives. Taking part in the Holocaust became, for many local residents, a key way to demonstrate their National Socialist credentials that denoted "Germanness" for the SS. Sonderkommando R's efforts to mobilize area Volksdeutsche in southern Ukraine helped to create a situation in which area denizens chose to participate in the Holocaust.

This dissertation has recovered Sonderkommando R's efforts to mobilize ethnic

Germans in Romanian-controlled southern Ukraine and the unit's involvement in the Holocaust. It has also reconstructed and analyzed the decision-making context in which the area's Volksdeutsche decided to participate in mass murder. Beyond contributing new information about an understudied episode of the Nazi occupation of the Soviet Union during the Second World War and dissecting the motivations of a prominent, but little-researched group of Holocaust perpetrators, this study has two broader implications for future scholarship on the history of the Holocaust. First, it highlights the specific circumstances in which area Volksdeutsche chose to participate in genocide. Scholars have long rejected claims by accused perpetrators that they killed because they feared dire consequences for not complying with their murderous orders. Instead, social scientists and historians have charted a constellation of reasons why perpetrators killed that include anti-Semitism, indoctrination, and social psychological pressures. This study explores how the Nazi regime created circumstances that left some prospective perpetrators with decisions that were not the "choiceless choices" of their victims, but nevertheless difficult ones.¹²³³ It demonstrates that the Third Reich was able to create killers by combining a system of extreme reward and punishment with an exploitation of past resentments, which, in the case of the Black Sea Germans, were more anti-communist than anti-Semitic. This dissertation supports the need for multicausal explanations for perpetrator behavior that is cognizant of particular contexts and circumstances—factors that are key to understanding the role of Soviet Volksdeutsche in the Holocaust.

Second, it highlights the value of local and regional studies to recover the antecedents

¹²³³ Lawrence L. Langer, *Versions of Survival: The Holocaust and the Human Spirit* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982), 146.

to genocide in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union. Insofar as scholars have charted preliminary explanations for the participation of local residents in the Holocaust, such as a historically high rate of anti-Semitism and venality, they have focused on large swaths of territory and extrapolated local conditions from one area to another, often without a detailed understanding of the occupation's dynamics or the local interethnic topography. Pogroms in western Ukraine during the summer of 1941, for example, have become either implicitly or explicitly the paradigm for understanding all indigenous complicity in the Holocaust. Yet ongoing research underscores that region's unique historical features and questions its representativeness for the occupied Soviet Union as a whole. This study's findings, moreover, suggest that very different local dynamics were at play in Transnistria's Volksdeutsche settlements. Further scholarship focused on the local and regional levels will help to nuance research on how the Nazi regime layered its plans for a demographic revolution over the Soviet borderlands' often violent interethnic milieu. The Holocaust, Jan Gross reminds us, was often a neighborhood affair.

APPENDIX

Einwandererzentrale (EWZ) records for the 89 militiamen attached to Sonderkommando R's Bereichkommando XI in Rastatt can be found in Record Group 242: Captured German and Related Records on Microfilm at the United States National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in College Park, Maryland.

Surname	Given Name	Type of EWZ Record	NARA Sub-Collection	Reel Number	Starting Frame	Ending Frame
Ackermann	Adalbert	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	I3	2036	2038
Ackermann	Albert	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	I3	2046	2047
Ackermann	Andreas	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	I3	2210	2212
Ackermann	Bernhard	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	I3	2404	2406
Ackermann	Erasmus	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	I3	2792	2802
Ackermann	Eugen	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	I3	2860	2864
Ackermann	Peter	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	I4	1386	1396
Ackermann	Vincenz	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	I4	1778	1787
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	A3	778	804
Anton	Nikodemus	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	I34	1312	1319
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	A13	2340	2368
Belitzer	Johannes	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	I34	820	821
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	A42	916	934
Belitzer	Leonhard	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	I34	822	824
Bengert	Eugen	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	I92	1444	1445
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	A44	696	718
Benz	Johannes	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	I93	1974	1982
Benz	Johann	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	I93	1988	2000
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	A45	658	672
Benz	Peter	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	I93	2278	2285
Berger	Peter	E-G Kartei	EWZ 56	I98	1620	1621
		Rasse Kartei	EWZ 50	A32	426	437

