

"There is enough for everybody."

"I'm tired. I'm going home."

"Me too."

"Goodbye."

"Goodbye."

After a pause I heard German spoken: "*Was suchst du dort?*" ("What are you looking for there?")

"*Ein Paar Strümpfe für meine Frau.*" ("A pair of stockings for my wife.")

Quiet for a while. Then, from the direction of the trench a child's cry: "Mama! Mama! Mamaaa!"

A few shots. Quiet. Killed. Then in German this smug assertion: "From our kettle nobody escapes alive."

The bridge-inspection officer whose report had reached Hitler wrote his wife a month later that German Jews had been moved into the area—into a camp and into the emptied ghetto. He could hear Swabian accents in the camp, he wrote, and Berlin accents in the ghetto. "How long will it be," he asked his wife rhetorically, "until these Jews, too, are 'resettled' to the pine forest, where I recently saw mounds of earth heaped up over five large pits, sharply sagging in the middle, and despite the cold a sickly, sweet odor lingered in the air?"

"After the killings," Ezergailis notes, "Jeckeln had told [his aide Paul] Degenhart that 22,000 rounds of ammunition had been used at Rumbula. Noting that on the two days more than 1,000 people were killed within the ghetto and on the road to Rumbula, the number adds up to just below 24,000." Adding in the trainload of victims from Berlin brings the total to twenty-five thousand.

"Although the bodies were picked up quickly," Ezergailis concludes his lamentation, "the ghetto remained in a shambles, and for days thereafter it bore the evidence of a pogrom. Broken suitcases, furniture, toys and baby carriages were all over the streets and yards. The houses were desolate, blood was splashed on the walls and in the stairwells. Days after the *Aktion*, frozen rivulets of blood were on the sidewalks and gutters. Even two months later, arriving German Jews found corpses in cellars and attics."

Jeckeln must have satisfied the Reichsführer-SS that he had not deliberately disobeyed. For his evil work liquidating the Riga ghetto he received a further promotion, to Leader of the SS Upper Section, Ostland, on 11 December 1941.

Nerves

Karl Jäger's notorious report on the murderous work of Einsatzkommando 3, issued from Kaunas on 1 December 1941, cumulates to a total of 137,346 deaths in five months in the area assigned to one Einsatzkommando alone. "I can state today," Jäger writes in summary, "that the goal of solving the Jewish problem in Lithuania has been reached by Einsatzkommando 3. There are no Jews in Lithuania anymore except the work Jews and their families, which total

in Siauliai	some 4,500
in Kaunas	some 15,000
in Vilnius	some 15,000

"I intended to kill off these work Jews and their families too," Jäger goes on with malicious bravado, "but met with the strongest protest from the civil administration (*Reichskommissar*) and the Wehrmacht, which culminated in a prohibition: these Jews and their families may not be shot dead!"

In Kaunas in the final days before he issued his report, on 25 and 29 November 1941, Jäger had overseen massacres of Reich Jews shipped east from Berlin, Munich, Frankfurt, Vienna and Breslau, a total for the two days of 1,869 men, 2,716 women and 327 children, all shot into the killing pits of the Ninth Fort. Since Reich Jews shipped to Lodz had not been immediately killed, and since Himmler vehemently protested Jeckeln's unauthorized killing of the Berlin Jews shipped to Riga, these prompt Kaunas massacres are anomalous. Historian Christian Gerlach notes that the Ostland section chief in the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Territories in the East met with Jäger on 22 November 1941 "and expressed his satisfaction with the executions of Lithuanian Jews," which to Gerlach indicates that the Ministry for the East "was in agreement with the plan to execute the German Jews who were expected to arrive in Kaunas." But no documents have yet emerged that reveal who ordered these anomalous slaughters before Hitler authorized the direct killing of Western Jews.

In his swaggering summary Jäger assesses the relative difficulties of

various *Aktionen*, commenting that "the *Aktionen* in Kaunas itself, where a sufficient number of trained partisans [i.e., Lithuanian auxiliaries] was available, can best be described as parade shooting, especially if compared with *Aktionen* in the country, where the greatest difficulties had to be overcome again and again." Like Jeckeln, Jäger had required all his subordinates to participate in the massacres: "All commanders and men of my commando in Kaunas took part in the large-scale *Aktionen* in Kaunas most actively." Only one official, Jäger adds, was released from participating "because of ill health."

