

sobibor

A History of a Nazi Death Camp



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JULES SCHELVIS

published in association with the
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

BLOOMSBURY

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Jules Schelvis

Edited and with a Foreword by
Bob Moore

Translated from the Dutch by
Karin Dixon

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List of Abbreviations

AA – Archive of the Auswärtiges Amt (Foreign Affairs) in Bonn.

AGKBZ – Archiwum Główna Komisja Badania Zbrodni Niemieckich w Polsce in Warsaw (Archive of the Chief Commission for Investigation of German War Crimes in Poland).

APL – Archiwum Państwowe Lublin (Lublin State Archives).

APM – Archiwum Państwowego Muzeum na Majdanku (state museum on the camp Majdanek site in Lublin).

BA – Bundesarchiv Koblenz.

BArch – Bundesarchiv, formerly Berlin Document Center.

BDC – Berlin Document Center.

IMT – International Military Court of Justice, records and other evidence.

JHI – Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.

NIOD – Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie, the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation.

StA.Do – The Staatsanwaltschaft Dortmund; first part of the code for trial documents pertaining to Sobibór. These documents have no further specific code.

StA.Do-IV'66-590 – The Staatsanwaltschaft Dortmund; documents archived by month pertaining to the first Sobibór trial at Hagen, in 1965–6 (IV denotes the month; '66 the year, and 590 the page number).

StA.Do-Gom-PB-III – The Staatsanwaltschaft Dortmund; trial documents in protocol volumes, pertaining to the trial against Gomerski in Frankfurt am Main.

StA.Do-RM-V-627 – The Staatsanwaltschaft Dortmund; trial documents in red volumes, pertaining to the second Sobibór trial at Hagen.

StA.Do-WZ-IV-96 – The Staatsanwaltschaft Dortmund; trial documents in black protocol and annexe volumes, containing additional inserted envelopes, numbered, pertaining to the second trial at Hagen (WZ is *Wiederaufnahmeverfahren* in the black volumes, IV is the volume number, and 96 the page number).

VoHa-66 – Schwurgericht (court) verdict of 20 December 1966 pronounced at Hagen, in the German Bundesrepublik, pertaining to the Sobibór trial against Dubois and nine others. Dossier 11 Ks 1/64 StA Hagen.

VoHa-85 – Schwurgericht verdict of 4 October 1985 pronounced at Hagen pertaining to the *Wiederaufnahmeverfahren* (retrial) of Karl Frenzel. Dossier 31 Ks 45Js 27/61 (54/76) Hagen.

ZStL – Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen zur Aufklärung nationalsozialistischer Verbrechen (Central legal administration office dealing with National Socialist crimes) in Ludwigsburg.

ZStL-230/59 – Dossier with documents pertaining to the Treblinka trial against SS officer Franz Stangl and others.

ZStL-251/59 – Dossier with documents pertaining to the Sobibór trial at Hagen of SS members Bolender, Dubois, Frenzel, Ittner, Jühns, Lachmann, Lambert, Schütt, Unverhau, Wolf, Zierke and Fuchs, from 6 September 1965 to 20 December 1966, number 45Js 27/61 StA Dortmund and 11 Ks 1/64 StA Hagen.

ZStL-252/59 – Dossier with documents pertaining to the Belżec trial against SS members Oberhauser, Schluch, Jühns, Dubois, Gley and others.

ZStL-643/71 – Dossier with documents pertaining to the so-called Trawniki trial against SS officer Streibel.

ZStL-Polen – File containing various documents in numbered order in the Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen zur Aufklärung nationalsozialistischer Verbrechen (Central legal administration office dealing with National Socialist crimes) in Ludwigsburg.

Author's Acknowledgements

When I visited my sister in Australia in the autumn of 1981, I was introduced to Chaskiel Menche, one of the survivors of the Sobibór uprising. He told me that he had been invited to the German city of Hagen to give evidence against a former SS-Oberscharführer who had been in charge of a number of Jewish work 'commandos' or detachments. As a foreigner going to what he always regarded as an enemy country, he asked me if I would accompany him to Hagen. From the beginning, I was not only a witness to his testimony, both inside and outside the court, but was later recognized as a *Nebenkläger* (co-plaintiff) by the *Schwurgericht* (German court). In this capacity I was able to attend the remaining court sessions and was given access to the trial documents. After the sentencing and in subsequent interviews, I obtained so much information that I felt the need to write a book about Sobibór. This was published in Amsterdam in 1993 and has now gone through five printings. In 1998, Metropol Verlag in Berlin published a German translation, followed by a second edition produced by Reihe antifaschistischer Texte/Unrast Verlag in Hamburg/Münster in 2003. The purpose of this new translation is to allow the book to reach a wider audience in the English-speaking world.

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I will repeat here the words I have written in my acknowledgements in the Dutch and German editions.

I would like to extend my gratitude first to the survivors of Sobibór, whose testimonies have now been committed to posterity. A special word of thanks is owed to the survivor Kurt Thomas in Columbus, OH, with whom I carried on an intensive correspondence about various aspects of the camp. I also wish to acknowledge the much valued assistance of Mrs H. Doms and Mr Willi Dreßen of the Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen in Ludwigsburg, who were very helpful in my search for documents; Mrs Wisotzki of the Oberstaatsanwalt; Mr Klaus Schacht of the Zentralstelle im Lande Nordrhein-Westfalen für die Bearbeitung von nationalsozialistischen Massenverbrechen bei der Staatsanwaltschaft Dortmund for their assistance in searching for documents pertaining to various Sobibór trials; Dr Josef Henke of the Bundesarchiv in Koblenz, for his assistance in finding documents about the Aktion Reinhardt; Drs Annemieke van Bockxmeer, C.M. Schulten, C.F.J. Stuldreher and H. de Vries of the Rijksinstituut (now the Nederlands Instituut) voor Oorlogsdocumentatie in Amsterdam, for their exceptional assistance; Mr H.C. Henri Giersthove of the Dutch Red Cross; Mrs Danuta Kolakowska, head of the archive of the Główna Komisja Badania Zbrodni Niemieckich w Polsce in Warsaw and her assistant, for the spontaneity with which they assisted me; the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw; the Archiwum Panstwowe in Lublin; the Archiwum Panstwowego Muzeum na Majdanku in Lublin; and Mrs Hadassah Modlinger of Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.