		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	A49	544	564
Bockmeier	Johann	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	I138	2168	2178
Bockmeier	Martin	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	I139	2324	2328
Ehrmanntraut	Christian	E-G Kartei	EWZ 56	K15	430	444
		Rasse Kartei	EWZ 57	B28	2252	2256
Ehrmanntraut	Leonhard	E-G Kartei	EWZ 56	K15	500	511
		Rasse Kartei	EWZ 57	B28	2270	2271
Ehrmanntraut	Michael	E-G Kartei	EWZ 56	K15	514	520
		Rasse Kartei	EWZ 50	A32	2272	2273
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	B36	894	910
Ehrmanntraut	Nikolaus	E-G Kartei	EWZ 56	K15	528	537
Ehrmanntraut	Nikolaus	Rasse Kartei	EWZ 57	B28	2276	2278
Ehrmanntraut	Pius	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	K15	538	548
Ehrmanntraut	Rafael	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	K15	552	562
Ehrmanntraut	Theodor	E-G Kartei	EWZ 56	K15	588	598
		Rasse Kartei	EWZ 57	B28	2288	2289
Eichstätter	Emil	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	K17	1268	1270
Fecht	Johann	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	K55	1738	1738
Feininger	Anton	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	K56	1748	1757
Feininger	August	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	K56	1778	1788
Feininger	Eugen	E-G Kartei	EWZ 56	K56	1798	1808
		Rasse Kartei	EWZ 57	B40	2504	2504
Feininger	Heinrich	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	K56	1876	1885
Feininger	Jakob	E-G Kartei	EWZ 56	K56	1898	1906
		Rasse Kartei	EWZ 57	B58	1478	1498
Feininger	Jakob	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	K56	1888	1898
Feininger	Josef	E-G Kartei	EWZ 56	K56	1938	1952
		Rasse Kartei	EWZ 57	B40	2512	2513
Feininger	Max	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	K56	2050	2060
Feininger	Nikodemus	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	K56	2064	2076
Feininger	Nikodemus	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	K56	2082	2083
Feininger	Robert	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	K56	2126	2136

Feininger	Thomas	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	K56	2162	2163
Fröhlich	Josef	UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	B84	1480	1488
Fröhlich	Josef	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	K112	1598	1604
Fröhlich	Nikodemus	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	K112	2182	2184
Fröhlich	Matheas	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	K112	2420	2429
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	B84	2176	2184
Fröhlich	Matthias	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	K112	2430	2893
Fröhlich	Peter	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	K112	2894	2896
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	B84	2406	2432
Gärtner	Johann	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	K126	1204	1212
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	B91	2878	2904
Gärtner	Josef	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	K126	1308	1316
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	B91	2930	2964
Götzfried	Eustachius	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	L23	18	20
Götzfried	Nikodemus	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	L23	46	54
Götzfried	Theophilia	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	L23	72	73
Hanecker	Georg	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	L85	1890	1898
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	C47	1988	2016
Heberle	Eugen	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	L104	906	907
Heberle	Franz	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	L104	912	916
Heck	Eugen	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	L105	864	871
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	C56	2298	2314
Heck	Eugen	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	L105	872	877
Heck	Franz	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	L105	972	980
Heck	Franz	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	L105	984	994
Heck	Franz	UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	C56	2500	2502
Heck	Franz	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	L105	998	1006
Heck	Ignaz	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	L105	1204	1211
Heck	Jakob	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	L105	1224	1232
Heck	Johannes	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	L105	1258	1265
Heck	Johannes	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	L105	1266	1273
Heck	Johannes	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	L105	1274	1281
Heck	Johannes	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	L105	1282	1290
Hekk	Max	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	L105	1720	1727

Heck	Max	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	L105	1684	1686
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	C57	410	412
Heck	Peter	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	L105	1794	1802
Heck	Peter	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	L105	1810	1812
Heck	Peter	UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	C57	592	604
Heck	Philipp	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	L105	1850	1858
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	C57	606	622
Heck	Siegfried	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	L105	2014	2022
Heck	Wilhelm	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	L105	2102	2110
Hirsch	Georg	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	M15	2806	2815
Hirsch	Georg	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	M16	454	456
Hirsch	Josef	UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 50	D8	1454	1470
Hirsch	Stefan	UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	D8	2722	2740
Hübner	Waldemar	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	M55	468	470
Hübner	Waldemar	UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 50	D27	818	830
Kniel	Franz	UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	E21	110	130
Koffler	Christian	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	N88	2816	2826
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	E26	1662	1690
Koffler	Peter	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	N89	2562	2572
Kopp	Johannes	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	N106	1230	1467
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	E32	2262	2290
Kopp	Josef	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	N106	1468	1478
Kowitz	Franz	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	N125	1192	1202
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	E39	784	818
Kowitz	Peter	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	N125	1376	1381
Kowis	Philipp	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	N125	1384	1394
Mayer	Gregor	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	O140	2304	2314
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	F20	1678	1706

