

Expert report

Evidence for the Implementation of the Final Solution

Electronic edition

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II. Purpose of the Expert Opinion Report

I have been asked to write a report that addresses the following issues:

1. What is the documentary evidence concerning the implementation of a policy to kill the Jews on German-occupied Soviet territory through shooting.
2. What is the state of evidence concerning the implementation of a policy to kill Jews by means of gas in camps other than Auschwitz, and particularly in the camps of Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka.
3. What is the state of evidence concerning the emergence and existence of an overall plan of the Nazi regime to kill the Jews of Europe.
4. What is the state of evidence concerning the importance and purpose of the Wannsee Conference.
5. What is the state of evidence concerning the naming and purpose of "Operation Reinhard."

III. Implementation of the Final Solution

The Nazi regime implemented the Final Solution or mass murder of the European Jews caught within its empire primarily by two methods--shooting and gassing. In the territories occupied by Germany after June 22, 1941 (with the exception of the district of Bialystok and partial exception of the district of Galicia), shooting was the most common method employed to kill Jews. The Jews of central and western Poland i.e. the Polish territory held by Germany since September 1939, and those deported from all over Europe to Poland during the war for the most part perished in the gas chambers of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka, and the gas vans of Chelmno.

The evidence for these killing operations is of four types used commonly by scholars in the writing of history and judicial authorities in the conducting of trials: (1) contemporary documentation; (2) witness

testimony recorded later (from survivors, perpetrators, and bystanders); (3) material evidence; and (4) circumstantial evidence. Because the Nazi regime sought to destroy not only the Jews of Europe but also the documentary evidence and material evidence (i.e. the mass graves and death camps), the evidence with which scholars and judicial authorities can work is both less than complete and not symmetrical for the two killing methods. In particular, the documentation of mass killing by shooting in the territories occupied by Germany after June 1941 is quite extensive, while documents relating to gassing in Poland are scant. For gassing, therefore, witness testimony and circumstantial evidence play a much larger role.

IV. Documentary Evidence for the Systematic Mass Killing of Jews by Shooting

Prior to the German invasion of the Soviet Union, Reinhard Heydrich (Himmler's deputy and Chief of the Security Police and Security Service) assembled four mobile SS units known as Einsatzgruppen. They were designated A, B, C, and D for the Baltic, Central, Southern, and Romanian fronts respectively. The four Einsatzgruppen were in turn divided into smaller units referred to as Einsatzkommandos and Sonderkommandos. By agreement with the German army, these SS units were permitted to move forward with the advancing German military and operate up to the front lines.

In the rear areas police functions were exercised by the Order Police, which included rural police stations of the Gendarmerie, urban police stations of the Schutzpolizei, mobile Police Battalions, and growing auxiliary police units composed of native recruits working on behalf of the Germans called Schutzmannschaften. Heinrich Himmler, the head

of the SS and Chief of German Police, also designated three Higher SS and Police Leaders (North, Central, and South) to coordinate all joint police activities behind the front.

By far the richest collection of surviving documents relevant to the systematic mass murder of Jews through shooting are the reports from the Einsatzgruppen recorded in the so-called Ereignismeldungen or Event Reports compiled by Heydrich's staff in Berlin. One hundred and ninety-five Event Reports were compiled between June 23, 1941, and April 24, 1942.

Eleven "Activity and Situation Reports (Tätigkeits und Lageberichte) of the Einsatzgruppen of the Security Police and SD in the USSR" were also compiled by Heydrich's staff between July 31, 1941, and March 31, 1942. These Activity and Situation Reports summarized the contents of the Event Reports (bi-monthly for August and September 1941 and otherwise monthly) and were widely circulated throughout the German government. Three other reports originating from the Einsatzgruppen (two by the commander of Einsatzgruppe A, Franz Stahlacker, and one by his subordinate, the commander of Einsatzkommando 3, Karl Jäger, as well as a series of orders from Heydrich are also significant.

One reason for this extensive reporting from the Einsatzgruppen and its systematic compilation in Berlin is revealed by a message from Heinrich Müller, the head of the Gestapo within Heydrich's Security Police, to the four Einsatzgruppen on August 1, 1941. "The Führer is to be kept informed continually from here about the work of the Einsatzgruppen in the East"

These collections of Einsatzgruppen documents certainly constitute the primary though not the only documentary sources for the killing operations into the spring of 1942. Thereafter, for contemporary written records, the historian is dependent upon a mixed collection of Ger-

man documents originating from a number of sources, such as the Higher SS and Police, the civil administration of the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories, the mobile Police Battalions, the Gendarmerie stations, and the military.

This report will not attempt a complete history of the destruction of Soviet Jewry as reflected in these German documents. Rather it will focus on four issues: 1) the scale of killing; 2) the steady escalation of the categories of Jews targeted for execution; 3) the use of open and camouflage language in the documents; and 4) the implications for our wider understanding of Nazi Jewish policy and the Final Solution.

A. Scale of killing:

The various reports and documents are incomplete concerning the total number of Jews and others executed by various German and collaborator units on occupied Soviet territory. Nonetheless, if one simply adds the summary numbers contained in the surviving documents, even the partial total gives a sense of the scale on which the killing was carried out.

Einsatzgruppe A:

- Einsatzkommando 2 reported having shot 34,193 people by February 2, 1942.
- Einsatzkommando 3 reported having killed 133,346 people by November 25, 1941.

Einsatzgruppe B:

- On November 14, 1941, Einsatzgruppe B reported that its “total number” (Gesamtzahl) of “liquidations” (Liquidierungen) had reached 45,467.

Einsatzgruppe C:

- Sonderkommando 4a reported having shot 59,018 people as of November 4, 1941, and
- Sonderkommando 5 reported having shot 36,147 people as of December 7, 1941.
- Einsatzgruppe D reported having shot 91,678 people as of April 8, 1942.

These cumulative totals do not distinguish between Jewish and non-Jewish victims. The Jäger Report (summarizing the activities of Einsatzkommando 3 in Lithuania up to December 1941), however, does identify all its victims, of which only 2,042 or barely 1.5% were non-Jewish (mostly identified as communist functionaries or mentally-ill). Einsatzgruppe D did not make this distinction in its cumulative totals, but it often did in its bi-weekly reports. For instance, on November 5, 1941, it reported killing 11,037 Jews and 31 communist officials in the previous two weeks. For the period November 16-December 15, 1941, it reported executing 17,645 Jews, 2,504 Krimchaks (categorized racially as Jews), 824 Gypsies, and 212 communists. For the last two weeks of December 1941, it reported shooting 3,176 Jews, 85 partisans, 12 looters, and 122 communists. For the first two weeks of January 1942, it reported a rare reversal, in which 1,639 communists and partisans were reported shot along with 685 Jews. For the latter half of January, it reported shooting 3,286 Jews, 152 communists, 84 partisans, and 79 looters and saboteurs, and asocials.

By the estimate of Einsatzgruppe C in late October, it had “liquidated” (liquidiert) some 80,000 people, of which 75,000 were Jews. Sonderkommando 4a conceded that “the total number...of those executed included, in addition to a relatively small number of political functionaries, active communists, people guilty of sabotage, etc., above all Jews...”. Einsatzkommando 5 occasionally offered specific breakdowns of its victims as well. For instance, for the period November 2-18, 1941, it shot 10,650 Jews, 15 political officials, 21 saboteurs and looters, and 414 hostages. For the week of November 23-30, 1941, it reported shooting 2,615 Jews, 64 political functionaries, and 46 saboteurs and looters. And for the following week it reported shooting 1,471 Jews, 60 political functionaries, and 47 saboteurs and looters. In short, there is compelling evidence to conclude that the overwhelming majority of the people reported executed by the Einsatzgruppen were in fact Jews.

In addition to giving figures for the four Einsatzgruppen themselves, the Event Reports occasionally record killings by other units as well, though in a much less complete fashion. For example, a police unit operating on Soviet territory just over the border from the town of Tilsit in East Prussia was credited with liquidating 3,302 persons in the first weeks after the invasion. An additional Einsatzgruppe “for special purposes” operated in the areas immediately across the demarcation line in Belarus and the Ukraine once the original four Einsatzgruppen had moved further east. For the last ten days of July, this unit was credited with 3,947 executions. For several periods in August, it was credited with an additional 12,652 killings. The Higher SS and Police Leader South, Friedrich Jeckeln, was reported to have killed 44,125 persons, “mostly Jews,” in August (meist Juden). He was subsequently credited with 10,000 Jews in Dniepropetrovsk and 15,000 Jews in Rowno (the latter with help from EK 5). Transferred to become Higher SS and Police Leader North in November 1941, the same Jeckeln was credited with reducing the Jewish population of Riga from 29,500 to 2,600 in late 1941.

For the period beyond the spring of 1942, other documents provide a glimpse of continued killing of Jews on a massive scale. On July 31, 1942, the head of the civil administration in western Belarus, Wilhelm Kube, reported from Minsk that in the previous ten weeks some 55,000 Jews had been killed in his district. On December 26, 1942, the Higher SS and Police Leader for South Russia, the Ukraine, and the Northeast submitted a report on the campaign against the partisans for the three-month period from September 1 to December 1, 1942. Three days later, on December 29, 1942, the report was retyped in the so-called Führer-type (especially large type that Hitler could read without his glasses) and retitled: “Reports to the Führer on combatting partisans. Report No. 51. Russia South, Ukraine, Bialystok. Results of the antipartisan campaign from 1.9. to 1.12.1942.”

The report was signed by Heinrich Himmler. On the top of the front page was the initialled hand-written note: “submitted 31.12.42.” The report noted for August, September, October, and November in the category of “bandits” a total of 1,337 killed in battle, 737 executed immediately after battle, and 7,828 executed after interrogation. In the category of “accomplices and suspects,” the report had two sub-categories: on a line for “executed,” it listed 14,256. On a separate line for “Jews executed,” it listed 363,211.

Why would Himmler include the killing of 363,211 Jews in a report to Hitler on anti-partisan warfare? According to Himmler’s appointment book, on December 18, 1941, he and Hitler had discussed the “Jewish question.” The result of their conversation was noted succinctly: “to be annihilated as partisans.” (Als Partisanen auszurotten) In short, annihilating Jews and solving the so-called “Jewish question” under the cover of killing partisans was the agreed-upon convention between Hitler and Himmler.

B. Escalation:

The categories of Jews targeted for killing by the Germans steadily expanded. There is no surviving copy of pre-invasion orders to the Einsatzgruppen concerning the killing of Jews. The most specific document in this regard is a summary “in compressed form” (in gedrängter Form) of pre-invasion instructions to the Einsatzgruppen that Heydrich passed on to the Higher SS and Police Leaders of July 2, 1941. According to Heydrich, the Einsatzgruppen had been instructed “to execute” (zu exekutieren) communist functionaries, “Jews in party and state positions” (Juden in Partei- und Staatsstellungen), and “other radical elements (saboteurs, propagandists, snipers, assassins, agitators, etc.” They were also instructed to “promote” (fördern) pogroms, euphemistically dubbed “self-cleansing attempts” (Selbstreinigungsversuchen), by local anti-Jewish elements but “without trace” (spurenlos) of German involvement. Finally, Heydrich

noted that Himmler had explicitly ordered that he be kept continuously and fully informed of the activities of the Einsatzgruppen. On July 17, 1941, Heydrich issued another written order for the execution of all Jews found in German POW camps.