I am also indebted to Dunya Breur and Frans Peeters, for interviewing twelve Sobibór survivors as well as two Polish railwaymen in Hagen, Rostow, Rotterdam and Tricht, which I recorded on video.

A special word of thanks goes to Prof. Dr Loe de Jong, who died on 15 March 2005. He read the original (Dutch) proofs of this book and suggested various improvements, and I was very proud to hand him the very first copy at Westerbork.

Last, but certainly not least, my deepest gratitude goes to my wife Jo, who died in 2001, for her patience and understanding for all the times I went off on my research and investigative missions, and for so often excusing me from my domestic duties.

Jules Schelvis

Foreword

During the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands, just over 107,000 of the pre-war Jewish community of approximately 140,000 people were deported to the concentration and extermination camps of the East. Of these, only around 5,000 were still alive at the war's end, and the scale of this disaster has haunted the national psyche of the Netherlands ever since the full horror of what had taken place was exposed after the liberation in 1945. How such a disaster could have taken place in a country with such supposedly liberal values and one whose people saw themselves as essentially resistant to the German occupation continues to occupy historians, sociologists and political commentators to this day and has generated a substantial Dutch literature on all aspects of the persecution of the Jews. The first works came from Dutch Jewish survivors. The jurist Abel Herzberg, who had returned after deportation to Bergen-Belsen, was the first to produce a survey work in 1950, followed in the mid-1960s by the historian Jacques Presser, who had been in hiding. The 'official' history of the Netherlands during the Second World War, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, written by Louis de Jong and published between 1969 and 1988, also devoted many chapters to the identification, isolation, deportation and ultimate fate of the victims. Innumerable books and articles have followed, as well as memoirs and testimonies from Dutch and other Jews who survived the camps or avoided the deportations by going into hiding.

Yet even in the context of this extensive historiography, Jules Schelvis's book may well be unique. The majority of Jews deported from the Netherlands from July 1942 onwards were sent to Auschwitz, but between 2 March and 20 July 1943 a total of nineteen transports were sent to the Sobibór extermination camp. Nearly all the 34,313 Jews sent on these transports were killed within hours of their arrival, and only eighteen of them survived to return home after the war. Two were among fifty or so survivors of the uprising in October 1943, while others owed their salvation to being chosen to work within the camp or in satellite installations. Separated from his wife and her family on arrival, Schelvis was one of those selected for a work detail. Two surviving women have produced memoirs of their experiences, and they are of course highly valued as sources of personal testimony and of information. However, Schelvis has gone much further than merely compiling a memoir of his own experiences. He has written a carefully researched and closely argued academic text that has employed the available testimonies and postwar trial documents to produce a comprehensive history of the camp.

The original Dutch edition, published in 1993, was designed for an audience in the Netherlands and contained a great deal of detailed statistical information on the deportees and on the role of the camp within Dutch debates on the fate of the Jews. These were reproduced in the subsequent German edition but have been reduced or omitted in this new English-language edition. Likewise, a contextual chapter on the origins of the 'Final Solution' has also been omitted, as this has been dealt with far more extensively in other specialist texts. Thus the focus of the book is now more firmly on the origins and history of the Sobibór extermination camp, although much material on the Dutch victims remains. The translator and editor have endeavoured at all times to render the tone as well as the meaning of the original Dutch text. This has taken on an added importance as some readers will choose to interpret the text as a survivor testimony in its own right, and the process has been aided immensely through close co-operation between author, editor and translator. Many quotations in the first Dutch edition came from German trial transcripts and other testimonies, and these have been translated from the original language wherever possible rather than from the Dutch.

The preparation of this English-language edition also provided an opportunity to update the text and to take into account new research on the subject. Here the author and editor would like to acknowledge the invaluable help afforded by historians Peter Black and Martin Dean at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and by Professors Raul Hilberg and Henry Friedlander. Their insights and ideas prompted the inclusion of further recent scholarship on the camp, including some revisions to the estimates of the total numbers of victims and some further archival research on files held in the Bundesarchiv in Berlin, ably carried out by Alexander Ruoff.

Finally, it is a pleasure to acknowledge the role played by Kathleen May and Fran Martin at Berg Publishers and Benton Arnovitz at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in liaising so effectively between all the parties involved in this project and bringing it to a successful conclusion.

Bob Moore
Sheffield

Introduction

Sobibór, in the eastern part of Poland, was one of the three extermination camps in the General Government which, together with Belżec and Treblinka, formed part of Operation Reinhardt,¹ launched by Himmler and headed by Odilo Globocnik.² Approximately 170,000 Jews from Germany, France, the Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Slovakia, the Soviet Union and Czech territory were sent there to be gassed by carbon monoxide. The camp was operational from the end of April 1942 until 14 October 1943, when an uprising broke out, which now holds a unique place in the history of Jewish persecution during the Second World War. Earlier that year, in the summer of 1943, a group of *Arbeitshäftlinge*³ (Jewish workers) from Poland had banded together, forming an underground group led by Leon Felhendler, a Polish Jew.⁴ The group consisted of fewer than ten men, who over the preceding months had been selected⁵ from various transports to work at the camp. They plotted their escape in total secrecy, keeping their plans even from the other *Arbeitshäftlinge*. Earlier escape attempts by other prisoners, including five men from the Waldkommando⁶ (forest detachment) who actually managed to get away, had met with varying degrees of success. However, for Felhendler and his allies it remained but a dream. A lack of insight, knowledge and skill hampered their chances of succeeding with such a complicated operation. Preparing and executing an escape in every minor detail required a lot of specialist knowledge, and they simply failed to come up with a sound plan.

On 22 September 1943, the arrival of 2,000 Russian Jews from Minsk, including a number of Jewish prisoners of war, gave rise to new hope. As it happened, carpenters were required at that time to build barracks in an as yet unfinished part of the camp. One of the volunteers was Alexander Petsjerski, not a carpenter but a Red Army lieutenant whose officer training had been geared not just to teaching soldiers how to fight, but also to how to overcome extremely challenging circumstances. He was swiftly asked, within days of his arrival, to join Felhendler's group, and it took him only three weeks to prepare and execute an uprising in every detail. This uprising carries great significance not only in terms of the 300 men and women who managed to break out of the camp, of whom forty-seven ultimately survived the war, but also for the generations that followed. Without the uprising, there would have been no survivors, no one to testify to what happened at Sobibór. No court proceedings could have been started against the SS staff and Ukrainian guards, and the crimes that were carried out in the strictest secrecy would never have been exposed.

