

The Holocaust and the Germanization of Ukraine



ERIC C. STEINHART

CAMBRIDGE

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The German invasion of the Soviet Union during the Second World War was central to Nazi plans for territorial expansion and genocidal demographic revolution. To create “living space,” Nazi Germany pursued two policies. The first was the systematic murder of millions of Jews, Slavs, Roma, and other groups that the Nazis found undesirable on racial, religious, ethnic, ideological, hereditary, or behavioral grounds. It also pursued a parallel, albeit smaller, program to mobilize supposedly Germanic residents of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union – so-called Volksdeutsche, or ethnic Germans – as the vanguard of German expansion. This study examines the intersection of these two projects in Transnistria, a portion of southern Ukraine that, because of its numerous Volksdeutsche communities, became an epicenter of both Nazi Volksdeutsche policy and the Holocaust in conquered Soviet territory. It ultimately asks why local residents, whom German authorities identified as Volksdeutsche, participated in the Holocaust with apparent enthusiasm.

Eric C. Steinhart earned a PhD in history from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2010. His dissertation received the 2011 Fritz Stern Prize from the Friends of the German Historical Institute for best doctoral dissertation on German history written in North America. From 2009 until 2012, he worked as a historian, serving as the Curt C. and Else Silberman International Tracing Service Research Scholar for what is now the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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Map 1. German-occupied Europe, 1942. Map prepared by Bryan Hart.

Introduction

Operation Barbarossa, the 1941 German invasion of the Soviet Union, launched the most destructive military campaign in Europe since the Thirty Years' War. For Adolf Hitler and the Nazi leadership, the war "in the East" was not simply an epic land grab. The territory from the Baltic to the Black Sea that Germany and its allies conquered during 1941 and 1942 was singularly important to the Third Reich's plan to transform Europe and ultimately, perhaps the globe. Nazi war aims were twofold. First, Hitler believed that Germany could project hegemonic power only by conquering Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Where this expansion was to stop was unclear, even to the Nazis. Their mental map of *Lebensraum*, or "living space," apparently ended at the Ural Mountains.

Second, Nazi planners believed that this territory would become an asset to Germany only if the region's millions of Slavs and Jews disappeared. Regarding Jews as the most pernicious of the area's many supposedly inferior peoples and as the Soviet regime's puppeteers, Nazi authorities targeted Soviet Jewry for mass killing from the very start of Operation Barbarossa. During the war, German authorities, their allies, and local collaborators murdered some two million Jews in conquered Soviet territory – more than a third of all Holocaust victims. Whereas German authorities in the Reich and Western Europe generally transported Jews to theoretically clandestine extermination centers in Poland, their counterparts in the occupied sections of the Soviet Union perpetrated a very public genocide. There, German forces and their helpers gunned down their victims in mass shootings.

Although Jews were the Nazis' preeminent racial enemies in the occupied Soviet Union, they were not alone. Nazi planners envisioned enslaving local Slavs once the war against the Soviet Union had been won, until German agricultural machinery made them obsolete. Then, they too would share

the Jews' grim fate. For the Nazis, the destruction of Soviet Jewry was a gambit in a planned long-term genocidal demographic revolution.¹

This study explores a complementary wartime Nazi project in the occupied Soviet Union that facilitated the Holocaust: the mobilization of local ethnic Germans, or *Volksdeutschen* (hereafter *Volksdeutsche*), to support Nazi rule. To replace the Jews and Slavs slated for eradication, German officials anticipated populating the region with militarized agricultural settlements inhabited by Germans. Without a surplus of Germans in the Reich or the wartime resources to relocate Germans to the conquered Soviet Union, the Nazis marshaled the territory's *Volksdeutsche* as the Third Reich's demographic vanguard.

Tens of thousands of German-speakers had relocated to the Russian Empire at the tsars' invitation by the early nineteenth century. They settled along the Volga and the Black Sea. The descendants of these "colonists" often clustered in homogenous communities, maintaining limited connections to Germany. The largest group of Soviet ethnic Germans to come under the Third Reich's control was the so-called Black Sea Germans (*Schwartzmeerdeutschen*), 130,000 *Volksdeutsche* located largely in southern Ukraine's Odessa oblast.²

During the Second World War, German occupiers targeted the Black Sea Germans for a violent Nazification program. When area German authorities resolved to murder Jewish deportees, the region's ethnic Germans became some of the most heavily involved Holocaust perpetrators. This study examines the Nazi *Volksdeutsche* enterprise in southern Ukraine and analyzes why so many local ethnic Germans participated in the Holocaust with apparent enthusiasm.

GERMAN VOLKSDEUTSCHE POLICY

Nazi planners were not the first to conceive of *Volksdeutsche* as a foundation for German territorial expansion "in the East." Before the First World War, Pan-German thinkers – many of them ethnic Germans – believed that the Russian Empire's *Volksdeutsche* could aid Germany's eastward expansion.³ At the First World War's twilight, the German military

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

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

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

advanced German influence in the crumbling Romanov Empire by succoring local Volksdeutsche.⁴ Germany's 1918 defeat increased the importance of German-speaking minorities in East Central and Eastern Europe in projecting German power. With the postwar reallocation of the German Empire's eastern periphery to Poland and the disintegration of the Habsburg Empire, German-speakers, formerly dominant members of Germanophone empires, became minorities in newly formed states. For Pan-Germans, Volksdeutsche abroad no longer supported future territorial expansion deep into the Russian steppe, but maintained a demographic claim to land that German nationalists regarded as rightly part of Germany. To this end, the Weimar Republic subvented these minorities financially and guarded their linguistic and cultural autonomy diplomatically.⁵

State assistance to ethnic Germans abroad intensified after the 1933 Nazi seizure of power. Like the governments of the Weimar Republic, the Nazi regime saw Volksdeutsche communities as an instrument to reverse Germany's territorial losses after the First World War. The Nazis centralized the diffuse efforts of the Weimar governments and placed ethnic German affairs under the supervision of the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle (Ethnic German Liaison Office) or VoMi. The VoMi coordinated the multitude of state and private actors working on behalf of Volksdeutsche and communicated a unified National Socialist message to ethnic Germans. During the mid-1930s, Heinrich Himmler's SS (Schutzstaffel, Protection Squadron) colonized the VoMi, ultimately co-opting it.⁶ Hitler's October 1939 appointment of Himmler as Reich Commissar for the Strengthening of Germandom (Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums) cemented Volksdeutsche affairs within the SS's domain.⁷

The Third Reich used Volksdeutsche to provoke war. During 1938, Hitler trumped up accusations of assaults against ethnic Germans as a pretext to annex the Sudetenland and an entrée to occupy rump Czechoslovakia. The following September, alleged mistreatment of ethnic Germans in

4 *Ibid.*, 583–585.

5 John Hiden, "The Weimar Republic and the Problem of Auslandsdeutsche," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 12, no. 2 (1977): 273–289.

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

7 On the Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums, see Robert L. Koehl, *RKFDV: German Resettlement and Population Policy, 1939–1945: A History of the Reich Commission for the Strengthening of Germandom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957). Markus Leniger, *Nationalsozialistische "Volkstumsarbeit" und Umsiedlungspolitik 1933–1945: Von der Minderheitenbetreuung zur Siedlerauslese* (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2006). See also Isabel Heinemann, "Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut: Das Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt der SS und die rassenpolitische Neuordnung Europas" (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2003).

Poland constituted a key Nazi justification for the invasion. Whereas Volksdeutsche minorities in Czechoslovakia and Poland facilitated Hitler's foreign policy aims, ethnic Germans elsewhere in Eastern Europe presented a diplomatic impediment, particularly in territory that, after the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, fell within the Soviet Union's sphere of influence. To remove this source of friction, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact's secret protocols included provisions for population transfers. After the accord, Hitler ordered Himmler and the VoMi to relocate Volksdeutsche from the Baltic, Volhynia, Bessarabia, and northern Bukovina to German-occupied Poland. There, Eastern European Volksdeutsche could help "Germanize" occupied Poland.⁸

Following the German invasion of the Soviet Union, the Nazis reversed their short-lived policy of relocating Volksdeutsche from Soviet territory. With Germany now at war with the Soviet Union and confident of victory, the VoMi took charge of the country's remaining Volksdeutsche, whom Soviet authorities had not permitted to relocate to German-controlled territory before the invasion. Himmler dispatched Sonderkommando R (Special Command R[ussia]), a special VoMi unit to mobilize ethnic Germans in conquered Soviet territory as the demographic seeds of future "Germanization." Removed from the VoMi's chain of command and subordinated directly to the Office of the Reichsführer-SS, Sonderkommando R functioned as Himmler's back-pocket Volksdeutsche affairs unit in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union. It operated in both German-occupied Soviet territory and, significantly for the Black Sea Germans, in "Transnistria," the territory along the Black Sea that Germany had granted its Romanian allies.

ROMANIA AND THE HOLOCAUST

Romania's wartime alliance with Nazi Germany and participation in the Holocaust shaped Nazi efforts to marshal the Black Sea Germans. During 1941, Romania was an eager partner in Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union and mass murder.⁹ Before Operation Barbarossa, Romania and

8 Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, 157–179. See also, Phillip T. Rutherford, *Prelude to the Final Solution: The Nazi Program for Deporting Ethnic Poles, 1939–1941* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007); Catherine Epstein, "Germanization in the Warthegau: Germans, Jews and Poles and the Making of a 'German' Gau," in *Heimat, Region, and Empire: Spatial Identities under National Socialism*, eds. Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann and Maiken Umbach (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 93–111.

9 Romania's alliance with the Third Reich and its involvement in the Holocaust has been the subject of considerable historical research. See Jean Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941–1942: The Romanian Mass Murder Campaigns*, trans. Karen Gold, 3 vol. (Tel Aviv: The Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research

Germany shared a key ambition – Soviet defeat. Ironically, Nazi Germany's pre-1941 diplomatic machinations had permitted Romania's neighbors to claim Romanian territory. The Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact declared Bessarabia and northern Bukovina within the Soviet sphere of influence. The Soviet Union annexed those territories during June 1940.¹⁰ Sensing Romanian weakness, Hungary pressed its claims to Transylvania, a contested region in northern Romania. To secure Hungarian support, Germany and Italy brokered the Second Vienna Award, which granted Hungary northern Transylvania in August 1940.¹¹ The following month, Bulgaria, again with German and Italian backing, compelled Romania to sign the Treaty of Craiova, transferring the contested border region of Southern Dobruja to Bulgaria.¹² Successive territorial losses forced King Carol II's abdication and brought Ion Antonescu to power. Otherwise unable to reverse its territorial losses, Romania accepted Nazi entreaties to join in the attack on the Soviet Union. Participation promised not only the return of Bessarabia and northern Bukovina but also the acquisition of territory between the Dniester and Bug Rivers, the region that Hitler dubbed Transnistria.¹³

Romania also had an established anti-Semitic tradition. It did not grant Jews civil equality until after the First World War, when the conflict's victors extracted this concession in exchange for territory.¹⁴ During the interwar period, preexisting Christian anti-Judaism, perpetuated by the Romanian Orthodox Church, reinforced economic anti-Semitism that grew from the disproportionately high representation of Jews in the Romanian middle class.¹⁵ Romania's territorial expansion after 1918 into previously Habsburg lands in Transylvania and northern Bukovina and the formerly Russian province of Bessarabia exacerbated anti-Semitism. Most Jews in

Center, 2003); Dennis Deletant, "Ghetto Experience in Golta, Transnistria, 1942–1944," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 18, no. 1 (2004): 1–26; Dennis Deletant, "Transnistria and the Romanian Solution to the 'Jewish Problem,'" in *The Shoah in Ukraine: History, Testimony, Memorialization*, eds. Ray Brandon and Wendy Lower (Bloomington: Indiana University Press in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2008), 156–189; Radu Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania: The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies Under the Antonescu Regime, 1940–1944* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2000). See also Mariana Hausleitner, et al., eds., *Rumänien und der Holocaust: Zu den Massenverbrechen in Transnistrien, 1941–1944* (Berlin: Metropol, 2001).

10 Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 136.

11 *Ibid.*, 185.

12 *Ibid.*, 137.

13 As Alexander Dallin noted, Antonescu expressed interest in trading Transnistria for Hungarian-occupied Transylvania. Alexander Dallin, *Odessa, 1941–1944: A Case Study of Soviet Territory under Foreign Rule*, 2nd ed. (Iași: Center for Romanian Studies, 1998), 59–60.

14 Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 12.

15 William I. Brustein, *Roots of Hate: Anti-Semitism in Europe before the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 66–70, 238–248.

these territories were Yiddish-, Hungarian-, or Russian-speaking, which fueled Romanian fears that unassimilated ethnic minorities, above all Jews, were diluting the ethnic purity of the expanded Romanian state.¹⁶ Anti-Semitism was prominent in interwar Romanian political discourse and constituted a key platform for two political parties, the Christian National Defense League and the League of the Archangel Michael (later known as the Iron Guard). During the early 1940s, anti-Semitism became state policy.¹⁷ The Romanian government under King Carol II, taking its cue from Germany's Nuremberg Laws, enacted Law No. 2650, which circumscribed social interaction between Jews and gentiles and codified a definition of who was a Jew that was more expansive than the one employed in its German model.¹⁸ After Carol II's September 1940 abdication, Antonescu's new Legionary State copied Nazi anti-Semitic measures. During his first six months in office, Antonescu expropriated Jewish property, conscripted Jews for forced labor, and limited Jews' access to education and health care.¹⁹ Within a year, Romania erected a wall of anti-Semitic legislation comparable to the one the Nazi regime had taken nearly a decade to build. By early 1941, Romania had clearly signaled its willingness to collaborate in Nazi Germany's war upon the Jews.

Romanian anti-Jewish violence intensified after the attack on the Soviet Union. At Iași, on the border between the Regat and Bessarabia, which Soviet forces had occupied the previous year, Romanian forces unleashed a multiday pogrom during which thousands of Jews perished.²⁰ This pattern repeated itself as the Romanian military advanced into Bessarabia, Bukovina, and the Soviet Union's pre-1939 border territories. During July 1941, Romanian forces and their German counterparts systematically shot many of the Jewish residents of the city of Kishinev (Chișinău) and deported the survivors.²¹ Romanian anti-Jewish violence peaked a few months later. When a Soviet-planted bomb destroyed the Romanian military headquarters in Odessa in late October 1941, Romanian authorities blamed the city's Jews and launched a killing spree that claimed as many as 25,000 lives.²²

Despite what the Nazis regarded as auspicious anti-Semitic foundations, Romanian anti-Jewish policy differed from that of the Third Reich. Unlike their Nazi counterparts, Romanian authorities differentiated between assimilated Romanian Jews and those viewed as unassimilated foreign Jews residing in the newly (re)acquired territories. For Romania, the decisive

16 Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 13–14.

18 *Ibid.*, 20.

20 *Ibid.*, 63–90.

22 *Ibid.*, 178–182.

17 *Ibid.*, 17–21.

19 *Ibid.*, 22–27.

21 *Ibid.*, 104.

factor was culture, not race. Although Romania pursued expropriatory and discriminatory measures against assimilated Jews in the Regat – the principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia in their 1859 borders – it did not target them for annihilation. By contrast, Romania’s leaders persecuted Jews in Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, whom they viewed as alien and therefore a threat. During the war, this distinction permitted the Romanian Jewish community’s leaders, including Dr. Wilhelm Filderman, to meet with high-level Romanian officials in Bucharest as Romanian military and police forces murdered thousands of Jews in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union – a situation that the Germans found unfathomable.²³

Although Romania and Germany pursued intense anti-Semitic campaigns during 1941, they differed on what the “Jewish problem” was and how it might be “solved.” If by summer 1941 it had not yet decided to kill all of Europe’s Jews, the Nazi regime anticipated the mass murder of Jews in captured Soviet territory. Before the invasion, German planners proposed killing Soviet Jews through an unspecified combination of starvation and exposure in Arctic Russia. As it became clear that this plan was infeasible, the Germans shifted to a policy of immediate and total mass killing by mobile shooting squads.²⁴ Romanian aims were more limited. To eliminate what they considered inassimilable ethnic minorities and to solidify control over newly reacquired Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, Romania’s leaders used ethnic cleansing to eliminate Jews and other allegedly troublesome minorities, including Roma.²⁵ Deportation deep into the Soviet Union and, according to Antonescu, preferably across the Urals, constituted the solution most attractive to the Romanian leadership.²⁶ Provided that Jews from Bessarabia and northern Bukovina disappeared, it mattered little to the Romanians whether they reached their destination or perished en route. Whereas the Germans planned in summer 1941 to murder Soviet Jews and viewed deportation and ghettoization as stopgap measures, the Romanians generally preferred deportation to mass shootings.

Romania’s enthusiasm for mass murder waned during late 1942 as prospects of total German victory dimmed. During fall 1942, for example, Antonescu postponed indefinitely the implementation of an agreement with Germany to deport Jews from the Regat to Operation Reinhard’s

23 Deletant, “Ghetto Experience in Golta, Transnistria, 1942–1944,” 7.

24 Christopher R. Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939–March 1942* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 103.

25 Viorel Achim, *The Roma in Romanian History*, trans. Richard Davies (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004), 163–188. Vladimir Solonari, *Purifying the Nation: Population Exchange and Ethnic Cleansing in Nazi-Allied Romania* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

26 Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 142.

killing centers in Poland. During 1943 and early 1944, Romanian authorities not only suspended deportations of Jews and Roma to Transnistria but even began to allow the deportees to return to Romania. The coordinated mass killing campaign that Transnistria's Romanian authorities pursued with German assistance during winter 1941–1942 marked the height of Romanian anti-Jewish violence that ebbed and flowed with Germany's military position.

SONDERKOMMANDO R IN TRANSNISTRIA

Offering Antonescu control of Transnistria was the price Germany had to pay for Romanian support in the invasion of the Soviet Union, but it had the tremendous drawback of placing the largest group of Soviet ethnic Germans in occupied territory under Romanian control. For Himmler and the VoMi, this situation was intolerable. They feared that the Black Sea Germans would languish under Romanian rule, and they also insisted that an ethnic German demographic bulwark in southern Ukraine was necessary to secure future German claims there after the war when a victorious Germany might wrest control of Transnistria from the Romanians.²⁷ The Romanians, junior partners in the alliance, permitted Sonderkommando R to operate in their occupation zone although they were well aware of the SS's designs on Transnistria.

In German-occupied territory, Himmler's subordinates were often challenged by other powerful German organizations, including the Wehrmacht and the civil administration. In Transnistria, by contrast, Sonderkommando R had to contend only with the Third Reich's Romanian allies. Owing to high-level agreements between the SS and the Romanians, which ceded ethnic German affairs to Sonderkommando R, and the willingness of area SS officers to run roughshod over Romanian occupation officials, the SS carved out unparalleled autonomy in Transnistria. Nowhere else in German-dominated Europe did the SS have such unfettered freedom to mobilize local German-speakers as a precursor to future German settlement. Examining Sonderkommando R's Volksdeutsche project in Transnistria provides an exceptional window into embryonic Nazi plans for the German-occupied Soviet Union.

27 There was substantial debate among German authorities regarding Transnistria and its Volksdeutsche population. Some Nazi planners, including Dr. Georg Leibbrandt, Alfred Rosenberg's deputy for political affairs and himself an ethnic German from southern Ukraine, opposed granting Romania southern Ukraine. Dallin, *Odessa*, 57. As late as early 1942, however, some German planners continued to toy with relocating Volksdeutsche from Transnistria to occupied Poland on the model of earlier German "resettlements." Heinemann, "*Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut*," 420–421.

Spread thinly across Romanian-controlled southern Ukraine, Sonderkommando R's personnel faced daunting challenges in organizing local Volksdeutsche into militarized islands of Germanness. Soviet rule and months of combat had devastated southern Ukraine's once-fertile countryside, and area residents faced starvation with winter's rapid approach. Tensions between Sonderkommando R's personnel and local Romanian authorities also boiled over into violent confrontations.

To make matters worse from the SS's perspective, the VoMi found few sufficiently "ethnically German" area residents to include in the *Volksgemeinschaft*, the Nazi racial community. Despite extensive institutional experience identifying and relocating ethnic Germans across Eastern Europe before 1941, the VoMi had not operationalized a definition for a category as ambiguous as ethnic identity. Its personnel therefore resorted to highly subjective evaluations of cultural proximity to Germany, especially interwar National Socialist affiliations, to identify would-be ethnic Germans. In Transnistria, even these measures of "Germanness" proved useless. The Black Sea Germans' circumscribed historical contacts with Germany made them one of the most culturally distant groups of ethnic Germans that Nazi forces encountered. Transnistria's Volksdeutsche also had only rarely, if ever, engaged in National Socialist agitation before the war. That Transnistria's ethnic Germans had intermarried with Slavs and Jews, as the SS suspected, merely compounded the VoMi's concerns about the racial viability of the area's Volksdeutsche. Although tantalized by the demographic opportunities that the Black Sea Germans presented, Sonderkommando R's personnel were left to rule a population that they regarded as especially suspect in an especially remote and backward corner of Hitler's new empire.

Driven by a commitment to National Socialism and a desire to maintain the VoMi's outpost in occupied Ukraine, Sonderkommando R's leaders brushed aside these obstacles. Without knowing which local residents to include in the Nazi racial community, the VoMi ceded ethnic classification to supposedly reliable indigenous informants, permitting them to define the boundaries of Germanness. For these putative Volksdeutsche, the VoMi unfurled a muscular Germanization project that hinged on material rewards, ethnic cleansing, propaganda, and constant violence.

Notwithstanding the brutality of Nazi rule in rural Transnistria's ethnic German communities, local residents understood the benefits of inclusion in the *Volksgemeinschaft* and adeptly manipulated the Third Reich's racial categories. In insular communities, where family ties danced across Nazi racial boundaries, area inhabitants exploited their power over ethnic classification to benefit from German policies. Initially unpersuaded by Nazi

entreaties to identify all local Jews, many would-be Volksdeutsche communities conspired to hide their thoroughly integrated Jewish or “mixed” ancestry members from the Germans. Enticed by the scarce agricultural resources that the VoMi channeled to local Volksdeutsche, area residents charged with ethnic classification included their non-German relatives in the Volksgemeinschaft. By late 1941, unbeknownst to the SS, the Nazi Germanization project was foundering on local prevarication.

At the same time, unanticipated actions by Romania moved local VoMi commanders to enlist residents in mass murder. During fall 1941, the Antonescu regime deported Jews from territories that it had acquired during the invasion, sending them to camps and ghettos near Odessa and along the Bug River’s right bank. Fearing that these Jews could spread epidemic typhus to local SS-controlled communities, Sonderkommando R assisted the Romanians in murdering Jewish deportees near the Bug River during mid-December 1941. Without other personnel in the region, the SS deployed its ethnic German militia (Volksdeutsche Selbstschutz) – units that German authorities had used to contest Romanian rule in the countryside – to shoot tens of thousands of Jews. Initially, Sonderkommando R regarded mass murder as a detour from its central Germanization mission. The Romanians, however, recognized that, if pressed, Sonderkommando R and its local militiamen could assist in “solving” their “Jewish problem.” When German authorities in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine refused to permit the Romanians to deport Jews across the Bug River and into German-controlled territory, the Romanians capitalized on Sonderkommando R’s willingness to kill. Instead of sending Jews across the Bug River, they deported their Jewish prisoners to villages in northeastern Transnistria – the heart of the VoMi’s population project. Confronted by the threat of racial “contamination” and epidemic disease, Sonderkommando R sent ethnic German militiamen on killing operations that lasted until spring 1942, when German diplomatic pressure and the increasing scarcity of victims largely ended the unit’s participation in mass murder. By summer 1942, Transnistria’s Volksdeutsche militiamen had evolved into skilled *genocidaires*, who had mastered many of the techniques that German perpetrators were beginning to deploy at extermination centers in occupied Poland.

Sonderkommando R’s initially unanticipated participation in mass murder bolstered the unit’s once-tenuous Germanization project in Transnistria. Aware that they had sabotaged Nazi ethnic categories, area residents used genocide to demonstrate their Germanness to the SS. As local inhabitants correctly suspected, the SS regarded complicity in genocide as evidence of the National Socialist convictions that, in turn, demonstrated Germanness. Sonderkommando R’s transformation into a killing unit also

provided the VoMi with access to plunder, which it used to reward its local helpers. Few perpetrators enjoyed such impressive material rewards as did Transnistria's Volksdeutsche killers. Augmented by a propaganda and terror apparatus, Sonderkommando R enticed most of Transnistria's Volksdeutsche to the seductions of National Socialism and silenced the handful of dissenters. By early 1944, when Germany's military situation prompted Sonderkommando R to evacuate Transnistria's Volksdeutsche to German-occupied Poland, the VoMi succeeded, albeit briefly, in making Germans by creating killers.

SOURCES

This study would have been impossible but for the recent availability of wartime German and postwar investigative records. Sonderkommando R destroyed its operational records at the war's end to conceal its crimes,²⁸ leaving only fragmentary references to its activities in Transnistria in surviving SS records. Within the past twenty years, two new caches of Sonderkommando R's wartime records have become available. First, the recently declassified records of the British Radio Code and Cypher School contain decrypted wartime German police radio traffic that British intelligence had gathered.²⁹ These intercepts include the text of hundreds of messages that Sonderkommando R sent or received while in Transnistria. Second, records from the Odessa oblast' archive preserve much of the correspondence between Sonderkommando R and Transnistria's Romanian administrators.

Most importantly, scholars now may access the records of nearly a half century of Soviet and West German investigations into Sonderkommando R's crimes. As these investigative records form the core of this study, it is necessary to detail how these investigations interacted. Soviet probes into Sonderkommando R began immediately after the German retreat from southern Ukraine. During mid-1944, the Soviet Extraordinary State Commission for Ascertaining and Investigating Crimes Perpetrated by the German-Fascist Invaders and their Accomplices (*Chrezvychainaia gosudarstvennaia komissiiia po ustanovleniiu i rassledovaniuu zlodeianii nemetsko-fashistskikh zakhvatchikov i ikh soobshchnikov*) interviewed local residents about Sonderkommando R's involvement in mass murder. Later that year, Soviet counterintelligence, or SMERSH (*Smert' Shpionam, Death to Spies*), interrogated some of the captured SS officers from Sonderkommando R. At

28 Aussage von V. S., April 14, 1965, Bundesarchiv-Außenstelle, Ludwigsburg [hereafter BAL], B162/2305. Aussage von G. B., December 13, 1966, BAL, B162/2307, 332.

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

the war's end, the Soviet secret police, or NKVD (Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del, People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs), clandestinely tried former area residents, many of whom the Red Army had captured as members of the German military. Although some convicted ethnic Germans faced immediate execution, after 1956 Soviet authorities generally released suspected local perpetrators to live in special settlements, such as those around Karaganda in the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic.

During the early 1960s, West German prosecutors began to investigate Sonderkommando R's wartime operations in Transnistria. The inquiry was an inaugural case for the Central Office of the State Justice Administrations for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes (Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen zur Aufklärung nationalsozialistischer Verbrechen) in Ludwigsburg, West Germany's primary investigative office for Nazi-era crimes. The West German police ultimately conducted more than 200 interviews with surviving members of Sonderkommando R and their relatives and took some 500 statements from erstwhile residents of Transnistria. Initially focused on SS violence against local ethnic Germans in southern Ukraine, West German authorities eventually focused on Sonderkommando R's role in mass murder.