In a follow-up telegram in early February 1942 Jäger increased his total of Jews murdered by 75, to 136,421, added the 1,851 non-Jews his subordinates had executed and gave a breakdown of this total of 138,272 by age and gender: 48,252 men, 55,556 women and 34,464 children.

Stahlecker, in a second long report that covered the period up to 31 January 1942, similarly concluded that the work of Einsatzgruppe A in the Baltic and Byelorussian Ostland was largely finished, a point Stahlecker gruesomely dramatized with a map studded with coffins sized proportionally to the number of Jewish victims. Subsuming Jäger's tallies, the Einsatzgruppe commander gave a combined total for Latvia and Lithuania of 229,052 Jewish men, women and children liquidated, a veritable city of the dead. There were still about 128,000 Jews remaining in Byelorussia, he noted, and killing them was "fraught with certain difficulties," including the need for Jewish labor, frozen ground and shortages of fuel and transportation. These difficulties were not insurmountable; they only meant that he would need two more months to finish the job.

Frozen ground was limiting more than Einsatzgruppen murders; Russian winter had stalled the Wehrmacht just as it had stalled Napoleon in 1812. Wehrmacht officer Siegfried Knappe found it brutally unforgettable:

By December [1941], we were no more than twenty-five kilometers [16 miles] from Moscow, but the temperature was paralyzing. Heavy snow fell on December 1, and the pitiless cold became unbearable. . . .

As we approached the outermost suburbs of Moscow a paralyzing blast of cold hit us, and the temperature dropped far below zero and stayed there. Our trucks and vehicles would not start, and our horses started to die from the cold in large numbers for the first time; they would just die in the bitter cold darkness of the night, and we would find them dead the next morning. The Russians knew how to cope with this weather, but we did not; their vehicles were built and conditioned for this kind of weather, but ours were not. We all now numbly

wrapped ourselves in our blankets. Everyone felt brutalized and defeated by the cold. The sun would rise late in the morning, as harsh now in the winter winds as in the heat of August, and not one fresh footprint would be visible for as far as the human eye could see. Frostbite was taking a very heavy toll now as more and more men were sent back to the field hospitals with frozen fingers and toes. Many infantry companies were down to platoon size. On December 5, the temperature plummeted to [-22° F.]. It was almost impossible for the human body to function in such numbing cold.

But Himmler's murderous forces were nothing if not dogged. The last major massacre in Liepaja, on the western Baltic coast of Latvia, took advantage of the friability of the deep sand dunes back from the beach at Skede, ten miles north of the city. Prisoners dug a V-shaped trench twenty feet deep in the sand and notched a ledge four feet down the ditch's seaward wall, on which victims were forced to stand facing the ocean to be shot from behind. Mass killings at Skede on orders from Riga during three days in mid-December 1941 destroyed about half the Liepaja Jewish population, some three thousand men, women and children. It was not as cold on the beach as Moscow's deep freeze, but a bitter wind was biting and the Liepaja victims were required to remove all their clothes and stand naked or nearly so. Rather than *Sardinenpackung*, the Latvians and Germans who did the killing reverted to the military system of two executioners firing simultaneously at each victim. But mothers with infants were told to hold their babies over their heads; one man then shot the mother while the other shot the child. "For the corpses that did not fall into the ditch" on their own, Ezergailis notes, "there was a kicker who rolled them in." A German SD man working down in the ditch administered *Genickschüssen* to the wounded.

At Vinnitsa, in the Ukraine, where Wehrmacht engineers were building the forward Hitler bunker, Werwolf, an area forty miles around was declared *Judenfrei* in December 1941 after an October Revolution massacre of 2,580 Vinnitsa Jews. In fact, Jewish slave laborers continued to live and work in the Vinnitsa area. On 5 January 1942 the SS published an announcement in the *Vinnitsa News* ordering Jews to assemble for resettlement with luggage and a three-day supply of food. They complied, but conditions were such that the SS had to send them home; as the officer responsible for the Hitler bunker subsequently informed Berlin, the ground was frozen and it had been impossible to dig pits. Not to be thwarted in reducing the supposed risk to Hitler's security in the neighborhood of Werwolf (which he would not occupy until July 1942), the SS seized 227 Jews who lived in the village nearest the bunker, lined

them up against the wall of the local NKVD prison and killed and simultaneously buried them by dynamiting the wall.