The urge to delve deeper into the truth about what happened to my wife and family, who were murdered in Sobibór, is what compelled me to start writing about it. I also wanted to try to understand what led to all of this. The first steps in that direction took me to Hagen in the Ruhr area of Germany, where in 1982 a Sobibór trial had started, lasting until 1985. Initially I sat in on the proceedings as a regular visitor, in an almost empty courtroom. At times, I would be joined by school pupils from the local area on an educational visit. In that courtroom, during the months of questioning, Sobibór first began to take shape. Very few documents relating to Sobibór and the other death camps had actually survived. After the uprising, Globocnik wrote to Himmler that 'the evidence should be destroyed as quickly as possible, now that all else has been destroyed,'⁷ and virtually all of the incriminating documents were burnt soon after.

The many statements and testimonies given during the trial do not include any from the *Arbeitshäftlinge* in Lager 3, the part of the camp where the gas chambers and mass graves were situated in a separate enclosure, surrounded by its own barbed wire fence. The SS prevented any form of contact between the Jews who worked in that part of the camp and the other camp prisoners; even the way in which the killing was carried out was kept strictly secret from all others. For any descriptions of the actual extermination procedure in Sobibór one has to rely solely on the SS men who were there; not a single Jew from Lager 3 managed to survive. Faced with the prospect of punishment, these SS henchmen tried to play down the role they played, doing so in order to protect their comrades. Yet there did turn out to be one *Arbeitshäftling*, Rudolf Reder, who was able to describe his experiences of the gas chambers. He had escaped from extermination camp Bełżec, where circumstances were very similar to those in Sobibór.

Still using their Nazi jargon, those who had once been in power, showing no signs of emotion and giving only the barest of facts, submitted their statements about what had happened at Sobibór. Later, however, one of them, while serving life imprisonment, decided to be less economical with the truth than he had previously been, admitting that: 'I have kept my silence up till now out of a false sense of loyalty, so as not to implicate my comrades, but I want to come clean about the whole truth from this moment on, to avoid being apportioned all the blame.'⁸

The first Sobibór trial was held as early as 1950, following the arrest of SS man Erich Bauer in Berlin after a tip-off by two of the camp's ex-prisoners.⁹ Around the same time, Johann Klier and Hubert Gomerski were apprehended in Frankfurt am Main. The latter, following his arrest, signed a statement in which he wrote: 'I can only declare that a place by the name of Sobibór is unknown to me.'¹⁰ Bauer and Gomerski were sentenced to life imprisonment, while Klier was found not guilty. The trials received hardly any publicity. The third trial took place in Hagen in 1965.¹¹ The verdicts, pronounced on 20 December 1966 and underpinned by voluminous case records of more than 400 pages, varied from not guilty to life imprisonment. Then, at the end of 1971, Gomerski started an appeal procedure,

which had to be concluded early due to his bad health. Finally, at the end of 1982 yet another *Wiederaufnahmeverfahren* (retrial) started in Hagen, this time initiated by SS sergeant Frenzel, who had been sentenced to life imprisonment in 1966. By this time, the Schwurgericht (court) had come into the possession of additional statements made by witnesses from the former Eastern bloc countries. In due course, the court agreed to let me act as one of the public prosecutors in the trial,¹² in which capacity I was able to collect information, and was the first foreigner and non-jurist to deliver, on 22 August 1985, an address to the jury in a German court of law, in which I demanded life imprisonment for the accused. On 4 October 1985 Frenzel's life sentence was reimposed. The verdict and its motivations have been recorded in a voluminous work of more than 700 pages.

The SS staff quotations that have been included in my book¹³ have been taken from statements and interrogations which they themselves endorsed with their signatures. Still there are those who stubbornly refuse to acknowledge – now also on the Internet – the existence of the extermination camps. They will find the incontestable evidence to the contrary in this book. No one could possibly still believe, once the last survivor has passed away, that the extermination camps were only a figment of Jewish imagination.

Shortly after the liberation of Poland in 1944, a number of survivors gave statements about what happened in the camp, and the criminals who operated there. Still so traumatized by the torture they had endured, they referred to some of their torturers by name in relation to specific crimes which, years later, they felt less sure about. Some knew only first names. These testimonies should be regarded as contemporary documents rather than legal indictments where each and every comma and full stop or period must be in the right place. Despite their inaccuracies, they are of great value because they were given fresh from memory rather than being influenced by later writings or statements by others. The actual events mattered more, at the time, than naming specific individual SS men. As some of the details were inconsistent, however, the defending counsels used these testimonies to assert their clients' innocence. The perpetrators, in turn, believed for a long time that their crimes would remain undiscovered and that they would never be held to account.¹⁴

The intriguing question is why, in the spring and summer of 1943, the transports from Western Europe headed for Sobibór rather than Auschwitz/Birkenau, which was in fact closer. From Danuta Czech's *Kalendarium of Auschwitz/Birkenau* it can be deduced that Birkenau had sufficient 'capacity' all through the period to 'receive' these transports, with the exception of March, when more than 21,300 people were gassed in that camp, while still others were selected for work. Perhaps the answer may be found in J. Wulf's¹⁵ chapter on Globocnik, who visited Auschwitz during that summer of 1943 and exchanged a few thoughts by the fireside one evening with commandant Höss. Globocnik was very interested in the Auschwitz crematoriums and mentioned he was not getting enough Jewish transports. It was his personal

aim to hold pride of place with his *Vernichtungen* (annihilations), and as he put it to Höss: 'Everything was done much more quickly at his camp.'