From the very beginning it was clear these instructions did not limit the shooting of Jews to those strictly in “party and state positions” but rather were understood and interpreted broadly to encompass the shooting of large numbers of adult male Jews. Moreover, this interpretation was immediately approved by Himmler and Heydrich. On June 24, 25, and 27, the Security Police in Tilsit organized three mass executions totalling 526 victims who were “primarily Jews.” (vorwiegend Juden) The reason given was that the Jewish population had supported the Red Army, and that in two incidents four Germans had been shot at from behind. In one execution every male Jew in the town of Krottingen was shot, and “only Jewish women and children were left.” (nur jüdischen Frauen und Kinder verblieben sind) Further executions were carried out in Augustowo. “The Reichsführer-SS [Himmler] and the Gruppenführer [Heydrich], who by coincidence were present there, had themselves briefed on the measures implemented by the Tilsit Security Police and approved them completely.” By early July the Tilsit Security Police and its subordinate border police stations reported shooting a total of 1,743 people, and one week later this figure had increased to 3,302.

Numerous Einsatzgruppen reports of July indicate that adult male Jews, and particularly professionals and community leaders, were targeted. For example, for Einsatzgruppe C: “Leaders of Jewish intelligentsia (in particular teachers, lawyers, Soviet officials) liquidated.” For Einsatzgruppe A: “Actions against the Jews are going on in an ever-increasing number. ...The Latvians drive the Jewish families out of town, while they arrest the men. ...The arrested Jewish men are shot without delay and interred in previously prepared graves.” And for Einsatzgruppe B: “In Minsk, the entire Jewish intelligentsia has been

liquidated (teachers, professors, lawyers, etc. except medical personnel).” And: “The emphasis of the operational activity was directed first of all against the Jewish intelligentsia.” As noted already, the Tilsit commando killed all the adult male Jews of Krottingen but not the Jewish women and children. Only Einsatzkommando 3, however, gave an exact statistical breakdown between male and female Jewish victims. For the period July 22-August 3, 1941, it reported killing 1,349 male Jews and 172 female Jews.

The escalation of the killing campaign to include Jewish women and children began in early August 1941, with clear impetus from the top SS leaders. When the 2nd SS Cavalry Regiment was preparing to sweep the Pripet Marshes, it received an “explicit order” (ausdrücklicher Befehl des RF-SS) from Himmler on August 1, 1941: “All Jews must be shot. Drive the female Jews into the swamp.” The reply of SS-Sturmbannführer Magill demonstrated that he fully understood the purpose of Himmler’s order, namely the killing of Jewish women and children through drowning, and he explained the inadequacy of the method: “Driving women and children into the swamps did not have the intended success, because the swamps were not so deep that a sinking under could occur.”

The War Diary of Police Battalion 322 shows a similar transition. In early August its third company carried out executions of all adult male Jews but still spared Jewish women and children on its march from Bialystok to Minsk. Then the chief of the Order Police met with Higher SS and Police Leader von dem Bach-Zelewski in Minsk on August 29, and the following day Police Battalion 322 was assigned to a “thorough Jewish action” (gründliche Judenaktion) or roundup in the Minsk. On September 1 third company took part in the execution of the Jews who had been seized, including 64 Jewish women. The inclusion of Jewish women was justified by their alleged failure to wear the Jewish star. By

early October the Battalion was shooting Jews “of both sexes” (beiderlei Geschlechts) without providing any explanation or rationalization.

Once again the detailed statistics of Jäger’s Einsatzkommando provide the clearest evidence of the transition. On August 6, 1941, Jäger was informed by Stahlecker that the latter had received “general orders from above that cannot be discussed in writing.” Beginning on August 15, 1941, Jäger’s statistics demonstrate a sharp increase in the number of Jews being shot and the inclusion of large numbers of Jewish women and children.

Beginning in late September, the killing campaign escalated once again when entire communities of Jews (with the exception of indispensable skilled workers) were killed in so-called “large-scale actions.” (Grossaktionen) On September 19, following a decision “to liquidate the Jews of Zhitomir definitively and radically,” the ghetto was emptied and 3,145 Jews were shot. The massacre of over 33,000 Jews in Kiev followed on September 29-30. “On November 6 and 7, 1941, the action against Jews that had been prepared for some time was carried out in Rovno, where about 15,000 Jews were shot.” Beginning on November 30, 1941, the Higher SS and Police Leader North reduced the Jewish population of the Riga ghetto from 29,500 to 2,600. In December Einsatzgruppe B reported the elimination of the Bobruisk and Vitebsk ghettos through the shooting of 5,281 and 4,090 Jews respectively. In early December 1941 Einsatzgruppe D noted that some 10,000 Jews lived in Simferopol; two months later, it noted that almost 10,000 Jews had been executed there. Such actions aiming at total extermination of the Jewish population were not limited to large cities. Following killing actions in smaller cities and rural areas, entire towns and then even entire regions were repeatedly proclaimed “free of Jews.”

In early 1942, Heydrich reported: "While the Jewish question in the Ostland (by which he presumably meant the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia) can be seen as practically solved and cleansed, progress continues to be made on the clarification of this problem on other occupied territories in the east." Outside the Baltic the pace of killing slowed temporarily in the winter of 1941-42 for two reasons. As SS-Sturmbannführer Hofmann, head of the Security Service in Minsk, explained to a meeting of officials from the civil administration: "At present a complete liquidation of the Jews is not possible due to the frost, because the ground is too frozen to dig pits which would then be available as mass graves for the Jews. A complete eradication of the Jews was also not possible, because workers were still needed from among the ranks of the Jews." Nonetheless, Hofmann assured his listeners that "in the spring large-scale executions would be initiated again."

With the warming weather in the spring of 1942, large-scale killing did indeed begin again. On March 2-3, 1942, 5,721 Jews were executed in Minsk, Vileyka, and Baranovichi, and later in the month 15,000 Jews were killed in Chevron. As noted from the Kube's report of July 31, 1942, on the killing of 55,000 Jews in six weeks in the Minsk region, and "Report No.51 for the Führer" on the execution of 363,211 Jews in the Ukraine and Bialystok in the four months of August through November, the killing was particularly intense in the summer and fall of 1942.

At this point, even the Jewish skilled workers important to the German war economy were no longer spared, as can be seen from documentation relating to the killing of the Jews in the region of Brest-Litovsk in the fall of 1942. Informed of the impending "overall resettlement of the Jews" (generelle Umsiedlung der Juden), the SS and Polizeistandortführer in Brest-Litovsk, Friedrich Wilhelm Rohde, pleaded: "Insofar as the Jewish question is solved in Brest, I foresee severe economic damage resulting from the lack of labor." He was supported by the local

commissioner (Gebietskommissar) Franz Burat: “Although the total resettlement of the Jews from the Kreisgebiet is desirable from the political standpoint, from the standpoint of labor mobilization, I must plead unconditionally for leaving the most needed artisans and manpower.”

These appeals were in vain. On October 15-16, 1942, the 20,000 Jews of Brest, including 9,000 workers, were shot. The war diary and reports of Police Regiment 15 show that the Jews working in camps and on state farms in the region were also executed. The totality with which Jewish labor was executed in this region can be seen from a subsequent report of the military armaments commando: “Then, in October 1942, there were large-scale Jewish evacuations in Volhynia as a result of which every Jew was removed from all the factories, and the factories came to a complete standstill for a shorter or longer time, or production dwindled to a mere fraction.”

In late July 1942 Himmler wrote emphatically: “The occupied eastern territories will be free of Jews. The carrying out of this very difficult order has been placed on my shoulders by the Führer. No one can take this responsibility from me.” In the end, this included even the skilled Jewish workers providing irreplaceable manpower for the German war economy.

C. Camouflage Language:

The documents concerning the killing of Jews on occupied Soviet territory contain both open and camouflage language. Often the documents speak frankly of shootings, executions, extermination, liquidation, etc. Elsewhere they use words such as “special treatment,” “evacuation,” “deportation,” and “resettlement.” Many times one or more rationalizations are given to justify the mass killing of Jews as a response to or “reprisal” for some alleged provocation, and sometimes the documents claim that the Jews were “convicted” and the executions were carried out “according to martial law.” On other occasions, however,

the goal of making these territories “free of Jews” through killing is openly admitted, and Jews are killed for no other reason than being Jewish. The large number of surviving documents for this region allows a more careful examination of this use of language.

The implication that Jews were investigated, convicted, and shot “according to martial law” (*standrechtlich*) for alleged individual offenses is dispelled by Einsatzgruppe C’s own reporting. It noted that by late October 1941, 80,000 persons had been “liquidated.” However, only 8,000 of these were persons “who on the basis of investigation could be proven guilty of anti-German or bolshevik activities. The remainder were finished off on the basis of reprisal measures.” In the same report, Einsatzgruppe C reported that 75,000 of its 80,000 victims were Jews. Clearly the killing of the vast majority of these 75,000 Jews was not the result of individual offenses that led to investigation, conviction, and execution “according to martial law.” Moreover, the claim of legal proceedings in connection with shootings was at times clearly formulaic and transparently specious. For instance, Sonderkommando 4a reported shooting 740 people in the first week of November “according to martial law.” Included in the list of victims, however, were only three political functionaries and one saboteur; the rest of the victims were 137 Jews and 599 mentally ill persons.

As indicated by Einsatzgruppe C, many killings of Jews were explained or justified as “reprisals,” that is collective punishment of the Jewish community for some alleged transgression by unidentified individuals. This involved a variety of accusations: refusing to work, incitement and spreading rumours, looting or plundering, supporting the partisans, and sabotage. On other occasions, the shooting of Jews was justified because of insufficient food supplies or because the Jews were deemed a source of infectious disease or were simply too old and unfit for work.

On two occasions in the Einsatzgruppen reports, however, the reasons for executions are spelled out systematically. Among the reasons listed by Einsatzgruppe C was quite simply: “Jews in general.” (Juden allgemein) Einsatzgruppe A also listed reasons for shooting: alongside participation in the communist party, sedition, partisan activity, and espionage, was quite simply: “Belonging to the Jewish race.” (Zugehörigkeit zur jüdischen Rasse) In short, Jews were to be killed for being Jewish, whether a pretext was listed or not. And in fact many executions were reported without any alleged justification whatsoever. Jews were killed for whom they were, not for what they had done.