By the end of 1941 many of the men of the Einsatzgruppen, Order Police and SD and their native auxiliaries had developed fully malefic violent identities. For some that meant taking pleasure in killing; for others it meant killing when ordered to do so and drinking afterward to forget.

An SS-Scharführer* named Ribe, for example, oversaw the Minsk ghetto. Ghetto resident Hersh Smolar remembers the Scharführer's enthusiasm for viciousness:

[Ribe] was even more sadistic than his predecessors. Jews who had escaped from Slutsk and settled in the Minsk ghetto recognized him as the murderer who had been in charge of liquidating the Slutsk ghetto. People called him "the Devil with the White Eyes." . . . Ribe never let any Jew he encountered go unscathed, regardless of age or sex. He would look at his victim with his big bulging eyes, his lips would form a smile, he would carefully aim his pistol—and never miss. It was Ribe who organized the "beauty contest" of young Jewish women, selected twelve of the youngest and prettiest, and ordered them to parade through the ghetto until they reached the Jewish cemetery. Here he forced them to undress and then shot them one by one. The last woman to be killed was Lena Neu. He took her brassiere from her and said smugly, "This will be my souvenir of the pretty Jewess."

Ribe was the SS man as beast, a familiar and all-too-common type. Not all the Third Reich's killers were so complacently socialized to violence, however. The discomfort that some of them felt certainly does not qualify as mitigation: crimes are judged by acts, not by facility. But the evidence that perpetrators exhibited a range of responses, often conflicted and even traumatic, supports Lonnie Athens's model of violent socialization and disqualifies ideology alone as the enabling mechanism for violence.

SS-Obersturmführer Karl Kretschmer of Sonderkommando 4a responded to his murderous duties with ambivalence even though he was committed to the Third Reich's anti-Semitic ideology and accepted the standard rationalizations of the Final Solution that Hitler and Himmler handed down. Kretschmer joined Sonderkommando 4a later

*Staff Sergeant.

in the war, after Blobel had been relieved and replaced by a physician, Erwin Weinmann, in January 1942, who in turn had been replaced by a former schoolteacher, Eugen Steimle, in August 1942. By then Sonderkommando 4a was working north of Stalingrad, far to the east of Kiev, but its work was the same as it had been since the beginning of Barbarossa: murdering Jews.

"The sight of the dead (including women and children) is not very cheering," Kretschmer wrote his wife soon after he arrived behind the front. "But we are fighting this war for the survival or non-survival of our people. . . . As the war is in our opinion a Jewish war, the Jews are the first to feel it. Here in Russia, wherever the German soldier is, no Jew remains. You can imagine that at first I needed some time to come to grips with this." Kretschmer counted himself lucky to be able to barter for food, a consequence of what he called "our hard work." He and his men could also choose among clothing. "We can get everything here," he told his wife. "The clothes belonged to people who are no longer alive today." He could not ship her a "Persian rug" because "the Jewish dealers are no longer alive," but he sent her canned butter, sardines, meat and tea.

All these goods were the fruits, of course, of robbery and confiscation. If the confiscation meant that Russians would die, Kretschmer told his wife, Germans would still seize the food; the Führer had given his approval. Moreover, "we have got to appear to be tough here or else we will lose the war. There is no room for pity of any kind. You women and children back home could not expect any mercy or pity if the enemy got the upper hand. For that reason we are mopping up where necessary but otherwise the Russians are willing, simple and obedient. There are no Jews here any more."