In occupied Holland the name Sobibór was first mentioned on 26 March 1943, at a meeting of the Central Commission of the Jewish Council: 'The latest news from Germany is not unfavourable. Some recent transports have apparently not been sent to Auschwitz, but to Sobibór. Also, according to Mr aus der Fünten¹⁶ elderly people from the Netherlands are now being sent to Theresienstadt as well. However, the general situation with respect to employment remains as yet unclear.'¹⁷ In all other respects, the name Sobibór remained largely unknown for the duration of the entire war. Even in Poland only a few insiders knew of its existence. Early in June 1942, shortly after the camp became operational, members of the Polish-Jewish underground group Dror managed to establish the camp's name. On 8 June, two couriers from Warsaw first heard the name Sobibór at the station of the small town of Miaczyn, and reported to the leader of their group: 'From dawn until dusk cartloads of people and their possessions were arriving there. As evening fell, the Jews were herded into special wagons. They were not allowed to take their luggage. [...] The train departed to an unknown destination. Rumours have it that the Germans have built an extermination camp like Bełżec.'¹⁸ The few postcards received in Germany and Holland were never recognized as signs of life from Sobibór, as they always had to be postmarked as though sent from Włodawa.

I myself was deported to Sobibór on 1 June 1943, along with 3,005 other people including my wife Rachel and her family. No one in the transport knew what to expect. Together with eighty others I was able to leave the camp within a few hours, as it turned out that the SS required eighty new workers in Dorohucz, a small labour camp for digging peat. After almost two years of being sent from one labour camp to the next in Poland and Germany, I was finally liberated on 8 April 1945 by the French army, in Vaihingen an der Enz near Stuttgart and, while still recovering from typhus in the local hospital, started to write about everything that had happened to me during those years. On 30 June 1945 I registered as a repatriate with the authorities in Amsterdam, armed with all my notes. No one was remotely interested in my return, or my account for that matter. The war as well as the famine winter in the west of the Netherlands were over; people had other things to worry about than Jews returning home.¹⁹ It took more than a year before a rather concise report about Sobibór was published in the Netherlands, and it contained the accounts of some survivors. I turned out to be the sole survivor from the transport of 1 June 1943.

A register of the names of those who survived the uprising, along with brief profiles as far as they are known, have been included in this book, as well as the profiles of the criminals in charge who literally 'walked over dead bodies'. The latter profiles are drawn chiefly from the testimonies they gave in various courtrooms over a period of time. Most of them would probably have been regarded as decent loving fathers by their wives and children; Nazis like many others of course, but to all appearances no more than ordinary men. A photograph of Bolender, who supervised

the gas chambers for a long time, depicts a man who would seem too innocent to hurt a fly. Yet his appearance, like that of many others, was only a mask, hiding the face of the worst kind of criminal. He hanged himself in his cell before his verdict was to have been pronounced in Hagen.

Notes

1. The name Operation Reinhardt ('Aktion Reinhardt' or 'Einsatz Reinhardt') originally derived from the name of the State Secretary at the Reich Finance Ministry, Fritz Reinhardt, who was charged with control over the assets of deported Jews. After the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich in June 1942, the operation was also named after him, hence the two different spellings.
2. Promoted by Hitler to SS-Gruppenführer und Generalleutnant der Polizei in November 1942.
3. *Arbeitshäftlinge*, called *Arbeitsjuden* by SS staff at Sobibór, were Jews who were forced to work in the camp for the SS, to distinguish them from those who were sent to the gas chambers.
4. Information on this comes from a document found by Peter Witte; it is from the Jewish Council in Żółkiewka signed by Felhendler.
5. In Auschwitz camp jargon, 'selection' meant people being earmarked for the gas chambers. The word carried a very negative meaning there. In Sobibór, however, selection referred to those men and women forced to labour for the Germans and not sent straight to the gas chambers.
6. This detachment was forced to chop wood in the adjacent forest to keep burning the fire on which the gassed bodies were cremated.
7. Odilo Globocnik to Himmler on 5 January 1944, Bundesarchiv Koblenz (BA) BA-NS-19-3425.
8. Erich Bauer on 20 November 1962 in Berlin-Tegel, Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen zur Aufklärung nationalsozialistischer Verbrechen in Ludwigsburg (ZStL) 251/59-VIII-1590.
9. Estera Raab and Samuel Lerer.
10. Testimony of Hubert Gomerski to the Landgericht, Frankfurt am Main, 23 August 1949.
11. SS staff on trial were Dubois, Fuchs, Frenzel, Ittner, Jühns, Lachmann, Lambert, Schütt, Unverhau, Wolf and Zierke.
12. German court law allows for a *Nebenkläger*, who takes part in the proceedings while the court is in session, speaking on behalf of himself as a victim and/or on behalf of family members who have been murdered. He is entitled to demand a sentence, although normally he will be represented by a lawyer.

13. Some quotations in this book have not been reproduced in full in order to improve coherence and readability.
14. Lachmann on 21 June 1961 in Wegscheid, ZStL-251/59-4-687.
15. Josef Wulf, *Das Dritte Reich und seine Vollstrecker. Die Liquidation von 500.000 Juden im Ghetto Warschau* (Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 1984), p. 270.
16. He was responsible for the day-to-day management of the Zentralstelle für jüdische Auswanderung (Central office for Jewish emigration) in Amsterdam. See also Louis de Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog* ('s-Gravenhage: Staatsdrukkerij- en Uitgeverijbedrijf, 1969–1988), vol. V, pp. 985–1006; Jacques Presser, *Ondergang. De Vervolging en Verdelging van het Nederlandse Jodendom 1940–1945* ('s-Gravenhage: Staatsuitgeverij, 1977) *passim*; Abel J. Herzberg, *Kroniek der Jodenvervolging* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1985), pp. 136–7, 154, 159–60, 178, 181, 201.
17. Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie (NIOD) Collection 182D, File 9B.
18. Report from 'Frumka' Plotnicka and 'Chawna' Folman, in Ruta Sakowska, *Die zweite Etappe ist der Tod. NS-Ausrottungspolitik gegen die polnischen Juden. Gesehen mit den Augen der Opfer. Ein historischer Essay und ausgewählte Dokumente aus dem Ringelblum-Archiv 1941–1943* (Berlin: Haus der Wannseekonferenz, 1993), pp. 40–1.
19. For a detailed analysis of the return of deportees to the Netherlands, see Dienke Hondius, *Return. Holocaust Survivors and Dutch Anti-Semitism* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003).