The term “special treatment” (Sonderbehandlung) appears in the Events Reports for the first time in No. 21 of July 13, 1941. The report notes that by July 8 the Einsatzkommando in Vilna had “liquidated” 321 Jews. Furthermore, the report explained how this was done, namely that 150 Lithuanians were recruited “to take part in the liquidation of the Jews. ...They arrested the Jews and put them into concentration camps where they were subjected the same day to special treatment. (italics mine) This work has now begun, and thus about 500 Jews, saboteurs among them, are liquidated daily.” Einsatzgruppe B reported in one paragraph that 640 Jews from the Nevel ghetto had been “liquidated.” In the very next paragraph it reported that in Janovichi 1,025 Jews “were subjected to special treatment.” (wurden...sonderbehandelt)

One month later Einsatzgruppe B reported a long list of actions, in which various terms were used interchangeably to indicate killing. In Belowchstchina 272 Jews were “liquidated.” (liquidiert) In Mogilev Einsatzkommando 8 and the Order Police “led 113 Jews to liquidation.” (brachte 113 Juden zur Liquidierung) In Schidow, 627 Jews were “liquidated. In a further action another 812 male and female persons were subjected to special treatment. Without exception they were racially and mentally inferior elements.” (liquidiert. In einer weiteren Aktion wurden noch 812 männliche und weibliche Personen der Son-

derbehandlung unterzogen. Es handelte sich durchweg um rassistisch und geistig minderwertige Elemente.) In Minsk, Einsatzkommando 8 “executed” (exekutierte) 41 persons, “primarily” (vorwiegend) Jews. In Talka, “222 Jews were led to liquidation.” (222 Juden zur Liquidierung gebracht wurden) Then in Marina-Gorka, “996 male and female Jews were subjected to special treatment.” (wurden 996 männliche und weibliche Juden der Sonderbehandlung unterzogen) In Borisov 83 Jews were “shot.” (erschossen) In Krupka and Sholpenitsche 912 and 833 Jews respectively were “liquidated.” (liquidiert) “The Rayon Krupka can now be considered free of Jews.” (Die Rayhon Krupka kann damit als judenfrei angesehen werden.) In Bobruisk Einsatzkommando 8 “executed” (exekutierte) 418 persons, including “rebellious Jews.” (widersetzlichen Juden) Then on October 8, 1941, the “total liquidation of the Jews in the ghetto of Vitebsk began. The number of Jews handed over to special treatment came to some 3,000.” (der restlosen Liquidierung der im Ghetto in Witebsk befindlichen Juden begonnen. Die Zahl der zur Sonderbehandlung gelangenden Juden beläuft sich auf etwa 3000.) In Ostrovno 169 Jews were “shot” (erschossen), and finally 52 Jews who had fled from Gorodok were “specially treated.” (sonderbehandelt) A subsequent report stated: “In Vitebsk, the ghetto was evacuated. During this process a total of 4,090 Jews of both sexes were shot.” (In Witebsk wurde das Ghetto geräumt, wobei insgesamt 4090 Juden beiderlei Geschlechts erschossen wurden.) In short, the term “special treatment” (and in this case also “evacuation”) was often used interchangeably with “liquidated,” “executed,” and “shot” in the reports, without any serious pretense that it was supposed to camouflage what was happening.

“Resettlement” and “deportation” are also terms that appear in German documents in a similar fashion. For instance, the Gendarmerie district leader of Brest reported: “On October 15 and 16, 1942, the Jewish action was carried out in Brest-Litovsk. Simultaneously the complete resettlement of the Jews in the Kreisgebiet Brest-Litovsk also occurred.

In all some 20,000 Jews have been resettled up until now.” Two pages later in the same report, he explained the activities of his police station using different language. “Participation in the action against the Jews in the city and Kreisgebiet Brest-Litovsk since October 15, 1942. Up until now some 20,000 Jews have been shot.”

Einsatzgruppe D reported that it had begun preparations for “the deportation of 12-13,000 Jews, Krimchaks, and Gypsies” in early December 1941. In a later document, Einsatzgruppe D noted that “Krimchaks...usually counted as part of the Jewish population.” Thus the inclusion of the Krimchaks and Gypsies in the fate of the Jews occasioned no special notice among the population. “Their extermination, together with that of the actual Jews and the Gypsies in the Crimea, was accomplished for the most part by the beginning of December 1941.”

Thus SS documents for internal use openly employed terms like “special treatment,” “evacuation,” “resettlement,” and “deportation” interchangeably with execution, shooting, liquidation, and extermination. In documents for external use, however, such language was often used to camouflage what the SS was doing or intended to do. The most blatant and cynical act of deception and camouflage can be seen by juxtaposing the internal documents of Einsatzgruppe A with its communications to the civil administration in its region in August 1941. On July 27, 1941, the Reichskommissar for the Ostland, Hinrich Lohse, had issued a set of provisional guidelines for the treatment of the Jewish population without either consulting Stahlecker or delineating any role for the SS. Higher SS and Police Leader North, Hans Adolf Prützmann, urged Stahlecker to meet with Lohse to discuss the matter. Stahlecker instead sent Jäger a three-page position page, which Jäger was to transmit to Lohse orally, as they were both in Kovno. Stahlecker explained that Lohse’s guidelines, providing for ghettoization and forced labor of Jews at the moment and “resettlement” (Umsiedlung) later, were in conflict with the orders that had been given to Einsatz-

gruppe A. Instead of ghettoization in the cities, Stahlecker sketched out a plan of “Jewish reservation areas” (Judenreservatsräume) in the open spaces, where the Jews would be separated by sex to prevent further procreation. Work shops and factories would eventually be constructed there to exploit Jewish labor. The reservations would also facilitate “the later collective deportation of the Jews to a reservation outside Europe.” In a handwritten note at the end, Stahlecker added that the Lohse draft “to a great extent touches on general orders from higher authority to the Security Police that cannot be discussed in writing.”

This scenario of deporting the Jews first to reservations in the open spaces of the Ostland and then later out of Europe was designed only for outside consumption, as Stahlecker’s own documents show. In his summary report of October 15, 1941, he wrote: “It was expected from the start that the Jewish problem would not be solved solely through pogroms. On the other hand the goal of security police cleansing work, according to basic orders, was the most complete removal possible of the Jews. Extensive executions in the cities and flat lands were therefore carried out through special units, to whom selected manpower – in Lithuania partisan troops and in Latvia troops of the Latvian auxiliary police – were attached.” Indeed, the nature of the orders Stahlecker had received from higher authority but could not put in writing are suggested by Jäger’s statistics: his unit began the systematic killing of Jewish women and children on August 15, just days after receiving Stahlecker’s position paper.

D. Implications:

The systematic mass-murder of Jews on occupied Soviet territory primarily through shooting, with the explicit goal of making these territories “free of Jews,” is clearly visible in the surviving German documents. Both method and goal are transparent. The commanders in the field were explicitly told to report extensively, as both Hitler and

Himmler were to be kept well informed. Clearly their reports were intended to show that government policy was being carried out with zeal and efficiency. Their actions were neither the unauthorized initiatives of a few rogue commanders nor the product of a sporadic breakdown in discipline in the heat of battle.

Such a thorough documentation does not exist concerning the fate of the Jews from the rest of Europe. What can be learned from these documents concerning the intentions and actions of the regime and its use of language is essential, however, in interpreting the scantier documentation, evaluating the credibility of eyewitness testimony, and drawing conclusions from circumstantial evidence.

V. The Evidence for the Killing of Jews through Gas in Chelmno, Semlin, Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka:

A. Documentary Evidence for the emergence of a program to kill the Jews of Europe:

The Nazi program to murder all the Jews of Europe within the German grasp was called the “Final Solution of the Jewish Question” (Endlösung der Judenfrage). While historians who have done extensive archival research on Nazi Jewish policy agree that such a program was implemented by the Nazi regime, they are not unanimous in their conclusions about several important aspects of historical interpretation. In particular, they do not agree as to precisely when the Nazi regime decided upon a policy of systematic and total mass murder, and they do not agree upon Hitler’s precise role in this decision-making process. Such disagreements over historical interpretation are, of course, not at all unusual. On the contrary, it is a quite normal occurrence.

What follows is my interpretation concerning the emergence of the Final Solution; it is not shared in every aspect by other able and learned historians of the Holocaust.

In the wake of the Kristallnacht pogrom, Hitler placed Hermann Göring in charge of coordinating Jewish policy. In turn, Göring delegated jurisdiction over Jewish policy that involved policing and emigration to the SS, and on January 24, 1939, Hermann Göring authorized Reinhard Heydrich to take charge of Jewish emigration from the Third Reich. Heydrich's jurisdiction expanded to include the expulsion of Jews, Poles, and Gypsies from the Polish territories incorporated into the Third Reich in the fall of 1939. In the spring of 1941 Heydrich began organizing the Einsatzgruppen of the Security Police and Security Service, which spearheaded the murderous attack on Soviet Jewry that summer. Then on July 31, 1941, Heydrich expanded his jurisdiction yet further, when he procured an authorization again signed by Göring, entrusting him with the task of making "all necessary preparations" for a "total solution to the Jewish question" (Gesamtlösung der Judenfrage) within the German sphere of influence in Europe. Heydrich was to submit a "comprehensive draft" (Gesamtentwurf) of the preliminary measures for this "Final Solution of the Jewish Question" (Endlösung der Judenfrage) promptly. This was not an order for the Final Solution, but Heydrich, the man who was currently in charge of the Einsatzgruppen killing campaign on occupied Soviet territory, was now authorized to draw up plans concerning the fate of all other Jews under German control.

No "comprehensive draft" for a Final Solution is among the surviving German documents found after the war. But other documents have survived that indicate a series of changes in Nazi Jewish policy in the fall of 1941 that, taken together, constituted a program for the systematic mass murder of European Jewry. The first was a reversal of Hitler's previous policy that the deportation of German Jews would not take place until after the war. On September 18, 1941, Himmler in-

formed the Gauleiter of the Warthegau, Arthur Greiser: “The Führer wishes that the Old Reich and Protectorate be emptied and freed of Jews from west to east as quickly as possible.” Thus Himmler intended, “as a first step” (als erste Stufe), to deport the Jews to the incorporated territories (especially the ghetto of Lodz) “in order to deport them yet further to the east the next spring.” On October 10, Heydrich in Prague announced that Riga and Minsk would also be destinations for the deportation of German Jews. The deportations, first to Lodz, then began on October 15.

The second major change in German policy was the ban on Jewish emigration overseas. In August 1941 a number of Spanish Jews living in Paris had been arrested, which led the Spanish government to suggest the possibility of evacuating all Spanish Jews (some 2,000) to Spanish Morocco--a proposal endorsed by the German Foreign Office as fully in line with previous German policy of emigrating or expelling Jews overseas. On October 17, Heydrich blocked the Spanish proposal for two reasons. First, the Spanish would not effectively guard them in Morocco. Second, “In addition these Jews would also be too much out of the direct reach of the measures for a basic solution to the Jewish question to be enacted after the war.” On October 23, 1941, the chief of the Gestapo, Heinrich Müller, then dispatched a circular to all police agencies announcing Himmler’s order that Jewish emigration was to be stopped.