Kretschmer was traumatized by his initial exposure to mass killing. He describes his difficulties only obliquely, censoring himself not only to spare his wife but perhaps also to evade whatever censors were reading his mail. "The reveille is at six o'clock," he wrote a month after his arrival, for example, "but I always wake up earlier because up to now I have not been able to sleep more than five hours, although I sometimes go to bed early." He connected his sleep disturbance with the work he was doing: "The first few days I was tired *and could not take very much* but after that *I managed to see the night through* and was actually *the last to quit the field.*"* He found the killing sufficiently upsetting that he sought alternative duty as an administrator, an assignment, he told his wife and children, that he had been granted:

*Emphasis added here and below.

I have already told you about the shooting—that I could not say “no” here either [i.e., he wanted to avoid doing it but was not allowed exception or did not risk asking]. But they’ve more or less said they’ve finally found a good man to run the administrative side of things. The last one was by all accounts a coward. That’s the way people are judged here. But you can trust your Daddy. He thinks about you all the time and is not shooting immoderately.

Judging men to be cowards who were unwilling to shoot unarmed victims in cold blood was a form of coercive violent coaching the group used to further the violent socialization of new members. And associating thinking about his children with “not shooting immoderately” emphasizes the difficulty Kretschmer was having accepting the group’s standards. A few lines later in the same letter he responded sardonically to his wife’s news of a neighbor’s military assignment: “It’s nice that Herr Kern is going to France. I think he would have been *too weak* for the East, *though people do change here*. People soon get used to the sight of blood, but *Blutwurst* is not very popular around here.”

A few days later Kretschmer was still feeling precarious. He told his wife and children about the fine meals he enjoyed, then explained, “We have to eat and drink well because of the nature of our work. . . . *Otherwise we would crack up*. Your Papa will be very careful and *strike the right balance*. It’s not very pleasant stuff. I would far rather sleep.” At the end of the same letter, Kretschmer summarized the strategies he had adopted to carry him through, a combination of habituation, rationalization and denial:

If it weren’t for *the stupid thoughts* [he had been having] *about what we are doing in this country*, the *Einsatz* here would be wonderful, since it has put me in a position where I can support you all very well. Since, as I already wrote to you, I consider the last *Einsatz* to be justified and indeed approve of the consequences it had, the phrase “stupid thoughts” is not strictly accurate. Rather *it is a weakness not to be able to stand the sight of dead people; the best way of overcoming it is to do it more often. Then it becomes a habit*. . . . The more one thinks about the whole business the more one comes to the conclusion that it’s the only thing we can do to safeguard unconditionally the security of our people and our future. *I do not therefore want to think and write about it any further*. I would only make your heart heavy needlessly. We men here at the front will win through. Our faith in the Führer fulfills us and gives us strength to carry out our difficult and thankless task.

If he is not yet converted at this point, Kretschmer appears at least to be moving toward incorporating the values of the violent group he joined almost two months previously. To do so he had progressively blurred the distinction between defensive and offensive violence, casting his murderous work as vital for the protection of his family. Characterizing a victim group as a relentless threat to a perpetrator group is the fundamental mechanism of genocide. It allows perpetrators to interpret their violence as defensive and therefore both justified and unavoidable—in Kretschmer’s words, “it’s the only thing we can do.”

Erich Naumann, who took over commanding *Einsatzgruppe B* in Byelorussia at the end of November 1941 when Nebe felt he could no longer go on, offered a variation on Kretschmer’s “it’s the only thing we can do” during his testimony at the postwar *Einsatzgruppen* trial in Nuremberg. “[The Führer order] was very harsh,” Naumann told the court, “terribly harsh for the *Einsatzkommandos* and others who were involved in it. Everyone knew that it was not pleasant but was very much against one’s inner feelings.” Naumann insisted that he questioned the Führer order all the way up to Heydrich, who told him finally and with exasperation:

“That is a clear Führer order. This Führer order has been issued for the security of the rear of the combating forces and of the entire army area. It can only be understood in one way, and it has to be carried out accordingly. All Jews, both male and female, all Gypsies, and all Communist officials fall under the Führer order.” He repeated, “There is no discussion. The order must be carried out. The Führer issued the order for reasons of security of the army areas.”