Prelude to the ‘Final Solution’

After the rapid advance of the German army early in September 1939, Hitler had annexed the western areas of Poland by 8 October. The districts of Poznań, Kalisz and Łódź were merged into the Reichsgau Wartheland and four days later a decree created the new General Government, comprising the districts of Warsaw, Radom, Cracow and Lublin farther to the east.¹

It did not take long before the Nazis were initiating radical measures against the Jews in occupied Poland. Only three weeks after the invasion, on 21 September, Heydrich issued his orders to the ‘Chefs aller Einsatzgruppen der Sicherheitspolizei’ (chiefs of all Security Police Task Forces), which outlined the various stages and methods involved in working towards the ‘ultimate aim’. The principal purpose of his initial instructions was to make his chiefs aware that

the planned measures, and also the ultimate aim, should be kept strictly secret. A distinction should be made between 1) the ultimate aim, which will require a longer period, and 2) the stages involved in achieving the ultimate aim, which are of a short-term nature. [...] The first precondition for achieving the ultimate aim is to move the Jews living in the countryside to concentration points within the larger cities. It is a matter of urgency that this is accomplished. [...] In order to facilitate future measures, there should be as few of these concentrations as possible, and they should be located either by a major railway junction, or at least along a railway line. In principle, all Jewish communities of fewer than 500 heads should be disbanded and relocated to the nearest concentration area. [...] The establishment of Jewish concentrations in the cities is to be justified on the grounds of their substantial participation in terrorist attacks and looting.²

It was a cunning plan to concentrate the Jewish population in larger cities near railway lines, as Heydrich realized that picking up Jews from a large number of smaller ghettos at a later stage would be much more cumbersome and time consuming.

It seems likely that Heydrich was actually referring to the total annihilation of Polish Jews, although what he may have had in mind instead was the establishment of a Jewish reservation in the Cracow area from where, at a later stage, they would disappear altogether. As a result of the German–Soviet border treaty of 28 September 1939, the existing demarcation line along the River Vistula down to the San had been pushed farther east, bringing the Lublin district into German hands and paving

the way for the creation of the 'Lublin reservation'. It is possible that Heydrich's 'ultimate aim' at this point, then, referred to the forced emigration of Jews overseas,³ as it later became apparent that the reservation was intended only as a temporary measure.

Authority over the General Government was given to Hans Frank,⁴ who was given the title of Governor-General. Hitler was so certain of victory that he confided in Frank that 'not a square kilometre of this territory will be returned. [...] The General Government is a fundamental part of the German Reich, and will remain so forever.'⁵

On 7 October 1939 Hitler appointed Heinrich Himmler as Reichskommissar für die Festigung des deutschen Volkstums (Commissioner for the Consolidation of the German Nation), with the brief to organize the repatriation of eligible 'Reichs- und Volksdeutsche'⁶ living abroad to within the borders of the German Reich. At the same time he was to eliminate all 'foreign influences' present within the Reich, and create new *Lebensraum* (living space) in the occupied East for the resettlement of the returning Volksdeutsche. In short: expel the Poles and Jews to make room for Volksdeutsche. The plan was to expel almost 600,000 Jews from the annexed area, which would increase the Jewish population in the General Government from 1.4 to 2 million.⁷ However, this forced 'emigration' was realized only in part. The people who were driven from their homes in the Warthegau to the General Government – a total of 128,000 up until 15 March 1940 – were in the main Polish Christians and included only a few thousand Jews. Deporting the Poles took absolute priority though, because their homes were to be made available to the Volksdeutsche: ethnic Germans living in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Volhynia.⁸ Almost 1.2 million Jews lived in Soviet-occupied Poland after the 1939 German–Soviet agreement.⁹ A quarter of a million living in the General Government managed to escape to the Soviet side just in time, while 20,000 made it to Romania and Hungary.¹⁰

The next step was the establishment of ghettos, the introduction of armbands displaying the Star of David, and the creation of Jewish Councils. In December 1939 SS-Oberführer Friedrich Uebelhoer, the newly appointed government president of Łódź – meanwhile renamed Litzmannstadt – had formed an *Arbeitsstab* (working group) to take responsibility for the required preparations. The first large ghetto was established in Łódź in April of 1940, a city that was home to 320,000 Jews some six months earlier. The ghetto was regarded as a necessary evil, intended, as Uebelhoer made clear, to be 'no more than a temporary concentration of Jews; it should be regarded as a transitional phase'. He went on to say: 'At what point in time and with what methods the ghetto, and with it the city of Łódź, is to be cleansed of Jews will be determined at my discretion. The ultimate aim must nevertheless be for us to burn out this plague completely.'¹¹ The Łódź ghetto, covering only four square kilometres, soon became overcrowded. Even after many Jews from Łódź itself, and from the annexed areas of Poland, had already been expelled to the General Government, this tiny plot of land still housed as many as 144,000 people.

In mid-September 1941 Hitler decided to have all Jews living in the Greater German Reich deported to the East.¹² A month later Heydrich wrote an urgent letter to Himmler, announcing that the *Abfahren* (departure) of Jews living in the Altreich would commence on 15 October. 'There will be daily transports carrying 1,000 people each, bringing a total of 20,000 Jews and 5,000 Gypsies to the Litzmannstadt ghetto by 8 November'.¹³ The large influx of people into the ghetto soon created an untenable situation. Within a very short period of time, it had become not only the assembly point for Jews from Germany, Austria and the Protectorate, but also for Polish-Jewish families from Antwerp who were sent there.¹⁴

In mid-November 1940 the Nazis decided to establish another ghetto, in Warsaw. Cracow followed in March 1941, Lublin and Radom one month later, and Lemberg in December 1941. Once the Warsaw ghetto had been opened and Jews from all over the annexed territory sent there, around 430,000 people¹⁵ were confined to an area of barely three and a quarter square kilometres. When, at a later stage, it was suggested that its southern part should be demolished, leaving even less space, a German doctor described the plan as 'ludicrous', on the grounds that it would only increase the chance of an outbreak of typhus.¹⁶ By the end of December 1941 the implemented measures had reached the point where virtually all of the Jews from the annexed territory as well as from the General Government were living in ghettos.¹⁷ For Hitler, there was no doubt what should happen to the Jews within the entire German sphere of influence. On 7 June 1941 he told Heinrich Lammers,¹⁸ head of the Reichskanzlei (Chancellor's office), that there would be no need for further regulations with regard to the status of the Jews in Germany, because 'after the war there would be none left in the land in any case'.¹⁹

A number of mass extermination methods were still in the experimental stages. In a letter of October 1941, Dr Pokorny, specialist in skin and venereal diseases, wrote to Himmler:

Prompted by the thought that the enemy must not only be conquered but also exterminated, I feel obliged to bring to your attention, as the Reichsführer zur Festigung des deutschen Volkstums, the following:

Dr Madaus has published the results of research into a medical treatment that sterilizes animals, using an extract of the *Schweigrohr* plant (*calcium seguinum, american arum*). If on the basis of this research an effective medical treatment can be developed which relatively quickly causes *eine unbemerkte Sterilisierung* (an unnoticed sterilization) in humans, we will have a new weapon at our disposal. The thought alone that the three million Bolsheviks currently in German captivity could be sterilized, rendered unable to procreate yet still be available to us as labourers, opens new perspectives.²⁰

Further research efforts were thwarted, however, as *Schweigrohr* occurs naturally only in North America and supplies were hard to acquire. Although the seeds of the

plant had been successfully propagated in greenhouse trials, this was felt to be too time-consuming.²¹

But the Nazis had another string to their bow: sterilization by use of X-rays. In a letter dated 28 March 1941, Viktor Brack²² wrote to Himmler from the Kanzlei des Führers (Führer's office):

A practical way around it would be to line up the relevant people in front of a counter, keeping them there for two or three minutes while they are asked questions, and required to fill in a few forms. The counter clerk can then operate a switch to activate both X-ray tubes, as radiation must come from two sides. This way, around 150 to 200 persons can be sterilized each day; twenty of such installations will take care of 3,000 to 4,000 persons.²³

The Nazis continued their search for more straightforward methods. The problems associated with the overcrowding of the Łódź ghetto generated a new idea amongst local SS officers, which was to take some of the Jews to Chełmno – or Kulmhof as the Germans had renamed it – a village sixty kilometres to the northwest of Łódź, and kill them there.²⁴

On 8 December 1941 in Chełmno, under the command of SS-Hauptsturmführer Herbert Lange, the gassings began of at least 152,000 Jews from the Warthegau as well as 5,000 Gypsies.²⁵ Police units took men, women and children from cities and villages to an assembly point, where they were told they were being sent away to work. The trucks transported them to a spot just past the church in the village of Rzuchów. The place was described as a 'castle' and obscured from view by a fence and invisible from the road. Very briefly the victims were told that their clothes were to be disinfected. They then had to go inside and undress, after which they proceeded down to the cellar, where a sign pointed 'To the bath'. Instead, a side-door opened straight out onto the loading ramp of a truck. There was no way back. After the captives were forcibly pushed inside, the engine was started and exhaust fumes entered the loading space via a tube. The carbon monoxide rendered the victims unconscious within seven to eight minutes, and after a few more minutes they were dead.

After the truck had driven about six kilometres, it stopped at the edge of a forest, where chained Jewish prisoners removed the bodies and deposited them into mass graves. The trucks went back and forth five to ten times a day, carrying fifty to seventy people at a time, depending on the size of the truck.²⁶ The final executions took place in January 1945, when the victims were killed by a shot to the back of the head. Simon Srebrnik and Mordechai Podchlebnik managed to escape when SS guards presumed wrongly that they were dead. A few hours later, they knocked at the door of a farmer, Gradziel, who gave them something to eat and drink.²⁷

After Hitler invaded the Soviet Union, Göring wrote to Heydrich that the Jewish problem now required a solution other than emigration. In this letter of 31 July 1941

the phrase *Endlösung der Judenfrage* (final solution to the Jewish question) was used for the first time. Why would Göring, who was second in command in Hitler's Third Reich, have sent this letter to Heydrich? Eichmann later wrote in his memoirs that the text had been typed up in the RSHA (Reichssicherheitshauptamt, Reich Security Main Office), and that it had subsequently been passed to Göring for the latter to sign. If this is true, then Göring was not writing to Heydrich at all; Heydrich in fact wrote the letter himself and had it signed by Göring. From this, the conclusion can be drawn that Heydrich was in a great hurry to get on with the *Endlösung*. Undoubtedly both Heydrich and Eichmann were after high-level authorization. No wonder that five months later the letter was enclosed with the invitations to the Wannsee conference. It was clearly intended to prove the legitimacy of their plans to those who were attending.²⁸

The conference, though planned for 9 December 1941, was postponed until 20 January 1942 due to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and Hitler's declaration of war on the US on 11 December 1941. However, Governor-General Frank already knew, a month before the conference, what was to happen to the Jews. During one of his government's sessions in Cracow on 16 December 1941, he said:

As far as the Jews are concerned – and I will be quite frank about this – they must be disposed of. [...] I have been in negotiations to have them deported to the East. [...] Gentlemen, I must urge you to brace yourself against any feelings of pity. We must destroy the Jews, wherever we find them, and wherever possible, in order to preserve the social fabric of the Reich as one unified nation. [...] To us, the Jews are also extremely malignant parasites. [...] The General Government must become as free of Jews as the Reich is.²⁹

The Wannsee conference, held at villa Am Großen Wannsee 56/58 in Berlin on 20 January 1942, was chaired by Heydrich in his role of Sonderbeauftragte zur Lösung der Judenfrage (Special Plenipotentiary for the Solution to the Jewish Question). His aim was to flesh out the decision which had already been taken to annihilate the Jews, and to clear away any potential obstacles in any other public service or administrative department which was going to play a part.³⁰ Nine top-ranking officials from various ministries, as well as five senior SS chiefs, were among those attending. What they were informed about was borne out in the months that followed: not whether but how the decision literally to annihilate the Jews was to be put into practice. By inviting all top-ranking ministry officials, Heydrich was in a position to coordinate the preparations for the *Endlösung* in all its aspects to ensure that, 'in view of the extreme importance of the subject, a consensus of opinion is reached. I urge you to adopt a common viewpoint.'³¹

None of the participants expressed any objection or even dared, had they so wished, to put up an argument. One of those present was SS-Sturmabführer Rudolf Lange, who only two months earlier, in late November 1941, had been in

charge at Riga of the first mass murder of Jews from Berlin.³² Adolf Eichmann was also present and fortunately wrote a meeting protocol that survived, so that the most important points of the discussions can be recounted below.