Shortly after the West German investigation began, the Soviet KGB (Komitet gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti, Committee for State Security), the NKVD's successor organization, reopened an inquiry into Sonderkommando R. Why the Soviets revisited the case is unclear. Definitive answers to this question may be found in the KGB's internal records, which are housed in the archives of the FSB (Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation, Federal'naiia sluzhba bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii) and could not be consulted for this study. That this second round of postwar Soviet investigations into Sonderkommando R paralleled West German probes suggests, however, that Soviet intelligence discovered new West German interest and reopened a cold case. Perhaps anticipating that their findings could shame or prod West Germany into a more thorough inquiry during the Cold War, Soviet authorities pursued detailed investigations into the crimes of local perpetrators who had served in Sonderkommando R's mass shooting campaigns. At the conclusion of their investigation, which resulted in a number of convictions and executions, Soviet authorities telegraphed their results to West German investigators by publishing newspaper articles about the trials in the Russian- and German-language Soviet press.³⁰

30 Izmenniki Rodini rasstrelyani, *Krasnaya Svesda*, August 28, 1966. E. Petrus, "Massenmörder am Pranger," *Neues Leben*, September 6, 1967. See also Brief von Dr. Hesse an den Justizministerium der UdSSR, October 16, 1967, BAL, B162/2308, 9.

By the time that West German prosecutors discovered complementary Soviet inquiries into Sonderkommando R and its local helpers, Willy Brandt's Ostpolitik permitted limited cooperation. Having engaged in diplomatic gymnastics, West German prosecutors obtained some key Soviet investigative records and vague promises of assistance. This cooperation became moot when, on the eve of indicting Sonderkommando R's surviving senior leaders, West German courts declared the suspects physically unfit for trial. The local prosecutor's office in Dortmund, which was responsible for pursuing Ludwigsburg's initial investigation, deemed further investigation fruitless and ended a decade-long inquiry into Sonderkommando R's crimes. It is unclear if the rumored past Nazi affiliations and continued sympathies of senior prosecutors in the office influenced their decision to end the probe.

Perhaps reflecting a generational shift in the Dortmund prosecutor's office, German state attorneys resurrected their investigation into Sonderkommando R during 1994, following an informational request from the Canadian Department of Justice.³¹ In the case's reincarnation, German investigators focused their inquiry on Transnistria's local residents, whom Sonderkommando R deployed to murder Jews. German prosecutors traveled to Ukraine, duplicated many Soviet investigative records, and interviewed surviving ethnic German residents from Transnistria then living in Germany. Although this second wave of postwar German investigations yielded new details about Sonderkommando R and its local collaborators' involvement in the Holocaust, prosecutors failed to develop evidence to demonstrate first-degree murder under German law. In 1999, prosecutors in Dortmund ended nearly four decades of investigations into Sonderkommando R.

Using testimony that Soviet authorities gathered constitutes a serious methodological challenge. The Soviet Union (and its satellite states) had a long history of politically motivated show trials in which coerced (and often tortured) defendants admitted imaginary crimes. Strong circumstantial evidence suggests that, during their investigations of Sonderkommando R, Soviet authorities deprived interviewees of sleep and physically abused them. Scholars must treat cautiously purportedly factual material that these testimonies contain, and they must question how Soviet political interests and the mindset and habits of the individual investigators shaped the information in these records.³²

31 Department of Justice Canada Crimes Against Humanity and War Crimes Section to the Zentralstelle Ludwigsburg, May 26, 1994, Landesarchiv Nordrhein-Westfalen, Abteilung Westfalen [hereafter LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund], Q 234 Staatsanwaltschaft Dortmund, Nr. 2809, 1. Verfügung, June 6, 1996, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2809, 72–77.

32 Aware of the methodological challenges that Soviet investigative material presents, a handful of scholars have begun to use these records to analyze previously under-studied dimensions of the

Jan Gross's path-breaking book *Neighbors* provides the most germane methodological discussion for using these sources. Gross uses testimonies that Polish security forces gathered during the late 1940s – the height of Stalinist rule – to study the Holocaust at the local level. Acknowledging the potential problems in using this material as an historical source, including the likely influence of torture on testimony, Gross nonetheless contends that the specific circumstances of the investigation make the historical information contained in its records reliable. Gross argues that because “the matter was handled as a routine case,” authorities did not manipulate the evidence to serve ulterior political motives.³³ He concludes that “for the very reason that this was by no means a political trial, materials produced during the investigation can serve us well in our reconstruction of what actually took place.”³⁴

As with the records that Gross used in *Neighbors*, there is no evidence that Soviet investigators fabricated information about Sonderkommando R. As most Soviet investigations into Sonderkommando R prior to the 1960s were secret, Soviet authorities had little reason to manipulate the results. Wartime materials, which SMERSH or the Extraordinary State Commission produced, remained secret because they had counterintelligence applications and threatened to expose the degree of local collaboration. Similarly, the records of clandestine NKVD trials during the 1940s remained sealed because public evidence of massive local complicity in German-led crimes was embarrassing to the Soviets. During the 1960s, when the KGB apparently responded to an ongoing West German inquiry by reopening an old case, a different dynamic seems to have been at play. Perhaps cognizant that their findings would be shared with West German authorities, Soviet investigators gathered meticulous evidence. The inquiry was massive. During a months-long investigation, the KGB transported witnesses from Central Asia to southern Ukraine, interviewed key suspects dozens of times, recorded thousands of pages of testimony, and conducted onsite forensic analysis. Investigators also recorded many defendants' absurdly implausible claims of ignorance about wartime events. Had the KGB simply wanted a

Holocaust in the Soviet Union. As this type of inquiry remains in its infancy, historians who use these materials have focused on studying Soviet judicial proceedings, rather than reflecting on how these records can be used to study wartime events. Tanja Penner, “Collaboration on Trial: New Source Material on Soviet Postwar Trials against Collaborators,” *Slavic Review* 64, no. 4 (2005): 782–790; Alexander Victor Prusin, “‘Fascist Criminals to the Gallows!’: The Holocaust and Soviet War Crimes Trials, December 1945–February 1946,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 17, no. 1 (2003): 1–30.

33 Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 13.

34 *Ibid.*, 14.

signed confession to make quick political hay, there would have been no reason to concoct such an elaborate investigation. A careful analysis of available testimony strongly suggests that the Soviet security apparatus recorded evidence that it judged to capture historical reality. Although, like all sources, Soviet investigative records concerning Sonderkommando R and its local helpers should be read critically for information that appears inaccurate, it would be an error simply to disqualify these sources from consideration.

The scale and diversity of sources available to reconstruct Sonderkommando R's mission to Transnistria and area Volksdeutsche complicity in the Holocaust present a unique methodological opportunity to use Soviet testimony as historical evidence. Not only is there a large, if fragmentary, body of wartime records that can be used to corroborate postwar statements, but the West German investigation provides an exceptional parallel set of records. In few if any other instances did German investigators possess the language skills or unfettered access to former local residents to investigate the Holocaust in the occupied portions of the Soviet Union at the grassroots level. Postwar inquiries into Sonderkommando R constitute a rare instance in which two very different states probed the same microhistorical events and one in which historians can compare the results. That interviews recorded decades apart in different countries provide remarkably consistent historical information speaks to the empirical weight of these testimonies.

CHAPTER ORGANIZATION

This book's first five chapters are organized chronologically. Its final chapter is topical. [Chapter 1](#) outlines the history of Germans in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, focusing on southern Ukraine's Black Sea German communities from the early nineteenth century until the fall 1941 arrival of German forces. A once-privileged minority, the Black Sea Germans suffered decline under Soviet rule before summer 1941, when the retreating Red Army deported local men and advancing German and Romanian forces targeted the region's Volksdeutsche communities for harsh but selective violence. Although the new Nazi order initially appeared to be an improvement over Soviet rule, local ethnic Germans understood that they would need to navigate the SS's expectations or face potentially lethal consequences.

[Chapter 2](#) analyzes Sonderkommando R's staff, which enjoyed unique independence in setting Volksdeutsche policy in Transnistria. A highly eclectic unit, it tapped professional *völkisch* activists, recently "resettled"

Volksdeutsche, Nazi party “old fighters,” members of the National Socialist Motor Corps (Nationalsozialistische Krafftfahrkorps), and German Red Cross nurses. Despite its diversity, much of Sonderkommando R was committed to the Nazi Volksdeutsche project and primed to attack obstacles that it encountered.

Chapter 3 explores Sonderkommando R’s initial efforts to transform Transnistria in line with the Nazis’ vision of territorial expansion. Having forcibly secured an area of influence in Romanian-occupied territory where it could operate autonomously, Sonderkommando R used ethnic cleansing to create homogenous Volksdeutsche communities where none had existed previously. To secure lasting German control of Transnistria, Sonderkommando R channeled the area’s scarce agricultural resources to area Volksdeutsche – a move that encouraged local residents to manipulate the SS’s ethnic categories for their own benefit.

Chapter 4 traces the involvement of Sonderkommando R and its local Volksdeutsche helpers in the Holocaust during winter 1941–1942. It examines how, during a shoving match between Romanian and German authorities over who was responsible for murdering the region’s Jews, Transnistria’s Romanian administrators used the SS’s fear of epidemic disease to enlist Sonderkommando R’s assistance. The chapter probes how Sonderkommando R deployed local Volksdeutsche militiamen in killings that not only expanded in scale and complexity but also anticipated techniques that German extermination centers later employed in occupied Poland.

Chapter 5 reconstructs Sonderkommando R’s Germanization project in Transnistria after the end of the unit’s involvement in mass killing in the region during spring 1942. Heartened by area Volksdeutsche participation in genocide, Sonderkommando R expanded its militias and gave stolen Jewish property to local ethnic Germans. To bind Transnistria’s Volksdeutsche to National Socialism, it suppressed the Catholic and Protestant churches and unfurled an ambitious propaganda initiative. During Sonderkommando R’s Germanization efforts, renewed denunciations of Jews and “communists” shattered the unit’s newfound faith in local residents. Frustrated by the VoMi’s poor progress, Sonderkommando R subjected area residents to indiscriminate violence that the unit’s leaders reigned in only by constructing a concentration camp.

Chapter 6 explores why so many of Transnistria’s Volksdeutsche participated in mass murder. It reconstructs a collective biography of some of the most heavily implicated Volksdeutsche militiamen. A historically marginalized population, these killers were vehemently anti-Soviet long before the Second World War. The chapter examines why local ethnic Germans began

to kill during December 1941 and why they continued to do so during early 1942. When German authorities first mustered area Volksdeutsche to murder Jewish deportees during late 1941, situational and social psychological factors were more important than anti-Semitism in moving local ethnic Germans to murder Jews. As mass murder became routine, two additional factors increased in importance. First, area Volksdeutsche reaped the material rewards of genocide. They not only robbed their victims, but, more importantly, they used participation in the Holocaust to clarify, at least temporarily, their previously suspect ethnic identity in the SS's eyes. As members of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, area ethnic Germans benefited from the Third Reich's largesse as no other perpetrator group could. And second, amid unbridled cupidity and deep-seated anti-Soviet sentiment, the VoMi's propaganda, which blamed Jews for the Soviet regime's evils, gained traction. Eager to avenge themselves against their Soviet tormentors and to justify their own avarice, Transnistria's ethnic German perpetrators became committed anti-Semites.

TERMS, PLACES, AND PERSONAL NAMES

Studying Nazi Germany presents the problem of deciding what terminology to use. The Nazis assigned individuals, particularly in the conquered Soviet Union, to rigid, supposedly scientifically delineated categories. This classification schema is repugnant not only for its bigotry but also for its racist and gendered distortion of reality. Nevertheless, Nazi categories were very real for German occupiers and had powerful consequences for the people that they ruled. For this reason, scholars are loath to part with these troubling terms.

The term "Volksdeutsche" is no exception. Although it predated the Nazis, it is now seldom used because of its association with Germany's murderous wartime population policies. Nevertheless, during the Nazi period, inclusion and exclusion from this category had important implications for Hitler's subjects. Despite its historical baggage, this book uses the terms "Volksdeutsche" and "ethnic German" interchangeably to describe individuals whom German authorities identified as ethnically German or who presented themselves as such to the Nazis.

For scholars of Eastern European and Soviet history, place names are similarly problematic. Given the region's ethnic and linguistic multiplicity, most places have several names. Choosing one name over another inevitably threatens to insert researchers into historic interethnic territorial struggles. Except for places that have common English spellings, such as Odessa, all

place names are given using the names that local German-speakers and later the SS assigned to them. This is done to recreate and convey the wartime historical landscape. During the war, violent German population schemas remade the region's demography. The SS's removal of local Volksdeutsche and the Soviet regime's refusal to permit German-speakers to return to post-war southern Ukraine meant that many of these Germanized settlements existed only briefly. Using wartime names reflects this historical reality. For the reader's convenience and geographical precision, if possible the contemporary Ukrainian-language place name is given in the first instance.

This study renders all personal names as they appeared during the war, except for names that appear exclusively in archival collections accessed in the Federal Republic of Germany. According to the conditions of access that German law imposes on scholarly users, the personal details, including names of possibly living private individuals, may not be published. Personal names that do not appear elsewhere in the public record are anonymized.

*From Privileged to Persecuted**The Black Sea Germans, 1800–1941*

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, expansion and tsarist recruitment brought three major groups of German-speakers into the Russian Empire. Invited by the tsars during and after the Napoleonic Wars to settle territory that Russia had acquired recently from the Ottomans, the Black Sea Germans were the third and final major group of Germanophone subjects to arrive in the empire. During the nineteenth century they prospered in agriculture and maintained comparatively limited connections to Germany. Beginning during the late nineteenth century, however, their privileged socioeconomic position eroded in the wake of the Russian Empire's domestic unrest. Although area German-speakers initially weathered these obstacles, repressive tsarist measures during the First World War began a multigenerational decline. For the Black Sea Germans the 1917 Russian Revolution, the Russian Civil War, and Soviet rule together constituted an unmitigated disaster that culminated in widespread expropriation, famine, arrest, and deportation. Targeted by Soviet authorities first as class enemies and then as an ethnically suspect minority, the Black Sea Germans suffered mightily before 1941.

The Second World War's opening months in southern Ukraine – an episode of the conflict that has received comparatively little scholarly attention – constituted the most violent period of the Black Sea Germans' recent history. During summer 1941, both retreating Soviet and advancing German forces targeted local Volksdeutsche communities. The lessons that local Volksdeutsche drew from these brutal encounters, however, were different. Soviet violence, which the Red Army and NKVD (Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del, People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) directed against virtually all ethnic Germans, underscored to area Volksdeutsche that their future under Soviet rule was grim. By fall 1941, the Black Sea Germans understood that Soviet power's return spelled destruction for

their communities. German violence, by contrast, was more selective and focused on local Jews, the members of “mixed race” families, and area residents whom other locals had denounced as communists. Although the public nature of this violence shocked area denizens, it highlighted to local inhabitants that their prospects under German rule were more positive, provided that they could navigate their new overlords’ expectations.

PROSPERITY AND CHANGE: GERMAN-SPEAKERS IN
THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE, 1721–1905

During the eighteenth century the Russian Empire was home to two substantial German-speaking populations. The first was the Baltic Germans (*Baltendeutsche*), who inhabited the provinces of Estland, Kurland, and Livland in present-day Estonia and Latvia. The 1721 Treaty of Nystadt, with which Peter I ended the Great Northern War against Sweden, incorporated the three provinces into the Russian Empire. It also established the local Germanophone nobility, which traced its ancestry to the Teutonic Knights who had conquered the region during the thirteenth century, as the tsar’s feudal vassals. In exchange for their fealty, Peter I granted the local aristocracy extensive cultural privileges, including confessional freedom, a German Protestant university in Dorpat (Tartu), and internal political autonomy.¹ Peter I’s ennoblement of all foreign officers in imperial service secured Baltic German participation and advancement in Russian state service until the regime’s 1917 demise. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Baltic German nobility and urban bourgeoisie used their close relationship with the tsarist autocracy to secure a socioeconomically privileged position vis-à-vis local Balts, who constituted most of the region’s population. This ethnic and socioeconomic differentiation catalyzed the emergence of Baltic nationalism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During the 1905 Russian Revolution the increasingly antagonistic relationship between Baltic Germans and Balts fueled interethnic and class violence. Following the Russian Empire’s dissolution after the 1917 Russian Revolution, the nascent Latvian and Estonian states circumscribed the political and economic power of the region’s ethnically German minority.

State-sponsored settlers, who arrived in the Russian interior in three waves, constituted the second and decidedly more parvenu group of ethnic Germans in the Russian Empire. The first wave of these new arrivals was

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

composed of ethnic Germans who settled along the Volga River, primarily near Saratov. Inspired by the Habsburgs' recruitment of Germans to settle the Banat and the Bačka regions of modern-day Serbia, Catherine II enlisted German-speakers to populate the vast Russian steppe.² Catherine II's December 1762 and July 1763 Manifestos solicited Germans who wanted either to escape the poverty of central Europe following the Seven Years' War or to avoid compulsory Prussian military service.³ The generous offer that the tsarist autocracy circulated throughout central Europe included a thirty-year taxation exemption, local self-government, a perpetual military service exclusion, and substantial land grants. Using local recruitment agents and Catherine II's home state of Anhalt-Zerbst as a staging area, the autocracy established more than 100 German settlements along the Volga between 1765 and 1770.⁴ By 1788, the Volga Germans (*Wolgadeutsche*) numbered some 31,000, a figure that increased tenfold by the 1897 tsarist census.⁵

The Russian Empire's territorial expansion during the eighteenth century's twilight encouraged the tsars to recruit German settlers. Following the Peace of Jassy, which ended the Second Russo-Turkish War in 1791, the Russian Empire acquired Ottoman territory near the Black Sea, so-called New Russia. To settle the region between the Dniester and Bug Rivers, Catherine II launched a second, more ambitious bid to attract Germans to the Russian Empire. The autocracy opened more than two million acres of land for settlement in the new provinces of Ekaterinoslav and Cherson as well as on the Crimea. Catherine II's new immigration policy coincided with Frederick Wilhelm II's 1786 accession to the Prussian throne and a subsequent decrease in official tolerance for religious minorities in that country.⁶ Mennonite religious refugees thus constituted a disproportionate number of the German-speaking settlers who arrived in the region before 1800.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Catherine II's grandson, Alexander I, launched the Romanov dynasty's third and final attempt to recruit German settlers to the Russian Empire.⁷ Alexander I's February 1804 Edict, in particular, encouraged German settlement by permitting potential immigrants significant latitude in choosing their destinations

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

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

4 Fleischhauer, *Die Deutschen im Zarenreich*, 100–103.

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

6 Fleischhauer, *Die Deutschen im Zarenreich*, 112–113.

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

within Russia.⁸ Alexander I increased the geographic area slated for German settlement to include parts of Bessarabia. Although tsarist officials recruited settlers from across central and southeastern Europe,⁹ German-speakers remained the most desired colonists, receiving double the land grants of non-Germans.¹⁰ The demographic pattern of German settlers changed in response to the Russian Empire's state incentives and the turbulence of central Europe during the Napoleonic period. Catholics, primarily from Württemberg, fled for New Russia. Protestants also emigrated from West Prussia, Brandenburg, Mecklenburg, and Pomerania to New Russia.¹¹ During the early nineteenth century, central Europe's turmoil and tsarist immigration policy created a uniquely diverse German settler community.¹²

The so-called Black Sea Germans were among the largest of these groups. Living in noncontiguous settlements that dotted Odessa's surrounding countryside, they inhabited largely ethnically homogeneous Germanophone villages during the nineteenth century. These settlements were typically segregated by confession, with Protestant and Catholic settlers residing in separate communities. New Russia's German settlers prospered in agriculture. Unlike the Volga Germans, who had relocated to the Russian interior several decades earlier and largely adopted Russian farming practices, the Black Sea Germans introduced central European agricultural techniques to the Russian Empire's southwestern frontier. Not only did the Black Sea Germans farm individual homesteads, but they also deployed technological innovations, including crop rotation and steel plows.¹³ The Black Sea Germans quickly outperformed their non-German neighbors economically. By the 1917 Russian Revolution, Ukraine's German-speakers owned and farmed between 40,000 and 45,000 square kilometers – an area approximately one and a half times the size of the state of Maryland.¹⁴ In the countryside surrounding Odessa, ethnic Germans, who comprised 7 percent of property owners at the beginning of the twentieth century, owned

8 Fleischhauer, *Die Deutschen im Zarenreich*, 157–159.

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

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

11 Schmidt, *Die Deutschen aus Bessarabien*, 52–53.

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

13 *Ibid.*, 111, 471.

14 According to the 1897 census, more than half of the Russian Empire's Germanophone population worked in agriculture, and by 1914, German-speakers farmed over thirty-five million acres of land – equivalent to 43 percent of the arable land in the German Empire. Ingeborg Fleischhauer, *Das Dritte Reich und die Deutschen in der Sowjetunion* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1983), 12. Throughout the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, the overwhelming majority of Russian ethnic Germans were rural. Pavel Polian finds that of the 1.4 million Soviet ethnic Germans prior to the Second World War, only 20 percent lived in urban areas. Pavel Polian, *Against Their Will: The History and Geography of Forced Migrations in the USSR*, trans. Anna Yastrzhembaska (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004), 126.

approximately 60 percent of the land.¹⁵ Before the Russian Revolution, the Black Sea Germans were Ukraine's prosperous peasants par excellence.

New Russia's German-speakers' economic success during the nineteenth century shaped their interactions with area Jews. Ironically, given their descendants' role in the Holocaust, the Black Sea Germans assisted the Russian Empire's experimental efforts to establish Jews as subsistence farmers in the Pale of Settlement. In 1808, Alexander I established the Aid Committee for Foreigners in Odessa, an organization that he charged with overseeing New Russia's non-Russian inhabitants.¹⁶ The Aid Committee was not only responsible for local Germans, but also supervised the sizable local Jewish population in what became the Pale of Settlement's southernmost tip.¹⁷ The Aid Committee was so impressed with the Black Sea Germans' agricultural acumen that they employed area ethnic Germans as "model farmers" for local Jews beginning in 1847. Over the next five years, the Aid Committee's incentives encouraged dozens of German-speaking farmers and their families to relocate to New Russia's two dozen Jewish experimental settlements. By 1858, an imperial survey of twenty predominantly Jewish villages revealed that the local population also included 450 ethnic Germans.¹⁸ During the first half of the nineteenth century, Russian authorities had charged some of the Black Sea Germans' ancestors with helping local Jews achieve agricultural self-sufficiency.

Despite comparatively warm relations between southern Ukraine's ethnic Germans and area Jews, contacts between area German-speakers and Ukrainians were chillier.¹⁹ Whereas Black Sea Germans interacted and intermarried with Jews both in the countryside and in Odessa, the region's cosmopolitan center, there was comparatively little intermarriage between

15 Meir Buchsweiler, *Volksdeutsche in der Ukraine am Vorabend und Beginn des Zweiten Weltkriegs – ein Fall doppelter Loyalität?*, trans. Ruth Achlama (Tel-Aviv: Schriftenreihe des Instituts für Deutsche Geschichte, Universität Tel-Aviv, 1984), 121.

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

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

18 *Ibid.*, 467.

19 Fleischhauer, "The Nationalities Policy of the Tsars Reconsidered—the Case of the Russian Germans," D1086; Fleischhauer, *Die Deutschen im Zarenreich*, 291. Interestingly, Nazi *Ostforscher* who hailed from southern Ukraine, such as Karl Leibbrandt, highlighted the ethnic homogeneity of the Black Sea communities in an effort to encourage the regime to bolster the then embattled settlements. See Georg Leibbrandt, *Die Gemeindeberichte von 1848 der deutschen Siedlungen am Schwarzen Meer*, ed. Georg Leibbrandt, vol. 5, *Quellen zur Erforschung des Deutschtums in Osteuropa* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel Verlag, 1941), xviii. Also see, Eric J. Schmaltz and Samuel D. Sinner, "The Nazi Ethnographic Research of Georg Leibbrandt and Karl Stumpp in Ukraine, and Its North American Legacy," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 14, no. 1 (2000): 28–64.

local Volksdeutsche and Ukrainians.²⁰ Ukrainians often conflated Jews and ethnic Germans. Because of state privileges for ethnic Germans and Jews, Ukrainians regarded both groups as economic exploiters. These tensions periodically precipitated Ukrainian-led anti-Jewish pogroms, in which the assailants also menaced area Germans.²¹ New Russia's German-speakers existed in a periodically tense interethnic milieu in which ethnic and economic antagonisms reinforced one another.

Following the Russian Empire's 1855 defeat during the Crimean War, the Russian state pursued aggressive social and economic reforms to modernize the Empire. Before his 1881 assassination, Alexander II abolished serfdom, established local self-government institutions, and codified the Empire's legal and administrative structure. Two of these reforms had important implications for southern Ukraine's ethnic Germans. First, in 1871, imperial authorities eliminated the special administrative structure under which they had governed ethnic German settlements and rescinded their taxation exemptions. As area ethnic Germans legally became part of the peasantry, Russian administrators invited them to participate in *zemstva*, a representative form of local government. Second, in 1874, Alexander II ordered universal male conscription.²² Although not explicitly designed to do so, Alexander II's reforms rescinded key privileges that had attracted German-speakers to southern Ukraine several generations earlier.

For local ethnic Germans these reforms proved mixed. On the one hand, obligatory military service challenged the Mennonites' pacifism. Although some Mennonites with financial means again emigrated, primarily to North America, most of their co-religionists reached an accommodation with the autocracy, whereby conscientious objectors served as noncombatants.²³ For local Protestants and Catholics, military service requirements proved less problematic. On the other hand, *zemstva* participation permitted New Russia's Germans to engage with their Slavic neighbors in local government in an unprecedented way.²⁴ Because a landowner's authority within the *zemstva* depended on the size of his landholdings, the wealthy maintained an unequal say in area affairs. Historically wealthy ethnic Germans could therefore disproportionately influence in local politics.²⁵ Although New

20 Brandes, *Von den Zaren adoptiert*, 459–461; Schmidt, *Die Deutschen aus Bessarabien*, 81–82. During the nineteenth century, Odessa was one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the Empire with a thriving, highly-assimilated Jewish community. See Steven J. Zipperstein, *The Jews of Odessa: A Cultural History, 1794–1881* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985).

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

22 Fleischhauer, "The Nationalities Policy of the Tsars Reconsidered – the Case of the Russian Germans," D1087.

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

24 Brandes, *Von den Zaren adoptiert*, 475–478.

25 *Ibid.*, 483.

Russia's ethnic Germans lost many of their *de jure* privileges vis-à-vis the autocracy, the new structure of local government ensured that many of their *de facto* privileges remained until the early twentieth century.

During the nineteenth century, in contrast to other ethnic German communities, such as the Habsburg Empire's Transylvanian Saxons (*Siebenbürger Sachsen*) and the Baltic Germans, the Black Sea Germans maintained only limited connections to Germany. The reasons for this were both geographical and cultural. Other than in Odessa, distance and the absence of direct transportation routes limited trade with central Europe. A primarily agricultural people, the Black Sea Germans had little demand for formal education and thus little engagement with the broader Germanophone cultural world. The notable exceptions were southern Ukraine's ethnic German clergy and teachers. Although some clergymen and teachers trained in Germany, many of them pursued their studies at German-speaking institutions within the Russian Empire, either in the Baltic or on the Volga.²⁶ For most of their history the Black Sea Germans remained exceptionally divorced from Germany – a characteristic that would have important implications for Nazi policy during the Second World War.