Mayer	Josef	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	O142	2344	2354
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	F21	756	800
Maier	Nikodemus	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	O145	2038	2048
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	F22	1228	1258
Mayer	Philipp	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	O146	1516	1520
Mayer	Raphael	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	O146	1712	1722
Mayer	Raphael	UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	F22	2442	2462
Meier	Raphael	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	O146	1742	1726
Mekler	Peter	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	P40	1734	1744
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	F44	626	652
Metz	Philipp	E-G Kartei	EWZ 56	P53	566	574
		Rasse Kartei	EWZ 50	F33	2856	2858
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	F50	846	858
Nuss	Christian	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	P155	1640	1648
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	G4	1730	1746
Nuss	Jakob	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	P155	1946	1956
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	G4	2156	2184
Nuss	Thomas	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	P155	2402	2406
Obenloch	Eugen	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	P156	1692	1699
Obenloch	Philipp	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	P156	1794	1798
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	G5	1092	1114
Pfoo	Eugen	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	Q72	2260	2260
Redler	Eduard	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	Q147	174	181
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	G58	1198	1224
Reichert	Johannes	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	R6	1932	1934
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	G61	1618	1640
Reinhauer	Anton	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	R16	2192	2192
Renner	Jakob	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	R24	2636	2537
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	G70	80	86
Scherger	Benno	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	R129	2708	2712
Scherger	Johannes	UdSSR	EWZ 57	H31	264	274

		Antrag				
Scherger	Johannes	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	R129	2674	2681
Scherger	Josef	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	R129	2690	2698
Schmidt	Eduard	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	S3	1178	1185
Schmidt	Jakob	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	S13	586	594
Schmidt	Johann	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	S13	2994	2998
Schmidt	Josef	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	S14	1306	1313
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	H46	2318	2336
Schmidt	Matthias	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	S17	2106	2116
Seifert	Adolf	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	S89	44	45
Seifert	Peter	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	S89	1844	1851
Seelinger	Georg	E-G Kartei	EWZ 56	S94	228	240
Selinger	Georg	Rasse Kartei	EWZ 57	I32	2712	2713
Seelinger	Gregor	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	S94	248	250
Seelinger	Peter	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	S94	486	494
Steif	Johann	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	T13	258	264
Stolz	Peter	UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	I33	1154	1168
Thomä	Franz	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	T75	2556	2556
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	I50	402	428
Thomä	Franz	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	T75	2568	2576
Thomä	Jakob	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	T75	2684	2691
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	I50	496	514
Thomä	Jakob	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	T75	2692	2703
Thomä	Jakob	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	T75	2704	2718
Thomä	Johann a.k.a. Raphael	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	T75	2750	2758
Thomä		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	I50	516	548
Thomä	Johannes	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	T75	2762	2770
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	I50	550	576
Thomä	Johannes	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	T75	2770	2778
Thomä	Johannes	UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	I50	578	594
Thomä	Johannes	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	T75	2788	2797
Thomä	Karl	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	T75	2860	2868

Thomä	Leonhard	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	T75	2918	2926
Thomä	Max	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	T76	32	40
Thomä	Michael	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	T76	44	54
Thomä	Michael	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	T76	56	64
Thomä	Peter	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	T76	122	135
Thomä	Peter	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	T76	136	139
Thomä	Peter	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	T76	140	147
Thomä	Wilhelm	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	T76	316	324
Weinberger	Johann	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	U22	450	460
Weinberger	Johann	UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	J2	616	624
Weinberger	Johannes	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	U22	462	471
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	J2	628	644
Vogt	Franz	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	U89	1206	1216
Vogt	Franz	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	U89	1218	1228
Wollbaum	Markus	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	U101	2816	2816
Wollbaum	Mattias	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	U101	2824	2826
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	J32	1588	1610
Wollbaum	Michael	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	U101	2836	2843
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	J32	1612	1642
Zenther	Eduard	E-G Kartei		U131	1310	1313

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