Heydrich started the conference by citing from Göring's letter, emphasizing that the Reichsmarschall had given him authorization to coordinate the required preparations for solving the 'Jewish question' in Europe. He then continued:

From now on, with the express permission of the Führer, the solution will be to evacuate the Jews to the East. Under authorized leadership the Jews will, within the context of the *Endlösung*, be sent to work in the East as appropriate. Those who are able to work will be transported in labour convoys to these areas, they will be segregated by sex, and deployed on the construction of roads, which will undoubtedly result in a large number of natural losses. Those who potentially survive, i.e. those with the highest resistance levels, will be treated accordingly. Otherwise, if they were ever to be freed, they might form a natural elite and become the seeds from which new generations of Jews would germinate. Within the context of the practical execution of the *Endlösung*, Europe will be combed from west to east. The Reich, including the protectorate Bohemia and Moravia, must, in view of the housing issue and other political implications, take first priority. Each and every Jew who is evacuated will first be transferred to so-called transit ghettos, and from there be transported farther east. There are around 11 million eligible Jews.

The protocol revealed a further breakdown of the 11 million: 2,284,000 from the General Government; 43,000 from Belgium; 865,000 from both occupied and non-occupied France; 160,000 from the Netherlands; 8,000 from Sweden; 330,000 from England (Britain); 18,000 from Switzerland; and 5 million from the USSR.³³ The Nazis were still confident of victory, hence they included Jews from Britain and the neutral countries on their list as well.

Heydrich made it clear that those who did not die, i.e. the Jews who were still able to work upon their arrival in the East, should be 'treated accordingly'. The language of the protocol was obscure; Heydrich was careful not to be more specific about his formulation. The words 'treated accordingly' can be interpreted in various ways, but the only reasonable conclusion must be that annihilation was the intention behind them. There was a grain of truth in what he said about 'labour convoys [...] deployed on the construction of roads'. Some roads were indeed constructed, but under such harrowing and life-threatening circumstances that the term 'treated accordingly' basically meant death. There was no need for him to elaborate further on this. It was customary to use euphemisms, such as the time when Himmler insisted that the expression *Sonderbehandlung der Juden* (special treatment of the Jews), which insiders knew really meant 'murdering' them, be taken out of a report by SS statistician Korherr and replaced by *Es wurden durchgeschleust* (they were 'guided through'). He added that no other terms were to be used.³⁴

Middle-ranking officials could, on the other hand, express themselves more freely. Dannecker, Eichmann's representative in France, knew precisely how to describe

the term 'Endlösung'. After speaking to a general about his cooperation in making railway transportation facilities available for the deportations, Dannecker reported back to Berlin that he had informed the general with regard to the Jewish question and Jewish politics in France. 'I was able to establish that he is an uncompromising opponent to the Jews, and agrees one hundred percent to an Endlösung der Judenfrage which has as its purpose the complete annihilation of the opponent.'³⁵

Another participant at the conference was Joseph Bühler,³⁶ State Secretary and Deputy Governor-General in the General Government. He welcomed the idea of proceeding with the Endlösung in his territory first, because the transport problem did not play a major role there. He explained that the Jews should be removed as soon as possible from the General Government because the Jew generally posed a great danger as a source of infection,³⁷ and continuously disturbed the economic structure through contraband trading as well.

The outcome is now well known. The Endlösung was to take place in camps built especially for the purpose within the General Government as well as in Auschwitz/Birkenau. Reich propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels was certainly aware of this when entering the following into his diary on 27 March 1942:

At this very moment, the Jews from the General Government, those from Lublin first, are being deported to the East. There, a rather barbaric method that cannot be further described here is being used, which leaves nothing much of the Jews themselves. In general terms it can be established that 60 per cent will have to be liquidated, while only 40 per cent can be put to work. The former Gauleiter of Vienna [Odilo Globocnik], who is in charge of this initiative, does it very covertly and discreetly [...]. As the ghettos in the cities of the General Government become vacant, the Jews expelled from the Reich are moved in. After some time has passed, the whole process will repeat itself.³⁸

During his trial in Jerusalem in 1961, Eichmann clarified the real purposes of the conference, admitting that there was talk of killing, eliminating and destroying.³⁹ Eventually all SS and SD staff in Poland knew about the concept of the Endlösung. In 1960 an employee of the Gesundheitsamt (local health authority) in Radom stated that it was 'absurd if anyone from the SD still claimed to be unaware that Jewish people were being gassed'.⁴⁰

The fate of the Jews had been determined even before the Wannsee conference. Early in January 1942, the first Jews from Upper Silesia were gassed in Birkenau.⁴¹ The plan for total annihilation was then ready to be worked out in further detail. Preparations for the building of camps at Bełżec and Sobibór had already begun in the autumn of 1941. Around the same time a new organization had been called into being which, using the administrative procedures already in place, had been delegated the task of bringing all the Jews who were still living under German jurisdiction to Bełżec, Sobibór and Treblinka in the General Government, for them to be gassed. After Heydrich's death, this organization would also be known by his

first name as Operation Reinhardt. Belzec became operational two months after the Wannsee conference, Sobibór three months after and Treblinka six months after.

A fourth camp, Lublin/Majdanek, was not an integral part of Operation Reinhardt. Himmler wanted the Jews there to be spared for the time being, as they were needed to keep the war industry going in the face of growing labour shortages. The strongest and highest-skilled Jews were taken mainly from the remaining ghettos of Warsaw, Lublin, Radom, Cracow and Lemberg. They were sent either to camps where private companies were allowed to run factories or workshops, or to SS labour camps in Trawniki, Poniatowa, Radom, Dorohucza and Lublin. The machines they had to operate there, such as sewing machines and printing presses, were Jewish property stolen from the Warsaw ghetto. At the start of 1943, approximately 100,000 Jews were employed as forced labour for the Germans. Beginning in early November, almost half of them were killed in the course of *Aktion Erntefest* (Operation Harvest Festival) in Lublin and the surrounding district.⁴²

Of all the Jews who ended up in the extermination camps, a few thousand did not disappear immediately into the gas chambers. On arrival, they were selected either to work elsewhere for the Germans, or to be put to use as *Arbeitskräfte* in the extermination camps themselves, forced to keep the factories of death running at full capacity. With the exception of a few hundred, they eventually could not escape the gas chambers either. Rough estimates have it that almost one thousand Jews from the Netherlands who were sent to Sobibór were selected to work in camps in Lublin and Dorohucza. Only sixteen of them survived the war.