Notwithstanding an evolving relationship between local German-speakers and imperial power and continued tensions with area non-Germans, the latter half of the nineteenth century marked the Black Sea Germans' historical high-water mark. Within a century, the region's German-speakers had secured a dominant economic position in the countryside surrounding Odessa and obtained precisely the religious freedoms that their ancestors sought in the Russian Empire. Despite tsarist modernization projects that eroded some of their historical privileges, the Black Sea Germans remained a socioeconomically privileged population that had little reason to maintain any but the most basic connections with their ancestors' former homeland.

THE BLACK SEA GERMANS IN AN ERA OF REVOLUTIONS AND CIVIL WAR, 1905–1922

The Black Sea Germans seemed untroubled by the Russian Empire's domestic problems at the beginning of the twentieth century. Compared to the

²⁶ A key example of this trend was the noted Nazi ethnographer Karl Stumpp, who conducted demographic surveys of Ukraine during the Second World War. Born in 1896 near Odessa, Stumpp completed his primary and secondary education in nearby Groß-Liebethal and then attended the University of Dorpat before the 1917 Revolution. Schmalz and Sinner, "Nazi Ethnographic Research," 31.

acute interethnic and class violence that the 1905 Revolution spawned in the Baltic, the upheaval initially affected the Black Sea Germans little. As the autocracy struggled to police the countryside, however, the area's German-speakers, like their Baltic German counterparts, established Selbstschutz units to guard their communities against theft and interethnic violence. Perhaps one of the Revolution's strangest episodes exemplifies the Black Sea Germans' desire to maintain the status quo. To bolster their fledgling militia forces, Baltic German leaders traveled to the Black Sea German settlements and suggested that the two groups combine self-defense units for a joint assault on revolutionaries in the Baltic. Black Sea Germans declined because they could see little advantage in defending Baltic German privilege.²⁷

Having escaped much of the 1905 Revolution's violence, New Russia's German-speakers continued their fealty to the tsarist autocracy, whose favor remained instrumental in maintaining their socioeconomic privileges. The Black Sea Germans supported Nicholas II's October Manifesto by returning Octobrist representatives to the First Duma, who accepted the proffered reforms as sufficient. When P. A. Stolypin's government dissolved the Second Duma and issued new election laws that favored propertied interests, the political power of southern Ukraine's ethnic Germans increased further.²⁸

The First World War was pivotal in the Black Sea Germans' historic interactions with the Russian state. In 1915, tsarist authorities became increasingly uneasy about the presence of German-speakers – both ethnic Germans and Yiddish-speaking Jews – along the Empire's western periphery. Fearing that Jews and ethnic Germans could become a fifth column for the armies of the advancing Central Powers, tsarist officials repressed their Germanophone subjects in the Empire's western borderlands.²⁹ Although ethnic Germans and Jews who were closest to the front, in areas such as Volhynia, faced the brunt of expropriation and deportation, the Black Sea Germans saw much of their linguistic, educational, and religious autonomy evaporate.³⁰ For the Black Sea Germans, these measures signaled a shift in the Russian state's role from protector to adversary.

Most Black Sea Germans greeted the February 1917 Revolution with guarded optimism. The Provisional Government's initial policies appeared promising. During March 1917, it declared civil equality and rolled back tsarist measures that had targeted German-speakers.³¹ The

27 Fleischhauer, *Die Deutschen im Zarenreich*, 372–376.

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

29 Peter Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia during World War I* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 23; Eric Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign Against Enemy Aliens during World War I* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 100, 104–108.

30 Fleischhauer, *Die Deutschen im Zarenreich*, 452. 31 Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking*, 180.

October 1917 Revolution, however, immediately threatened these advances. As wealthy farmers, the Black Sea Germans stood to lose from the new Bolshevik socioeconomic order. Over the next three years they launched quixotic efforts to maintain their position antebellum.

The Selbstschutz spearheaded the Black Sea German response to the October Revolution. During the 1917 Revolution, southern Ukraine's ethnic Germans again raised indigenous self-defense forces to protect their communities.³² Although these revived Selbstschutz units, like their 1905 predecessors, initially guarded ethnic German settlements from theft, they soon joined counterrevolutionary forces. When the German army occupied southern Ukraine in 1918, local German commanders implemented measures that favored area Volksdeutsche. Confirming recent tsarist fears, the German military trained and armed local Selbstschutz units as a bulwark against area non-Germans and suspected revolutionaries.³³ The Black Sea Germans reciprocated this privileged treatment by purchasing 60 million Goldmarks worth of German war bonds.³⁴ Assistance from area German forces, however, ended as quickly as it began. Following the November 1918 revolution in Germany, the German military withdrew from the region. In the power vacuum that retreating German forces created, the Red Army, the anarchist Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of Ukraine (or Black Army), and the antirevolutionary White Army vied for control of southern Ukraine. Fearing Bolshevik victory and besieged by Nestor Makhno's Ukrainian anarchist forces, the Black Sea Germans sided with the Whites. During spring and summer 1919, Black Sea German militiamen fought alongside A. I. Denikin and P. N. Wrangel's White forces, which resupplied the Selbstschutz with arms from Sevastopol.³⁵ When Black and later Red forces routed the Whites during 1920, thousands of Black Sea Germans fled southern Ukraine, primarily for Germany and North America.³⁶ The remaining Black Sea Germans had to come to terms with a Soviet regime whose creation many of them had just fought.

THE BLACK SEA GERMANS UNDER SOVIET RULE, 1922–1941

Following the Russian Civil War, the Black Sea Germans were embattled on two fronts. First, particularly in southern Ukraine, the war's devastation

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

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

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

35 *Ibid.*, 587–589.

36 *Ibid.*, 578.

was immense. As in much of the rural Soviet Union, years of warfare had decimated the countryside. The conscription of young men and draft animals by warring armies hamstrung agriculture. The destruction of ethnic German settlements and equipment precipitated widespread malnutrition and disease.³⁷ Second, the Black Sea Germans were archenemies of Soviet power. As onetime staunch supporters of the tsarist autocracy, recipients of wartime German military aid, and finally as White allies, the Black Sea Germans had, at every opportunity, thrown their lot in with Bolsheviks' avowed opponents. Soviet authorities routinely labeled local ethnic Germans, and particularly ethnic German men, as counterrevolutionaries and ordered their arrest, deportation, and execution. This move exacerbated the paucity of area ethnic German men and intensified local economic hardship.

Despite their inauspicious early encounters with Soviet rule, during the 1920s the Black Sea Germans benefited from some Soviet policies. Unlike War Communism and its ruinous grain requisitions, the New Economic Policy (NEP), begun in 1921, permitted local German-speakers limited opportunities for independent agricultural production. More importantly, Soviet nationalities policies during the 1920s, typified by *korenizatsiia* (nativization), afforded the Black Sea Germans substantial cultural latitude.³⁸ Like the Volga Germans, whom the Soviet regime granted an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in 1924, the Black Sea Germans received substantial administrative and linguistic independence in southern Ukraine – privileges that the tsarist regime had suspended during the First World War.³⁹ Local ethnic Germans remained tepid toward these moves. Not only were their economic opportunities under NEP limited, but cultural autonomy in the face of antireligious measures that the Soviet regime later implemented appealed little to most area ethnic Germans.⁴⁰

For the Black Sea Germans, mass expropriation, famine, and arrest punctuated the 1930s. During winter 1929–1930, the Soviet regime, under Josef

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

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

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

40 On Soviet repression of ethnic German clergy during the 1930s, see O. Litsenberger, "Repressii protiv liuteranskikh i katolicheskikh sviashchennooslyzhitelei v SSSR," in *Nakazannyi narod: Po materialam konferentsii "Repressii protiv rossiiskikh nemtsev v Sovetskom Soiuze v kontekste sovetskoi natsional'noi politike,"* ed. I.L. Shcherbakova (Moscow: Zven'ia, 1999). Linguistic autonomy was also problematic because Soviet authorities insisted on High German as the lingua franca for the country's German minority. Soviet Volksdeutsche spoke an array of German dialects and objected to this imposed linguistic uniformity. Irina Mukhina, *The Germans of the Soviet Union* (London: Routledge, 2007), 31.

Stalin's control, pursued an intense policy of "dekulakization" and "collectivization." Although local Soviet authorities had implemented these measures haphazardly, they now intensified. Allegedly wealthy farmers, whom Soviet officials identified as "kulaks," faced property confiscation, arrest, and deportation.⁴¹ The Soviets did not target German-speakers as an ethnic minority. Dekulakization, however, fell particularly hard on Ukraine's historically economically productive ethnic Germans. Despite accounting for only 2 percent of the region's population, ethnic Germans constituted 15 percent of all kulaks.⁴² Soviet authorities compelled local residents, who had survived dekulakization, including the Black Sea Germans, to surrender their property and join collective farms. Dekulakization and collectivization yielded famine. During 1932 and 1933, decreased agricultural output coupled with increased state grain requisition precipitated food shortages across the Soviet Union. More than three million residents of Soviet Ukraine perished.⁴³ Although the famine was particularly severe in eastern Ukraine, southern Ukraine's Odessa oblast', where most Black Sea Germans lived, was also hard hit.⁴⁴ In response to perceived rural recalcitrance and agricultural "sabotage," the Soviet regime ramped up repression in the countryside.⁴⁵ Although, during the early 1930s, Soviet authorities did not target the Black Sea Germans as an ethnic minority and maintained much of the group's cultural and administrative independence, the Black Sea Germans, like area non-Germans, felt the full brunt of Soviet agricultural policy.

During the latter half of the 1930s, the Soviet regime targeted southern Ukraine's German-speakers as a suspect ethnic minority. The move reflected a broader shift in Soviet nationalities policy. Until the early 1930s, Moscow sought to Sovietize the USSR's multiplicity of ethnicities by granting them extensive cultural and linguistic independence. Beginning in 1935, however, Stalin became concerned about the potential for diaspora populations to project foreign, capitalist influence within the Soviet Union. Although the Soviet state remained suspicious of other minority groups, such as Finns, Poles, and Koreans, ethnic Germans constituted a particular concern for Soviet authorities. In late 1929, during increasingly repressive Soviet agricultural policies, thousands of ethnic Germans swarmed the German

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

42 Buchsweiler, *Völkische in der Ukraine*, 122.

43 Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 53.

44 Before the Second World War, Odessa oblast' was significantly larger and included territory along the Bug River. Today, much of this region falls within Ukraine's Mykolaiv oblast'.

45 Buchsweiler, *Völkische in der Ukraine*, 76–79.

Embassy in Moscow and demanded exit visas. Public outrage in Germany at the condition of Soviet ethnic Germans precipitated intensive diplomatic engagement and the formation of a charity, Brüder in Not (Brothers in Need), to aid Soviet Volksdeutsche.⁴⁶ Soviet fears that these initiatives would insert German influence into internal Soviet affairs intensified in 1933, when the vociferously anticommunist Nazi party assumed power in Germany.

Shortly thereafter, Soviet authorities began to deport ethnic minorities from Ukraine's western borderlands. Expanding the designated border region deep into Soviet territory, Stalin's security forces deported local ethnic Poles and Germans to Kazakhstan, where they became "special settlers" alongside kulaks, whom Soviet authorities had sent to the region a few years earlier.⁴⁷ By 1936, Soviet forces had deported roughly half of the territory's ethnic Germans to Central Asia.⁴⁸ As the Black Sea Germans fell outside the delineated border zone, they weathered this initial wave of ethnically based deportation. Nevertheless, Soviet officials curtailed Germanophone administrative bodies and cultural institutions, eventually ending German-language education by the eve of the Second World War.⁴⁹

Soviet authorities expanded anti-German measures during the Great Terror. Inspired by earlier initiatives, in early 1938 the Politburo authorized repressive actions against a host of diaspora minorities. These included German-speakers, whom the Soviet regime regarded as a vanguard of fascist aggression. At roughly the same time, local Communist party officials in Odessa oblast' ordered the deportation of some 5,000 ethnic German households for suspected anti-Soviet activities.⁵⁰ By summer 1941, a return to ethnic-based discrimination and expulsion that the Black Sea Germans had first tasted under tsarist rule during the First World War underscored to local Volksdeutsche their increasingly endangered position.

A CHANGING OF THE GUARD: THE VIOLENT SUMMER OF 1941

Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of the Soviet Union, was an offensive of unmatched barbarity. The attack's military operations coincided with plans to kill substantial numbers of Soviet civilians, above

46 Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 319–320.

47 Natalija Rublova, "Die Deutschen in der sowjetischen Ukraine, 1933–1939," in *Die "Volksdeutschen" in Polen, Frankreich, Ungarn und der Tschechoslowakei: Mythos und Realität*, eds. Jerzy Kochanowski and Maïke Sach (Osnabrück: Fibre Verlag, 2006), 137–142.

48 Kate Brown, *A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 160.

49 Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 332.

50 *Ibid.*, 336–337.

all Jews. Although scholars have understandably focused on murderous German plans, it is important to note that the Soviet military's retreat was also brutal. Examining violence that both Soviet and German authorities unleashed on local civilians during the war's opening months is not meant to relativize or minimize the unique intentionality with which the German invaders targeted civilians. The Germans launched an expansionist, genocidal war; the Soviets did not. Nevertheless, from the perspective of local gentiles, and specifically ethnic Germans, overlapping waves of Soviet and German violence typified the months leading up to Sonderkommando R's arrival in September 1941.

The German invasion of the Soviet Union surprised the Soviet government and military. During the invasion's first months, the German Blitzkrieg triumphed over often poorly organized Soviet resistance. The German and Romanian sweep through southern Ukraine was no exception. Although Antonescu's determination to capture Odessa without German assistance prevented the invaders from taking the city until late October 1941, the campaign in what would become Transnistria lasted mere weeks. Although slowed by periods of intense fighting, German and Romanian forces wrested control of territory west of the Bug River by late August 1941.

As the front reached southern Ukraine, Soviet authorities prepared defenses and evacuated materiel, agricultural equipment, and local residents to the Soviet interior. Like their tsarist predecessors, the Red Army and NKVD suspected that area Volksdeutsche would become a German fifth column and intensified repression against local German-speakers.⁵¹ Shortly after the start of the German offensive, Soviet authorities impressed area ethnic German men into forced labor squads and assigned them to construct defensive fortifications.⁵² When they failed to halt the German and Romanian thrust into southern Ukraine, Soviet authorities started stripping the countryside of livestock and agricultural equipment.⁵³ They placed special emphasis on removing tractors from the Machine Tractor Stations (MTSs) that peppered southern Ukraine's countryside.⁵⁴ Slavs and Jews, who

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

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

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

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

correctly anticipated the consequences of German occupation, also fled.⁵⁵ To spirit livestock, tractors, and civilians across the Bug River, Soviet authorities turned to local Volksdeutsche men. Using area ethnic Germans to shuttle animals, equipment, and refugees away from advancing German and Romanian forces accomplished two tasks simultaneously. It not only denied the invaders resources, but it also removed would-be collaborators from enemy control.

Shortly before withdrawing, Soviet commanders ordered all ethnic German men from the ages of sixteen to sixty to assemble in their localities and staff the evacuation transports.⁵⁶ Some area Volksdeutsche anticipated correctly that their departure would mean permanent relocation to the Soviet interior and hid to await the Germans.⁵⁷ Most ethnic German men, however, feared Soviet reprisals and mustered for transport duty. The forced evacuations departed for the Bug River shortly before the area became a combat zone. As far as can be reconstructed from postwar statements, the Soviet deportation was amateurish. Soviet authorities could spare no rail or truck transportation and ordered ethnic Germans to move civilians by horse-drawn wagon. Many area Volksdeutsche were left herding cattle and driving their tractors in a futile and undoubtedly halfhearted effort to outrun German and Romanian forces.⁵⁸

The evacuation was, predictably, only partially successful. Owing to their greater speed, horse-drawn civilian evacuation transports tended to reach the Soviet interior. The relocation of livestock and agricultural equipment, however, proceeded at a glacial pace. Advancing German military units overran many of these transports and freed their impressed drivers from their Soviet guards, who either fled or fell prisoner.⁵⁹ After liberation, German soldiers ordered ethnic Germans to return home with their livestock and agricultural equipment – a trek that took up to several weeks.⁶⁰ Although the rapidity of the German advance spared many Volksdeutsche

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

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

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

58 Protokol doprosa/Fet Ivan, May 18, 1948, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum [hereafter USHMM], RG-38.018M, Reel 79, 3750–3752. Protokol doprosa/Renner Yakov Yakovich, May 18, 1948, USHMM, RG-38.018M, Reel 79, 3696. Aussage von A. E., November 19, 1962, BAL, B162/2301, 152.

59 Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung J. S., December 12, 1961, BAL, B162/2290, 140. Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von J. D., August 14, 1962, BAL, B162/2296, 166.

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

from deportation, Soviet authorities transferred much of the region's economic infrastructure and some 6,000 area ethnic German men behind the lines.⁶¹ This final deportation of Volksdeutsche men fell particularly heavily on Black Sea German communities that already had lost many men to prewar Soviet arrests. It also underscored to local German-speakers their grim future under Soviet rule. Notwithstanding earlier hardships, southern Ukraine's Volksdeutsche had never faced the prospect of wholesale deportation from southern Ukraine. Their experiences during the final weeks and days before the occupation highlighted to the Black Sea Germans the dire fate that awaited them should they again fall into Soviet hands. For local ethnic Germans, whose parents had fought the Bolsheviks during the Russian Civil War and for whom Soviet rule had precipitated a multigenerational decline, this final, brutal episode of Soviet power in southern Ukraine left them with little choice but to welcome an alternative.

Early encounters between the Wehrmacht and local ethnic Germans were relatively benign. Not only had the German army liberated many would-be deportees, but it also provided a defense against Romanian troops, who had begun raiding Volksdeutsche settlements. The German army temporarily assumed responsibility for the safety of ethnic German communities, erecting placards to ward off their Romanian allies and stationing troops to curtail Romanian incursions.⁶²

As the German Eleventh Army, which operated in southern Ukraine during late summer 1941, protected area ethnic German residents from Romanian banditry, its soldiers also tapped the virulent animosity that many local Volksdeutsche felt toward the Soviet regime. During the 1920s and 1930s, Soviet authorities had arrested, deported, and sometimes executed suspected political opponents based on local denunciations.⁶³ Now, the shoe was on the other foot. Local Volksdeutsche, whose relatives Soviet informants had denounced to Soviet officials prior to the war, took their

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

62 Andrej Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord: Die Einsatzgruppe D in der südlichen Sowjetunion 1941–1943* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2003), 261–266.

63 Aussage von E. T., May 20, 1965, BAL, B162/2304, 67. Aussage von A. K., October 10, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 17. On denunciation in the rural Soviet Union during the 1920s and 1930s, see Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants*, 254–261.

revenge by denouncing Soviet-era informants to German forces as communist agents.⁶⁴ It is unclear whether the German army had orders to pursue suspected communists within area Volksdeutsche settlements. It appears, however, that initially individual Wehrmacht units responded to this groundswell of denunciations with summary executions. In the town of Speyer, some 45 kilometers northwest of Nikolaev (Mykolaiv), for example, an ethnic German woman merely flagged down a passing German tank and fingered the administrator of the local collective farm as a communist responsible for the Soviet-era deportations of local residents. A member of the tank's crew dismounted and shot the man before his unit continued eastward.⁶⁵ Perhaps to systematize what had been an ad hoc response to local Volksdeutsche denunciations, the Wehrmacht's Secret Field Police (Geheime Feldpolizei) launched investigations into the complicity of individual ethnic Germans in the Soviet regime's brutality, and particularly into the deportation of Volksdeutsche men immediately prior to the arrival of German forces.⁶⁶ Throughout Transnistria's Volksdeutsche settlements the Wehrmacht became a conduit for local ethnic German frustration with Soviet power and executed dozens of suspected local Soviet collaborators.⁶⁷

The Wehrmacht's efforts were merely the initial salvo in Nazi efforts to purge southern Ukraine's Volksdeutsche settlements of political opponents and racial enemies – a project that would consume German officials for years. As German military forces pushed deeper into the Soviet Union, Einsatzgruppe D assumed responsibility for local Volksdeutsche settlements during mid-August 1941.⁶⁸ Whereas the Wehrmacht responded to local denunciations by executing Volksdeutsche “communists,” Einsatzgruppe D's primary function was to purge the German military's rear areas of suspected communists and Jews.

As the Wehrmacht had already discovered, area Volksdeutsche were eager to denounce their perceived Soviet-era tormentors – both Jews and gentiles – to German authorities. Yet, in deciding whether to denounce their

64 The significance of denunciation in southern Ukraine during summer 1941 underscores Robert Gellately's earlier findings about its importance for Gestapo operations in Germany. See Robert Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society: Enforcing Racial Policy 1935–1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

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

66 Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*, 267–268.

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

68 Aussage von A. E., November 19, 1962, BAL, B162/2301, 152–153. Aussage von A. E., November 16, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 123. Aussage von A. S., March 17, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 4. Aussage von C. K., October 16, 1962, BAL, B162/2300, 129. Aussage von E. A., August 18, 1964, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2684, 29. Aussage von F. V., June 24, 1970, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2702, 82.

neighbors to German forces, area residents made nuanced assessments about individual complicity in Soviet violence. Einsatzgruppe D, however, was indifferent to the gradations of local involvement in Soviet crimes for area ethnic Germans, let alone for Jews, whose murder was their core mission. Whereas local Volksdeutsche would have been content for German forces to kill area residents whom they deemed complicit in prewar Soviet terror, Einsatzgruppe D slated most former Soviet administrators and all local Jews for murder. As the unit's aims became apparent to area ethnic Germans – many of whom Einsatzgruppe D conscripted temporarily to dispose of its victims' bodies – some local residents attempted to retard the process that they had helped initiate.⁶⁹ Prior to Einsatzgruppe D's shooting operations, local ethnic Germans periodically interceded on behalf of those former Soviet administrators whom they regarded as innocent of prewar wrongdoing.⁷⁰ When local ethnic Germans realized that Einsatzgruppe D aimed to murder not only Jews but also the Jewish spouses, Volksdeutsche partners, and children of “mixed race” families, many ethnic German communities hid more integrated local Jews from the SS.⁷¹ Shielding selected Jews from Einsatzgruppe D would have lethal consequences when German authorities discovered this subterfuge the following year.

Einsatzgruppe D not only targeted a broader group of residents than most Volksdeutsche would have chosen, but it also reintroduced a level of public violence absent in southern Ukraine since the Russian Civil War. Except for the Red Army's recent retreat, Stalinist violence had been bureaucratized and, although an open secret, often opaque. Einsatzgruppe D's summer 1941 murder spree in Transnistria was precisely the opposite. Upon arriving in a Volksdeutsche settlement, the members of Einsatzgruppe D's Einsatzkommandos typically established a temporary local command post and asked local residents to identify Soviet agents and Jews, often encouraging denunciations at public meetings.⁷² Upon identifying their victims, Einsatzgruppe D detained alleged Jews and communists while local residents received orders to dig trenches at the edge of town. The units then shot its victims before advancing eastward. Anton T., an ethnic

69 See chapter three for a detailed discussion of this phenomenon vis-à-vis Sonderkommando R.

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

71 German policy of murdering “mixed race” individuals in Transnistria contrasted sharply with Nazi measures against Germans of “mixed race” ancestry in the Reich. On the latter policies, see Jeremy Noakes, “The Development of Nazi Policy Towards the German-Jewish ‘Mischlinge’ 1933–1945,” *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 34 (1989): 304–307, 343.

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

German from the town of Landau (Shyrokolanivka), some 50 kilometers northwest of Nikolaev, later described one of Einsatzkommando 12's killing operations:

An SD unit of approximately 25 men arrived in Landau at the end of August 1941 and remained there at most 10 days. . . . These SD personnel shot 8 Jews in Landau, including an elderly local Jewish woman and seven other Jews, who all lived in the Landau's retirement home. The shooting took place at a sand pit 500 meters to the southwest of Landau. . . . Mayor F. ordered Willibald S., Michael W., and Johann L., and I to dig a pit the size of a double grave. Then the SD personnel arrived. After a time we heard the shots fired. Before that [however] Raphael S. the coachman from the retirement home had arrived. We found out from him that he had to drive the old Jews from the retirement home on a horse-drawn wagon to the pit. About 10 minutes after the shots were fired the SD personnel – it was four of them – came to us and ordered us to cover the grave.⁷³

In a pattern that repeated itself through southern Ukraine, Einsatzgruppe D shot residents whom it identified as the enemies of National Socialism within plain sight of the local population. Sometimes, Einsatzgruppe D's staff even posted signs announcing which inhabitants they had murdered.⁷⁴ The opening weeks of German rule in southern Ukraine left area Volksdeutsche with few illusions about either the Nazi regime's brutality or its desire to murder Jews and suspected communists.

CONCLUSION

Einsatzgruppe D's peripatetic mass murder campaign constituted the historical nadir of a once-prosperous minority. The last major group of German-speakers that the tsars recruited to settle the Russian interior, the Black Sea Germans prospered as farmers during the nineteenth century. Fearing the unreliability of this German-speaking minority along the Empire's periphery, tsarist officials targeted area ethnic Germans during the First World War. Although the new Provisional Government and the German army's brief occupation of southern Ukraine offered temporary relief from persecution, the October 1917 Russian Revolution and subsequent Russian Civil War brought new challenges. As White allies during the Civil War, the Black Sea Germans faced a generation of Soviet rule in which local authorities identified them first as political and class opponents and then as a potentially disloyal ethnic minority. Stripped of their property and the remnants of their historical linguistic and cultural independence, the Black

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

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

Sea Germans were a beleaguered minority by the eve of the Second World War. Between the end of June and the beginning of September 1941, both retreating Soviet and advancing German forces exposed the Black Sea Germans to an unprecedented level of violence in a region that had endured world war, revolution, civil war, collectivization, famine, and the Soviet terror. When Sonderkommando R arrived on the heels of Einsatzgruppe D's withdrawal in early September 1941, it faced Germanophone enclaves whose economies were wrecked, whose men had been deported, whose livestock and tractors had been stolen, and whose Jews and former local leaders had been brutally and publicly murdered.

Although the legacy of Soviet interwar policies and the destruction wrought in Operation Barbarossa's opening months was not the ideal foundation for the Third Reich's *völkisch* project, this history prepared area Volksdeutsche for Nazi rule in two ways. First, most local ethnic Germans grasped the dangers of Soviet power. A persecuted minority under Stalin, local Volksdeutsche glimpsed during the final weeks before the occupation what they could anticipate if Soviet rule returned. In contrast to their experiences during the 1920s and 1930s, area ethnic Germans faced not random arrests and expropriation, but the wholesale deportation of their communities. Second, their contact with the Wehrmacht and Einsatzgruppe D had taught them two valuable lessons about their new German masters. On the one hand, initial encounters with German forces illustrated to area residents the intensity of the Nazi anti-Jewish and anticommunist campaign. Amid mutual denunciations, local residents realized how easily they could become targets of this violence. On the other hand, preliminary Nazi moves against Jews and accused Soviet collaborators highlighted the degree to which local residents could direct German aggression. Although the events of the preceding months left area ethnic Germans little choice but to embrace their German occupiers as the only viable alternative to Soviet rule, they realized that their status in the new order would depend on the inclinations of their new German overlords.