What did the end of Jewish emigration overseas so that even Spanish Jews would not be “too much out of the direct reach of the measures for a basic solution to the Jewish question to be enacted after the war” mean? What did the deportation of German Jews first to Lodz, Minsk, and Riga and then “yet further east the next spring” mean? Did they mean nothing more than expulsion into eastern Russia or Siberia after the defeat of the Soviet Union still expected by the spring of 1942? A combination of three documents dating from the end of October 1941 suggest otherwise.

Between October 18 and 21, 1941, the Foreign Office expert for Jewish affairs, Franz Rademacher, and Eichmann's second deputy, Friedrich Suhr, visited Belgrade. After the trip Rademacher reported how the adult Jewish men in Serbia had been shot by the German army. Concerning the fate of the Jewish women, children, and elderly, Rademacher reported: "Then as soon as the technical possibility exists within the framework of the total solution to the Jewish question, the Jews will be deported by waterway to the reception camp in the east." In short, Jews deported from Europe were not simply going to be expelled into eastern Russia, but rather they were to be interned in a German "reception camp" not yet built. Furthermore, as this reception camp was for women, children, and elderly, it clearly was not a labor camp.

A second relevant document is a short hand-written letter of October 23, 1941, that Franz Rademacher found waiting for him from the foreign editor of *Der Stürmer*, Paul Wurm, when he returned to Berlin. Wurm wrote: "Dear Party Comrade Rademacher! On my return trip from Berlin I met an old party comrade, who works in the east on the settlement of the Jewish question. In the near future many of the Jewish vermin will be exterminated through special measures."

What did Wurm mean by "special measures" for the destruction of Jews in the east? On October 25, 1941, Rademacher's counterpart in the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories, Eberhard Wetzel, met first with Viktor Brack of the Führer Chancellery (where he was involved with the so-called euthanasia program for the killing of mentally- and physically handicapped patients in German hospitals and asylums) and then with Adolf Eichmann (Heydrich's special advisor on Jewish policy). Wetzel then drafted a letter to be sent by his boss, Alfred Rosenberg, to Hinrich Lohse, who was not happy about the imminent deportation of German Jews to Riga. According to Wetzel, Brack declared himself ready to aid in the construction of "gassing apparatuses" ("Vergasungsapparate") on the spot in Riga. Eichmann con-

firmed to Wetzel that Jewish camps were about to be set up in Riga and Minsk to receive German Jews. Those capable of labor would be sent “to the east” later. Under the circumstances there were no objections “if those Jews who are not fit for work are removed by Brack’s device” in the meantime.

In short, surviving documents show that by late October 1941 the Nazi regime: 1) had ended a longstanding policy of creating a Europe free of Jews through emigration and expulsion overseas; 2) had begun deporting German Jews to the east into ghettos where they awaited deportation further east the following spring; 3) was planning a “reception camp” in the east for non-working Jewish women, children, and elderly; 4) was planning for the destruction of Jews through “special measures”; and 5) was discussing the construction of “gassing apparatuses” in Riga, so that German Jews incapable of work could be “removed” immediately.

These documents suggest that a policy of systematic extermination, including deportation to reception camps and the use of gassing as a method of killing, was taking shape by late October 1941, even if it was not to be implemented until the following spring (after the expected end of the war). The statements of leading Nazis in the following months certainly point to a widening recognition that mass killing, not expulsion, was now the goal of the regime. On November 15, 1941, Himmler had a four-hour discussion with Alfred Rosenberg. Three days later Rosenberg gave a “confidential” background report to the German press. The reporters were not yet to print the details of what was happening in the east, but they needed sufficient background so that the press could give its treatment the proper “color” (Farbe), he explained. Among the topics Rosenberg dealt with was the Jewish question. “ In the east some six million Jew still live, and this question can only be solved in a biological eradication of the entire Jewry of Europe. The Jewish question is only solved for Germany when the last Jew has left German territory, and for Europe when not a single Jew

lives on the European continent up to the Urals. ...for this reason it is necessary to expel them over the Urals or eradicate them in some other way.”

On November 28, 1941, Hitler met with the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. Hitler stated: “Germany was resolved, step by step, to ask one European nation after the other to solve its Jewish problem, and at the proper time, direct a similar appeal to non-European nations as well.” When Germany had defeated the Soviet Union and broken through the Caucasus into the middle east, Germany would have no imperial goals of its own and would support Arab liberation, Hitler assured the Grand Mufti. But he did have one goal: “Germany’s objective would then be solely the destruction of the Jewish element residing in the Arab sphere under the protection of British power.”

In December 1941, after the Soviet counter-offensive around Moscow, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, and the German declaration of war on the United States, there could be no doubt any longer that there would be no end to the war by the following spring. Yet Hitler made clear in a speech to the top echelons of the Nazi party on December 12, 1941, that this did not change the emerging German policy of systematic mass killing. “Concerning the Jewish question, the Führer is determined to make a clean sweep. He prophesied that, if they were once again to cause a world war, the result would be their own destruction. That was no figure of speech. The world war is here, the destruction of the Jews must be the inevitable consequence.”

Hans Frank, who attended this meeting, returned to the General Government and explained what he had learned in Berlin to his district governors and division leaders. “We must put an end to the Jews, that I want to say quite openly. The Führer once spoke these words: If united Jewry should once more succeed in unleashing a world war, then the peoples who have been incited to this war will not be its only victims, because the Jew in Europe will also have found his end. ...Before I con-

tinue to speak I would ask you to agree with me on the following principle: we want to have compassion only for the German people, otherwise for no one in the whole world. Others have had no compassion for us. As an old National Socialist, I must also say: if the Jewish tribe were to survive the war in Europe, while we had sacrificed our best blood for Europe's preservation, then this war would be only a partial success. Thus vis-a-vis the Jews I will in principle proceed only on the assumption that they will disappear. They must go. I have entered into negotiations for the purpose of deporting them to the east. In January a large meeting will be convened in the Reich Security Main Office by SS-Obergruppenführer Heydrich. In any case a large migration of Jews will be set in motion. But what is to happen to the Jews? Do you believe that they will be lodged in settlements in the Ostland? In Berlin we were told: why all this trouble; we cannot use them in the Ostland or the Reichskommissariat either; liquidate them yourselves! Gentlemen, I must ask you, arm yourselves against any thoughts of compassion. We must destroy the Jews, wherever we encounter them and wherever it is possible, in order to preserve the entire structure of the Reich. " Frank did not yet know how unprecedented destruction on this scale could be done, but he assured his audience that "nonetheless we will take some kind of action that will lead to a successful destruction, and indeed in conjunction with the important measures to be discussed in the Reich."

What Frank called the "large meeting" in Berlin under the chairmanship of Heydrich, where "important measures" were to be discussed in January, had originally been scheduled for December 8, 1941, but was postponed until January 20, 1942. Known as the Wannsee Conference, it was attended by the State Secretaries of the ministries of the Interior (Stuckart), Justice (Freisler), the General Government (Bühler), and the Occupied Eastern Territories (Meyer and his deputy Leibbrandt), as well as the Office of the Four Year Plan (Neumann) and Party Chancellery (Klopfer), the Undersecretary of the Foreign Office (Luther), and

ministerial director of the Reich Chancellery (Kritzingen). The State Secretaries, just beneath the cabinet minister level, were by protocol the highest ranking officials that Heydrich could invite to a meeting over which he--as Himmler's deputy--would preside. Also attending were the heads of the Gestapo (Müller), the Race and Resettlement Main Office (Hofmann), and the Security Police in the General Government (Schöngarth), as well as Heydrich, Eichmann, and Rudolf Lange, commander of Einsatzkommando 2 in Latvia. Heydrich's invitations to the meeting were accompanied by copies of his authorization, signed by Göring on July 31, 1941, to prepare a Final Solution to the Jewish question throughout Germany's sphere of influence in Europe. There is no record of Heydrich having chaired any other meeting with such an illustrious list of leading officials of the Nazi regime in attendance in his entire career.

Heydrich briefly reiterated his authority to prepare a European-wide Final Solution and reviewed the policy of emigration until its prohibition in the fall of 1941. Heydrich then stated: "In place of emigration, the evacuation of the Jews to the east has now emerged, after the appropriate prior approval of the Führer, as a further possible solution. A total of 11 million European Jews, including even those from neutral countries like Ireland, Switzerland, and Sweden, would be involved, according to Heydrich. The evacuations, however, were to be regarded "solely as temporary measures" (lediglich als Ausweichmöglichkeiten), for "practical experiences" (praktischen Erfahrungen) were already being gathered that would be of great significance for the "imminent" (kommende) Final Solution. Heydrich then went on to explain just what he meant by this. The Jews would be utilized for labor in the east. "Separated by sex, the Jews capable of work will be led into these areas in large labor columns to build roads, whereby a large part will doubtless fall away through natural diminution. The remnant that finally survives all this, because it is undoubtedly a question of the part with the greatest resistance, will have to be treated accordingly, be-

cause this remnant, representing a natural selection, must be regarded as the germ cell of a new Jewish reconstruction if released.” If the protocol indicates that Jews capable of work were to be subjected to such strenuous labor that most would die, and those who did not would be “treated accordingly,” it makes no mention of what was to happen to those Jews who were not capable of work to begin with. Bühler understood perfectly well that the Final Solution meant more than working Jews to death, for he urged that it begin in the General Government, because there was no transportation problem there and most of the Jews there were already incapable of work.

The protocol summarized in detail lengthy discussions about policy toward Jews in mixed marriage and their children without resolution. On one point the protocol was exceptionally brief, however, and that concerned the question Frank had raised in December, namely how were the Jews to be destroyed. Without any explanation as to actual content of the discussion, the protocol merely noted cryptically: “Finally there was a discussion of the various types of possible solutions....”

Thirty copies of the protocol of the Wannsee Conference were made, and the only surviving copy is the one that was sent by Heydrich to the Foreign Office on January 26, 1942. Apparently the Reich Interior Ministry received a copy at the same time, for already at another meeting on January 29, 1942, its Jewish expert, Bernhard Lösener, made reference to the conference of January 20.

One notable Nazi leader had not sent a representative to the Wannsee Conference, namely Heydrich and Himmler’s disliked rival, Josef Goebbels of the Propaganda Ministry. It would appear that Goebbels received an expurgated version of the protocol only much later. He noted in his diary entry of March 7, 1942, concerning a report “from the SD and police regarding the final solution of the Jewish question.” He noted the Wannsee Conference figure of 11 million Jews in Europe and then wrote: “They will have to be concentrated later, to begin with,

in the East; possibly an island, such as Madagascar can be assigned to them after the war.” In reality, of course, the Jews were neither going to be concentrated “later,” nor sent to Madagascar after the war. The Jews of the Warthegau were already being gassed at this moment, and the gassing of Serbian Jews in the Semlin camp outside Belgrade was imminent. Moreover, the “concentration” of the Jews of Poland in the three tiny villages of Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka was about to begin.