Naumann continued his testimony under questioning from the president of the court, Michael Musmanno:

NAUMANN: These discussions concerning this order, its seriousness and its terrible burden when executing it . . . were confronted, on the other hand, with another discussion—namely, that this order had been issued by the Führer—that is to say, by the man in supreme command, the supreme head of the state. We were now faced with the problem of our personal feelings and this order. Each one of us had to make up his mind whether, during the war, we could decide according to our own personal feelings or whether we had to obey an order which was issued during the war by the supreme commander of the state. The decision was for us, as obedient soldiers, not easy, but it was clear we had to carry out the order, for the very simple reason that a soldier

during the war has to carry out orders. If every soldier only carries out an order after having considered whether he likes it or not, then there would be no more soldiers. . . .

Guilt and remorse I can only feel for crimes I personally commit. If I myself have carried out killings and cruelties then I would have to feel guilt and remorse. If I have carried out an order then I have no guilt at all, and therefore I cannot feel remorse for a guilt that does not exist.

MUSMANNO: Did you have any misgivings at that time?

NAUMANN: Yes, your Honor.

MUSMANNO: Then you did not agree with the order?

NAUMANN: Insofar as I had misgivings about the execution of this order and it was contrary to my nature to kill defenseless people.

MUSMANNO: And you believe it was wrong to kill, especially women and children?

NAUMANN: Not wrong, your Honor, because I was given the authority to do so, because there was a Führer order.

MUSMANNO: I have asked you whether you believed it was wrong at that time to shoot down women and children.

NAUMANN: No, I did not hold that opinion owing to my convictions. It was my conviction that it had to be done.

Naumann's argument that he was only obeying orders was unacceptable to the court, which sentenced him to death, but its value to him as a rationalization should not be discounted. If the highest authority of the state told him to do something, then he could convince himself he had no choice and was therefore not personally responsible. The problem with such appeals to higher authority, as psychologist Herbert C. Kelman points out, is that everyone in the chain of command, up to and including the supreme authority, may feel authorized and therefore freed of moral restraint:

According to a view that is widely held (although it has been challenged by the Nuremberg principles), the state itself is an entity that is not subject to the moral law; it is free to do anything it deems necessary to protect or promote its national interests. The central authorities, in acting for the state, are similarly not subject to moral restraints that might be operative in their personal lives. . . . According to this view, the freedom from all restraints devolves on the central decision maker [e.g., Hitler] from a higher authority, the state, of which he is merely the servant. . . . He too claims that he had no choice in that he was responding to authoritative demands. . . . The whole doctrine is, of course, extremely dangerous because of its total circularity.

But the repetition of massacre after massacre, the screams and pleadings, the faces and bodies glimpsed in their helpless final agonies that unavoidably recalled a sister, a brother, a wife, a child, an aging parent at home or the perpetrator himself, made such rationalizations difficult for some perpetrators to maintain at the edge of the killing pits, if not in the extravagant security of the Führer bunker. A few among the SS leadership succumbed. Erwin Schulz asked to be relieved of duty as commander of Einsatzkommando 5 (Einsatzgruppe C) in September 1941. In a Nuremberg affidavit he explained why: "The reasons for my [request] lay, among others, in the ever-intensified orders for the ruthless extermination of the entire Jewish population. *SS Brigadeführer* Dr. Rasch distinguished himself by particular ruthlessness. He ordered the leaders also to participate personally in the shootings. [SS-Gruppenführer Bruno] Streckenbach himself described the activity of the *Einsatzgruppen* in the East to me as murder." Schulz, like Hitler and Himmler, was prepared to organize massacres but not to participate personally.

Alfred Filbert, a lawyer who commanded Einsatzkommando 9 (Einsatzgruppe B) from June through October 1941, suffered what he later called a "nervous collapse" after organizing massacres in Grodno, Vilnius and Vitebsk and applied for a transfer to military duty in the *Waffen-SS*. Instead he was recalled to Berlin, charged with illegally withholding 60,000 Reichsmarks confiscated from his victims and sent home on extended unpaid leave. (He was exonerated in 1943 and assigned to the Reich Security Main Office.) A British psychiatrist, Henry V. Dicks, interviewed Filbert many years later in prison, where he was serving a life sentence for his part in murdering eleven thousand people in massacres in Lithuania and Byelorussia.