Sonderkommando R

The Men and Women Who Made Germans and Created Killers

Before reconstructing the local dynamics of Sonderkommando R's rule in Transnistria's Volksdeutsche settlements, it is necessary to examine Transnistria's German occupiers. Although Sonderkommando R nominally reported to Himmler, distance and lax management granted German authorities in Transnistria tremendous latitude. Understanding Nazi rule and ultimately Sonderkommando R's involvement in mass killing requires an analysis of the Germans who implemented Nazi policy at the grassroots level.

Germany devoted limited manpower to Volksdeutsche affairs in Ukraine. Sonderkommando R had no military application and, when Himmler conceived the unit during spring 1941, Germany had not yet decided to murder all Soviet Jews. What more limited plans for the mass killing existed in late spring 1941 were the bailiwick of other German authorities and, in Transnistria, a Romanian responsibility.¹ Himmler, put simply, had slim pickings for his pet project.

The Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle (Ethnic German Liaison Office) or VoMi drew on its earlier Volksdeutsche "resettlement" campaigns in Eastern Europe for both inspiration and staff. Following the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the VoMi had relocated hundreds of thousands of Volksdeutsche from the Baltic, Volhynia and Podolia, and Bessarabia and northern Bukovina to occupied Poland. These resettlement units trained a cadre of specialists and taught the VoMi to manage mixed units of SS and non-SS personnel to control Volksdeutsche affairs "in the East." Sonderkommando R was

¹ The chronology of the origins of the Final Solution is a topic of tremendous historical debate. Absent new records that would suggest otherwise, Browning's contention that the Nazi regime decided to murder Soviet Jewry in mid-July 1941 appears convincing. Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939–March 1942* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 314.

the descendant of earlier SS-orchestrated population transfers from Eastern Europe.

Sonderkommando R was a perhaps uniquely diverse unit. Its senior and mid-level leaders included Volksdeutsche activists, professional security personnel, Nazi party “old fighters,” and ethnic Germans whom the VoMi had relocated from Eastern Europe before the invasion. Sonderkommando R drew its rank-and-file personnel largely from the NSKK (*Nationalsozialistische Kraftfahrkorps*, National Socialist Motor Corps), an organization whose members maintained varying ideological commitments to National Socialism. Once Transnistria’s security situation stabilized, the VoMi also deployed German women as nurses and Nazi party organizers to Transnistria. Accounting for perhaps a tenth of Sonderkommando R’s staff, women were an especially prominent group of German occupiers in Transnistria.

Sonderkommando R’s diversity fostered tensions within the unit. The SS jealously guarded its institutional independence and its unique autonomy in Transnistria. Although the unit’s non-SS members often later criticized how the SS treated them (perhaps to distance themselves from the unit’s crimes), Sonderkommando R functioned in the field because many of the unit’s members shared an ideological commitment to Germanizing Transnistria – a commitment that would come to have violent consequences.

THE STRUCTURE OF LOCAL RULE IN TRANSNISTRIA

Sonderkommando R departed its Stahnsdorf headquarters in suburban Berlin in mid-August 1941. Given wartime scarcities, it was a heady enterprise. Its caravan numbered some one hundred vehicles, including specialized radio vans, field kitchens, dispensaries, and even a mobile darkroom.² Traveling via Łódź, Sonderkommando R reached the western Ukrainian city of Zhytomyr, where its commander, SS-Oberführer (and later SS-Standartenführer) Horst Hoffmeyer, divided his 200-strong staff roughly in two. Half of the unit remained in Zhytomyr for later deployment to the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, a German occupation zone.³ Under

2 Rundankündigung Nr. 5, October 13, 1941, BB, R59/66, 148, Einheit Feldpost Nr. 10528/Betr.: Munitionsverbrauch und Gebrauch von Schußwaffen, March 14, 1942, BB, R59/66, 111. Rundankündigung Nr. 14/Betr.: Feier des Tages der nationalen Erhebung, January 20, 1942, BB, R59/66, 125. Protokoll doprosa/M. A., June 7, 1945, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2902, 31, 112. Aussage von H. J. G., August 1, 1962, Staatsarchiv der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg [hereafter Staatsarchiv Hamburg], 213/12 NSG 0589-001, Band 2, 91. Aussage von G. B., December 13, 1966, BAL, B162/2307, 329.

3 Protokoll doprosa/A. M. G., September 20, 1944, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2902, 56.

Hoffmeyer's deputy, SS-Obersturmführer Dr. Klaus Siebert, the rest of Sonderkommando R proceeded into Romanian-occupied Transnistria. Although Transnistria remained a combat zone, fighting was limited largely to Odessa by early September. Siebert selected Landau as the unit's Transnistrian headquarters because it was near other area Volksdeutsche settlements and could accommodate Sonderkommando R's administrative offices.⁴ He organized most of his staff into Bereichskommandos⁵ or regional commands of four to five men. Supervised by a midlevel SS officer, the Bereichskommandoführer, these subunits mixed SS and NSKK personnel, who were responsible for driving and maintaining vehicles. On Siebert's orders, these Bereichskommandos established 18 outposts throughout Transnistria in the predominately ethnic German towns of Alexanderfeld, Ananjew, Bischofsfeld, Groß-Liebenthal, Halbstadt, Hoffnungsthal, Janovka, Johannesfeld,⁶ Lichtenfeld, Mannheim, Marienberg, Neudorf, Rastatt,⁷ Rosenfeld, Selz, Speyer, Worms, and Odessa (Map 2.1).⁸

In Transnistria, Hoffmeyer's subordinates were among the most isolated German occupiers in the conquered territories of the Soviet Union (Figure 2.1). Transportation and thus communications were difficult. As elsewhere in rural Ukraine, road conditions were poor. In good weather, Landau was a hard, two-day drive from Kiev. In bad weather, washed out roads made this trip impossible (Figure 2.2).⁹ Winter further complicated ground travel. Some of Sonderkommando R's Bereichskommandos did not reach their command posts until early 1942.¹⁰ Because roads were frequently impassable to wheeled vehicles, Sonderkommando R couriered weekly mail deliveries and written staff orders to rural Bereichskommandos.¹¹ Sonderkommando R's "Pony Express" transported even cipher equipment and

4 Aussage von K. S., October 30, 1963, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2690, 76.

5 Wartime and postwar German records contain various spelling of "Bereichskommando" and "Bereichskommandoführer." Both terms are spelled here as they conventionally appear in historical scholarship.

6 Johannesfeld was sometimes spelled Johannsfeld in wartime German records.

7 Rastatt was sometimes spelled Rastadt in wartime German records.

8 Protokoll doprosa/A. M. G., LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2902, 56.

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

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

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



Map 2.1. Ethnic German Settlements in Transnistria, 1942. Source: Map Prepared by Bryan Hart.



Figure 2.1. A Sonderkommando R mobile unit encounters local residents in Transnistria, c. 1941. *Source:* LAV NRW W, Q 234 Staatsanwaltschaft Dortmund, Zentralstelle Nr. 2795.



Figure 2.2. Road conditions in Landau during winter, undated. *Source:* LAV NRW W, Q 234 Staatsanwaltschaft Dortmund, Zentralstelle Nr. 2726.

code books from Nikolaev to Landau's radio transponder.¹² Except for VoMi offices in Landau and eventually Odessa, individual Bereichskommandos had no communications equipment.¹³ To catch Wehrmacht news broadcasts, Bereichskommandos used their car radios.¹⁴ Quarterly conferences for Transnistria's Bereichskommandoführer permitted Hoffmeyer or Siebert to troubleshoot problems. Held initially in Landau and then in Odessa, these meetings were a welcome opportunity for Bereichskommandoführer to socialize and obtain provisions.¹⁵ Dependent on a nineteenth-century communications network and infrequent face-to-face meetings, Sonderkommando R's senior officers had few opportunities to supervise their subordinates in Transnistria.

They also had little inclination to insert themselves into Sonderkommando R's daily operations. Hoffmeyer's lax management style was typical. A man of action and ambition, Hoffmeyer maintained a retinue to keep hard-topped and convertible limousines at the ready.¹⁶ He established rest stops from Berlin to Ukraine, including two in Łódź and Kiev.¹⁷ Rumor had it that the VoMi-run Łódź way station was a favorite for the married Hoffmeyer because of the charms of its female proprietor, the mother of one of his young protégées.¹⁸ Occasionally, Hoffmeyer would visit Landau, Odessa, or the odd rural Bereichskommando for inspections with pomp and circumstance.¹⁹ During one visit to Rastatt, an honor guard from the local ethnic German militia received Hoffmeyer in special white dress uniforms.²⁰

12 Aussage von O. T., February 23, 1965, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2680, 77.

13 German Police Decodes: 27.11.41, December 6, 1941, BNA, HW 16, Piece 32, 1. Aussage von H. S., March 17, 1966, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2693, 140–141.

14 Rundanwiesung Nr. 5, October 13, 1941, BB, R 59/66, 148.

15 Stabbefehl Nr. 101, April 10, 1943, BB, R 59/67, 106. Bereichskommando 12 des SS-Sonderkommandos/Bericht, August 26, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1088, 192. Aussage von H. K., October 13, 1966, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2695, 131. Aussage von G. G., March 3, 1965, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2690, 117.

16 Aussage von J. P., December 12, 1966, BAL, B162/2307, 325. Other Sonderkommando R members and wartime records confirm Hoffmeyer's incessant travel. Aussage von V. R., July 31, 1962, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2671, 151. German Police Decodes Nr. 2 Traffic: 17.10.42, October 23, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 36, 1. Protokoll doprosa/A. M. G., September 20, 1944, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2902, 33.

17 Aussage von E. S., December 15, 1966, BAL, B162/2307, 349–350.

18 Aussage von F. J. L., January 16, 1965, BAL, B162/2303, 310. Other postwar testimony confirms a personal relationship between Hoffmeyer and the woman. Aussage von O. H., August 15, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 236.

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

20 Aussage von E. P., July 16, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 194–195.



Figure 2.3. Horst Hoffmeyer, Sonderkommando R's leader, exits one of his cars to greet German occupation officials and local residents in Transnistria, probably 1942 or 1943. Source: LAV NRW W, Q 234 Staatsanwaltschaft Dortmund, Zentralstelle Nr. 2795.

These tours, however, were mainly for show. Invariably, the unit's photographer, SS-Untersturmführer Georg Bauer, was present to capture the photo op (Figure 2.3).²¹

Except for key decisions, Hoffmeyer delegated authority to his subordinates. For his staff, Landau, to say nothing of Berlin, was a very long way away. With limited capacity and appetite for oversight, Sonderkommando R's midlevel leaders had to fend for themselves. Area residents grasped the latitude that local VoMi administrators enjoyed, later quipping that their former overlords had behaved as "little gods."²² Wendy Lower has aptly identified "'on the spot' decision-making" as part of the organizational culture of German administrators in the occupied Soviet Union.²³ In Transnistria, it was also a necessity.

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

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

23 Wendy Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2005), 8.

SONDERKOMMANDO R'S SS LEADERS

Veterans of the VoMi's pre-1941 resettlement campaigns, Sonderkommando R's leaders were deeply committed to the Nazi Volksdeutsche project in Ukraine. Hoffmeyer, to whom Himmler entrusted Sonderkommando R, remains enigmatic. Hoffmeyer escaped postwar questioning by committing suicide shortly after his capture by Soviet forces in Romania during August 1944. Surviving wartime records, however, illustrate his meteoric advance in the SS. Born in Posen (Poznań) in 1903, Hoffmeyer's youth precluded service in the First World War but not association with the interwar radical right. At 16, Hoffmeyer enlisted in Free Corps Border Patrol East (*Freikorps Grenzschutz Ost*), serving for six months in 1919. Upon leaving the Freikorps, Hoffmeyer joined the Stahlhelm (Steel Helmet) and remained a member until 1923.²⁴

Hoffmeyer's activities during the late 1920s and early 1930s remain more opaque. According to his SS personnel file, Hoffmeyer joined the SA (Sturmabteilung, Stormtroopers) during March 1927.²⁵ Hoffmeyer's wife later testified that, when they married in Königsberg seven years later, he was a manager for Dr. Theodor Oberländer's interwar *völkisch* organization, the League of the German East (Bund Deutscher Osten).²⁶ Its absorption into the VoMi during the mid-1930s presented Hoffmeyer with an entrée into the SS. To advertise the National Socialist credentials necessary for an SS career, Hoffmeyer likely concocted a story about clandestine Nazi party membership beginning in 1927. In June 1935, Hoffmeyer's former SA commander submitted a letter to Erich Koch, East Prussia's Gauleiter (local Nazi party leader), claiming that Hoffmeyer had rendered some unspecified "special service" (*Sonderdienst*) that required that his party membership remain off the books to prevent Hoffmeyer from perjuring himself if called to testify.²⁷ Whether Koch found this story compelling is unclear. Hoffmeyer officially joined the Nazi party only in May 1937 and received an SS commission only in March 1939.²⁸ A March 3, 1939, performance evaluation from VoMi chief Werner Lorenz indicates that it was Hoffmeyer's service

24 SS Offizier Akte Horst Hoffmeyer, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SSO-109A, 1376-1377.

25 *Ibid.*

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

27 SS Offizier Akte Horst Hoffmeyer, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SSO-109A, 1397. In his examination of Hoffmeyer's personnel file, Lumans hypothesizes that his "special services" and references to his association with Hermann Behrends demonstrated Hoffmeyer's SD membership. Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, 56. That the only reference to Hoffmeyer's "special services" to the Nazi party appears in a letter likely designed to secure a plum position for him in a new SS career makes Lumans's conclusion possible, but unlikely.

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

with the VoMi that prompted his request to transfer to the SS.²⁹ Hoffmeyer's induction into the SS apparently had more to do with the flow of career Volksdeutsche organizers into the SS than with any pre-1933 secret Nazi party activities.

Once in the SS, Hoffmeyer advanced quickly. Between March 1939 and October 1941 – a mere two and half years – Hoffmeyer rose six grades from the rank of SS-Untersturmführer to that of SS-Oberführer.³⁰ Hoffmeyer distinguished himself through impressive wartime service in both the VoMi and in the Waffen-SS. During October 1939, Lorenz tapped Hoffmeyer to oversee the resettlement of Latvia's Baltic Germans in Riga. Following that operation, Lorenz recommended Hoffmeyer for promotion, complimenting his “outstanding character traits and his excellent service performance.”³¹ Later that year, Hoffmeyer's superiors granted him sole command of arduous Volksdeutsche resettlement operations in Volhynia and Podolia, which relocated some 135,000 Volksdeutsche during the bitter winter of 1939–1940.³² During summer 1940, Hoffmeyer spearheaded the resettlement of a roughly equal number of ethnic Germans from Bessarabia and northern Bukovina.³³ The VoMi delighted in Hoffmeyer's performance during this final resettlement operation and later published a glossy photo album to extol its success.³⁴ After his VoMi operations in southeastern Europe, Hoffmeyer transferred to the Waffen-SS and fought in Yugoslavia and Greece.³⁵ Although Hoffmeyer had served as a reserve noncommissioned officer in the interwar German army, his combat experience enhanced his National Socialist vita and overshadowed his late Nazi party entry.³⁶

There is some evidence that Hoffmeyer came to Himmler's attention. Valdis Lumans notes that Himmler personally decorated Hoffmeyer in Przemysł following the VoMi's operations in Volhynia and Poland.³⁷ When interviewed by the West German police shortly before his death in 1974, the elderly Lorenz explained that Himmler had always been “very interested” in Hoffmeyer.³⁸ Under investigation in West Germany for his involvement in Sonderkommando R's crimes and eager to conceal his own close relationship with Hoffmeyer, Lorenz likely exaggerated the

29 *Ibid.*, 1415.

30 *Ibid.*, 1376.

31 *Ibid.*, 1394.

32 Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, 169.

33 SS Offizier Akte Horst Hoffmeyer, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SSO-109A, 1389.

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

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

36 *Ibid.*, 1387.

37 Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, 162.

38 Vernehmung von Werner Lorenz, April 16, 1973, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2787, 101.

Himmler–Hoffmeyer connection to mask his own culpability.³⁹ Hoffmeyer’s relationship with Himmler apparently was professional, not personal. Surviving wartime records support this conclusion. Himmler’s day planner, for example, lists six meetings with Hoffmeyer between August and December 1942.⁴⁰ Except for the year’s final meeting on New Year’s Eve, at which Lorenz and Hoffmeyer lunched at Himmler’s East Prussian Hochwald compound, the other five meetings all occurred during Himmler’s sojourns to Ukraine.⁴¹ According to a 1942 German police radio message that British signals intelligence intercepted, it took Hoffmeyer four months to schedule his first recorded appointment with Himmler.⁴² Although he never entered Himmler’s circle of intimates, Hoffmeyer had, within the course of five years, become Himmler’s point man for ethnic German affairs.

Dr. Klaus Siebert was Hoffmeyer’s subordinate during these earlier Volksdeutsche resettlement operations and reprised this role in Transnistria. He had a more typical, if less spectacular SS career. Born near Dessau to a chemist and his wife in 1904, Siebert was a committed *völkisch* activist and an early, enthusiastic National Socialist.⁴³ Like Hoffmeyer, Siebert had missed the First World War, but not the allure of right-wing politics. Attaching himself to a German army unit in late 1919, the sixteen-year-old Siebert participated in the abortive Kapp Putsch the following year.⁴⁴ Returning home after his unit’s dissolution in March 1920, Siebert passed the Abitur in 1922. After completing apprenticeships in business and farming, Siebert started an agricultural science course in 1925, studying at the universities of Königsberg and Breslau.⁴⁵ In 1928, Siebert and three of his friends embarked on a month-long hike through the Baltic in search of “German agriculture.”⁴⁶ Returning to Königsberg, Siebert completed his doctorate in agricultural science in 1930.⁴⁷

39 Lorenz, for example, claimed that Himmler removed Hoffmeyer from his chain of command and subordinated Sonderkommando R to the Office of the Higher SS and Police Leader. Vernehmung von Werner Lorenz, April 16, 1973, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2787, 102. As such a position did not exist for Transnistria, Hoffmeyer reported directly to Himmler. Although perhaps technically true, wartime British radio decryptions of German police radio traffic demonstrate that Hoffmeyer remained at least partially under Lorenz’s command. During the evacuation of Transnistria’s Volksdeutsche, for example, Lorenz called Hoffmeyer on the carpet for failing to report in and admonished him that “it is to be avoided that other Reich offices are better informed than me.” German Police Decodes No. 1 Traffic: 18.4.44, BNA, HW 16, Piece 40, 3.

40 Peter Witte et al., eds., *Der Dienstkalender Heinrich Himmlers 1941/42* (Hamburg: Christians, 1999), 511, 524, 553, 591–592, 600–601.

41 *Ibid.*, 660.

42 *Ibid.*, 524.

43 SS Offizier Akte Klaus Siebert, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SSO-135B, 483. Aussage von K. S., October 30, 1963, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2690, 73.

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

45 Aussage von K. S., October 30, 1963, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2690, 73.

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

47 *Ibid.*

Unlike Hoffmeyer, Siebert was an early Nazi activist and a career SD officer. Shortly after completing his doctoral studies, Siebert, as he later described, “followed the call of the Carinthian Heimatbund in Klagenfurt” to form a demographic bulwark against alleged growing Slavic encroachment.⁴⁸ Purchasing a sixty-hectare farm north of Klagenfurt, the newly wed Siebert began organizing Austria’s clandestine Nazi party.⁴⁹ In March 1932, Siebert joined the Klagenfurt’s SA and, after hosting local Nazi meetings on his farm, rose to the rank of SA–Sturmführer.⁵⁰ Siebert’s second failed putsch – this one in 1934 against the Austrian government – forced him to slip across the Yugoslavian frontier and to return to Germany.⁵¹

His livelihood martyred for National Socialism, Siebert, much like Adolf Eichmann a year earlier, found work with the Nazi party.⁵² Assigned to SD headquarters in Berlin’s Wilhelmstrasse in January 1935, Siebert quickly secured a commission as an SS–Untersturmführer and sent for his wife and two young daughters, who had remained laboring on their Carinthian farm. Siebert’s initial responsibilities entailed the surveillance of other Nazi party organizations.⁵³ Over the next three and a half years, Siebert advanced steadily, reaching the rank of SS–Sturmbannführer and obtaining a post in the internal intelligence department (Abteilung III) of the Reichssicherheitshauptamt (Reich Security Main Office, or RSHA). In November 1939, Siebert’s superiors seconded him to aid the VoMi’s Volksdeutsche population transfers.⁵⁴ As Hoffmeyer’s number two, Siebert participated in all of the VoMi’s resettlement campaigns in Eastern Europe, including Hoffmeyer’s fêted Bessarabian operation.⁵⁵ After the war, Siebert claimed that he had received a transfer to the VoMi in late 1939. His SS personnel file, however, indicates that he remained an active SD officer, temporarily attached to the VoMi, until his June 1941 assignment to Sonderkommando R.⁵⁶ Siebert, unlike Hoffmeyer, had no experience in Volksdeutsche matters before 1939. The VoMi’s wartime manpower needs likely prompted Siebert’s assignments to the organization in 1939 and 1940. It is also possible that his Nazi credentials assured Hoffmeyer’s superiors that the VoMi’s population transfers and their then untested commander remained in good hands.

48 *Ibid.*

49 Aussage von K. S., October 30, 1963, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2690, 73.

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

51 *Ibid.*

52 David Cesarani, *Becoming Eichmann: Rethinking the Life, Crimes, and Trial of a “Desk Murderer”* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2007), 36.

53 Aussage von K. S., October 30, 1963, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2690, 74.

54 *Ibid.*

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

56 *Ibid.*, 498. Aussage von K. S., October 30, 1963, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2690, 74.

The VoMi's earlier resettlement operations groomed Eastern European Volksdeutsche specialists, who became Bereichskommandoführer in Transnistria. SS-Untersturmführer Franz Liebl, who commanded Bereichskommando XX in Lichtenfeld, typified the SS officers who had cut their teeth under Hoffmeyer before 1941. Born in 1900 in Mannheim, Liebl grew up in Riga. Interned by Russian authorities at the beginning of the First World War as a German national, Liebl returned to Germany after Riga's occupation by German forces more than three years later. He served in the German army from August 1918 until the war's end. After the First World War, Liebl drifted in and out of paramilitary organizations and the military, serving five months in both the Freikorps and the German army. After his army discharge in February 1920, Liebl married and became a civil servant.⁵⁷

Liebl's brief exposure to Germany's postwar right-wing paramilitary milieu apparently whetted his appetite for radical politics. He joined the Nazi party in February 1932, more than a year before party membership became an occupational norm for state employees. From 1932 until 1939 Liebl served as a Nazi party local group leader (*Ortsgruppenleiter*).⁵⁸ Exactly how and when Liebl joined the VoMi is unclear. A July 1944 notation in his personnel file indicates that he was a member of the organization "since the beginning of the resettlements."⁵⁹ Given that he had lived in the Baltic as a youth and spoke both Latvian and Russian, the VoMi likely assigned Liebl to accompany Hoffmeyer to Riga during October 1939. Liebl's role in the VoMi's subsequent resettlement operations is more evident. During late 1939 and early 1940, Liebl ran a reception camp in Germany for Volksdeutsche "resettlers" from Volhynia and Podolia. Later in 1940, he followed Hoffmeyer and Siebert to Bessarabia and helped relocate ethnic Germans from those territories. After his brief deployment to Lithuania later in 1940, the VoMi discharged Liebl. When the VoMi formed Sonderkommando R little more than a year later, the SS reactivated Liebl and sent him to southern Ukraine.⁶⁰ Like many of his fellow Bereichskommandoführer, Liebl had previous experience in Eastern Europe and an affinity for National Socialism. It was, however, his participation in the VoMi's earlier Volksdeutsche resettlement actions that prepared him for a leadership position in Sonderkommando R.⁶¹

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

58 *Ibid.*, 596. Aussage von F. J. L., January 16, 1965, BAL, B162/2303, 305.

59 *Ibid.*, 598.

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

61 *Ibid.*, 306.

Earlier VoMi resettlement campaigns also provided field experience for Nazi academics, who continued their work in Transnistria. Dr. Gerhard Wolfrum, Sonderkommando R's resident intellectual, had known both Hoffmeyer and Siebert since before the war. All three men shared strong connections to Oberländer via the University of Königsberg, where Oberländer held a university chair during the mid-1930s. Wolfrum maintained a particularly close relationship with Oberländer after the Second World War, when he served as Oberländer's personal advisor during the latter's tenure as the Federal Republic's Minister for Expellee Affairs (Bundesminister für Vertriebene). A child of a university professor, Wolfrum was born in Leipzig in 1911.⁶² Although neither his SS officer file nor his disingenuous 1965 statement to the West German police offer much insight into his youth, his political orientation during the 1930s is evident. At the age of twenty-two, Wolfrum joined the SA months after the Nazi seizure of power and, like Hoffmeyer, assumed a leading role in the League of the German East a few years later.⁶³ He completed his doctorate in history at the University of Königsberg and in 1936, through the League, Wolfrum published his first book, entitled *Die polnischen territorialen Forderungen gegen Deutschland in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung (Polish Territorial Claims against Germany and Their Historical Development)*.⁶⁴ Wolfrum joined the Nazi party in May 1937.⁶⁵ His military service ended in September 1939, when he was injured two days into the Polish campaign.⁶⁶

Following his recovery in a Königsberg military hospital,⁶⁷ Wolfrum joined the VoMi. At Hoffmeyer's personal request, Wolfrum participated in the VoMi's 1940 relocation of the Bessarabian and Bukovinian Germans. Awarded an SS commission commensurate with his role as VoMi departmental director (*Abteilungsleiter*), Wolfrum wrote the mission's operational history, which Volk und Reich Verlag (press) published in 1942 as a glossy photo album, complete with Lorenz's foreword.⁶⁸ Wolfrum's book's description of Slavs and Jews suggests that he had internalized Nazi stereotypes of both groups.⁶⁹ Wolfrum described incompetent, brutish Soviet border guards who "rifled through every article of clothing with [their]

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

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

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

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

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

67 *Ibid.*

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

69 Wolfrum, *Der Zug der Volksdeutschen*.

dirty fingers.”⁷⁰ The VoMi doctor’s medical instruments apparently mystified the ignorant Soviet sentries. The VoMi’s true nemesis, however, was “the Jew Dobkin,” who sabotaged the VoMi at every turn.⁷¹ Nothing links Wolfrum to a 1942 VoMi request on his behalf for a “Jewish apartment” in Berlin.⁷² It appears doubtful, however, that he would have objected.

Ethnic Germans whom the VoMi had relocated to Germany in earlier population transfers from Eastern Europe constituted a disproportionate number of Sonderkommando R’s officers. Because the Wehrmacht could not conscript Volksdeutsche who were not German citizens, the SS had a virtual monopoly on Volksdeutsche manpower. As the SS frequently granted Volksdeutsche commissions commensurate with their prewar *völkisch* agitation abroad, Volksdeutsche officers tended to be thoroughly Nazified. The SS also appears to have assigned Russian- and Romanian-speaking Volksdeutsche to Sonderkommando R for their language skills.