B. Documentary Evidence concerning the gassing of Jews at Semlin, Chelmno, and on Soviet occupied territory in gas vans:

A surviving file of documents shows that gas vans called “special trucks” (Spezialwagen and Sonderwagen) were constructed and dispatched by Office II D 3 (Friedrich Pradel’s motorpool section of Walter Rauff’s division for technical affairs) within Heydrich’s Reich Security Main Office. Demand exceeded supply. In one surviving letter, Rauff informed the Criminal Technical Institute that the staff doctor at the Mauthausen concentration camp had requested a gas van. However, “The special trucks constructed by us are at this time all in action in accordance with the order of the Chief of the Security Police and SD.” Moreover, one would not be available for some time. Thus Rauff asked the Criminal Technical Institute, where the chief chemist Albert Widmann had earlier advised the euthanasia program on the use of carbon monoxide in gas chambers to kill mentally- and physically handicapped patients, for help. “Because I assume that the concentration camp Mauthausen cannot wait for an indefinite time for availability, I request the procurement of steel canisters of carbon monoxide or other remedies for implementation be initiated from your end.” No gas van was available for Mauthausen at this time, because they were all in use in three other places: Semlin near Belgrade, Chelmno (Kulmhof) near Lodz, and with the Einsatzgruppen on occupied Soviet territory.

1. Semlin

After the male adult Jews in Serbia had been shot in the fall of 1941, the women, children, and elderly were interned in a makeshift camp constructed in the old fair grounds of Semlin across the river from Belgrade. The planned deportation to a “reception camp” in the east never took place, and by late March 1942 the number of Jews in Semlin had reached 6,280. On April 11, 1942, the head of the military administration in Serbia, Harald Turner, wrote to Himmler’s adjutant, Karl Wolff: “Already some months ago I had everything that could be got hold of in the way of Jews in this land shot, and had all the Jewish women and children concentrated in a camp and at the same time, with the help of the SD, procured a ‘delousing vehicle’ that will now finally have carried out the clearing of the camp in some 14 days to 4 weeks...”

The 10-day reports of the military commander in Serbia document a steady decrease in the number of Jewish inmates in the Semlin camp between early March and late May. They register a population of 5,780 Jews--“mostly women and children”--in the “Jewish camp Semlin” on March 3, 1942, and this number declined to 491 Jews as of May 22. The reports cease to mention the presence of any Jews or even the existence of a “Jewish camp” in Semlin as of June. On May 29, 1942, Franz Rademacher at the Jewish desk in the Foreign Office wrote: “The Jewish question in Serbia is no longer acute.” Ten days later the head of the Security Police in Belgrade, Emanuel Schäfer, informed the commanding general in Serbia, Paul Bader, and the Military Commander Southeast, Walter Kuntze, that there was no longer a Jewish question in Serbia. And Schäfer reported to Berlin, concerning the “special Saurer truck” (Spezialwagen-Saurer)--Saurer was the larger of the two truck models used for conversion into gas vans--that the two drivers, Goetz and Meyer, “had carried out their special task”, and therefore they and the truck were being sent back.

2. Chelmno:

Beginning in December 1941, Jews from the Lodz ghetto and other towns in the Warthegau were deported to the small village of Chelmno. On May 1, 1942, Arthur Greiser wrote to Himmler: “The special treatment of some 100,000 Jews in my territory in an action approved by you in agreement with the Chief of the Reich Security Main Office SS-Obergruppenführer Heydrich will be completed in the next two to three months.”

The completion of this task was not without incident, however, as can be seen in a report in the motor pool section of the RSHA of June 5, 1942, concerning technical alterations in the production of the “special trucks.” “ Since December 1941, for example, 97,000 were processed by three trucks in action, without any defects in the vehicles being encountered. The known explosion in Chelmno must be deemed an isolated case. Its cause must be traced to operator’s error. ”

The deportations from the Warthegau to Chelmno continued in 1942 until the provinces had been made free of Jews and the population of the Lodz ghetto had been reduced to less than 90,000.

3. Einsatzgruppen

On May 16, 1942, Dr. August Becker submitted a secret report to Walter Rauff concerning his inspection tour of the gas vans being used by the Einsatzgruppen. The large model Saurer trucks with Einsatzgruppen C and D, he reported, could travel cross country only in dry weather but were unusable after a rain. Moreover, the rough terrain had loosened seals and rivets, so that many trucks were no longer airtight. The trucks of Einsatzgruppe D had become so well known to the civilian population that they openly referred to them as “death trucks.” (Todeswagen) He had had them disguised by painting windows on the side, but he did not think this subterfuge would preserve secrecy for long.

However, the greatest problems with the gas vans, according to Becker's report, were not technical. The men suffered "enormous emotional and health injuries" (ungeheure seelische und gesundheitliche Schäden) and complained of headaches after each unloading. "The gassing is without exception not undertaken properly. In order to finish the job as quickly as possible, the drivers without exception open full throttle. For this reason those to be executed suffer death from suffocation and are not, as intended, put to sleep peacefully." The result was gashlty--horribly distorted faces and bodies covered with excrement and vomit (verzerrte Gesichter und Ausscheidungen).

Despite such problems, the gas vans were still in demand. The chief of security police in Riga reported in mid-June 1942, one month after Becker's report, that in German-occupied Belarus "a Jewish transport arrived weekly that had to be subjected to a special treatment. The 3 special trucks on hand there did not suffice for this purpose!" He thus requested an additional large Saurer model to add to the other Saurer and the two small Diamond model trucks.

C. Documentary Evidence concerning the Camps of Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka.

If the documents concerning the Einsatzgruppen and the "special trucks" speak openly about the methods of killing, i.e. shooting and gassing, such is not the case with the documents concerning the camps located in the three tiny villages of Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka, to which most Polish Jews were deported. Nonetheless, the quite scant surviving documentation makes clear that these were neither labor camps nor transit camps, and Jews were sent there simply to be killed.

In March 1942 the Nazi regime began two simultaneous programs: the deportation of Jews from the Third Reich and Slovakia into the General Government, and the deportation of Jews in the General Government

(initially from the districts of Lublin and Galicia) to a camp at Belzec--a small village on the Lublin side of the border between these two districts. The clearing of the Lublin ghetto began on March 16, as noted in a weekly report circulated by the propaganda division on March 21, 1942: "Resettlement of the Jews. Since Monday, March 16, the ghetto of Lublin is being cleared of Jews. Daily some 2,000 Jews are seized and sent eastward. Only a small Jewish quarter is being preserved for the Jews who still work for German agencies. It is therefore reckoned that the action will be completed by April 1, with the deportation of 35-38,000 Jews. "

In preparation for the simultaneous influx of Jewish transports from outside the Third Reich and Slovakia, Hermann Höfle on Globobnik's staff met with Richard Türk of the Lublin district's Department of Population and Welfare on March 16, 1942, the same day that the clearing of the Lublin ghetto began. Türk reported the results of the conversation: " 1) It would be expedient to divide the Jews in the transports coming into the district of Lublin already at the departure station into those capable and those not capable of work. If this separation is not possible at the departure station, one must then switch over to dividing the transport in Lublin according to the above-mentioned viewpoint. 2) Jews not capable of work must all go to Belzec, the furthest border station in Kreis Zamosc. 3) Hauptsturmführer Höfle intends to build a large camp, in which the Jews capable of work can be classified according to profession and requisitioned. 4) Piaski will be freed of Polish Jews and become the collection point for Jews coming from the Reich. ...In conclusion he declared, he could receive daily 4-5 transports of 1,000 at the end station of Belzec. These Jews would cross over the border and would never return again to the General Government. "

On March 20, 1942, Türk again reported on a discussion that had taken place between Höfle and two Kreishauptmänner (county heads) in the Lublin district. " Kreishauptmann Weienmeyer has as yet been able to learn nothing about final outcome of the deportation; all that is

known is the existence of a collection camp some distance from the Belzec train station on the district border, that is entirely closed off, and the arrival of a SS-commando of some 60 men. ”

After the clearing of the Lublin ghetto, deportations were carried out in various parts of the Lublin district. For instance, the Kreishauptmann of Pulawy reported on May 13, 1941: “In the period from May 6-12 inclusive, 16,822 Jews from the Kreis Pulawy were expelled over the Bug on the instruction of the SS and Police Leader.” (The Bug River was the demarcation line between the German and Soviet occupation zones in 1939-41 and formed the boundary between the districts of Lublin and Galicia thereafter.) With the exception of sick and old Slovakian Jews in the ghetto of Opole, only working Jews remained.

In short, the German documents make clear that tens of thousands of Jews were being sent to the camp at Belzec in the spring months of 1942. There was no pretense that this was a work camp, for only non-working Jews were sent there. There was no pretense that such numbers of Jews could all remain in Belzec, in a tiny village guarded by a mere 60 men. Thus the explanation given by the SS was that these Jews were “expelled over the Bug,” that is sent across the border into the district of Galicia, with the guarantee that they would never return. Two factors make the acceptance of such an explanation utterly untenable.

First, on March 27, 1942, shortly after the clearing of the Lublin ghetto began, Josef Goebbels confided to his diary about the fate of the non-working Jews, i.e. precisely those sent to Belzec: “ Beginning with Lublin, the Jews in the General Government are now being evacuated eastward. The procedure is a pretty barbaric one and not to be described here more definitely. Not much will remain of the Jews. On the whole it can be said about 60 percent of them will have to be liquidated whereas only about 40 percent can be used for forced labor. ”

Second, German documents from the district of Galicia make clear that not only were Jews not arriving in their district from the Lublin district via Belzec, but on the contrary, Jews were simultaneously being deported from the district of Galicia westward to Belzec. The Oberfeldkommandant in Lwow (Lemberg) reported on March 19, 1942: “ Within the Jewish population of Lemberg a noticeable unrest has spread in regard to a deportation action that has begun, through which some 30,000 elderly and other unemployed Jews shall be seized and allegedly transferred to a territory near Lublin. To what extent this evacuation can be equated with a decimation remains to be seen. ”

The Oberfeldkommandant reported the following month: “ The Jewish population displays the deepest depression, which is completely understandable because on the one hand in various locations in the district the well-known actions against the Jews occur again and on the other hand in Lemberg the temporarily interrupted resettlement of Jews resumes; in the meantime it is whispered also among the Jews that the evacuees never reach the resettlement territory that is alleged to them as the destination. ” The deportations from Galicia broke off during the months of May, June, and July 1942, but resumed in August. In October the Oberfeldkommandant reported again: “ The resettlement actions continue undiminished. The Jews are informed of their fate. Indicative is the statement of a member of the Lwow Jewish council: We all carry our death certificates in our pocket--only the date of death is not yet filled out. ”

The trains deporting Jews from Galicia did indeed go to Belzec, as can be seen in the report of Reserve Lieutenant Westermann of the 7th company of Police Regiment 24, whose men helped round up the Jews in Kolomyja and nearby towns and then guarded two transports to Belzec on September 7 and 10, 1942. The first contained 4,769 Jews in 50 train cars and went without incident. The second involved 8,205 Jews. Many had been held for days without food and force-marched 35-50 kilometers to the train in blistering heat. They were then packed

into train cars, in many cases 180-200 per car, virtually without ventilation. As Lieutenant Westermann concluded: "The ever greater panic spreading among the Jews due to the great heat, overloading of the train cars, and stink of the dead--when unloading the train cars some 2,000 Jews were found dead in the train--made the transport almost unworkable." Nevertheless the train that left Kolomyja at 8:50 pm. on September 10 finally crawled into Belzec at 6:45 pm on September 11.