Dicks offers a rare view into the background family experiences of an Einsatzkommando leader. Filbert had been born in 1905 in Darmstadt of Protestant parents. He mentioned to Dicks several significant occasions of childhood brutalization. "In my home and family," the tall, gaunt Filbert told the psychiatrist, "we only knew command and order. I was born in military barracks. My father started as the sergeant major of the Guard of his Highness the Duke of Hesse. We had a good life then. Of course I wanted to become a soldier. After all—the Guards!" Dicks commented that the SS's rule of absolute obedience must have appealed to him. "The Kaiser demanded worse," Filbert responded—"he said 'When I order you to murder your father and mother you must obey!' The Kaiser's orders were like God's." Evidently *Kadavergehorsam*, corpse-like obedience, predated Nazism.

Protesting his sensitivity, Filbert revealed that his brother handled him violently. "I always went to great lengths to avoid anything to do with death or corpses as a child," he told Dicks. "When I was very young my brother, eighteen months older, took hold of me and held me out over the window sill. Ever since I've had a dread of heights—a feeling it draws me down."

Another memory focused on his violent subjugation by his mother during the years when his father was away at war. Dicks paraphrases Filbert's recollection:

[Filbert] had looked up to this kind, warm-hearted father and missed him terribly as a child. . . . It was left to his mother to be the disciplinarian. Yes, she was too strict. [Filbert] recalls how he had a bad fall during his father's absence and lay on the ground yelling in great pain. The mother came out to him with her stick and gave him a beating for weeping. It was only after that had been done that she even looked at his leg and found that he had broken it.

("In [Filbert's] case," Dicks comments, "we are afforded a glimpse of how far back dates his sense of being surrounded by hard, unloving, even murderous figures, with his good daddy not there to save him. . . . I think that insofar as [Filbert] was relating a fact of his own experience, we are justified in recoiling as much from this piece of cruelty by the mother against her own child as from a typical SS man's atrocity.")

Filbert had gone to the universities of Giessen, Heidelberg and Marburg, winning his dueling scars at one of them, earning his doctorate in law in 1933. He moved up rapidly in the SS, participating with Nebe, Eichmann and others in the conference Heydrich held in 1939 to organize Einsatzgruppen for Poland. At his postwar trial the court established that Filbert had taken command of Einsatzkommando 9 with a speech to his men announcing "hard consequences for any who demurred at taking part in the destruction of Jews." He told his men that "every man must fire," including himself, "to set a good example." Dicks reports that "his bearing was described by some of his subordinates in evidence as 'ruthless,' for example in dismissing objections to the herding and stripping of women and in his lack of consideration for the youth of some of his personnel taking part. It was clear to the court that [Filbert] presented himself as the zealous as well as ferocious executor of his Führer's policies." The psychiatrist quotes the prosecution as acknowledging "that [Filbert] stopped the wild shooting of the Lithuanian auxiliary police, but he substituted for it the routine mechanical slaughter of the Chicago stockyards at the rate of 500 a day."

The court further established that Filbert had ordered a man in Ein-

satzkommando 9 who showed consideration for his Jewish victims to be severely punished. Filbert's history, from his childhood brutalization to his fanatic SS posturing, indicates that he was fully violently socialized. Yet he was pragmatic enough to reduce his unit's direct participation in slaughter when he saw evidence that his men were being traumatized:

By the time the *EK* reached the Vitebsk area [Filbert] had delegated some of the shooting to a civilian militia recruited from among the local Jew haters and anti-Soviet members of the population, distinguished only by armbands, without even the semblance of "due legal process." This was shown to be due to a deterioration of morale among his own men who had to be issued with increasing rations of vodka to carry out their killing orders. Rather than shoot, they would bully the victims to jump into the pit alive, so that the local irregulars should do the final shooting for them.