Sonderkommando R’s Volksdeutsche SS officers were a subset of the ethnic Germans whom the VoMi had relocated prior to Operation Barbarossa. A substantial number of them were recent Baltic German émigrés, as illustrated by Freiherr Erich Edgar Alexander von Sievers. Born in 1896 on his family’s ancestral Gotthardsberg estate in the Russian Empire’s Livland province, Sievers was a prototypical anti-Bolshevik and *völkisch* activist.⁷³ A Baltic German aristocrat, Sievers had private tutors until he enrolled in the German Gymnasium in Reval (Tallinn). To escape a 1917 Russian army draft notice, Sievers fled to join the German military. Tsarist officials apprehended Sievers before he reached the Swedish border and imprisoned him in Krasnoyarsk. Returning home after the Russian Revolution to resume his studies at the University of Dorpat, Sievers quickly secured a commission in the Baltische Landwehr (Baltic Militia).⁷⁴ Wounded in Kurland in January 1919, Sievers retained his commission until the Baltische Landwehr’s dissolution the following year.⁷⁵

After Latvian independence, Sievers relocated to Germany, where he began his studies anew at the University of Berlin. He received a scholarship to the University of Jena, where he courted Freifrau Erika von Richter, a fellow Baltic German aristocratic refugee. The two married in 1923. Returning to Latvia without a degree, Sievers and his new wife administered what remained of his ancestral holdings following the Latvian Republic’s postwar agricultural reforms. Diminished in wealth but not *völkisch* fervor,

70 *Ibid.*, 10.

71 *Ibid.*, 24.

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

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

74 *Ibid.*

75 *Ibid.*, 939, 947–948.

Sievers established himself as the leader of the interwar Baltic German farmers' organization.⁷⁶

With the growing Soviet threat, Sievers and his extensive clan "reset-tled" to German-occupied Poland with Hoffmeyer's operation in 1939. He began working for the SS on November 21, 1939, and received German citizenship two days later.⁷⁷ Although Sievers's SS intake officers maintained reservations about his son Gert, whose "physical and mental condition" per-turbed them, they praised Sievers's "exemplary leadership qualities in the struggle for the German race."⁷⁸ After only six months in the SS, Sievers advanced to the rank of SS-Sturmbannführer, jumping three grades in one promotion.⁷⁹ Sievers so impressed the SS that Himmler personally awarded him the 508-hectare Buchwalden estate near present-day Września, Poland, shortly before the SS seconded him to Sonderkommando R.⁸⁰ An SS offi-cer on the make, Sievers's language skills and interwar *völkisch* activism contributed both practically and ideologically to Sonderkommando R.

Although Baltic Germans enjoyed unique advancement opportunities in the VoMi, Volksdeutsche from southeastern Europe constituted another prominent group of Sonderkommando R's officers. Like Sievers and the unit's other Baltic Germans, Theophil Weingärtner was a *völkisch* activist with rare language skills (Figure 2.4). Born near Teplitz (Teplitza) in Bessara-bia in 1909, Weingärtner divided his formative years between Romania and Germany, where he studied theology in Königsberg and Berlin apparently without completing a degree. A member of the crypto-fascist Renewal Movement (Erneuerungsbewegung) in Romania since 1933, he developed an early affinity for National Socialism.⁸¹ Despite Weingärtner's interwar Romanian army service, he relocated to Germany as part of Hoffmeyer's 1940 Bessarabian resettlement operation.⁸²

Weingärtner's political credentials smoothed his entry into the Waffen-SS.⁸³ Trumpeted as a "flawless ethnic German" by his SS evaluator, Weingärtner received assignments first to the staff of Danzig's Higher SS- and Police Leader (Höhere SS- und Polizeiführer) and then to the Reich

76 *Ibid.*, 938, 946, 1006.

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

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

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

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

81 *Ibid.*

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

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



Figure 2.4. Theophil Weingärtner, left, one of Sonderkommando R's Bereichskommandoführer, probably 1942 or 1943. *Source:* LAV NRW W, Q 234 Staatsanwaltschaft Dortmund, Zentralstelle Nr. 2795.

Commissar for the Strengthening of Germandom, where he worked from February until August 1941.⁸⁴ Hoffmeyer personally recruited Weingärtner for service in Transnistria. Weingärtner's other colleague held him in equal esteem. Writing to support Weingärtner's efforts to obtain an estate in German-occupied Poland in November 1942, a fellow Sonderkommando R officer praised him as "one of the most diligent men in our ranks," and whom he valued "equally highly as a person, SS man and comrade."⁸⁵ Weingärtner nevertheless struggled to obtain an estate a fifth of the size of

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

85 *Ibid.*, 471.

the one that Sievers had secured.⁸⁶ As Weingärtner must have realized, the SS had a hierarchy for its Volksdeutsche recruits.

Most Sonderkommando R's officers had served under Hoffmeyer during earlier VoMi missions in Eastern Europe or were themselves ethnic German resettlers. Nazi party "old fighters" also held key positions in Sonderkommando R. Too old for military service and too incompetent for more critical assignments, they lacked experience with ethnic Germans. They could offer only a commitment to National Socialism. Transferring these third-rate troops to the VoMi satisfied two SS needs. These comparatively elderly officers provided critical manpower. VoMi postings also permitted the regime to reward Nazis who had long proven their loyalty but had yet to receive plum positions.

For Paul Mattern, command of Groß-Liebenthal's Bereichskommando was a modest and much-delayed reward for years of party service.⁸⁷ Born in Mohrungen, East Prussia, in 1895, Mattern was a textbook Nazi party "old fighter."⁸⁸ After elementary school, Mattern completed an apprenticeship as a gardener before 1914.⁸⁹ At the First World War's outbreak, Mattern enlisted in the German army. His father perished during the war's opening campaigns, defending his native East Prussia from advancing Russian troops.⁹⁰ Stationed initially on the Eastern Front, Mattern redeployed to France for the 1916 Verdun offensive. Decorated with the Iron Cross Second Class, Mattern ended the war as a noncommissioned officer and a machine gun instructor.⁹¹ After demobilization, he returned to his East Prussian home, purchased a floral shop, and married.⁹²

Life as an unsuccessful florist failed to satisfy the former machine gunner. By the late 1920s, Mattern's restlessness gave way to right-wing political agitation. He joined the Stahlhelm in 1927 and both the SA and the Nazi party in 1932.⁹³ By the eve of the Nazi seizure of power, Mattern had advanced to the rank of SA-Sturmführer.⁹⁴ An active local party enforcer, he cemented Nazi control of East Prussia. In March 1933, Mattern and his SA subordinates took the mayor of neighboring Freiwalde, a Social Democrat, into *Schutzhaft* (protective custody) for supposedly discharging

86 *Ibid.*, 476–487.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

a firearm illegally.⁹⁵ Witnesses later implicated Mattern as the ringleader of the mayor's nocturnal abduction and likely assassination.⁹⁶ Perhaps as a reward for decapitating local SPD resistance in East Prussia, Mattern advanced in the SA. He completed an impressive array of leadership courses throughout Germany. As an SA-Obersturmführer, Mattern reprised his role as a firearms instructor at SA academies first in Memmingen and later in Kapfenburg.⁹⁷ By mid-1934, Mattern's star in the SA was rising.

Were it not for the June 1934 Röhm Putsch, Mattern would have enjoyed a successful SA career. Like many SA members, however, Mattern's prospects faded as the organization was marginalized. Following the dissolution of the SA Sports Academy (*Sportschule*) in Kapfenburg the following year, Mattern found himself unemployed. After applying at the local employment office, he became a municipal gardener in Schäbisch-Gmünd. Dissatisfied with his hefty demotion, although apparently undeterred in his enthusiasm for National Socialism, which he instilled in his sons,⁹⁸ Mattern joined the SS in 1936.⁹⁹ His new career in the SS, however, paled in comparison to the one that he had enjoyed in the SA but a few years earlier. Lacking educational qualifications increasingly needed for an SS commission and stained by his earlier SA service, Mattern floated listlessly through dead-end postings as an SS noncommissioned officer.¹⁰⁰ Even after the SS assigned him to the VoMi for deployment with Sonderkommando R in fall 1941, Mattern never advanced beyond the rank of SS-Untersturmführer (second lieutenant).¹⁰¹

SONDERKOMMANDO R'S RANK-AND-FILE PERSONNEL

Unlike Sonderkommando R's leaders, the unit's rank-and-file members had tenuous Nazi credentials. As in the VoMi's earlier resettlement campaigns, the NSKK contributed a large part of Sonderkommando R's personnel. Some 150 strong on the eve of the unit's deployment to Transnistria and growing steadily thereafter, Sonderkommando R's NSKK complement comprised slightly less than half of Sonderkommando R's staff.¹⁰² Although

95 Aussage von P. M., February 21, 1957, BAL, B162/2295, 103–104.

96 Aussage von R. K., May 13, 1957, BAL, B162/2295, 118–119. Mattern would later dispute these accusations during a postwar West German investigation into the night's events.

97 Aussage von P. M., March 13, 1962, BAL, B162/2292, 147–148.

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

99 Aussage von P. M., March 13, 1962, BAL, B162/2292, 147–148.

100 *Ibid.*, 147.

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

102 The number of NSKK members that the VoMi fielded to Transnistria in September 1941 as part of Sonderkommando R remains in some dispute. Wartime Romanian records peg Sonderkommando

the NSKK was the second-largest Nazi party mass organization, it remains remarkably understudied.¹⁰³ The NSKK's relative obscurity necessitates a brief recovery of its history.

Founded in April 1931, the NSKK styled itself as the Nazi party's "motorized armed force."¹⁰⁴ Begun as the National Socialist Automobile Corps (Nationalsozialistisches Automobil-Korps) in 1929, the NSKK harnessed the Third Reich's motor vehicles and drivers for the Nazi cause.¹⁰⁵ Given the relatively low rate of car ownership in prewar Germany, this was a heady endeavor. In 1939, there was roughly one car for every 40 Germans. In the same year, the ratio of cars to Americans was roughly one to four. As Jeffrey Herf has noted, Nazi Germany "was overwhelmingly a nation of pedestrians."¹⁰⁶ The NSKK's purview included all motorized vehicles, ranging from motorcycles to speedboats. After the war, many of the organization's former members, including prominent West Germans such as Axel Springer, defended it as a simple automobile club akin to the ADAC (Allgemeiner Deutscher Automobil-Club e.V). The reality was both more complicated and more sinister.

The NSKK was remarkably diverse. Membership was voluntary and, except for a brief 1934 moratorium on admission, all driver's license holders were eligible to join.¹⁰⁷ Between July 1933 and November 1937, NSKK membership tripled from 100,000 to 300,000 and reached more than 500,000 shortly after the beginning of Operation Barbarossa.¹⁰⁸ It drew members predominately from the urban petty bourgeoisie. Workers and farmers were underrepresented in its prewar ranks.¹⁰⁹ The NSKK maintained a curious mix of young and middle-aged adherents. Veterans of the First World War constituted nearly a quarter of the NSKK's members

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

103 Dorothee Hochstetter's research remains the primary academic study of the organization. Her study focuses on the organization's activities in Germany and provides a more limited treatment of its deployment in the German-occupied Soviet Union. Although Hochstetter's monograph addresses both issues at least cursorily, she focuses her analysis of NSKK deployment to the occupied Soviet Union on the NSKK's Transportation Companies and does not address NSKK personnel seconded to Sonderkommando R. Dorothee Hochstetter, *Motorisierung und "Völksgemeinschaft": Das Nationalsozialistische Kraftfahrkorps, NSKK, 1931–1945* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 2005), 422–454.

104 *Ibid.*, 99.

105 *Ibid.*, 102.

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

107 Hochstetter, *Motorisierung und "Völksgemeinschaft,"* 102.

108 *Ibid.*, 104.

109 *Ibid.*, 108–109.

in 1937. Yet, most NSKK members were too young to have served.¹¹⁰ Notwithstanding impressive growth during the 1930s, most NSKK members did not own vehicles, and most vehicle owners in the Third Reich were not NSKK members.¹¹¹

Ascertaining why Germans joined the NSKK is difficult. In their memoirs and statements during postwar denazification proceedings, former members invariably downplayed any ideological attraction to the organization. Nevertheless, using these sources, Dorothee Hochstetter's pioneering research discerns three motivations for why Germans joined the NSKK: political, sporting, and professional.¹¹²

Many Germans joined the NSKK for political reasons. That nearly a third of the NSKK's members in 1935 had joined the Nazi party suggests that many early NSKK members were committed National Socialists.¹¹³ As the Nazi party circumscribed new party membership in May 1933, restrictions that lasted until 1937, and in less stringent form even until 1939, this statistic is somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, Hochstetter suggests that NSKK membership provided an alternate type of party affiliation for Germans who could not join the Nazi party.¹¹⁴ On the other hand, she hypothesizes that for some Germans, and particularly for some university students, NSKK membership proved attractive precisely because it offered a connection to the party that stopped short of formal party membership.¹¹⁵ For some Germans during the 1930s, NSKK membership was the next best thing to joining the Nazi party. For others, it was a way to avoid the official party membership that some of their compatriots coveted.

After the war, former NSKK members contended that the organization permitted them to pursue their interest in competitive motor sports and automobile technology. These assertions may reflect a certain reality of the post-"synchronization" (*Gleichschaltung*) Nazi order. With motorized activity at least theoretically under the NSKK's aegis, it would have been difficult for automobile enthusiasts to pursue their avocation independently. Nevertheless, the postwar propensity of former NSKK members to divorce their enthusiasm for motor sports from its specific ideological content in the Third Reich appears to be too convenient an alibi. As Hochstetter convincingly observes, the automobile and private car ownership were integral to the Nazi platform.¹¹⁶ It is likely that the sporting interests that many Germans later articulated for joining the NSKK might have masked an earlier affinity for the Nazi movement.

110 *Ibid.*, 108.

112 *Ibid.*, 116.

114 *Ibid.*, 117.

116 *Ibid.*, 1.

111 *Ibid.*, 111–112.

113 *Ibid.*, 120.

115 *Ibid.*, 117–119.

Many Germans joined the NSKK because membership became a professional necessity. After 1933, Germans whose livelihoods revolved around manufacturing, selling, maintaining, or operating motor vehicles felt pressure to join the NSKK. The NSKK actively recruited automobile mechanics, offering members privileged access to crucial goods and services.¹¹⁷ For many Germans, there were practical reasons to join the NSKK.¹¹⁸

The NSKK worked closely with the Wehrmacht and police. Before 1939, the NSKK trained the German army's motorized and mechanized units.¹¹⁹ During the war, the NSKK provided logistical support to the German military, the SS, and the Order Police (Ordnungspolizei). After November 1939, all NSKK units assisting German military and police units became subordinate to the head of the Order Police and operated under German military law.¹²⁰ By 1940, 60 percent of NSKK members were deployed in this capacity. Three years later, this proportion had increased to 80 percent.¹²¹

NSKK personnel participated in the Holocaust in the Soviet Union. In May 1941, Himmler ordered the creation of NSKK Transportation Companies (NSKK-Verkehrskompanien) for deployment to the Eastern Front. As special policemen, NSKK members served with the Einsatzgruppen and the Order Police during Operation Barbarossa.¹²² In the field, the NSKK supported and participated in the mass murder of Jews. Its activities were never the focus of postwar criminal investigation, however, and the surviving documentation provides only the general outlines of its involvement in the Holocaust. Nevertheless, Hochstetter notes that the NSKK's role in mass murder was widespread and met with little internal resistance.¹²³

When the VoMi formed Sonderkommando R in summer 1941, Hoffmeyer already had commanded NSKK personnel during the VoMi's pre-1941 resettlement campaigns. During late 1939 and early 1940, more than 120 NSKK members helped relocate Volksdeutsche from Volhynia and Galicia. Later in 1940, during the Volksdeutsche population transfer from Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, Hoffmeyer commanded some 500 NSKK men.¹²⁴ NSKK members not only provided valuable manpower for the VoMi's resettlement campaigns, but many of them contributed their personal vehicles to the effort.¹²⁵ The NSKK also staffed more than fifty of the VoMi's Resettlement Camps (*Umsiedlungslagern*).¹²⁶ When Hoffmeyer

117 *Ibid.*, 121.

119 *Ibid.*, 422.

121 *Ibid.*, 430.

123 *Ibid.*, 469.

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

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

118 *Ibid.*

120 *Ibid.*, 456.

122 *Ibid.*, 461.

124 *Ibid.*, 441.

selected personnel for Sonderkommando R, he had a long list of NSKK members from whom to choose for his new command.

Obtaining a profile of the NSKK members assigned to Sonderkommando R in Transnistria is difficult. No wartime rosters or personnel files survive. What remains are transcripts of a dozen detailed interviews that the West German police conducted with the unit's former NSKK members. Nevertheless, it appears that most NSKK personnel deployed to Transnistria were neither diehard Nazis nor ardent anti-Semites. Except for their previous shared experience resettling Volksdeutsche from Eastern Europe, most of Hoffmeyer's NSKK subordinates were "ordinary men."

NSKK members who served in Transnistria fit a four-point profile. First, most NSKK men in Sonderkommando R joined the NSKK because it facilitated their occupational goals. Second, most NSKK members in the unit had entered the NSKK prior to the Second World War. All of their remaining colleagues did so before the invasion of the Soviet Union. Third, virtually all NSKK personnel in Sonderkommando R had served under Hoffmeyer during earlier Volksdeutsche resettlement campaigns. And last, despite the institutional affiliation between the Nazi party and the NSKK, most of the NSKK personnel in Transnistria were not Nazi party members. Even relative to their organization, Sonderkommando R's NSKK colleagues appear to have been among the least Nazified.

A couple of brief biographical sketches exemplify these trends. Otto Hotz, a professional test driver for Porsche, had joined the NSKK during the 1930s for occupational reasons.¹²⁷ In 1940, the NSKK assigned him to assist the VoMi in its Volksdeutsche resettlement operations in Volhynia and Galicia. As required, Hotz drove his own car during the mission. Hotz's superiors then ordered him to northern Serbia to support VoMi operations in the Banat.¹²⁸ With the conclusion of that deployment, Hotz accompanied Sonderkommando R to southern Ukraine.¹²⁹

Ernst R.'s journey to Transnistria with the NSKK was even more circuitous. The Berlin automobile mechanic had joined the ADAC in 1933 and, at the request of his employer, the NSKK a few years later.¹³⁰ R.'s superior in Berlin, Ernst Gutsche, Transnistria's future NSKK chief, assigned him to ethnic German resettlement operations in Bessarabia and the Baltic.¹³¹ Returning to Berlin, R. began work servicing the VoMi motor pool.

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

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

129 *Ibid.*, 235.

130 Aussage von E. R., February 16, 1968, BAL, B162/2309, 206–207.

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

Because of “personal difficulties” with his new supervisor, he requested Gutsche’s help and transferred to Hoffmeyer’s unit in Transnistria during summer 1942.¹³² Rather than Nazi ideologues or Volksdeutsche “experts,” most of Hoffmeyer’s NSKK subordinates deployed to Transnistria simply because they were available manpower.

Hoffmeyer also selected NSKK personnel with specialized skills. He drew both medical professionals and Russophone Volksdeutsche from the NSKK’s ranks. Dr. Otto Franke, one of Sonderkommando R’s physicians, came to the unit via the NSKK. An NSKK member since 1933, Franke participated in the VoMi’s Volksdeutsche resettlements from Volhynia and Galicia. After a stint as a German Army surgeon, Franke requested that Hoffmeyer transfer him back to the VoMi perhaps because a posting behind the lines appeared safer. Hoffmeyer authorized his transfer to Sonderkommando R and Franke deployed to southern Ukraine with the unit.¹³³

Like the SS, the NSKK fielded Volksdeutsche from the Soviet Union whom the VoMi had relocated prior to Operation Barbarossa. Otto T. is an example. Originally from Volhynia, T. settled in the Warthegau in early 1940. Perhaps lacking the educational or National Socialist credentials for the SS, T. volunteered for the NSKK shortly after arriving in occupied Poland. Although T. served primarily as a truck driver, he was one of a handful of Russian-speaking NSKK men, as his superiors were apparently well aware.¹³⁴ Like the SS, the VoMi took language skills into consideration in selecting recruits for deployment in Transnistria.

The VoMi staffed Sonderkommando R so hastily that it often overlooked professional qualifications. Dental technician (*Zahntechniker*) turned truck driver Erwin Niessner exemplified the ill-fitting assignments that NSKK personnel sometimes received. Born in the Sudetenland in 1912, the bilingual Niessner spent his formative years in Germany, where he joined the Hitler Youth (Hitler Jugend) and later the Nazi party. It is difficult to pinpoint why Niessner joined the Nazi party, but it is possible that he did so merely for professional advantages. Contrary to SS conventions, when Niessner received an SS commission as an SS-Untersturmführer in April 1944, his personnel file indicated that he remained a practicing Catholic.¹³⁵

132 *Ibid.*, 206.

133 Aussage von O. F., December 15, 1966, BAL, B162/2307, 351. German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 1st August–31st August 1942, September 7, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 20.

134 Aussage von O. T., December 18, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 249–250.

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

Nevertheless, his deployment to Transnistria owed more to his NSKK membership than it did to any personal political loyalties. Seconded to the VoMi in Berlin during August 1940, Niessner worked as a chauffeur until his superiors attached him to Sonderkommando R bound for Transnistria.¹³⁶ It was not until he reached Odessa in late October 1941 that his SS superiors realized that he might be more valuable to the unit as a dentist than as a truck driver.¹³⁷ The VoMi sometimes struggled to assign effectively even the limited personnel that it could find.

GERMAN WOMEN IN SONDERKOMMANDO R

German women in Sonderkommando R made it one of the Third Reich's most diverse units. Their duties ranged from medical care to Nazi party organizing. Hoffmeyer's female subordinates frequently had educational and ideological qualifications that surpassed those of their male colleagues. Disproportionate to their numbers, German women facilitated Sonderkommando R's mission in southern Ukraine.¹³⁸

When Sonderkommando R arrived in Transnistria in September 1941, it had no women. The SS likely initially excluded German women because

136 Aussage von E. N., September 14, 1962, BAL, B162/2298, 47–48.

137 Aussage von E. N., October 20, 1967, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2699, 46.

138 The role of German women in the Third Reich and their participation in Nazi plans to "Germanize" Eastern Europe have been the subject of considerable research. See Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987). Gudrun Schwarz, "Verdrängte Täterinnen: Frauen im Apparat der SS (1939–1945)," in *Nach Osten: Verdeckte Spuren nationalsozialistischer Verbrechen*, ed. Theresa Wobbe (Frankfurt: Verlag Neue Kritik, 1992), 197–227. Following Schwarz, more recent historically scholarship has also addressed the role of women as perpetrators. See, Brigitte Scheiger, "'Ich bitte um baldige Arisierung der Wohnung': Zur Funktion von Frauen im bürokratischen System der Verfolgung," in *Nach Osten: Verdeckte Spuren nationalsozialistischer Verbrechen*, ed. Theresa Wobbe (Frankfurt: Verlage Neue Kritik, 1992), 175–196; Daniel Patrick Brown, *The Camp Women: The Female Auxiliaries Who Assisted the SS in Running the Nazi Concentration Camp System* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer, 2002); Alexandra Przyrembel, "Ilse Koch – 'normale' SS-Ehefrau oder 'Kommandeuse' von Buchenwald?," in *Karrieren der Gewalt: Nationalsozialistische Täterbiographien*, ed. Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Gerhard Paul (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2004), 126–133; Elisabeth Kohlhas, "Gertrud Slotke – Angestellte im niederländischen Judenreferat der Sicherheitspolizei," in *Karrieren der Gewalt: Nationalsozialistische Täterbiographien*, ed. Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Gerhard Paul (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2004), 207–218. Following Claudia Koonz's seminal research, recent scholarship has probed the direct participation of women in the Nazi "machinery of destruction," exploring their variegated roles from administrative staff to concentration camp guards. Other research underscores the important contribution of German women in implementing Nazi "Germanization" plans in conquered Poland. See Elizabeth Harvey, *Women and the Nazi East: Agents and Witnesses of Germanization* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003). Wendy Lower's research on German women in the Nazi East echoes many of Harvey's findings and suggests that, in the occupied Soviet Union, German women had greater proximity to the murder of Jews and expanded opportunities to kill than in Poland. Wendy Lower, *Hitler's Furies: German Women in the Nazi Killing Fields* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013).



Figure 2.5. Bereichskommando Worms's staff assembled for a meeting, probably 1943. Note the large number of German and local women working for the Bereichskommando. *Source:* LAV NRW W, Q 234 Staatsanwaltschaft Dortmund, Zentralstelle Nr. 2795.

of Transnistria's uncertain security situation. Once Sonderkommando R established that Transnistria had few Soviet partisans – apart from Odessa's catacombs – German women began to arrive in fall 1941 (Figure 2.5). A biographical profile of women in Sonderkommando R emerges from statements that they made to the West German police after the war.

German women in Sonderkommando R were generally part of either the German Red Cross (Deutsches Roten Kreuz or DRK) or career Nazi party organizers in the National Socialist Women's Organization (NS-Frauenwerk). Arriving between October 1941 and March 1942, DRK members reported to DRK-Plenipotentiary (Bevöllmachtige) Ursula Kästner, who was based in Rowno (Rivne) and later in Landau. DRK nurses received assignments throughout Transnistria.¹³⁹ Daily command rested in the dozen or so physicians assigned to rural Transnistria. Where no doctor was stationed, as was frequently the case, DRK nurses reported to local

139 German Police Decodes, No. 2 Traffic: 10.12.42., December 14, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 36, 2. Aussage von A. F., August 21, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 255. Aussage von U. L., December 21, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 310. Aussage von E. A., September 30, 1966, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2695, 107.

SS commanders.¹⁴⁰ Numbering perhaps fifty by the height of Sonderkommando R's deployment, DRK nurses cared for the unit's personnel and area Volksdeutsche.¹⁴¹

A couple of biographical patterns are evident. Some DRK nurses received postings in Transnistria simply because Hoffmeyer's unit required medical personnel. Else A. joined the DRK in February 1917 and served during the First World War. After a posting to Alsace and without any experience with Volksdeutsche affairs, she received a transfer to Hoffmeyer's command.¹⁴² Similarly, Irmela K., a twenty-four-year-old pastor's daughter from Halle, had just completed a DRK training course in Dresden when her superiors transferred her to Sonderkommando R. She also had had no apparent previous contact with the VoMi.¹⁴³

Many DRK nurses, however, volunteered for wartime service in the East. Kästner, for example, left medical school at the University of Munich to go to Ukraine. Although she was silent after the war about why she left her medical studies, her earlier service as a League of German Girls (Bund Deutscher Mädel) senior area leader (*Obergauführerin*) for Bayerischen Ostmark suggests her political leanings.¹⁴⁴ Other women had more personal motivations for volunteering for the German-occupied Soviet Union. Franziska W. from Carinthia, for example, joined the DRK and requested a posting on the Eastern Front in early 1942 after her fiancée died fighting near Murmansk.¹⁴⁵ Service to Transnistria grew on some DRK personnel. Hildegard Schneider, for example, began a three-month practicum with Sonderkommando R in mid-September 1942. Only a month into her apprenticeship, she requested a permanent posting to the unit after the scheduled completion of her state exams in December.¹⁴⁶ Although postwar statements of former DRK nurses often only hint at why they requested this assignment, many of them had significant ideological and personal reasons for volunteering.

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

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

142 Aussage von E. A., September 30, 1966, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2695, 106.

143 Aussage von I. K., March 17, 1967, BAL, B162/2307, 419–420.

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

145 Aussage von F. W., October 13, 1967, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2699, 20.

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

The second-largest cohort of women under Hoffmeyer's command engaged in what former members of the unit described as "women's work" (*Frauenarbeit*).¹⁴⁷ Loosely conceived, "women's work" aimed to convert local ethnic German women and children into National Socialists by establishing schools, creating a National Socialist youth organization, and training local young men, and particularly local young women, to spread the Nazi gospel.