Operation Reinhardt was to become one of the largest-scale and most horrific non-military operations of the Second World War, ranking alongside the organized mass murder carried out by the *Einsatzgruppen* (task groups/forces) in the Soviet Union. As far as is known, the decision leading to this was taken on 3 March 1941, when General Jodl, the chief of staff of the German Wehrmacht, held discussions with the army command on the subject of the management and structure of the areas that Germany intended to occupy. Hitler's view was that Operation Barbarossa, the code name for the war against the Soviet Union, would be more than a conflict of arms and extend into a battle against two world visions: Bolshevism and Judaism. His goal was to extinguish both. Once war on the eastern front had become a reality on 22 June 1941, the liquidation of the 'Jewish-Bolshevist intelligentsia' became one of the main goals, equal in importance to the military offensive. Hitler initiated this by suggesting that the SS units should be allowed to operate alongside the military. 'The necessity immediately to put the Bolshevik leaders and commissars out of action points in that direction.'⁴³ In saying this, he implied that, wherever the army was operational, the *Einsatzgruppen* should also be there as units belonging to the Reichsführer-SS.

The Wehrmacht high command then issued guidelines which essentially confirmed that, wherever the army was operational, the Reichsführer-SS would be given *Sonderaufgaben* (special assignments) by the Führer: 'The Reichsführer-SS

acts independently and on his own responsibility.⁴⁴ On 26 March 1941 Field Marshal von Brauchitsch issued a command in which these guidelines were presented as an order from the Wehrmacht. In this order, it was stated that the Sonderkommandos (Einsatzgruppen) 'are authorized to carry out, on their own responsibility, *Exekutivmaßnahmen* [executive measures] in the context of their assignment concerning the civilian population'. Moreover, the Einsatzgruppen would receive their orders for the execution of their task from the head of the Sicherheitspolizei and the SD.⁴⁵ The Einsatzgruppen were thus given a licence to do away with any persons they deemed undesirable. Shortly after the war against the Soviet Union had begun, this was extended by Heydrich's order to include civilian Jews in occupied areas. Through its close collaboration, the German Wehrmacht was to become an accomplice to mass murder.

The personnel for the Einsatzgruppen was not recruited solely from SS and SD ranks. On the contrary, a large proportion came from elsewhere because the Sicherheitspolizei did not have sufficient men available, and so the Police Reserve Battalion 9 and the first battalion of the Waffen-SS z.b.V (*zur besonderen Verwendung* – for special use), from Berlin, were summoned.⁴⁶ Early in May 1941, the troops were assembled in Pretzsch, Dübben and Bad Schmiedeberg to prepare for their future special task, after which they were reorganized into four Einsatzgruppen. These groups were then subdivided into eighteen Einsatz- und Sonderkommandos,⁴⁷ small, motorized units ready for quick action. As the invasion progressed, they followed directly behind army troops to carry out their assignments. Rather than operating as compact units, they divided into smaller groups and even smaller commands, enabling them to strike wherever possible. Keeping pace with the rapid advance of the army, they were very thorough in the execution of their task.

All their activities were neatly recorded, in accordance with the *Merkblatt für die Führer der Einsatzgruppen für den Einsatz Barbarossa* (Instructions for the heads of the task forces deployed in Operation Barbarossa), as *Geheime Reichssache* (secret state affairs), 'for future reference'. From 26 March 1941 commanders were duty bound to keep a war diary from the day their units were first formed.⁴⁸

Because of this order, the crimes perpetrated were accurately mapped out. The Nazis assumed that they would be sharing their heroic deeds with the German people after the war through their *Ereignismeldungen* (records of events). Unlike the situation in the extermination camps, the perpetrators had to record everything they did immediately afterwards, producing often accurate accounts of where, when, how many and under what circumstances communists, Gypsies and Jews were murdered, 'bandits' were captured and houses were set alight. Usually this was done in code language: 'von Juden gereinigt, erledigt, die jüdische Frage gelöst, hingerichtet, liquidiert, unschädlich gemacht' (cleared of Jews, dealt with, solved the Jewish question, executed, liquidated, rendered harmless). Each command leader used his own language. Walter Blume, for some months in charge of the Sonderkommando

7a, stated during his trial that ‘the mere thought of giving a false declaration would have been below his dignity’.⁴⁹

The Jews were captured as quickly as possible, giving them no chance to escape. In the territories that were to be occupied by the Germans during the ensuing months there were approximately four million Jews. One and a half million managed to escape to areas farther to the east just in time.⁵⁰

On 6 June 1941 General Warlimont had issued guidelines for the treatment of political commissars. These stated that:

In the battle against Bolshevism we cannot count on the enemy having any regard for the fundamental principles of humanity or human rights. Especially from the political commissars, who are the true rebels, a German prisoner of war can only expect an atrocious and inhumane treatment driven by pure hatred. The troops must be aware that in this combat, towards these elements, pity and an appeal for human rights would be misplaced. They are a danger to individual safety and to a rapid pacification of the conquered territory. The political commissars are the instigators of barbaric Asiatic combat methods. This calls for direct and decisive action. If they are captured either in battle or while offering resistance, they must be immediately liquidated without question by force of arms.⁵¹

This guideline, summarized in an order termed the *Kommissarbefehl* (Commissar Order), was at that stage directed only at political commissars of the Red Army, officers specially trained to indoctrinate Soviet soldiers with the communist political thinking of the era. To the German army commanders they must have seemed most dangerous, for:

It has been established in numerous cases that the tough resistance of Soviet troops can be attributed partly to the terror of political commissars and the politruks.⁵² They defend themselves to the death, often killing themselves to avoid being captured, and use all means of persuasion to get their officers and soldiers to follow their example. The attitude of the commissars springs forth from their conviction that, once taken prisoner, they will be killed.⁵³

Heydrich’s measures went rather beyond those that had been issued by the high command. He announced that all Komintern⁵⁴ officials must be executed, as well as the higher and middle-ranking staff and the radical rank and file; the central committee; the provincial and area committees; people’s commissars; Jews in party and state institutions; and other radical elements such as saboteurs, propagandists, snipers, terrorists, rabble-rousers and the like.⁵⁵ The Jews were mentioned specifically. The question as to whether Heydrich actually believed that the Einsatzkommandos would bother to take the time and effort required to check whether or not a prisoner qualified on the grounds of these criteria is rhetorical. He must have trusted in a nod being as good as a wink.