And just as his men had trouble killing, so also did Filbert find it impossible to sustain the hardness Himmler demanded (but did not himself display). "Well," Filbert challenged Dicks, "how does a man show he cannot stand it except by his nerves giving way?" I asked if this was really how he reacted. "Yes—a complete nervous breakdown . . . to be degraded into a hangman and murderer—nobody [i.e., the court] believes I felt it." Myself: What were the symptoms? [Filbert:] "Uncontrollable trembling" (*Schüttelfrost*—a word I translate as *rigor*, as in fever), "and weeping. I did not laugh any more." At another point in their long conversation Filbert said of his breakdown, "I was degraded into a hangman—I began to tremble and have weeping fits—I used to be so gay."

Filbert supplies a clue to Nebe's reasons for withdrawing from command of Einsatzgruppe B in November 1941. He says Nebe, the former police officer, told him "I have looked after so many criminals, and now I have become one myself." (Nebe's driver had committed suicide, ostensibly because he was unable to bear participating in massacres, and Nebe's friend Hans Gisevius, who saw Nebe after he returned to Berlin, described him as "a mere shadow of his former self, nerves on edge and depressed.") Filbert also offered a typology of the Einsatzgruppen leaders he encountered:

What about those in the service who could accept the extermination tasks [Dicks asked]—how do you think this was possible for them? [Filbert] says: "There were many of those others. The SS was full of desperate and bad characters." . . . He lists categories: (a) There were those who said: "The Führer commands, all is in order"—the

unquestioning ones; (b) another type were those whose motto was simply "In the morning we shoot . . . in the evening we feast"; (c) the third group were those, like himself, who kept aloof from these types, and he was accused of being a bad comrade . . . ; (d) yet another sort were like the young law graduate SS officer who came to him at Vilnius and said "I cannot do it" and [Filbert] had to say "Don't say that aloud!" and put him to work in the unit office.

Perhaps surprisingly, Bach-Zelewski, the Higher SS and Police Leader responsible for Russia-Center, was among those who broke down. Sometime in February 1942 he traveled to Germany and checked into the Red Cross hospital at Hohenlychen, seventy miles north of Berlin, suffering from hemorrhoids. The chief SS physician, Ernst Robert Grawitz, personally attended his case. Grawitz wrote Himmler early in March about the bad turn Bach-Zelewski's recuperation had taken. "Slow healing and prolonged pain are common in hemorrhoid operations," Grawitz wrote, but Bach-Zelewski offered additional challenges:

It was especially noticeable, however, that the patient arrived from the eastern front for treatment suffering from a very serious state of general exhaustion, particularly nervous exhaustion. (He suffers especially from flashbacks connected with the shootings of Jews which he himself conducted and other difficult experiences in the East!) Because the psychological treatment of the patient is complex, I have personally extensively intervened and am working daily to restore his mental balance. Frau von dem Bach requested to live in the hospital and care for her husband and I have acceded to her request. I took this unusual step, which has led to unavoidable but not unbridgeable difficulties, because the psychological treatment of the patient is a significant factor in the total healing plan.

When Grawitz had asked Bach-Zelewski why he was so disturbed, the Obergruppenführer is supposed to have said, "Thank God, I'm through with it. Don't you know what's happening in Russia? The entire Jewish people . . . is being exterminated there." He wasn't through with it, however; within two months he was back in Russia supervising massacres.

Even Jäger, a hard case, eventually broke down, Jeckeln testified during his 1945 interrogation. "Jäger told me that he had become neurotic as a result of these shootings," Jeckeln said. "[He] was pensioned off and left his post for treatment."

Himmler was concerned about the effect on his subordinates of direct participation in mass killing, as his 12 December 1941 letter ordering

"comradely gatherings . . . in the best German domestic style" demonstrates. But he was adamant about accomplishing the Final Solution the Führer had ordered. Heinz Jost, a lawyer and SS-Brigadeführer who took command of Einsatzgruppe A after Stahlecker was killed by Estonian partisans in late March 1942, claimed at the Nuremberg Einsatzgruppen trial to have challenged successively Jeckeln, Heydrich and Himmler with the problem of psychological casualties among the SS killing squads. When he confronted Himmler, he testified, "I was asked, 'Are you a philosopher? What is the meaning of this? What do you mean, problems? All that is concerned are our orders.'" Himmler offered an analogy: "I have given the *Handschuhbefehl*, the glove order." Jost explained to the court: "Himmler had given an order that when [an SS] superior was greeted or saluted the glove had to be removed from the hand. In the Army it was the other way around, the glove had to remain on the hand." Jost continued:

Himmler said, "I have given this glove order. There are many who believe they do not have to bother about such an order because they don't like it. Anyone whom I meet who does not follow this order and obey it in the strictest manner, I shall punish him very severely and harshly. Even if the contents of the order are ever so ridiculous, the contents of the order don't matter, all that matters is that it is an order, and those who don't obey the glove order prove that they do not want to carry out orders of great importance. Orders cannot be discussed or debated. Orders have to be obeyed, and that principle you don't seem to have realized yet. What is your age?" he asked. I replied, "I was born in 1904." "Oh, you are one of those people who never had any military training. No one here can be an officer or a general who cannot obey, because those who don't obey orders cannot give orders either. I must think about how I can train you to do this."

Himmler trained Jost by breaking him to Unterscharführer—corporal—and sending him to the Eastern front. The episode supports Felix Kersten's unsurpassed portrait of the SS-Reichsführer, whose immense and devious labor turned the "Führer's wish" into the monstrous reality of the Holocaust:

His eyes were extraordinarily small, and the distance between them narrow, rodent-like. If you spoke to him, these eyes would never leave your face; they would rove over your countenance, fix your eyes; and in them would be an expression of waiting, watching, stealth. His manner of reacting to things which did not meet with his approval was also not quite that expected from the jovial bourgeois [he pretended

to be]. Sometimes his disagreement was clothed in the form of a fatherly admonition, but this could suddenly change and his speech and actions would become ironic, caustic, cynical. But never, even in these expressions of disagreement and dislike, did the man himself seem to appear. . . . Never any indication of directness. Himmler, when fighting, intrigued; when battling for his so-called ideas used subterfuge, deceit—not dueling swords, but daggers in his opponent's back. His ways were the ophidian ways of the coward, weak, insincere and immeasurably cruel. . . . Himmler's mind . . . was not a twentieth century mind. His character was medieval, feudalistic, machiavellian, evil.

It bears repeating that psychological trauma incident upon carrying out criminal orders to murder large groups of unarmed noncombatants in no way mitigates the crime. Indeed, such mental conflict is indirect evidence that the men of the Einsatzgruppen were well aware that what they were doing was criminal and evil even if the highest authority of the German state had ordered it.

Final Solution

In October 1941 Stalin learned from a mole in the German Embassy in Tokyo, Richard Sorge, that the Japanese had decided to remain neutral in the German-Russian War rather than attack the Soviet Union from the east, through Mongolia, as Germany had proposed. The Japanese decided on neutrality to reserve their forces to fight the United States. Matching Sorge's information to other corroborating evidence, Stalin decided he could rely on it. He proceeded to transfer his entire Far Eastern army—some 250,000 men deploying 1,700 tanks and 1,500 aircraft—westward across Siberia to the Moscow front.

Siberian divisions began probing German forces south of Moscow as early as 18 November 1941, but the full-scale Soviet counterattack came on the night of 4–5 December 1941 all along the front. Russian winter and German overconfidence had left the Third Reich's armies ill-prepared, Panzer Group commander Heinz Guderian would argue to justify the heavy German losses that followed:

Only he who saw the endless expanse of Russian snow during this winter of our misery, and felt the icy wind that blew across it, burying in snow every object in its path; who drove for hour after hour through that no man's land only at last to find too thin shelter, with insufficiently clothed half-starved men; and who also saw by contrast the well-fed, warmly clad and fresh Siberians, fully equipped for winter fighting; only a man who knew all that can truly judge the events which now occurred.

(A few days later Guderian recorded an outside temperature of -63°F ; "many men died while performing their natural functions," he wrote gruesomely, "as a result of a congelation of the anus.")

But even with fresh divisions, Soviet strength no more than matched German numbers. "The Red Army," writes Alan Clark, ". . . had no power to achieve, nor did the weather permit, a deep penetration in the manner of the summer battles. In the few cases where the Russians succeeded in surrounding their enemy they had neither the artillery to reduce them nor sufficient strength in the air to prevent their revictual-