Although Sonderkommando R's DRK nurses varied in their attachment to the Nazi regime and to its Volksdeutsche project in the East, the unit's professional female Nazi party activists were committed National Socialists. Their chief in Transnistria, Gertrude Braun, was a career National Socialist organizer.¹⁴⁸ Born in 1906 in Yevpatoria on Crimea, Braun's childhood left her an avowed anti-Bolshevik. After Soviet authorities had executed her father in 1919, she fled to Germany with her mother and two siblings. During the late 1920s and early 1930s, Braun worked for Protestant women's welfare agencies in southwestern Germany. Braun's decision to join the Reich Labor Service's (Reichsarbeitsdienst) Women's Labor Service (Weiblicher Arbeitsdienst) likely stemmed from the large-scale centralization of Protestant welfare agencies within the Nazi party after 1933.¹⁴⁹

Once in the Women's Labor Service, Braun advanced rapidly to Deputy Regional Leader (*stellvertretende Bezirksführerin*) in Stuttgart as a protégée of Reich Women's Leader (Reichsfrauenführerin) Gertrude Scholtz-Klink. In 1939, Braun's superiors promoted her to the staff of the Reich Leadership of the German Women's Organization (Reichsleitung des Deutschen Frauenwerks) in Berlin as Administrator for Russian Germandom (*Sachbearbeiterin für das Russlanddeutschtum*). The organization's specialist for ethnic German affairs in the Soviet Union, Braun supervised programs for ethnic German women in VoMi Resettlement Camps in the Warthegau.¹⁵⁰ During her 1966 interview with the West German police, Braun explained: "After the outbreak of hostilities with Russia it was always my aspiration to deploy to the East to care for and change my fellow ethnic German countrymen and, if possible, to return to my old homeland again."¹⁵¹ Braun accomplished both goals. During summer 1943, Braun took a six-day vacation to German-occupied Yevpatoria.¹⁵²

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

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

149 Aussage von G. B., June 16, 1966, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2694, 144.

150 *Ibid.*

151 *Ibid.*

152 *Ibid.*

Braun's subordinates were cut from the same cloth. Braun sometimes handpicked her helpers. Former gymnastics teacher Johanna W., for example, had volunteered to serve in the VoMi's Warthegau Resettlement Camps. There, Braun recruited her for subsequent deployments to the occupied Soviet Union.¹⁵³ Irene H., a fellow former gymnastics instructor, shared a Stuttgart connection with Braun. An erstwhile League of German Girls leader and Nazi party member since 1939, H. was working for the NS-Frauenwerk in Stuttgart when she received Braun's offer to serve in Transnistria. As H. later recounted, she accepted Braun's invitation because she found the opportunity intriguing.¹⁵⁴ H.'s affinity for her duties was not unique. As Ilse S., then a twenty-year-old from Schleswig-Holstein, later admitted: "I always had a particular interest in the East."¹⁵⁵ Like many German women in Transnistria, Braun and her subordinates were as thoroughly Nazified as any German women in the Third Reich.

Many of Sonderkommando R's female subordinates established lasting romantic relationships with their male colleagues. Admittedly, the records available to reconstruct these liaisons – personnel files and postwar testimony – imperfectly capture the range of relationships. Both sources overrepresent long-term relationships and underrepresent more ephemeral attachments. SS personnel records documented applications for authorization to marry. Postwar testimony taken by the West German police is virtually silent about casual relationships between German men and women in Transnistria. Discussing these relationships both violated postwar German sensibilities and likely appeared irrelevant to investigators. Nevertheless, the available information paints the portrait of an intimate unit in which work and love overlapped.

Three notable patterns emerge. First, many of these relationships were lasting. When the West German police interviewed these women during the 1960s, many of them were still married to Sonderkommando R veterans whom they had met during their deployment to southern Ukraine. Friederike C.'s experience was typical. Originally from the Sudetenland, she joined the German Red Cross as a nurse's assistant in 1935. In May 1942, C.'s superiors deployed her to Transnistria via Breslau and Rowno. At 38 years old, C. was well past the marriage age for most German women.¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless, during her deployment she had a relationship with Rosenfeld's Bereichskommandoführer, SS-Obersturmführer Heinz Born, a fellow

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

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

155 Aussage von I. S., February 26, 1965, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2680, 95.

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

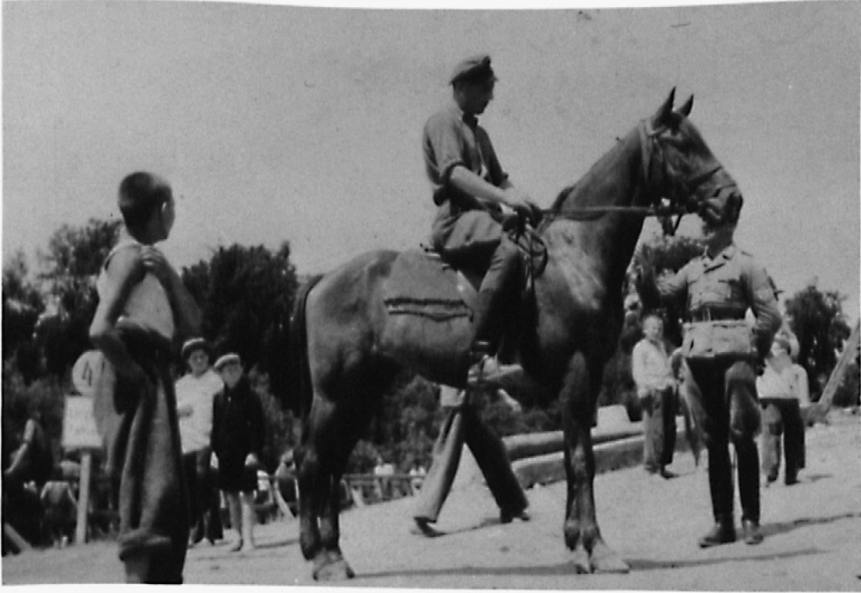


Figure 2.6. Erich von Fircks, one of Sonderkommando R's Bereichskommandoführer, probably 1942 or 1943. *Source:* LAV NRW W, Q 234 Staatsanwaltschaft Dortmund, Zentralstelle Nr. 2795.

Sudeten German ten years her senior.¹⁵⁷ Decades later, she attempted to shield her husband of twenty years by concocting a farfetched story about rescuing Jews.¹⁵⁸

Second, German women assigned to Sonderkommando R were more likely to marry its officers than its enlisted personnel. In many cases, these unions presented social advancement opportunities. Anna R.'s marriage was typical. An Austrian by birth, R. volunteered for the German Red Cross after the 1938 Anschluss. In 1940, R.'s superiors assigned her to a VoMi resettlement camp for Bukovinian Volksdeutsche in Herberstein in Steiermark. After a brief Luftwaffe deployment, R. deployed to Transnistria with Sonderkommando R. Assigned to Bereichskommando XI in Rastatt, R. began a relationship with the commander of neighboring Bereichskommando XIV in Worms, SS-Untersturmführer Erich von Fircks, a Baltic German nobleman, who had joined the SS after relocating from Latvia to German-occupied Poland during 1940 (Figure 2.6).¹⁵⁹ Shortly after

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

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

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

meeting at a unit social gathering, Fircks orchestrated R.'s transfer to Worms. When R. departed Transnistria in May 1943, she was pregnant. The couple married the following month in her native Steiermark.¹⁶⁰

Last, DRK nurses and doctors under Hoffmeyer's command frequently married. Given that DRK nurses reported to the unit's physicians scattered throughout Transnistria's countryside, it is little surprise that this isolation bred intimacy. At least a quarter of Sonderkommando R's physicians met their spouses in Transnistria.¹⁶¹ SS-Untersturmführer Dr. Herbert Lützendorf, Sonderkommando R's head doctor, met his future wife in Transnistria. An SA member during his medical studies at the Universities of Munich and Halle during the 1930s, Lützendorf had participated in Hoffmeyer's earlier resettlement campaigns as a VoMi physician. After working as a doctor for the Einwandererzentrale or EWZ, the SS's Central Immigration Office for Volksdeutsche resettlers, and a six-month posting at the University Clinic in Berlin, Lützendorf's superiors transferred him to Landau as Hoffmeyer's chief physician in April 1942.¹⁶² The following month, Lützendorf met his future bride, Hildegard Stefan, when the DRK assigned her to Landau as a kindergarten teacher. She had volunteered for the DRK in 1938 and then sought a wartime posting at the front. Stefan was a good ideological match for Lützendorf.¹⁶³ After a six-month romance, Lützendorf proposed in early October 1942 and the couple married in June 1943.¹⁶⁴ Perhaps out of devotion to Lützendorf, Stefan continued to use her married name during the 1960s, despite the fact that her husband had been missing in action since March 1945.¹⁶⁵

Scholars have long pointed to the supporting role that German women played in the Third Reich's murderous policies.¹⁶⁶ In her examination of the family lives of concentration camp staff, Gudrun Schwarz argues that these relationships created a "clan society" (*Sippengemeinschaft*) in which German women oiled the "machinery of destruction."¹⁶⁷ No less so than in

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

161 Another example of a Sonderkommando R doctor who met his spouse on duty is SS-Untersturmführer Dr. Eberhard Mohr. Mohr's 1942 marriage to DRK nurse Elisabeth Weyel was his second marriage to a member of the German Red Cross. Mohr's previous wife, whom he had met during an earlier VoMi deployment, had passed away in December 1941. RuSHA Akte Eberhard Mohr, NARA, A 3343 RS E35, 284-492.

162 RuSHA Akte Dr. Herbert Lützendorf, NARA, A 3343 RS D5210, 1520-1523.

163 *Ibid.*, 1542-1545.

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

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

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

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

German concentration camps, Cupid's arrow normalized Sonderkommando R's increasingly brutal mission in Transnistria.

UNCOLLEGIAL COLLEAGUES

How did such a heterogeneous unit function? Often poorly. Sonderkommando R's Transnistrian outposts were often uncollegial workplaces. The unit's SS leaders were predictably hostile toward their non-SS subordinates. This institutional rivalry was not solely a product of the SS's hubris. It also grew from the VoMi's failed past attempts at interinstitutional cooperation. The VoMi's initial plan for its fall 1939 Baltic resettlement operations envisioned substantial support from local Nazi party administrators in West Prussia and the Warthegau, who were to care for the Baltic Germans upon arrival. To the VoMi's chagrin, area Nazis were unenthusiastic about the Baltic German resettlers and had failed to prepare adequately. Himmler's realization that few Nazis outside the SS shared his zeal for ethnic German resettlement projects prompted him to create a VoMi-run immigration center in Posen. This experience merely sharpened the SS's already pronounced desire to centralize all Volksdeutsche affairs under the VoMi. Subsequent VoMi resettlement operations in Volhynia and Poland and Bessarabia and northern Bukovina remained under exclusive SS control from start to finish.¹⁶⁸ This autarkic mindset shaped the SS's hostility toward its institutional partners in Sonderkommando R.

In Romanian-controlled Transnistria, Sonderkommando R was also free from the institutional restraints that it faced in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine. In principle, Himmler had removed Sonderkommando R from the VoMi's chain of command and subordinated it directly to himself.¹⁶⁹ In the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, this command structure was more complicated – an ambiguity that created friction with both the SiPo-SD (Sicherheitspolizei und Sicherheitsdienst, Security Police and Security Service) and the German civil administration. In matters related to security and policing, Hoffmeyer was to report to the local Higher SS- and Police Leader in an opaque arrangement that precipitated endless debate about Sonderkommando R's authority.¹⁷⁰ Hoffmeyer's relationship with the civil

¹⁶⁸ Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, 159.

¹⁶⁹ As noted above, Lorenz claimed that Himmler removed Hoffmeyer from his chain of command and subordinated Sonderkommando R to the Higher SS- and Police Leader. Vernehmung von Werner Lorenz, April 16, 1973, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2787, 102. As such a position did not exist for Transnistria, Hoffmeyer reported directly to Himmler.

¹⁷⁰ See, for example, SS- und Polizeigericht XVIII in Kiew an den SS-Richter beim Reichsführer-SS und Chef der Deutschen Polizei SS-Obersturmbahnführer Bender, February 15, 1942, BAL,

administration was still more unclear and more acrimonious. Both organizations tussled over Volksdeutsche affairs, including control of ethnic German schools.¹⁷¹ The civil administration and Sonderkommando R also competed over ethnic German recruits, who were in great demand.¹⁷² As British signals intelligence concluded in 1943: “The connection between Vomi [sic] and the civil administration under the Ost-Ministerium in Ukraine is not sharply defined, their respective fields of activity often overlap and there appears to be a complete lack of co-operation bordering on hostility between the two organizations.”¹⁷³ Except for carrying out the Holocaust, as Wendy Lower has noted, interagency cooperation was abysmal in German-occupied Ukraine.¹⁷⁴

Sonderkommando R’s conflicts with the SiPo-SD and the German civil administration in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine were absent in Transnistria because neither organization operated there. A Romanian occupation zone, Transnistria had no Higher SS- and Police Leader. Hoffmeyer therefore had no immediate superiors in Transnistria and reported directly to Himmler and indirectly to his VoMi superiors in Berlin, including Lorenz. Similarly, in Transnistria, Sonderkommando R had to compete not with German civil administrators, but with the Romanians. Challenging local Romanian authorities proved far easier for Sonderkommando R because, unlike German civil administrators in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, Sonderkommando R simply ran roughshod over the Romanians. Absent local oversight and with only weak supervision from Berlin, in Transnistria Hoffmeyer’s command enjoyed exceptional autonomy – an independence that the unit guarded jealously.

Landau was the epicenter of the SS’s protracted power struggle with the NSKK. NSKK-Truppenführer Gutsche’s autonomous staff there was a perennial thorn in the SS’s side. Unlike in rural Transnistria, where area NSKK leaders made infrequent inspection visits and where the organization’s personnel were subordinated to Sonderkommando R’s SS officers, in Landau a robust NSKK staff presented a viable competitive chain of

B162/2292, 130. Der SS-Richter beim Reichsführer-SS und Chef der Deutschen Polizei Feldkommandostelle an den Höhern SS- und Polizeiführer Rußland-Süd SS-Obergruppenführer u. General der Polizei Prützmann/Kiew, February 20, 1942, BAL, B162/2292, 131.

171 German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 1st November–31st December 1942, January 1, 1943, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 7. Information on the work of the Volksdeutschemittelstelle [sic] gained from GPD, August 1, 1943, BNA, HW 16, Piece 58, Part 1, 4.

172 German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 1st November–31st December 1942, January 1, 1943, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 7.

173 Information on the work of the Volksdeutschemittelstelle [sic] gained from GPD, August 1, 1943, BNA, HW 16, Piece 58, Part 1, 4.

174 Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building*, 70, 83.

command.¹⁷⁵ The SS found this challenge unacceptable and, beginning in 1942, Hoffmeyer attempted repeatedly to have Gutsche recalled to Berlin and to subordinate his staff directly to the SS. Hoffmeyer succeeded in doing precisely this in mid-1943.¹⁷⁶ Why Gutsche's superiors removed him is unclear. That Gutsche's transfer coincided with the withdrawal of NSKK units elsewhere in the German-occupied Soviet Union suggests that a change in NSKK staffing perhaps prompted his removal. Nevertheless, the SS won its struggle to end the NSKK's nominal independence in Transnistria.

Following Hoffmeyer's lead, SS personnel launched a petty campaign against their NSKK colleagues. Siebert distinguished between the SS and the NSKK in Landau. He billeted members of these organizations separately, establishing the SS's barracks in a former government building and the NSKK's quarters in a former school on the other side of Landau's church.¹⁷⁷ SS hostility toward the NSKK had a trickle-down effect on Sonderkommando R's rank-and-file personnel. Herman J., a former policeman and NSKK member, whose deployment to Transnistria with Sonderkommando R marked his second VoMi operation "in the East," recounted bitterly that "the SS repeated to us that we were only 'drinkers' and not 'fighters.'"¹⁷⁸ The abuse that SS personnel levied against their NSKK colleagues was not merely verbal. NSKK member Ernst R. later described having been threatened physically by an SS member during a squabble.¹⁷⁹ The discord between SS and NSKK personnel, however, should not be overstated. After the war, NSKK members likely exaggerated this strife to distance themselves from the SS and to deflect suspicion. Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that the SS and NSKK's marriage of convenience was an unhappy one.

Sonderkommando R's SS leaders fought similar institutional turf wars against the DRK and the NS-Frauenwerk. Hoffmeyer and his deputies began grousing about both organizations shortly after they reached their full complements in mid-1942. The SS again objected to autonomous

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

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

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

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

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

command structures. Although the SS was to authorize the DRK and NS-Frauenwerk's personnel transfers, this procedure apparently worked only in theory. An April 10, 1943, order, for example, chastised both the DRK and the NS-Frauenwerk for moving staff without SS approval.¹⁸⁰ Hoffmeyer's frustration risked a confrontation with Himmler. According to British signals intelligence, Himmler ordered the NS-Frauenwerk to dispatch a further forty staff members to Transnistria to beef up its Nazification program. Hoffmeyer resisted the order, claiming that the region was already "overflowing" with DRK and the NS-Frauenwerk representatives.¹⁸¹ Hoffmeyer lamented that, although these organizations continued "working under the direction of Vomi [sic]," they "remain under the command of their own stations."¹⁸² It is unclear whether or not Hoffmeyer's rearguard action was successful. Anecdotally, the DRK and NS-Frauenwerk assigned fewer women to Transnistria after April 1943. Given Germany's increasingly precarious military position in the Soviet Union, this change was more likely a consequence of events at the front than a result of Hoffmeyer's protestations.

Sonderkommando R's SS staff also ratcheted up pressure on the DRK and the NS-Frauenwerk. In May 1943, Sonderkommando R banned German women from riding horses and ordered them henceforth to ride bicycles, which the unit hoped to obtain for them.¹⁸³ The consequences of this punitive directive were predictable. Four months later, Hoffmeyer had to eat crow. In August 1943, Sonderkommando R ordered its SS and NSKK personnel to cooperate with their female counterparts and admonished them that their continued complaints about these women were unfounded.¹⁸⁴ Sonderkommando R in Transnistria was beset with interinstitutional squabbling.

CONCLUSION

Although Sonderkommando R was often tempestuous, much of its staff remained wedded to the VoMi's Volksdeutsche enterprise in Transnistria. Most of the unit's managers had made their careers as *völkisch* activists during the interwar years. The VoMi's creation during the 1930s provided them with institutionalized state support to mobilize Germanism abroad and professional advancement possibilities. They relished organizing

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

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

182 *Ibid.*

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

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

Volksdeutsche in conquered Soviet territory. For most of Sonderkommando R's leaders, deployment to Transnistria was precisely the opportunity for which they had yearned for decades. They would permit neither uncooperative local residents, nor an unexpected influx of Jewish deportees, to derail this mission. Violence and even mass murder were acceptable to protect their heady undertaking.

The German women who deployed to Transnistria with Sonderkommando R cooperated with the VoMi's plans for similar reasons. The war in the East created unique career opportunities for them. Many of the DRK nurses and Nazi party activists who followed the SS to southern Ukraine were committed National Socialists. The myriad long-term romantic relationships that these women enjoyed with their like-minded male counterparts merely reinforced these convictions. These liaisons lent normalcy to the violent Nazi population project in southern Ukraine not only for German men, but also for German women. No less so than for men, Hoffmeyer's female subordinates were bound to the VoMi's mission for ideological, professional, and personal reasons.

Sonderkommando R's Nazi party "old fighters" had a different orientation. Assigned to Sonderkommando R because they were available manpower, they had little, if any, previous experience with Volksdeutsche affairs. A posting to the unit, however, constituted a much-deferred reward. Fervent National Socialists, they were unwilling to forgo the spoils of the Nazi occupation. If anything, they were even more sanguine about using violence to surmount obstacles than the unit's professional VoMi operatives. Drilled in street brawls, assassinations, and impromptu concentration camps during the Nazi seizure of power, these Nazi veterans were primed to respond to any challenge with naked brutality. This mindset would propel the Holocaust in Transnistria and shape Sonderkommando R's policies toward area ethnic Germans.

The willingness of NSKK personnel assigned to Sonderkommando R to support the unit's rapid descent into violence is somewhat more perplexing. Unlike most of the unit's officer corps and female support staff, most NSKK members in southern Ukraine were not true believers in National Socialism. Even fewer of them had an appetite for or experience with violence – a characteristic on which former local residents commented after the war.¹⁸⁵

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

Scholars have long attempted to explain why such seemingly “ordinary men” participated in genocide. The constellation of situational and social psychological motivations that they have charted helps to explain why the NSKK’s “ordinary” members took part in the unit’s bloody mission.¹⁸⁶

Two additional factors, however, are relevant. First, a critical mass of NSKK members seconded to the VoMi for wartime service in Transnistria had served under Hoffmeyer during earlier population transfers. This experience proved seminal. It introduced NSKK members to their SS superiors and to the Nazi Volksdeutsche project. The occupation’s violence could not have come as a surprise. Second, NSKK members constituted an impotent minority within Sonderkommando R. Most of their SS colleagues were convinced National Socialists and maintained a monopoly on the unit’s leadership corps. Outnumbered and subordinate within the unit, NSKK members, unsurprisingly, did little to obstruct Sonderkommando R’s increasingly violent agenda.

In his examination of the Nazi security apparatus in Kiev, Alexander Prusin describes local members of the SiPo-SD as a “community of violence.”¹⁸⁷ This label applies equally to Sonderkommando R’s personnel in Transnistria. In comparison even to the hodgepodge units that the Third Reich fielded to murder civilians during the war, Sonderkommando R’s staff was particularly diverse. This exceptional institutional and biographical multiplicity bred cleavages within the unit. Yet, most of Sonderkommando R’s members in Transnistria had strong reasons to pursue the SS’s Volksdeutsche enterprise in southern Ukraine with gusto and brutality. When called to unleash tremendous violence against Jews and, ultimately, against local ethnic Germans, they were prepared to do so.

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

187 Alexander V. Prusin, “A Community of Violence: The SiPo/SD and its Role in the Nazi Terror System in Generalbezirk Kiev,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 21, no. 1 (2007): 1–30.

Establishing Nazi Rule in Transnistria

During late summer and fall 1941, Sonderkommando R began its multi-year mission in Transnistria. Hoffmeyer's initial plan was simple and, as his subordinates discovered, simplistic. A veteran commander of successful resettlement operations in the East, Hoffmeyer saw the mission of the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle (Ethnic German Liaison Office) or VoMi in Transnistria as a continuation of these earlier deployments. As before, his men would classify local ethnic Germans according to the four-tiered categories of the Deutsche Volksliste (German Peoples' List), Volksdeutsche classification guidelines that the SS had employed elsewhere in Eastern Europe.¹ Instead of relocating area Volksdeutsche to Nazi reception centers in occupied Poland, as they had prior to 1941, Hoffmeyer's teams would now marshal local ethnic Germans onsite in conquered Ukraine. There, Sonderkommando R would secure an economically dominant position for them and ensure that they became committed National Socialists. Rescued from "Judeo-Bolshevism," the Black Sea Germans would become the leading edge of the Third Reich's planned population revolution in the vanquished Soviet Union.

As Hoffmeyer and his underlings soon discovered, Germanizing Transnistria presented unanticipated challenges. The first was the Romanians. Antonescu had acquiesced to German pressure and permitted the VoMi to deploy to Transnistria. Yet, local Romanian authorities grasped the threat that the SS's Volksdeutsche population project posed. SS-administered Volksdeutsche settlements inserted German influence into Romanian-occupied territory and established a basis for future competing Nazi claims

1 See Alexa Stiller, "On the Margins of *Volksgemeinschaft*: Criteria for Belonging to the *Volk* within the Nazi Germanization Policy in the Annexed Territories, 1939–1945," in *Heimat, Region, and Empire: Spatial Identities under National Socialism*, eds. Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann and Maiken Umbach (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

to the region. At virtually every turn, Romanian occupiers wrestled with Sonderkommando R for control of Transnistria. Hoffmeyer's subordinates lashed out at this antagonism, igniting a low-level conflict in which SS-led ethnic German bands battled their supposed Romanian allies.

Other local realities frustrated Hoffmeyer's plans and propelled his subordinates down a path of escalating violence during late 1941. Sonderkommando R quickly discovered that previous German efforts to murder local Jews and politically suspect Volksdeutsche were incomplete. Inundated with local denunciations, Sonderkommando R began to kill Jews and Volksdeutsche "communists." Many of the unit's midlevel officers were experienced street fighters, but these murders marked the beginning of Sonderkommando R's complicity in the Holocaust.

The unit's deadly response had implications for VoMi rule in Transnistria's Volksdeutsche settlements. The SS's continual discovery of Jews and putative Soviet agents in communities that Einsatzgruppe D already had "liberated" from the evils of "Judeo-Bolshevism" raised concerns about the Germanness of local Volksdeutsche. If Jews and communists abounded, as the SS suspected, who was sufficiently German to absorb into the *Volksgemeinschaft*?

Despite these concerns, the VoMi remained committed to Germanizing Transnistria. Failure to do so would have made a mockery of the organization, ended the careers of Sonderkommando R's officers, and invited their transfer to more hazardous assignments. Having found few Volksdeutsche who satisfied the criteria that the SS had used elsewhere in Eastern Europe, Sonderkommando R jettisoned existing guidelines. Instead, Sonderkommando R issued improvised ethnic classification instructions that depended ultimately on the discretion of local VoMi commanders. In effect, Hoffmeyer told his subordinates that they would know real ethnic Germans when they found them.

Hoffmeyer's determination to push forward provided local residents with motive and opportunity to manipulate the VoMi's improvised ethnic categories for their own benefit. Beginning shortly after Sonderkommando R's arrival in Transnistria, the VoMi began to channel property to local ethnic Germans. It purloined enterprises, confiscated tractors, and rustled cattle for area Volksdeutsche. The VoMi also quietly dismantled collective agriculture, permitting the residents of its communities to farm independently. This exceptional move in occupied Soviet territory enabled local residents to resume the farming that they had known before Soviet rule. Sonderkommando R's material redistribution became still more apparent as it created new homogenous ethnic German settlements through localized

ethnic cleansing. Schooled in the brutal politics of Soviet agricultural production, local residents grasped the implications of the VoMi's material redistribution perhaps more keenly than the SS. Area Volksdeutsche would grow fat under Nazi rule as their non-German neighbors starved. With an acute understanding of the grim fates that awaited area Jews and Slavs, Transnistrians – ethnic Germans and non-Germans alike – had every reason to seek admission to the Nazi racial community during fall 1941.

The SS provided them with the chance to do so. Hoffmeyer charged local VoMi commanders with culling Volksdeutsche from a suspect and especially cosmopolitan population, yet offered little guidance on how they were to do so. Understaffed and overwhelmed by the assignment, his subordinates took the path of least resistance. If they could not easily determine who among Transnistria's residents belonged in the Volksgemeinschaft, then they would simply find reliable local helpers who could. Unaware that many VoMi-administered communities conspired to hide some integrated local Jews from the SS, Sonderkommando R mistakenly believed that it had found confederates to separate Transnistria's population along Nazi lines. If some area residents had fingered racially and politically targeted individuals, then could they not also help identify suitable ethnic Germans?