As in the rest of Hitler's Europe, the Germans in Galicia were busy insuring that their district was becoming free of Jews. The SS and Police Leader, Friedrich Katzmann, reported that as of November 10, 1942, 254,989 Jews had been resettled. By June 23, 1943, the total had reached 434,329 Jews "resettled" (ausgesiedelt) with only 21,000 Jews still in labor camps. In short, the allegation that Belzec was a transit camp through which Jews were expelled from Lublin into Galicia is totally disproven by German documentation. Month after month, in train after train, tens of thousands of Jews were taken to the little village of Belzec, and the trains came from both Lublin and Cracow to the west and Galicia to the east. If Höfle clearly lied about the purpose of Belzec, in one regard he told the truth: with the exception of a handful of escapees, the Jews sent to Belzec never returned.

The camp at Treblinka was located in a tiny village just off the main railline between Warsaw and Bialystok near the eastern border of the General Government. Massive deportations from Warsaw to Treblinka began on July 22, 1942, as can be seen in the letter from the State Secretary for the Transportation Ministry, Albert Ganzenmüller, to Himmler's adjutant, Karl Wolff: "Since July 22, one train with 5,000 Jews departs daily via Malkinia to Treblinka. Moreover, twice per week a train with 5,000 Jews departs Przemysl for Belzec." When deportations from the city and surrounding district of Warsaw came to an end in early October, the district governor Fischer reported that a total of 400,000 Jews had been deported. Surviving fragmentary train schedules also show that Jews were deported from northern Lublin district,

Radom district, and the Bialystok district to Treblinka as well. The deportations from Bialystok, a district east of Treblinka, are of special significance for two reasons. First, these deportations from Bialystok make clear that Treblinka was not a transit camp for the expulsion of Jews eastward from the General Government. Rather the tiny village of Treblinka, like Belzec, was a point at which transports of Jews converged from east and west. Moreover, the fate of the Bialystok Jews in the fall of 1942 was clearly stated in Himmler's report to Hitler of December 31, 1942. The Jews of Bialystok were among the 363,211 "Jews executed." The fate of the Jews sent to Treblinka is also reflected in a report noted in the October 10, 1942, entry to the War Diary of the Oberquartiermeister of the military commander in Poland. "OK Ostrow reports that the Jews in Treblinka are not adequately buried and as a result an unbearable smell of cadavers pollutes the air." Ostrow, it should be noted, was some 20 kilometers from Treblinka.

The documentary evidence makes clear that Belzec and Treblinka were camps to which hundreds of thousands of Jews were sent to be killed, though without specifying the method of killing. The scant surviving documentary evidence concerning the purpose of Sobibor indicates that the Germans considered it in the same category as Treblinka and Belzec, but that it was inaccessible due to railline repairs during the peak months of the killing campaign of July-October 1942. Like Belzec, Sobibor received transports of Jews deemed incapable of work, as can be seen in the report of Lieutenant Fischmann of June 20, 1942. Fischmann commanded the police guard that accompanied a train that departed Vienna with 1,000 Jews from Vienna for the Lublin district. SS-Obersturmführer Pohl of Globocnik's staff met the train in Lublin on June 16 and selected 51 Jews between the ages of 15 and 50, who were deemed capable of work. On June 17 Lieutenant Stangl took delivery of the remaining 949 Jews in Sobibor. In the same letter in which Ganzenmüller informed Wolff of the daily transports from Warsaw to Treblinka and the twice-per-week transports

from Przemyśl to Belzec, he also noted that further transports to Sobibor were not possible until October due to construction on the railline. The protocol of a meeting in Berlin on September 26 and 28, 1942, to plan allocation of transportation for the future “evacuation of 600,000 Jews” of the General Government noted: “ After the completion of the restoration of the line Lublin-Chelm, probably from November 1, 1942, the other urgent transports can also be carried out, namely: 1 train per day from the district of Radom to Sobibor; 1 train per day from the northern Lublin district to Belzec and 1 train per day from the central Lublin district to Sobibor.... ” And in his promotion recommendations to Himmler’s chief of personnel, Herff, Globocnik included Franz Stangl, the commandant at Sobibor who was then transferred to Treblinka. According to Globocnik, Stangl was “the best camp commander, who had the greatest share of the entire action....” Included on the list of promotion recommendations for the SS-Sonderkommando “Einsatz Reinhard” were personnel from all three camps of Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka. Clearly, Sobibor was a camp no different in purpose than Belzec and Treblinka.

D. Eyewitness Testimony concerning Gassing at Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka.

While surviving German documentation reveals that hundreds of thousands of Jews not considered essential for labor were sent to the three small villages of Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka from areas both to the east and west and were never seen again, and moreover that the military 20 kilometers from Treblinka complained about the pestilential smell caused the inadequate burial of the Jews there, no contemporary document specifically states how the Jews sent to these three camps were killed. A very large body of testimony--from numerous German, Jewish, Polish, and Ukrainian eyewitnesses--provides evidence that the Jews sent to Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka were killed in gas chambers with carbon monoxide from engine exhaust. As in any

body of eyewitness testimonies, there are errors and contradictions as well as both exaggerations and apologetic obfuscation and minimization, but in this case there is above all overwhelming concurrence on three facts: gas chambers existed in these camps, they were used to kill Jews, and the corpses of the murdered Jews were first buried and then later cremated.

It is not possible in the framework of this report to identify, summarize, and analyze the individual testimony of each of more than one hundred relevant eyewitnesses. I will instead identify five categories of eyewitnesses and then provide examples of testimony from each category.

- German visitors to the camps of Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka.
- German personnel stationed in the camps of Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka.
- Ukrainian auxiliaries taken from POW camps, trained at Trawniki, and assigned as guards to these three camps.
- Poles living in the immediate area of these three camps.
- Jewish escapees from these three camps.

First Category

The first category, testimonies of German visitors, is easily the smallest. The testimonies of three such visitors are very important, however. The first is Adolf Eichmann. In the late 1950's he gave an interview to a Dutch journalist Willem Sassen and corrected the resulting transcript. A brief summary of the interview was published in Life Magazine. After his arrest, he was interrogated extensively in Israel. He composed his hand-written "Meine Memoiren." He prepared notes for his defense attorney, Servatius, that remained in the private papers or Nachlass of the latter that were donated to the Bundesarchiv. He gave testimony in court. And his widow, with the editorial help of the lawyer Rudolf Aschenauer, had a posthumous memoir published in 1980, entitled *Ich Adolf Eichmann. Ein historischer Zeugenbericht*, based primarily upon the Sassen transcripts. In all of these testimonies,

Eichmann confirmed that he had been in charge of organizing the deportation of Jews from all over Europe, in order for them to be killed in the death camps in Poland as part of the Final Solution. In several accounts he also described his visits to Auschwitz, Chelmno, Treblinka, and one other camp in the fall of 1941 whose name he did not remember but which fits the description of Belzec at that time.

According to Eichmann, he was sent by Heydrich to Globocnik in Lublin to report on how Hitler's order to kill the European Jews was going to be carried out. It was the fall of 1941, when the autumn colors were at their peak. Hermann Höfle on Globocnik's staff drove him out of Lublin to a site where he was introduced to an Order Police captain. Eichmann and his escort then crossed the highway to a place where 2-3 wooden buildings were under construction. The Order Police captain explained to Eichmann that one building had to be made airtight to serve as a gas chamber, in which Jews would be killed by carbon monoxide exhaust from a Russian U-boat motor that would be attached. The camp was still empty and the motor was not yet there. In the following summer of 1942, Eichmann visited another camp, where he remembered the railway station with the sign Treblinka. Here he saw naked Jews standing in line behind the barbed wire about to be driven into the gas chambers. By his own account, he also witnessed the gassing of Jews in a gas van at Chelmno.

The second German visitor was Kurt Gerstein, a covert anti-Nazi who infiltrated the SS and became head of the Disinfection Services of the Waffen-SS. According to his testimony, he was ordered by Eichmann's deputy, Rolf Günther, to take 100 kilos of prussic acid to Globocnik in Lublin. They were accompanied by a Professor of Hygiene at the University of Marburg/Lahn, Wilhelm Pfannenstiel. They arrived on August 17, 1942, and met with Globocnik, who boasted (falsely) of a recent visit by Hitler. According to Gerstein, Globocnik also claimed (with great exaggeration) that in Belzec, Treblinka, Sobibor respectively 15,000, 25,000, and 20,000 Jews were killed daily with "diesel ex-

haust gas.” (Dieselauspuffgasen) Gerstein’s task was to disinfect the huge amounts of clothing taken from the Jews, and on August 19, he and Pfannenstiel travelled to Belzec and were shown around the camp by SS-Hauptsturmführer Obermeyer. On the following morning, August 20, they witnessed the arrival of a 45-wagon transport from Lwow (Lemberg) with 6,700 Jews, of whom 1,450 were already dead. The Jews were forced to undress (the piles of shoes were allegedly 25 meters high), the women’s hair was cut off, and then the naked Jews were driven between two barbed wire fences to the gas chamber by Ukrainian guards. An SS man offered soothing assurances that they should inhale deeply to prevent lung infection, and then the men would be sent to work. Approximately 750 Jews were driven into each of 4 gas chambers, measuring 5 x 5 meters apiece. For 2 hours and 49 minutes, SS Sergeant Heckenholt struggled to start the engine. Pfannenstiel, looking through glass peep hole in the door of one of the gas chambers, commented that the Jews were weeping “as they do in the synagogue.” Finally, the engine started, and the gassing took 32 minutes. Then Jewish workers opened the outside doors to the gas chambers and took out the bodies. Before the corpses of the Jews were tossed into a large trench, they were searched for valuables and gold dental work was broken out.

The following day Gerstein drove to Treblinka, where the gassing facilities were larger, and he saw “veritable mounds of clothing and underwear, 115 to 130 feet high.” At a dinner in the visitors’ honor, Pfannenstiel made a speech about “the greatness of the work” being done there. On the night of August 21-22, Gerstein travelled by train from Warsaw to Berlin, and accidentally encountered the Secretary to the Swedish Embassy in Berlin, Göran von Otter. In a feverish conversation lasting hours, Gerstein told the Swede all he had just seen and urged him to make it known to the outside world. Von Otter later confirmed this encounter with Gerstein. Gerstein wrote one handwritten French

and two type-written German versions of this report in April 1945 and died in a French prison cell the following July. His death was ruled a suicide by French prison officials.

A third eyewitness account is that given by Professor Wilhelm Pfannenstiel in a series of depositions he gave to judicial authorities in Germany in the 1950's. Pfannenstiel claimed that Gerstein's version was "false" and "full of exaggerations." Günther did not accompany them to Lublin. He did not go to Treblinka after visiting Belzec and thus did not give a speech there. The gassing at Belzec had taken only 18 minutes, not 32 minutes, and he had not made any remark about the Jews weeping as they do in a synagogue. He did confirm that the Jews had to strip naked, the women had their hair cut, an SS officer made soothing remarks, the Jews were driven into four of six gas chambers in the building, exhaust gas from an engine was piped in, and gold teeth were taken from the corpses before they were stacked in a trench by Jews who did the "dirty work."

Many aspects of Gerstein's testimony are unquestionably problematic. Several statements he attributes to Globocnik are clearly exaggerated or false, and it is not clear whether Gerstein or Globocnik was the faulty source. In other statements, such as the height of the piles of shoes and clothing at Belzec and Treblinka, Gerstein himself is clearly the source of exaggeration. Gerstein also added grossly exaggerated claims about matters to which he was not an eyewitness, such as that a total of 25 million Jews and others were gassed. But in the essential issue, namely that he was in Belzec and witnessed the gassing of a transport of Jews from Lwow, his testimony is fully corroborated by Pfannenstiel. It is also corroborated by other categories of witnesses from Belzec.

Second Category:

The second category of eyewitnesses is comprised of Germans who were stationed at Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka. Twenty-nine such German camp personnel were indicted and brought before German courts in the 1950's and 1960's. They all gave pre-trial depositions. Many claimed that they had had no choice but to carry out the duties that they had been assigned, and many denied that they had committed any harmful or malicious acts beyond routine compliance with their obligatory duties. But none of them denied that the camps were equipped with gas chambers, in which hundreds of thousands of Jews were killed. At least 26 of the 29 had prior experience in the so-called "euthanasia" program, in which German mentally- and physically handicapped were gassed in one of six "institutes" or killing centers in Germany.

Of these 29 men, Franz Stangl held the highest rank as commandant of first Sobibor and then Treblinka. Outside of judicial proceedings, he also gave extensive testimony in long interviews with the British journalist, Gitta Sereny, that are easily accessible in her book, *Into That Darkness*. The testimony of Franz Suchomel, a guard at Treblinka, who was interviewed at length on hidden camera by Claude Lanzmann, can be seen and heard in latter's documentary film *Shoah*. Among the judicial testimonies of the other 27 camp personnel brought to trial in Germany were those of Alfred Schluch, Hermann Gley, Erich Fuchs, Erich Bauer, and Heinrich Matthes.

Alfred Schluch had worked at the euthanasia institutes of Grafeneck and Hadamar prior to his assignment to Belzec in February or March 1942. He described the routine killing procedure of the Belzec camp as follows: " After unloading, the ambulant Jews proceeded to the assembly place. At the unloading the Jews were told that they were going to be resettled and before that had to be bathed and disinfected. The speech was given by Wirth and also by his translator, a Jewish capo.

Next the Jews were then led to the undressing barracks. In one of the barracks the men and in the other the Jewish women and children had to undress. After undressing the male Jews and the women with children were led separately through the tube. ...My position in the tube was quite near the undressing barracks. Wirth had installed me there, because in his opinion I could have a pacifying effect on the Jews. I had to direct the Jews along the path to the gas chamber after they left the undressing barracks. I believe that I made the way to the gas chambers easier for the Jews, because they must have been convinced from my words or gestures that they were actually to be bathed. After the Jews had entered the gas chambers, the doors were tightly closed by Hackenholt himself or by the Ukrainians assigned to him. Then Hackenholt started the motor that was used for the gassing. After about 5 to 7 minutes--and I only estimate the length of time--the peephole into the gas chamber was looked through to establish whether everyone was dead. Only then were the outer doors opened and the gas chambers aired out. ...After the gas chambers were aired out, a Jewish work commando under the direction of a capo arrived and took the corpses out of the chambers. I was also occasionally assigned to supervise at this place. Thus I can exactly describe the procedures, because I saw and experienced everything myself. The Jews had been very tightly packed into the gas chambers. For this reason the corpses did not lie on the ground, but all leaned in a jumble this way and that, the one backwards, the other forwards, one prone to the side, the other kneeling, each according to the space around. The corpses were at least partially besmirched with excrement and urine, others in part with saliva. The lips and nose tips of some of the corpses had turned blue. With some the eyes were closed, with others the eyes had rolled. The corpses were pulled out of the chambers and immediately examined by one of the dentists. The dentist removed rings from the fingers and pulled out gold teeth. The valuables recovered in this way were tossed into a box that had been provided. After this procedure the corpses were thrown into the large graves nearby. ”

Heinrich Gley arrived in Belzec in the summer of 1942 and was eventually assigned to the “cremation commando.”

(Verbrennungskommando) Concerning the burning of the corpses, he testified: “ As I remember the gassing was stopped at the end of 1942, when there was snow already on the ground. Then the general exhumation and cremation of the corpses began; it might have lasted from November 1942 until March 1943. The cremation was carried out day and night without a break, and indeed at first at one and then later at two fire sites. It was possible to cremate some 2000 corpses at one fire site within 24 hours. About 4 weeks after the beginning of the cremation operation the second fire site was constructed. On average, therefore, some 300,000 corpses were cremated at the first site over 5 months, at the second site some 240,000 over 4 months. Naturally this is a matter of estimates based on averages. To figure the total number of corpses at 500,000 could be correct. ”

Erich Fuchs, who was stationed first at Belzec, gave the following testimony concerning the construction of the gassing facilities at Sobibor: “ On Wirth’s instructions I drove to Lemberg in a truck and picked up a carburetor engine, that I transported back to Sobibor. ...We unloaded the motor. It was a heavy Russian gasoline engine (probably a tank engine or tractor engine) with at least 200 PS (V-motor, 8 cylinder, water-cooled). We placed the motor on the a concrete base and installed the connection between the exhaust and the pipeline. Then we tested the motor. At first it did not work. I repaired the ignition and the valve with the result that the motor finally started up. The chemist, whom I already knew from Belzec, went into the gas chamber with a measuring instrument in order to test the concentration of gas. In conclusion a test gassing was then conducted. As best I remember, some 30-40 women were gassed in the chamber. ”

Erich Bauer testified to the gassing procedure at the Sobibor camp, where he served from April 1942 to November 1943. “Perhaps 3 or 4 times I also led certain groups through the tube to the gas chambers.

After all no member of the permanent staff in Sobibor could exempt himself over the course of time from having to perform this and all other functions occurring during the destruction process. It may sound astonishing that the Jews went unsuspecting to their death. Resistance occurred extremely seldom. The Jews only became suspicious when they were already in the gas chambers. At this point in time, however, there was no turning back. The chambers were densely packed. ...The doors were sealed airtight and immediately the gassing procedure commenced. After some 20-30 minutes there was complete silence in the gas chambers; the people were gassed and dead. Then the chambers were opened, work Jews dragged the people who had been killed out of the gas chambers and transported the victims by means of lorry to the graves. Later the victims were cremated.”

Heinrich Matthes was assigned to Treblinka in the summer of 1942. He testified: “ The entire time that I was in Treblinka, I served in the upper part of the camp. The upper part of the camp was that part of Treblinka in which the gas chambers were located and in which the corpses of the Jews who had been killed were at first put in graves and later were cremated. ” Matthes’ job was to supervise the Jewish workers in the upper camp. “These had to carry away the corpses and later to cremate the corpses. There were also work Jews, who had to break out the gold teeth of the corpses.”

All of these above testimonies of camp personnel were given to German judicial authorities in the course of pre-trial investigation. The testimonies were given under oath and signed, and those testifying had been advised of their right not to give self-incriminating testimony.

Third Category:

Approximately 30 Germans were stationed at each of the camps and held the key supervisory positions. More numerous were the guards, about 120 per camp, who were for the most part Ukrainians recruited out of the POW camps for captured Soviet soldiers and sent to a special SS training facility at Trawniki southeast of Lublin. Some of these men, having returned to the Soviet Union, gave testimony to German judicial investigators who were collecting evidence for the trial of Karl Streibel, the commandant of Trawniki. Others emigrated abroad, including to the U.S., where some of them faced judicial investigation by the Office of Special Investigations in the U.S. Department of Justice.

Aleksandr Illarionwitsch Semigodow testified that he was captured at the outbreak of war in June 1941 and volunteered to serve with the Germans to escape a very probable death by starvation in the POW camp at Cholm. He was sent to Trawniki in March 1942, and then served at Belzec from August 1942 to March 1943. At first trains arrived daily, and in some cases even twice daily, and then the number of incoming transports gradually diminished. The Jews were killed in the six gas chambers, and the bodies were buried. Then in late fall, the graves were opened, and the burning of the corpses began. This was not finished until March 1943.

Captured in August 1941, Peter Petrowitsch Browzew was taken to Trawniki at the end of 1941 and assigned to Belzec in June 1942. About his experiences in Belzec, he gave the following testimony about procedures after the first small wooden building with three gas chambers had been replaced with a larger cement structure with six chambers: “ Upon the arrival of a train, several train cars at a time were uncoupled and brought into the death camp. In the camp the train car doors were opened, and the Jews were told that they had come to work and that now they would be taken to the bath and should hand over their valuables. Next they were told to undress. Then the Jews were led

through a gate surrounded by barbed wire into a wooden barracks, where they undressed and where their hair was cut. No difference was made between men and women. They all had to undress in one room. Next they were led through the same gate to the gas chambers. There were six gas chambers, three on each side of the entrance. In general the chambers were usually crammed with some 200 Jews. The people were locked in the chambers for 10-15 minutes. Next the chambers were opened, and a Jewish work commando had to take the corpses to a grave already dug near the gas chambers on the grounds of the camp. However, before the corpses were removed from the gas chambers, one worker from the Jewish work commando tore out the gold teeth from the dead. ” The incoming transports of Jews came to an end in late 1942, and the burning of the buried corpses began. “The corpses were pulled out of the graves, they were decomposed. There were metal rails, wood, and everything was burned. 24 hours through, day and night, the corpses burned.” Then on February 3, 1943, Browzew escaped from Belzec and joined a partisan band.

Feodor Federenko gave sworn, pre-trial testimony on May 25, 1976, to American investigators in Hartford, Connecticut. He was captured by the Germans in July 1941 and eventually was sent to the large POW camp in Cholm. Here he was picked out of the camp and sent to Trawniki for training. In late August or early September 1942, he was assigned to Treblinka. He was asked: “Were you aware of the fact that thousands of Jews were being exterminated in Treblinka?” He answered, “Yes, I knew.” Asked if he was assigned to the forced labor camp or the camp “where they had gas chambers,” he replied: “I was where the gas chambers were.”

At his subsequent denaturalization hearing in June 1978, Fedorenko testified over three days in greater detail. He denied that he had actually entered the section of the camp where the gas chambers were located but admitted that he had once been posted on a guard tower overlooking this section of the camp. “I saw how they were loading up dead

people, loading them on the stretchers. ...And they were loading them in a hole.” Later in his testimony, he reconfirmed that this part of the camp “is where there was the workers that took the bodies and buried them or stacked them in the holes. This is where the gas chambers were.” Concerning the unloading of Jews from the trains, he testified: “Some were picked for work and the others, they went to the gas chambers.”