Recruiting supposedly trustworthy indigenous informants proved disastrous. Local ethnic German classifiers knew the rewards for achieving ethnic German status under Nazi rule. Many of them scrambled to present their non-German and sometimes even Jewish friends and relatives as Volksdeutsche to the SS. By late 1941, the VoMi had not only failed to identify the boundaries of Germanness in Transnistria, but it had invited area residents to sabotage Sonderkommando R's entire enterprise.

AN ANTAGONISTIC ALLIANCE: GERMANS AND ROMANIANS IN TRANSNISTRIA

Relations between the Romanian government and the SS were dysfunctional long before Hoffmeyer's unit arrived in Transnistria. Antonescu and Himmler detested one another. Earlier in 1941 the SS had backed a coup against Antonescu, led by Horia Sima's fascist Iron Guard. When it failed, Himmler orchestrated Sima's transfer to Germany, where the SS kept him as an alternative to Antonescu. Had the prospect of territorial expansion into occupied Soviet territory not tantalized Antonescu, he likely would have forbidden the SS to station personnel in Transnistria. The Romanian leadership grudgingly informed their subordinates in Transnistria to expect Sonderkommando R's arrival in early September 1941. Tellingly, when the

SS informed the Romanians of Sonderkommando R's impending deployment, it misrepresented the unit's size and mission.²

Following the invasion of the Soviet Union, Romanian military and police forces were rapacious. During the campaign's first weeks, marauding Romanian soldiers stole titanic amounts of civilian and state property.³ To make matters worse from the German perspective, they treated area Volksdeutsche as a conquered people whose property was fair game.⁴ Georg B., an ethnic German from the village of Mannheim, later recounted his initial encounter with the Romanian army: "on the first day of the occupation, we had to hide in the basement and could not leave. . . . We were under Romanian military guard and were prevented from leaving the cellar. When we finally were let go, all of the poultry had been taken away by the Romanians."⁵ Both the Wehrmacht and Einsatzgruppe D tried to stem Romanian banditry. Their protection ended as they advanced eastward. Guarding and rebuilding the area's largely denuded Volksdeutsche communities fell to Sonderkommando R.

Romanian robbery endangered Hoffmeyer's plan to establish a dominant economic position for Transnistria's Volksdeutsche. He initially attempted to halt Romanian theft. On September 22, 1941, Hoffmeyer ordered his freshly minted Bereichskommandoführer to "stop all [Romanian] requisitions in Volksdeutsche villages."⁶ Ethnic Germans left homeless by Romanian raids added particular urgency to this effort.⁷ Nevertheless, Romanian pillaging continued through fall 1941. In November 1941, Hoffmeyer's subordinates warned him of "growing Romanian pressure" and "renewed attacks on ethnic Germans near Landau."⁸ Continued Romanian thefts not only damaged Romanian-German relations, but jeopardized the survival of local Volksdeutsche.

Hoffmeyer's response was swift and predictably violent. With fewer than 150 German subordinates scattered across Transnistria, he lacked the manpower to interdict Romanian raids. To augment its small staff, Sonderkommando R expanded the local Selbstschutz to protect Transnistria's Volksdeutsche settlements against Romanian theft. As Heinrich Krumbeck, the former Bereichskommandoführer of Janowska, later explained:

2 Copie de pe adresa Nr. 67148 a Ministerului Afacerilor Străine Dir politică către M.St.M., September 11, 1941, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1081, 13.

3 Dallin, *Odessa*, 68.

4 Aussage von F. E., August 27, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-002, Band 4, 573

5 Aussage von G. B., August 29, 1962, BAL, B162/2302, 139.

6 Dienstabweisung Nr. 1, September 22, 1941, BB, R 59/66, 154.

7 *Ibid.*, 153.

8 Teleprinter Message, 22.11.41, January 16, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 53, 7.

“Bereichskommandoführer . . . were ordered to create a militia made up of ethnic German men to protect the Volksdeutsche population because there were no German troops . . . in the area. We could not rely on the Romanians. It was rather the case that we had to arm ourselves against the Romanians.”⁹

As noted in [Chapter 1](#), Transnistria’s Volksdeutsche Selbstschutz was not one of Sonderkommando R’s creations, but rather a decades-old local defensive organization resurrected after long inactivity. Sonderkommando R expanded the Selbstschutz’s size and Nazified its mission. It ordered Bereichskommandoführer to enhance the militias that the Wehrmacht and Einsatzgruppe D had created in larger Volksdeutsche settlements and to establish units in smaller localities, where earlier German forces had not operated. With no guidance on recruitment, Bereichskommandoführer added men to their Selbstschutz units as they could. Initially, personnel came from existing militia forces that the Wehrmacht and Einsatzgruppe D had organized. Between eight and ten Selbstschutz members typically guarded each VoMi-administered locality.¹⁰ During fall 1941, however, Bereichskommandoführer expanded recruitment. Sonderkommando R favored young ethnic German men in their late teens and twenties, perhaps because they regarded them as less influenced by Soviet rule.¹¹ As Soviet authorities had deported many ethnic German men of military age to the country’s interior before the occupation, it often proved impossible to find enough young men. Bereichskommandoführer often had to recruit men up to the age of 40 and, particularly in smaller localities, Sonderkommando R had to muster all able-bodied ethnic German men.¹² After the war, former militiamen almost universally claimed that Selbstschutz service was compulsory.¹³ In some instances, this undoubtedly was the case. Nevertheless, many ethnic German men likely volunteered. Sonderkommando R’s militias initially appeared little different from the earlier defensive forces that local residents had fielded during crises. These militias also were all that stood between their property and the Romanians. To area

9 Aussage von H. K., October 13, 1966, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2695, 131. RuSHA Akte Heinz Krumbek, NARA, RG 232, A 3343 RS D347, 30–244.

10 Aussage von J. F., March 27, 1962, BAL, B162/2292, 29–30. Aussage von K. Z., November 19, 1962, BAL, B162/2299, 108–109. Vernehmung von J. B., November 15, 1962, BAL, B162/2299, 254. Protokol doprosa/Fet Ivan, May 22, 1948, USHMM, RG-38.018M, Reel 79, 3753–3754.

11 Aussage von E. P., July 16, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 192. Aussage von J. R., August 24, 1962, BAL, B162/2302, 7.

12 Aussage von G. S., March 2, 1962, BAL, B162/2292, 6. Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von J. D., August 13, 1962, BAL, B162/2296, 159.

13 Aussage von J. S., April 13, 1962, BAL, B162/2292, 53. Protokol doprosa/Kokha Floriana, October 8, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8580.

Volksdeutsche, there was little reason not to join the Selbstschutz during fall 1941.

Transnistria's early Nazi-led militia was a ragtag force. Militiamen reported to an area resident, whom the responsible Bereichskommandoführer had designated the local militia commander, or *Selbstschutzzführer*.¹⁴ Sonderkommando R appears to have selected Selbstschutzzführer based on presumed ideological reliability and previous Red Army service.¹⁵ Each Selbstschutz unit established a local command post near the seat of municipal government, the *Bürgermeisteramt*.¹⁶ During fall 1941, Transnistria's ethnic German militias were badly clothed, armed, and trained. Except for local militia commanders, who wore surplus Wehrmacht tunics, Selbstschutz members had no uniforms.¹⁷ Sonderkommando R could manage to outfit its militiamen only with homemade white armbands marked with swastikas.¹⁸ It relied on obsolete and often defective hunting rifles and captured Soviet firearms.¹⁹ Training for these early militias was virtually nonexistent. Although some Bereichskommandos held rudimentary drills for their militiamen,²⁰ other Bereichskommandos provided no instruction whatsoever.²¹ Understaffed and undertrained, Transnistria's Selbstschutz struggled to ward off the Romanians.²²

With fledgling militia forces at its disposal, Hoffmeyer's command confronted its would-be Romanian allies. Simmering hostility quickly escalated into a low-level armed conflict. A fall 1941 encounter between Sonderkommando R's staff in Halbstadt and Romanian soldiers stationed in nearby Varvarivka typifies this mounting antagonism. On November 20, 1941,

14 Aussage von E. T., May 20, 1965, BAL, B162/2304, 69. Aussage von J. E., November 17, 1962, BAL, B162/2299, 263. Aussage von K. U., January 28, 1963, BAL, B162/2301, 143. Protokol doprosa/Fet Ivan, May 22, 1948, USHMM, RG-38.018M, Reel 79, 3753. Protokol doprosa/Fet Ivan, May 29, 1948, USHMM, RG-38.018M, Reel 79, 3766. Protokol doprosa/Renner Yakov Yakovich, July 1, 1948, USHMM, RG-38.018M, Reel 79, 3726.

15 Protokol doprosa/Fet Ivan, May 18, 1948, USHMM, RG-38.018M, Reel 79, 3749.

16 Aussage von F. V., June 24, 1970, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2702, 83–84. Aussage von F. D., November 27, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 206.

17 German Police Decodes No. 1 Traffic: 9.3.43, March 17, 1943, BNA, HW 16, Piece 37, Part 1, 1. Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von D. R., n.d. BAL, B162/2290, 136. Aussage von B. B., November 13, 1962, BAL, B162/2300, 54.

18 German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 29 June–28 July 1943, August 10, 1943, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 4. Protokol doprosa/Ionusa Aleksandra, May 29, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8504. Protokol doprosa/Kokha Floriana, October 8, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8579. Aussage von M. B., June 10, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 193. Aussage von J. S., March 17, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 8.

19 Rundanwesiung Nr. 5, October 13, 1941, BB, R 59/66, 148. Protokol doprosa/Ionusa Aleksandra, May 28, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8504.

20 Aussage von I. F., July 27, 1962, BAL, B162/2300, 102.

21 Protokol doprosa/Fet Ivan, May 29, 1948, USHMM, RG-38.018M, Reel 79, 3766.

22 Aussage von J. H., September 9, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 278.

Sergeant Marinescu of the Romanian Seventy-eighth Infantry Battalion²³ arrived in the predominantly ethnically German town of Steinberg and proceeded to the local mill, whose ownership Romanian and German authorities contested. There, Marinescu ejected the mill's Volksdeutsche employees, screaming "You Germans, you Hitler!" (*Du Deutsche, Du Hitler!*). At least according to the Germans, during the ensuing brawl Marinescu nearly threw a twelve-year-old local boy into the mill's flywheel. Steinberg's residents appealed to Sonderkommando R's Bereichskommando in Halbstadt, which dispatched SS-Rottenführer Franz Leibham to intercede. Upon arriving in Steinberg, Leibham detained Marinescu and sent a local ethnic German, Matthäus Wanner, to report the arrest to Romanian authorities in Varvarivka. Infuriated by Marinescu's detention, his commanders arrested Wanner for allegedly insulting Romanian national honor. Leibham then traveled to Varvarivka with Marinescu in tow to secure Wanner's release. Leibham approached Captain Constantin Sendrea, Marinescu's superior, who had imprisoned Wanner. After heated negotiations, in which Leibham banged his fists on the table out of frustration, Leibham and Sendrea reached a deal: each man would release his prisoner and Marinescu would be banned from patrolling near Steinberg. With the captives traded, Leibham headed home with Wanner. On the road back to Steinberg, they again encountered Marinescu, who, in violation of the agreement, was returning to the town accompanied by two fellow Romanian soldiers. During the ensuing wagon chase and shootout, Leibham recaptured Marinescu and took him back to Halbstadt for interrogation. Sonderkommando R released Marinescu back to his unit a short time later.²⁴

Although this bizarre skirmish is among the best-documented, it was by no means unique. The ongoing and periodically violent struggle between Sonderkommando R and Romanian authorities for control of Transnistria's Volksdeutsche settlements played out both physically and bureaucratically. Selbstschutz units routinely engaged Romanian soldiers, whom

23 Based on the Romanian order of battle during the Second World War it is conceivable that the relevant German report incorrectly listed the Seventy-eighth Infantry Regiment as the Seventy-eighth Infantry Battalion. See Mark Axworthy, *The Romanian Army of World War II* (London: Osprey, 1991), 11. I thank Benton Arnovitz for bringing this issue and this source to my attention.

24 Both German and Romanian accounts of this encounter are preserved in correspondence between the Wehrmacht Liaison Office for Transnistria and the region's Romanian civil administration. Although both versions confirm the basic event, each portrays the other side as the aggressor. Alexianu an Wehrmachtsverbindungsstab für Transnistrien in Tiraspol/Betr.: Beschwerde wegen Uebergriffe deutscher Soldaten, November 27, 1941, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opus 1, Ed. Hr. 1084, 70, 162 (Pages out of sequence). Verbindungsstab der Deutschen Wehrmacht für Transnistrien la./Dem Kgl. Rum. Armeeoberkommando Depatement [sic] des Zivilgouverneurs von Transnistrien/Betr.: Beschwerde wegen angebl. Übergriffen deutsche Soldaten., January 2, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opus 1, Ed. Hr. 1084, 10-12.

they suspected of pillaging ethnic German property. During October 1942, for example, Sonderkommando R's liaison officer, SS-Untersturmführer Dr. Eckert, complained to his Romanian counterparts about thefts from the vineyards and corn fields near the Volksdeutsche town of Peterstal. According to Eckert, "recently this plundering has reached such proportions that the [Romanian] soldiers are driving their booty to Odessa to sell."²⁵ The Selbstschutz responded to one such incursion by firing on Romanian soldiers.²⁶ Sonderkommando R lamented the difficulties of disarming often intoxicated Romanian troops. During September 1942, for example, Selbstschutz sentries in the Volksdeutsche town of Rauch caught and arrested a drunken Romanian soldier wandering through the town at three o'clock in the morning.²⁷ Well into 1943, Sonderkommando R's commanders admonished their subordinates to report to Landau shootouts between the Selbstschutz and the Romanians. Direct confrontation between Sonderkommando R and Romanian authorities was a perennial feature of the occupation.

Although armed clashes between the Romanians and Sonderkommando R abounded, some engagements resulted in more paperwork than casualties. Transnistria's Romanian civil administrators sniped at Sonderkommando R over frequently petty issues in reams of written complaints. As early as January 1942, at the apex of the Holocaust in the region, Alexianu complained to Hoffmeyer about the "arbitrariness" (*Eigenmächtigkeit*) of Sonderkommando R's staff.²⁸ In June of that year, Romanian authorities called SS-Untersturmführer Matthäus Köhli on the carpet for a litany of affronts, including disseminating pro-German propaganda to local Ukrainians, spying on Romanian forces, and stealing Romanian vehicles.²⁹ His colleague, SS-Untersturmführer Franz Liebl, fared little better. In March 1943, the

25 Reichsführer-SS Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle/Der Verbindungsführer beim Zivilgouverneur von Transnistrien Verwaltungsdirektion/Betr.: Feldplünderung im Judet Ovidiopol durch rumänische Soldaten, October 11, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opus 1, Ed. Hr. 1089, 169.

26 *Ibid.* Reichsführer-SS Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle/Der Verbindungsführer beim Zivilgouverneur von Transnistrien/Betr.: Übergriffe rumänischer Soldaten in Freudental, October 12, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opus 1, Ed. Hr. 1089, 152.

27 Abschrift, September 29, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 18, Fond 2361, Opus 1, Ed. Hr. 70, 244.

28 Zivilgouverneur an Herrn Kommandanten der Volksdeutschen Mittelstelle Oberführer Hoffmeyer in Landau/Betr.: Uebergriffe der SS in Marianowka, January 20, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opus 1, Ed. Hr. 1084, 86.

29 Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle BK XXIV/1068 an den Hauptstab Landau/Betr.: Stellungnahme zum Schreiben des Departments des Zivilgouverneurs für Transnistrien – Verwaltungsdirektion – Nr. 14 635 vom 28.3.1942, June 30, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opus 1, Ed. Hr. 1085, 116.

Romanian prefect in Berezovka (Berezivka) complained that local Volksdeutsche were collecting wood from a forest that was off-limits to them.³⁰ Sonderkommando R's friction with the Romanians could, at least for some local VoMi commanders, become a death by a thousand paper cuts.

Despite some of the hostility, Sonderkommando R remained economically dependent on the Romanians. The VoMi's operations in Transnistria were a financial disaster. Sonderkommando R oversaw more than 370,000 hectares of farmland – a radically disproportionate 10 percent of Transnistria's arable land – that produced a diverse and impressive yield. Yet, the unit had no cost-effective way to bring these goods to market.³¹ Negotiations with possible German and Romanian buyers repeatedly fell through because the market value of Sonderkommando R's agricultural products could not cover the immense transportation costs of shipping these goods via an underdeveloped transportation infrastructure.³² Hoffmeyer's command, however, desperately needed to sell its agricultural goods because its small budget was barely sufficient to pay its staff and local Volksdeutsche employees.³³ Sonderkommando R had but one option: to barter with the Romanians.

In exchange for agricultural goods, Romanian authorities provided Hoffmeyer's unit with imported and scarce items that the VoMi could not afford to purchase. Beginning in 1941, Sonderkommando R granted the Romanian civil administration half of all Volksdeutsche agricultural output in Transnistria.³⁴ During April 1942, once road travel became feasible, Siebert ordered his Bereichskommandoführer to transfer half of the previous year's harvest to the agricultural director of the local Romanian prefecture. Aware of mounting Romanian complaints about his subordinates, Siebert ordered his staff to make the promised deliveries to the Romanians by June 1, 1942, and threatened to punish any non-compliant

30 SS-Untersturmführer Liebl an die Präfektur Berezovka/Betr.: Ihr Schreiben vom 20.12.42, March 25, 1943, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 18, Fond 2361, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 70., 8824–8825.

31 According to British signal intelligence, Sonderkommando R reported this figure to Berlin in September 1942. G.C. & C.S. Air and Military History, Vol. XIII, The German Police, c.1945, BNA, HW 16, Piece 63, 222. Transnistria had approximately 3.3 million hectares of arable land. Dallin, *Odessa*, 51. By comparison, Transnistria's 130,000 Volksdeutsche accounted for no more than 5 percent of the region's population. *Ibid.*, 62.

32 These were the conclusions of British analysts, who were privy to now-destroyed German police radio intercepts and penned a classified history of the German police immediately after the war. G.C. & C.S. Air and Military History, Vol. XIII, The German Police, c.1945, BNA, HW 16, Piece 63, 222–223.

33 In September 1942, Sonderkommando R sent a special request to Berlin for 500,000 Reichmarks to support its educational initiatives in Transnistria. German Police Decodes Nr 2 Traffic: 8.9.42, September 11, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 47, 2.

34 Rundanweisung Nr. 72, September 29, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 54–55.

Bereichskommandoführer.³⁵ Later in 1942, Sonderkommando R's leaders and their Romanian counterparts extended this agreement to include wheat and wool, and pelts that ethnic Germans had trapped.³⁶ Despite Sonderkommando R's earlier violent dispute with the Romanian army over a mill in rural Transnistria, both sides ultimately reached a profit-sharing agreement concerning Volksdeutsche-operated mills. Beginning in August 1942, Romanian authorities allowed ethnic Germans to operate some mills, and Sonderkommando R consented to pay approximately 30 percent of the mills' revenue to the Romanian state.³⁷

To fulfill their part of the bargain, Romanian authorities provided Sonderkommando R with finished products. Throughout 1942, for example, Alexianu's staff supplied Sonderkommando R with cigarettes, matches, and distilled alcohol.³⁸ At year's end, the Romanian civil administration traded 100 tons of salt for a special delivery of additional agricultural products from local Volksdeutsche.³⁹ The Romanians were also a primary source of construction materials. During July 1942, the unit asked the Romanians for a wagonload of cement for roadwork between Worms and Landau.⁴⁰ Sonderkommando R repeated this request the following summer.⁴¹ Similarly, in August 1943, Hoffmeyer's subordinates ordered five crates of window glass from the Romanian prefect in Berezovka to fix damaged panes in a local ethnic German school.⁴² This economic partnership solidified an otherwise acrimonious relationship.

Although high-level trade agreements between Sonderkommando R and the Romanian civil administration stabilized Romanian-German relations

35 Rundanweisung Nr. 37, April 9, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 96. Also see Reichsführer SS Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle/Der Verbindungsführer beim Zivilgouverneur von Transnistrien an den Zivilgouverneur von Transnistrien Abt. Verwaltung/Betr.: Ablieferung von 50% Futtergras in Seebach, Jud. Ribnita, July 1, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1088, 157.

36 On Sonderkommando R's required wheat deliveries, see Rundanweisung Nr. 74, October 20, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 51. On wool deliveries, see Rundanweisung Nr. 67, September 8, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 61. On required fur and pelt deliveries, see Rundanweisung Nr. 88/Betr.: Ablieferung sämtliche Häute und Felle sowie der Wolle, December 12, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 34. Rundanweisung Nr. 100, April 3, 1943, BB, R 59/66, 4.

37 Rundanweisung Nr. 62/Betr.: Staatsabgaben der Getreide- und Ölmühle, August 18, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 66. Rundanweisung Nr. 67, September 8, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 60.

38 Rundanweisung Nr. 32, April 7, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 101. Rundanweisung Nr. 67, September 8, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 61.

39 Rundanweisung Nr. 90, December 29, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 31.

40 Der Deutsche landw. Berater bei der Präfektur Beresowka an den Herrn Präfekt des Judez Berezovka, July 21, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 20, Fond 2361, Opis 1s, Ed. Hr. 7, 183.

41 Einheit F.P. Nr. 10 528 BK. XI an den Herrn Oberst Leonidas Popp Beresovca [sic]/Betr.: Anforderung von Fensterglas, July 28, 1943, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 18, Fond 2361, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 70, 65.

42 Einheit Feldpost Nr. 10528 BK. XIII an die Präfektur Beresowka/Betr.: Anforderung von Fensterglas, August 2, 1943, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 18, Fond 2361, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 70, 61.

in Transnistria, they did not eliminate long-term distrust between the two powers. Even as Sonderkommando R's commanders instructed the unit's midlevel officers to cooperate with the Romanians, they underscored the divergence between German and Romanian interests. During June 1942, for example, Hoffmeyer reached an agreement with the Romanian military, whereby the latter was permitted to confiscate all vehicles of Soviet manufacture. Shortly after Hoffmeyer signed the accord, he secretly instructed his subordinates to drive all of the unit's captured Soviet vehicles to Landau, where the NSKK would repaint them with SS registration numbers and issue appropriate paperwork to hide their origin.⁴³ Despite entreaties from their superiors in Landau to cooperate with the Romanians, perceptive Sonderkommando R staff understood the subtext: the unit's alliance with the Romanian civil administration was a necessity at least until a victorious Germany could revisit the issue of control of southern Ukraine.

THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST LOCAL JEWS AND "COMMUNISTS"

As Sonderkommando R wrestled with the Romanians for mastery of the Transnistrian countryside, Hoffmeyer's staff discovered a more pressing problem: Jews and Volksdeutsche communists appeared to be everywhere. Sonderkommando R knew that both the Wehrmacht and Einsatzgruppe D had swept through the area weeks earlier and shot dozens of racially and politically suspect local residents.⁴⁴ The unit's leaders had naively assumed that this bloody business was finished. Yet, no sooner had Sonderkommando R arrived than local residents again began identifying purported agents of the "Judeo-Bolshevik" cabal that advancing German units supposedly had just vanquished.

As already discussed, German forces depended on local residents to finger Jews and suspected Soviet agents. Area inhabitants were less interested in identifying the Third Reich's racial and political enemies, however, than in punishing individuals whom they deemed complicit in Soviet crimes. Jews and alleged Soviet agents seemed to multiply under Sonderkommando R's watch not because they were limitless, as the unit's officers believed, but because area residents continued to use denunciations to settle Soviet-era scores.

43 Rundanweisung Nr. 46, June 20, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 84.

44 Intercepted radio communiqés indicate that Sonderkommando R and Einsatzgruppe D were in close touch with one another. German Police Decodes Nr. 2 Traffic: 12.10.42, October 16, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 36, 4.

During fall 1941, grassroots denunciation intensified, revealing many more alleged enemies to Transnistria's new German rulers. The seemingly permanent demise of Soviet power emboldened local informers. Having already denounced the most pernicious supposed perpetrators of Soviet violence, they moved on to the next tier of persons implicated in the Soviet system. As temporarily deported residents returned home, the number of alleged "Judeo-Bolshevik" agents and potential denouncers mushroomed. Far from inheriting a region free of Jews and suspected communists, Sonderkommando R ruled an area in which the number of "Judeo-Bolshevik" enemies seemed to be increasing exponentially.

Sonderkommando R responded to this perceived threat to its Volksdeutsche project in Transnistria with systematic killing. Never before had one of Hoffmeyer's units assumed such a direct role in murder and on such a scale. Sonderkommando R targeted dozens of suspected local Jews and communists throughout Transnistria's VoMi-administered communities. During fall 1941, Sonderkommando R proceeded down the slippery slope to genocide.

Murder was not part of Sonderkommando R's original job description, yet it embraced this grisly task with enthusiasm. It is useful to consider why it did so. Sonderkommando R, apparently on its own initiative, began to murder residents of villages that it controlled. There are no references to Sonderkommando R's pursuit of suspected Jews and communists in the unit's surviving staff orders and radio communiqués. This silence suggests that Sonderkommando R's local commanders did not feel compelled to solicit its superiors' guidance once in the field or to seek Romanian input. What the unit's commanders told their subordinates before deployment is unknown. Hoffmeyer possibly prepared his personnel for the eventuality of having to murder suspected Jews and communists. Predeployment instructions, however, would have been largely superfluous. Sonderkommando R's staff understood keenly the murderous dimensions of Operation Barbarossa, if for no other reason than they encountered the consequences of Einsatzgruppe D's killing operations in Transnistria weeks earlier. The murder of racially and politically suspect civilians was the order the day, and Hoffmeyer's subordinates knew it.

As noted in the previous chapter, many of Sonderkommando R's midlevel leaders were no strangers to political violence. Most Bereichskommandoführer were committed National Socialists who ascribed to the murderous Nazi agenda "in the East." For many of them, deployment to Transnistria was a plumb posting. They would not permit local Jewish and communist "infiltrators" to degrade the racial and political stock

of local Volksdeutsche and to derail their careers. Although these murders were a first for Hoffmeyer's command, many local VoMi commanders were Nazi party "old fighters," schooled in the street violence of the late Weimar Republic. For these National Socialist veterans, attacking Jews and communists was nothing new. Rather, it was a return to the happy days before the Nazi seizure of power. Here again was a landscape swarming with racial and political adversaries who could be suppressed violently and publicly. Now, however, their actions would not be circumscribed by the Nazi leadership's earlier reluctance to offend German popular opinion. In Transnistria, the gloves could come off.

Sonderkommando R responded to the tidal wave of denunciations that years of animosity under Soviet rule had pent up with an increasingly bloody campaign to crush suspected Jews and communists. At the unit's headquarters in Landau, for example, one of Sonderkommando R's domestic servants denounced a coworker as a Jew. The accused apparently had betrayed the woman's husband to Soviet authorities during the 1930s. Following a speedy investigation, Sonderkommando R executed the alleged "Judeo-Bolshevik" offender.⁴⁵ Similarly, residents of the rural hamlet of Krassna denounced Peter B., a former Soviet official, to the VoMi in September 1941. After a quick round of interviews in the local schoolhouse, VoMi personnel adjudged B. guilty and shot him.⁴⁶ Throughout VoMi-administered settlements, Sonderkommando R's personnel relied on denunciations to identify and murder racially and politically suspect local residents.⁴⁷

There were two patterns to this localized killing campaign. First, Sonderkommando R standardized its response to denunciations. Its personnel interviewed denouncers and occasionally recorded their testimonies – protocols that apparently have not survived.⁴⁸ VoMi proceedings to determine the "Jewishness" or prewar Soviet affiliations of local residents sometimes evolved into elaborate spectacles. The trial and execution of Franz Z., the Soviet chairman of the Lichtenfeld collective farm during fall 1941, is illustrative. According to numerous witnesses, including surviving members of his immediate family, local residents held Z. responsible for the deportation of scores of Volksdeutsche men during the late 1930s.⁴⁹ Anticipating

45 Aussage von R. M., May 29, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 95–96.

46 Aussage von J. H., April 1, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 33.

47 Postwar testimony is replete with references to these killings. See, for example, Aussage von E. E., May 30, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 103–104. Aussage von E. T., May 20, 1965, BAL, B162/2304, 69–70. Aussage von A. K., October 10, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 17.