Fourth category:

Many Poles in the villages around these camps saw the endless flow of transports, smelled the terrible odors of the camps, and heard all kinds of rumors of how the Jews were killed, including not only by gas but also by steam and electricity. Some Polish witnesses had particular vantage points, which enabled them to know much more about the camps than other Poles in the surrounding areas. For instance, between November 1 and December 23, 1941, a small force of Polish workers was employed to construct the initial buildings, including the first small gas chamber with only three rooms, at Belzec. Stanislaw Kozak and Edward Ferens both testified immediately after the war about their construction work in Belzec. According to Kozak sand was poured between the double walls of one small building, whose interior was partially covered with zinc sheeting. The building had three rooms, each with two doors, one entering from a interior corridor and the other exiting to the outside. The doors were very strong and covered with rubber; they opened outward and were secured with crossbars on the outside. When Edward Ferens asked the German supervisor the purpose of the building, the latter merely laughed.

While the Poles worked on these buildings, the black-uniformed auxiliaries dug a large pit behind it. Beginning in March 1942 transports began arriving, sometimes 2-3 per day. In the fall the transports stopped, and an excavator was employed to open and empty the mass

graves. For the next three months the terrible smell of burning bodies pervaded the area and could be detected up to 15 kilometers away. The camp was then dismantled.

Jan Jrzowski and Jan Piwonski worked at the train station in Sobibor, directly across from the ramp where the transports for the camp were unloaded. Three German officers arrived in the fall of 1941 and measured the station ramp. Construction on the camp began March 1942, and the observant Poles wondered about the arrival and unloading of large, heavy doors covered with rubber. The transports began arriving in April, and by fall the smell of decaying corpses was detectable. In October 1942 an excavator arrived. The graves were opened and the corpses burned. The smell of burning bodies reached Wlodawa 9 kilometers away. The fire within the camp could be seen clearly at night. On October 14, 1943, an uprising occurred in the camp, after which it was closed.

Fifth category:

Concerning the last category of eyewitnesses, due to prisoner uprisings and breakouts in Treblinka and Sobibor, approximately 50 Jews from each camp survived the war. Some testimonies were recorded even before the end of the war, and one Treblinka survivor, Samuel Rajzman, testified very briefly before the International Military Tribunal at Nürnberg. The testimonies of many others have subsequently been collected, especially at Yad Vashem, and many have been published.

The situation regarding Belzec is much different. Perhaps as many as six prisoners escaped individually from Belzec, but only one, Rudolf Reder, has given extensive post-war testimony. In his very early testimony of December 1945, Reder recounted how he had been deported from Lwow to Belzec on August 17, 1942, in a train of 50 cars, each crammed with 100 Jews. He was only one of eight prisoners selected as skilled workers to join the Jewish labor force in the camp that day.

Working in the camp as a mechanic, for several months he operated the excavator that dug graves behind the gas chamber. He could see the gas chambers even more closely when he delivered gasoline (Benzin) to the engine room at the end of the corridor that ran between the three gas chambers on each side. He gave the following description: “In these chambers the people were packed so tightly together, that even after death they were found in standing position. As soon as all chambers were crammed full, all the doors were tightly shut;then the motor was started. The work of the motor was watched over by the prisoner Moniek, a cabman from Cracow. The motor was always run exactly for 20 minutes, after which Moniek gave one of the machinists the signal to turn it off. After the motor had been turned off, on the order of Moniek the prisoners opened all the doors wide and pulled the dead in pairs out of the chambers with the help of straps placed around the hands of the corpses; the corpses were then pulled to the mass graves already dug out beforehand by machine. On the way between the ramp of the chamber and the grave, dentists pulled gold teeth from the corpses.” In November 1942 Reder escaped his captors and survived in hiding in Lwow until the arrival of the Red Army. He emigrated to Canada in 1953.

Once again, human memory is imperfect. The testimonies of both survivors and other witnesses to the events in Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka are no more immune to forgetfulness, error, exaggeration, distortion, and repression than eyewitness accounts of other events in the past. They differ, for instance, on how long each gassing operation took, on the dimensions and capacity of the gas chambers, on the number of undressing barracks, and on the roles of particular individuals. Gerstein, citing Globocnik, claimed the camps used diesel motors, but witnesses who actually serviced the engines in Belzec and Sobibor (Reder and Fuchs) spoke of gasoline engines. Once again, however, without exception all concur on the vital issue at dispute, namely that Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka were death camps whose primary

purpose was to kill in gas chambers through the carbon monoxide from engine exhaust, and that the hundreds of thousands of corpses of Jews killed there were first buried and then later cremated.

5.5 Documentary Evidence concerning Aktion or Einsatz (Operation) Reinhard (alternatively spelled Reinhardt)

The deportation of Jews to and killing of Jews in the camps of Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka, as well as the confiscation of their property, became known as Operation Reinhard, under the command of Odilo Globocnik, the SS and Police Leader in the district of Lublin. The expression Operation Reinhard appears in only a few German documents. So little documentary evidence explicitly dealing with Operation Reinhard survived because it was intentionally and systematically destroyed in 1943 and 1944. This is clearly revealed in a letter from its director, Odilo Globocnik, to Heinrich Himmler of January 5, 1944. It was a cover letter for Globocnik's submission of a final financial accounting of the program, for which Globocnik wanted a quick confirmation of financial propriety, given the "odium" (Globocnik's own expression) that attached to his past reputation in financial matters. Globocnik gave another reason for urgently concluding an audit of the financial side of Operation Reinhard, namely that its "records must be destroyed as soon as possible, after the documents of all other work in this matter have already been destroyed."

An early document mentioning "Einsatz Reinhard" dates from July 18, 1942. It is a form on which the personnel specially authorized "for the carrying-out of the work of the Jewish resettlement within the framework of 'Operation Reinhard' with the SS and Police Leader in the Lublin district" acknowledged having been oriented to specific rules of secrecy by SS-Hauptsturmführer Höfle on Globocnik's staff. They were forbidden to make any communication, verbal or oral, concerning the "Jewish resettlement" (Judenumsiedlung) under any circumstances to

anyone outside of Operation Reinhard. Moreover, there was “an explicit prohibition against photography in the camps of ‘Operation Reinhard.’”

One surviving file of Aktion Reinhard documents (partially burned) concerns the camp personnel at Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka. Two letters date from April 13, 1943. The first of these, addressed to SS-Obersturmführer Kuno Ther of the SS Central Office for Personnel, proposed promotions of the officers and men of Aktion Reinhard. It noted: “The Reichsführer-SS [Himmler] had approved in principle the promotion of the most deserving officers and men after his visit to the Sobibor camp.” It identified Christian Wirth as Inspector and Gottlieb Hering, Franz Reichleitner, and Franz Stangl as “camp commanders.” (Lagerführer) The remaining non-commissioned officers on the list “had been employed in Aktion ‘Reinhard’ since the beginning and had proven themselves in the best possible manner.”

A second letter of the same date, from Globocnik to Gruppenführer von Herff of the SS Central Officer for Personnel of the same day and sent by courier, was slightly rephrased. It did not mention Himmler’s visit to Sobibor specifically but stated that Himmler “on the occasion of his visit in March had visited installations of Aktion ‘Reinhard’” and approved promotions. The enclosed promotion list was for “members of the SS-Special Commando ‘Einsatz Reinhard’.” Subsequent correspondence in the file concerning the recommended promotions of Aktion Reinhard personnel confirmed Himmler’s visit and inspection of Sobibor but dated it precisely to February 12, 1943.

On October 27, 1943, Globocnik confirmed to Herff in the SS Central Office for Personnel that included on his staff of 434 men were 92 men “from the Führer’s Chancellery for the carrying out of Aktion Reinhard.” These were the men who formerly staffed the institutes of the “euthanasia” program for killing mentally- and physically handi-

capped Germans and were subsequently assigned to the camps of Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka, where they could continue to use their expertise in gassing.

Another surviving file of documents that mention Aktion Reinhard concern the audit of Operation Reinhard following Globocnik's transfer from the General Government to Trieste in the fall of 1943. On September 22, 1943, Himmler wrote to Oswald Pohl, head of the Economic and Administrative Main Office of the SS, and Globocnik that, in view of Globocnik's transfer, the latter should turn over an audit of the "'Reinhard' account" (Konto 'Reinhard') to Pohl. On November 4, 1943, Globocnik wrote Himmler from Trieste: "As of October 19, 1943, I have terminated Aktion Reinhardt, which I directed in the General Government, and dissolved all camps." It is only at this point in the fall of 1943 that the alternative spelling of "Reinhardt" rather than "Reinhard" first appeared in the documents.

On January 5, 1944, Globocnik submitted his final report on the "economic part of Aktion Reinhardt." (Wirtschaftlicher Teil der Aktion Reinhardt) This report made clear that alongside the seizure and utilization of Jewish property, Aktion Reinhardt also dealt with "the evacuation itself" (die Aussiedlung selbst) and "the utilization of labor." (die Verwertung der Arbeitskraft) In a brief section of the report devoted to the evacuation, Globocnik reported that the "installations" (Einrichtungen) created for the operation had been "entirely cleared away." (zur Gänze weggeräumt) Moreover, "for purposes of surveillance a small farmstead had been founded in each camp," and the occupants had to be paid continuously to maintain the farmsteads. Concerning the utilization of labor, Globocnik noted that he had had a workforce of some 52,000 working in 18 enterprises, but on November 3, 1943, all the manpower had been withdrawn from the work camps, and the factories had been idled. (In this regard it should be noted that on November 3-4, 1943, some 42,000 Jews in the work camps of Lublin, Trawniki, and Poniatowa were shot in an SS killed action code-

named “Fall Harvest” or Erntefest.) Among the recipients of the Jewish property collected during Operation Reinhard were the Ministry of Economics and Reichsbank as well as the Ministry of Finance.

Several conclusions can be drawn from this miniscule remnant of Operation Reinhard documents. Operation Reinhard was directed by Odilo Globocnik, the SS and Police Leader of Lublin, and the SS “special commando” of Operation Reinhard was made up of personnel who staffed the death camps of Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka and who had earlier worked in the gassing institutes of the “euthanasia” program in Germany. The deportation of Jews to and the gassing of Jews in these camps was the central purpose of Operation Reinhard, and every effort was made to erase all physical traces of the three camps. The exploitation of Jewish labor and property were collateral aspects of Operation Reinhard, and the Finance Ministry was only one of a number of recipients of Jewish property. Staatssekretär Fritz Reinhardt of the Finance Ministry is not mentioned in any of the documents, and the spelling of Operation Reinhardt with a “t” as in his name begins only in late 1943. The notion that Operation Reinhard was a program for collecting and exploiting Jewish property and was named after the state secretary of the Finance Ministry, Fritz Reinhardt, is farfetched and finds no support in the surviving documents. Nothing in the surviving documents, however, explicitly indicates that Operation Reinhard was named for the assassinated Reinhard Heydrich.

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