48 Aussage von J. H., April 21, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 63.

49 Z.'s brother, nephew, and son all confirmed that local residents denounced him to the SS for earlier alleged crimes. Aussage von J. Z., June 3, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 184. Aussage von J. S., January 27, 1962, BAL, B162/2291, 161. Aussage von H. Z., November 5, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 109.

retribution, Z. had fled with the retreating Red Army but did not succeed in escaping to the Soviet interior. He avoided capture and likely execution during the initial German sweeps through Lichtenfeld. He returned home a few days before Sonderkommando R's arrival. Local residents immediately denounced him to Bereichskommando XX's new commander, Franz Liebl. Liebl convened a show trial to affirm Z.'s culpability. As one local resident later described the proceeding:

All residents of our community, including older children, had to take part in this meeting by summons. On one side of the [municipal] hall, sat women and children, whose husbands and fathers had been deported by the Russians. On the other side of the hall, the rest of the population took its place. The members of the Kommando [Bereichskommando XX] asked the wives of the deported questions related to the deportation of their husbands. It was determined that Z. was responsible for the deportation of their husbands. Z. was then asked how much money he had. He admitted to having a small amount. At the same time, his home was searched, where they found a large sum of money. This was presented to him. He was accused of having a lot of money while the wives and children of the deported lived in poverty. He was then asked how he would like to account of his sins. He explained that he wanted to work day and night. The Kommando explained to him that he could only decide between hanging and shooting. They had the intention of hanging him in front of the municipal building. At the request of the then Mayor K., Franz Z. was not hanged, but rather shot.⁵⁰

VoMi commanders, such as Liebl, were not content simply to identify and murder racial and political enemies within the communities that they administered; they sent a message to area inhabitants about the deadly seriousness of Sonderkommando R's mission in Transnistria.

A second feature of these initial killings was the growing involvement of area residents. Although denunciations abounded, postwar interviewees rarely admitted to having played an active role in this process. There was little incentive to do so as postwar investigators would have concluded that these individuals were implicated in the killings. Edward E., an erstwhile Helenenthal resident, provided West German investigators with an exceptional, albeit somewhat implausible, description of his involvement in denunciation. In 1934, the Soviet secret police had arrested E.'s father, who later perished in a labor camp. E. and his sister held another Helenenthal resident, Mrs. S., responsible for their father's arrest. Shortly after Sonderkommando R arrived, they approached Helenenthal's German-installed mayor with their accusations and insisted that he raise the issue with the town's

50 Aussage von K. B., June 4, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 116. Other local residents confirmed this sequence of events in their postwar statements. Aussage von A. L., April 4, 1962, BAL, B162/2292, 48. Aussage von J. S., April 13, 1962, BAL, B162/2292, 52.

Bereichskommandoführer, SS-Untersturmführer Walter Nadolny. According to E., Nadolny decided not to punish Mrs. S. and instead banished her to Odessa.⁵¹ That outcome was very convenient for E. in 1960s West Germany, but, given Sonderkommando R's standing order forbidding the transfer of Volksdeutsche to Odessa and strong evidence about Nadolny's personal involvement in shooting local Jews, it is also highly unlikely.⁵² Mrs. S. probably shared the fate of many of other suspected Jews and communists in VoMi-ruled Transnistria.

Area residents did not merely denounce one another to the SS; they also sometimes participated in the killing as Selbstschutz members. Sonderkommando R's efforts to arrest Friedrich M., the former chairman of the village soviet in Neudorf, a Volksdeutsche settlement of roughly 2,400 residents some 60 kilometers northwest of Odessa, is illustrative.⁵³ Local Volksdeutsche accused M. of expropriating the property of his neighbors, whom Soviet authorities had identified as kulaks.⁵⁴ According to some postwar statements, during collectivization M. routinely raped the wives of farmers whose property he had confiscated. For the latter crime, Soviet authorities allegedly had sentenced M. to seven years in prison.⁵⁵ After his release shortly before the war's beginning, M. relocated to Pervomaisk, either because Soviet authorities had not permitted him to return to Neudorf or because he feared local retribution.⁵⁶ In Pervomaisk, however, Karolina H., one of M.'s alleged victims, who had also since moved to the city, recognized him. Upon returning to Neudorf, H. denounced M. to the town's Bereichskommandoführer, SS-Untersturmführer Matthäus Köhli.⁵⁷ At Köhli's request, German authorities in Pervomaisk arrested M. and returned him to Bereichskommando XIV in Neudorf, to face his accusers.⁵⁸ During his incarceration in the Bereichskommando's office, Köhli ordered M. to perform hard labor under the guard of the local militia. Köhli also permitted

51 Aussage von E. E., November 19, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 151.

52 Aussage von G. Z., May 19, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 106–107.

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

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

55 It is difficult to determine whether the charge of rape has any merit. Although it is conceivable, it may also have been a postwar fabrication designed to justify M.'s execution. Aussage von J. R., May 24, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 152. Interestingly, after the war, Anna D. made similar accusations against the Soviet-era mayor of Worms, Georg W. Aussage von A. D., August 13, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 218.

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

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

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

M.'s detractors to beat him savagely, leaving him with seven broken ribs.⁵⁹ After the pummeling, on Köhli's orders, members of the area's Selbstschutz drove M. to a vegetable garden a half kilometer from Neudorf, forced him to dig his own grave, and shot him. Köhli refused M.'s wife's request that she be permitted to move her husband's body to Neudorf's cemetery.⁶⁰ Under the guise of advancing the Nazi agenda, Sonderkommando R's local killing campaign during fall 1941 permitted many of rural Transnistria's local inhabitants to exact retribution on their neighbors for the violence of the Soviet years.

STRENGTHENING GERMANDOM IN TRANSNISTRIA

As Sonderkommando R identified and murdered suspected racial and political opponents in Transnistria's VoMi-administered settlements, the unit unfurled its ambitious program to secure an economically dominant position for local German-speakers. Years of Soviet rule had impoverished the historically prosperous ethnic Germans. Jakob Feininger, an ethnic German from Friedenheim, a Germanophone settlement near Rastatt, exemplified the group's poverty on the eve of the invasion. Before the occupation, Feininger had lived in a 50-square-meter one-room stone house with a dirt floor and no running water or electricity. In addition to a small garden plot, Feininger's possessions included two cows, two pigs, two sheep, five geese, and a dozen chickens. He had four years of primary education and the last of his nine children died in childbirth in 1942.⁶¹ Such was the typical level of economic development among rural area ethnic Germans *before* the German invasion, during which both the Red Army's scorched earth retreat and Romanian banditry further endangered the material well-being of local Volksdeutsche. When Sonderkommando R arrived in Transnistria, the Black Sea Germans were one of the most, if not the most, impoverished Volksdeutsche groups that the unit's staff had encountered during its many deployments to Eastern Europe.

Sonderkommando R sought to return local ethnic Germans to a dominant economic position in the region in two ways – both of which incurred Romanian ire. First, the VoMi channeled economic resources to area Volksdeutsche. Transnistria's main assets were agricultural. Seventy percent of the region's rural population labored on its more than 3,100 collective farms.⁶²

59 *Ibid.*

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

61 Einbürgerungsantrag Jakob Feininger, September 20, 1943, NARA, RG 242, A3342-EWZ50-B58, 1494-1495.

62 Dallin, *Odessa*, 51.

Sonderkommando R dismantled many of these collective farms and transferred land, agricultural equipment, and livestock to local Volksdeutsche. Throughout the Transnistrian countryside, Sonderkommando R's Bereichskommandoführer encouraged local ethnic Germans to cultivate crops independently.⁶³ Sometimes Hoffmeyer's subordinates assigned collective farmland on the basis of ethnic Germans' prerevolutionary land claims.⁶⁴ In other instances, Bereichskommandoführer reallocated collective farmland roughly equally among area Volksdeutsche.⁶⁵

Bereichskommandoführer also removed tractors from nearby MTSs and gave them to area ethnic Germans.⁶⁶ Some enterprising local commanders traveled as far afield as the Reichskommissariat Ukraine to obtain machinery. As Bereichskommandoführer SS-Hauptsturmführer Martin Assmann later explained to Soviet counterintelligence, during late 1941 and early 1942 he removed forty-five tractors from MTSs in German-occupied Nikolaev oblast', had them driven back to Transnistria, and distributed them to local ethnic Germans.⁶⁷ Similarly, many Bereichskommandoführer confiscated livestock from collective farms and provided the animals to area Volksdeutsche.⁶⁸ If Assmann's statements to Soviet authorities – who were keenly interested in the theft of Soviet state property – are any indication, Sonderkommando R distributed enormous numbers of animals to the region's Volksdeutsche. According to Assmann, during his tenure as Halbstadt's Bereichskommandoführer, he emptied the area's collective farms of 1,000 cows, 2,000 horses, 500 sheep, and 30 teams of oxen for distribution to local ethnic Germans.⁶⁹ Despite the scale of these reallocations, Sonderkommando R appears to have been sensitive to the needs of individual ethnic Germans. In Worms, for example, the then local Bereichskommandoführer, SS-Untersturmführer Ludwig Bruderemann, demanded that the collective farm in Petrovka relinquish two horses, a cart, and a cow

63 This was a widespread experience among local ethnic Germans. See, for example, Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von J. F., January 17, 1962, BAL, B162/2290, 168. Aussage von R. B., October 31, 1962, BAL, B162/2301, 4. Aussage von P. H., October 17, 1962, BAL, B162/2300, 131. Aussage von J. S., November 23, 1962, BAL, B162/2301, 79. Aussage von J. S., April 13, 1962, BAL, B162/2292, 50.

64 Aussage von H. B., August 11, 1962, BAL, B162/2302, 124. In Worms, for example, the local Bereichskommando staff returned to Oskar W.'s father a farm that Soviet authorities had collectivized prior to the war. Aussage von O. W., November 19, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 169.

65 Aussage von W. H., November 26, 1963, BAL, B162/2301, 21.

66 Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von L. B., January 16, 1962, BAL, B162/2290, 164.

67 Protokoll doprosa/A. M. G., September 20, 1944, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2902, 46. Bereichskommando 12 des SS-Sonderkommandos/Bericht, August 26, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1088, 192.

68 Bescheinigung, October 20, 1941, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 20, Fond 2361, Opis 1s, Ed. Hr. 7, 289.

69 Protokoll doprosa/A. M. G., September 20, 1944, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2902, 47.

to Jacob Herz, a local ethnic German, or suffer “harsh consequences.”⁷⁰ Similarly, during 1942, SS-Untersturmführer Reichert, the Bereichskommandoführer responsible for the ethnic German settlement of Marienberg, assisted Richard Tews’s property claims by ordering the local Selbstschutz to strong-arm a nearby collective farm into surrendering two horses to him.⁷¹ Between late 1941 and early 1942, Sonderkommando R’s midlevel leaders dismantled years of Soviet agricultural policy for Transnistria’s Volksdeutsche.⁷²

In liquidating collective farms, midlevel VoMi personnel in Transnistria acted contrary to German occupation policy in the Soviet Union and, at least initially, violated superior orders. German authorities throughout conquered Soviet territory maintained collective agriculture because it was the only reliable way to requisition agricultural products.⁷³ Romanian authorities pursued a similar policy in Transnistria, which Sonderkommando R’s personnel there were to emulate.⁷⁴ In October 1941, Hoffmeyer instructed his staff that collective farms would be maintained indefinitely and even ordered the unit’s Bereichskommandoführer to centralize smaller collective farms to increase efficiency.⁷⁵ Hoffmeyer soon reversed himself. During 1942, Hoffmeyer traveled to Bucharest in an unsuccessful bid to reach a high-level agreement “to loosen” collective agriculture in Transnistria.⁷⁶ The following year, Hoffmeyer ordered his staff unilaterally to redistribute land from collective farms to area ethnic Germans.⁷⁷ The dissolution of collective agriculture, like many of Sonderkommando R’s actions, was a policy initiated by the unit’s local commanders and only later ratified by their superiors.

Hoffmeyer ultimately reached the conclusion that many of his Bereichskommandoführer almost immediately had grasped – namely that collective

70 BK 14 Worms/Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle/Bescheinigung, November 27, 1941, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Ed. Hr. 1083, 113.

71 Reichsführer-SS Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle Sonderkommando ‘R’ BK. XXVII Marienberg an den Hauptstab, z.Hd. von SS-Ostuf. Dr. Siebert, August 3, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1089, 15–16.

72 Protokol doprosa/A. M. G., September 20, 1944, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2902, 48, 57. Although Liebl did not specify the date of Hoffmeyer’s order, he confirmed its existence. Aussage von F. J. L., January 16, 1965, BAL, B162/2303, 308.

73 Protokol doprosa/A. M. G., September 20, 1944, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2902, 47.

74 Dienstanweisung Nr. 2, September 22, 1941, BB, R 59/66, 152.

75 Rundanweisung Nr. 7, October 14, 1941, BB, R 59/66, 143.

76 German Police Decodes Nr. 2 Traffic: 30.10.42, November 7, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 36, 2.

77 Protokol doprosa/A. M. G., September 20, 1944, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2902, 48, 57. Aussage von F. J. L., January 16, 1965, BAL, B162/2303, 308. Stabbefehl Nr. 109, June 22, 1943, BB, R 59/67, 58.

agriculture did little to advance the long-term material status of local Volksdeutsche, let alone the VoMi's position. Although perpetuating collective agriculture permitted the occupiers to monitor production, it also allowed the local population to pool land and particularly motorized equipment. The latter was significant in Transnistria because of the scarcity of tractors. During their retreat, Soviet forces had removed or destroyed nearly half of the region's tractors.⁷⁸ Remaining tractors in Transnistria were such prized commodities that Sonderkommando R kept careful tabs on them. In March 1942, for example, NSKK-Sturmführer Otto Hotz, the head of the MTS in Waterloo, decreed that local ethnic Germans who had stolen tractor parts had until the following month to return them or face "a general house-to-house search" for the missing components.⁷⁹ According to Hotz, any person found intentionally sabotaging agricultural production by hiding the equipment would "suffer the harshest penalties."⁸⁰ Although Romanian authorities eventually reopened an agricultural machinery plant in Odessa and imported several hundred tractors, primarily from Germany, agricultural equipment was still in short supply.⁸¹ Sonderkommando R had good reason to monopolize this scarce resource. Confiscating tractors from MTSs permitted local Bereichskommandoführer to increase the amount of VoMi-administered territory under motorized cultivation. By February 1942, for example, Bereichskommando XIV, based in Worms, used 69 tractors to cultivate 56 percent of its more than 25,000 hectares of arable land.⁸² Exclusive access to tractors provided area Volksdeutsche farmers with a competitive advantage over their non-German neighbors. Concentrating tractors in Volksdeutsche hands also permitted Sonderkommando R to deny them to area non-Germans, whose agricultural production on behalf of the Romanians suffered. Maintaining collective farms during the occupation only made sense if the desired goal were to increase total agricultural output – an aim that many within Sonderkommando R understood to be incompatible with the unit's task of establishing ethnic German economic dominance.

78 Dallin, *Odessa*, 95. Local Volksdeutsche were acutely aware of this priority because Soviet forces ordered them to evacuate the tractors. See Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von J. D., August 14, 1962, BAL, B162/2296, 166. Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von D. R., n.d. BAL, B162/2290, 133. Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von A. S., August 17, 1962, BAL, B162/2296, 176. Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung J. S., December 12, 1961, BAL, B162/2290, 140. Protokol doprosa/Renner Yakov Yakovich, May 18, 1948, USHMM, RG-38.018M, Reel 79, 3696. Protokol doprosa/Fet Ivan, May 18, 1948, USHMM, RG-38.018M, Reel 79, 3750–3752.

79 Aufruf, March 27, 1942, BB, R 57/66, 112.

80 *Ibid.*

81 Dallin, *Odessa*, 102.

82 Zusammenstellung für Frühjahrssaat, February 10, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 20, Fond 2361, Opis 1s, Ed. Hr. 7, 58.

Although Hoffmeyer may have been slow to recognize that Sonderkommando R would benefit from eliminating collective agriculture, his Romanian counterparts were not. Grasping that German gain would come at their expense, the Romanians objected vociferously to Sonderkommando R's independent moves against collective farms and MTSs. Beginning in late November 1941, Alexianu began to forward these complaints to Sonderkommando R.⁸³ Amid the large-scale theft of tractors for local Volksdeutsche, SS-Obersturmführer Heinz Born, the commander of Bereichskommando XVI in Rosenfeld, had the temerity to request fuel from his Romanian counterparts to run the very equipment that he and his colleagues were appropriating for the VoMi.⁸⁴ As local Bereichskommandoführer intensified their acquisition of land and machinery during early 1942 in anticipation of the spring planting season, Romanian complaints about Sonderkommando R's assaults on collective agriculture multiplied.⁸⁵ By late 1942, Romanian remonstrations required the unit's liaison officer to acknowledge the Romanian position and issue a rare, albeit tepid, apology. In response to Romanian charges that SS-Untersturmführer Köhli, the Bereichskommandoführer in Neudorf, had removed agricultural equipment from a nearby Ukrainian town, Eckert explained that Köhli had simply attempted "to correct an old mistake" by returning the equipment to local Volksdeutsche, its rightful owners.⁸⁶ Eckert assured the Romanians that for his well-intentioned but misguided actions, Köhli had "received the sharpest reprimands from headquarters in Landau."⁸⁷ Given that Hoffmeyer already was contemplating an end to collective agriculture by November 1942, whatever tongue-lashing Köhli received was more likely for ruffling Romanian feathers than for having removed the equipment. The following month, in a feeble effort to diffuse the situation, Siebert ordered his

83 Alexianu an Wehrmachtsverbindungsstab für Transnistrien in Tiraspol/Betr.: Beschwerde wegen Uebergriffe deutscher Soldaten, November 27, 1941, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opus 1, Ed. Hr. 1084, 70.

84 Bereichskommando XVI an den Herrn Präfekt Beresowka, January 10, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 20, Fond 2361, Opus 1s, Ed. Hr. 7, 67.

85 Individual Bereichskommandoführer were compelled to respond to these complaints. Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle BK XXIV/1068 an den Hauptstab Landau/Betr.: Stellungnahme zum Schreiben des Departments des Zivilgouverneurs für Transnistrien – Verwaltungsdirektion – Nr. 14 635 vom 28.3.1942, June 30, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opus 1, Ed. Hr. 1085, 116. Verbindungsstab der Deutschen Wehrmacht für Transnistrien/an das Zivilgouvernement von Transnistrien/Tiraspol, May 15, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opus 1, Ed. Hr. 1086, 112.

86 Reichsführer-SS Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle/Der Verbindungsführer beim Zivilgouverneur von Transnistrien an das Zivilgouvernement von Transnistrien Verwaltungsdirektion/Betr.: Gewaltsame Entnahme einer Dreschmaschine, November 23, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opus 1, Ed. Hr. 1089, 208.

87 *Ibid.*

subordinates to consult with Romanian prefects prior to acquiring tractors for Volksdeutsche use.⁸⁸ Ironically, Sonderkommando R's senior leaders were perhaps the last to recognize that the demise of collective agriculture in Transnistria on the SS's terms would benefit area Volksdeutsche and enhance the unit's position at Romanian expense.

The second way in which Sonderkommando R sought to secure a dominant economic position for area ethnic Germans was by reorganizing the region's demographic landscape. Historically, Transnistria's Volksdeutsche rarely lived in exclusively Germanophone enclaves. During late summer 1941, even the smallest nominally "ethnically German" localities had residents whom local German-speakers, besides the SS, regarded as Ukrainians or Russians.⁸⁹ The upheaval of the war's opening months further muddied the region's ethnic waters. Although targeted Soviet deportations had threatened the viability of some ethnic German communities by reducing the number of Volksdeutsche men, in some cases the war created new majority ethnic German settlements.⁹⁰ During November 1942, for example, in the midst of a dispute about billeting Romanian troops in the town of Heinrichsdorf (Schevtschenko), even Sonderkommando R conceded that its claim as a historically Germanophone settlement was tenuous. The unit admitted that "a large part of the population" had arrived in the town "as a result of resettlements and the influence of the war."⁹¹

In response, the unit used ethnic cleansing to create homogeneous communities where none had existed previously. As Gustav G., an NSKK driver attached to the Bereichskommando in Bischofsfeld, later explained: "our primary responsibility in the Bereichskommando pertained to concentrating Volksdeutsche insofar as they lived with the Russian population in various villages. The Volksdeutsche were to be concentrated in certain residential areas as were the Russian residents."⁹² To achieve this historically unprecedented ethnic segregation required Sonderkommando R to relocate both area non-Germans and local Volksdeutsche. In towns with a significant population of German-speakers, Sonderkommando R forced

88 Rundanweisung Nr. 84, December 9, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 37.

89 See, for example, Protokol doprosa Ionusa Aleksandra, April 6, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8454. Protokol doprosa Kokha Floriana, October 1, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8555-8556. Protokol doprosa Kokha Floriana, November 14, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8703.

90 Reichsführer-SS Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle/Der Verbindungsführer beim Zivilgouverneur von Transnistrien an das Zivilgouvernement von Transnistrien Verwaltungsdirektion/Betr.: Einquartierung in Heinrichsdorf (Schevtschenko), November 21, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1089, 176.

91 *Ibid.*

92 Aussage von G. G., March 3, 1965, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, March 3, 1965, 115.

local non-Germans to move. As Franz M., a former resident of Kunersdorf near Berezovka, later explained: “[area Russians] from our locale were expelled.”⁹³ Similarly, in Friedensfeld, a town of 200 residents near Rosenfeld, Sonderkommando R deported half of the town’s residents to create an “ethnically pure” Volksdeutsche settlement.⁹⁴ Where Sonderkommando R’s staff found too few ethnic Germans to claim the whole town, they sometimes carved out a Volksdeutsche enclave. Peter B., one of a handful of ethnic Germans in the town of Roschkova, recounted one such effort: “only Russians lived in my neighborhood. In another section of Roschkova, Russians and Volksdeutsche lived mixed together. . . . The Germans carried out a resettlement. All Russians had to move into the exclusively Russian neighborhood. The section of town in which the Volksdeutsche lived received the name Weidenau.”⁹⁵ Sonderkommando R also pressured B. to move to Weidenau, requiring him to leave his Ukrainian partner and their two children – a request that he rejected.⁹⁶ Where Hoffmeyer’s subordinates encountered too few ethnic Germans to claim even part of a town, they simply relocated individual Volksdeutsche families to larger nearby settlements.⁹⁷ Remaking Transnistria’s demographic landscape was a key part of Sonderkommando R’s plans to centralize the region’s economy under the VoMi’s aegis.

Predictably, the unit’s population engineering angered the Romanians. Area Romanian officials complained bitterly that Sonderkommando R’s expulsions had created indigent refugees, for whom they could not find accommodations.⁹⁸ To add insult to injury, Sonderkommando R also deported ethnic Moldovans, whom the Romanians treated as a related and privileged ethnic group.⁹⁹ Alexianu’s pressure ultimately forced Hoffmeyer to intercede with his Sonderkommando R staff – one of the rare instances in which he did so. On June 22, 1942, he ordered Sonderkommando R to coordinate its deportations of non-Germans more closely with Romanian authorities.¹⁰⁰ Although Hoffmeyer’s attempts to rein in his staff sometimes

93 Aussage von F. M., July 20, 1967, BAL, B162/2299, 287.

94 Aussage von W. B., November 6, 1962, BAL, B162/2299, 184.

95 Aussage von P. B., October 20, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 57.

96 *Ibid.*

97 Aussage von H. D., December 16, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 238.

98 For Sonderkommando R’s response to Romanian complaints see Der Reichsführer SS Hauptamt/Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle Sonderkommando R an den Zivilgouverneur von Transnistrien Herr Professor Alexianu, August 3, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1088, 145.

99 SS-Sonderkommando ‘R’ Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle BK XV Nebenstelle Großliebental [sic] an den Herrn Prätor von [Illegible] Kr. Ovidiopol, March 27, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 20, Fond 2369, Opis 1s Ed. Hr. 7, Frame unnumbered.

100 Rundandweisung Nr. 47, June 22, 1942, BB, R. 59/66, 83.

precipitated more carefully coordinated deportations, it did little to assuage Romanian anxiety.¹⁰¹ Sonderkommando R's capacity to declare part or all of a town "ethnically German" and to reengineer local demographics to support that claim provided the unit with almost limitless capacity to create islands of Germanness and expand its authority.

THE CRISIS OF GERMANNESS IN TRANSNISTRIA

The Romanians were not the only keen students of Sonderkommando R's policies and their long-term implications. Local residents too watched intently as the VoMi remade Transnistria's economic and demographic landscape. Survivors of brutal Soviet agricultural policies during the 1920s and 1930s, they were astute observers. Under Stalin, area inhabitants had learned the profound consequences of state categorization. As "kulaks," "wreckers," or "saboteurs," they had been excluded from agricultural production and faced expropriation, arrest, deportation, and even death at Soviet hands. Now, using racial and ethnic categories, the German conquerors were doing something very similar. The VoMi lavished material rewards on the members of the Nazi racial community by restoring pre-Revolutionary patterns of independent agricultural production. Local residents, whom the VoMi excluded from the *Volksgemeinschaft*, faced circumscribed opportunities for farming and the very real prospect of a famine, such as the one that had ravaged much of Ukraine little more than a decade earlier. Local residents whom the Germans found particularly pernicious, including supposed Jews and communists, were even being killed outright. Given these stark alternatives for local residents during the early months of the occupation, the question was less one of who wanted to be part of the Nazi racial community than who would not want to be numbered among the ethnic Germans.

For Sonderkommando R, the crisis of Germanness in Transnistria was not one of insufficient local enthusiasm, but one of the SS's confidence in the racial and political stock of area inhabitants. If Jews and communists were everywhere, as local denunciations had led the SS to believe, who could be included in the Nazi racial community? Much to the SS's dismay, the answer seemed to be precious few residents. Echoing his colleagues' frustrations, the commander of *Bereichskommando XXV* in Odessa, SS-Untersturmführer Hans-Joachim Goerbig, later recounted that "60 percent" of Odessa's

101 Einheit Feldpost Nr. SS-10528 BK-Rastatt Stützpunkt Lichtenfeld/An den Bürgermeister des Dorfes Gieße-Chutor, August 9, 1943, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 18, Fond 2361, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 70, 72.

Volksdeutsche “were Jews.”¹⁰² The VoMi’s entire enterprise in Transnistria hinged on mobilizing politically reliable “Aryan” ethnic Germans for the National Socialist cause. But with suspected Jews and communists abounding, the situation appeared desperate to Sonderkommando R during fall 1941.

The epiphany that the Third Reich had yet to vanquish its racial and political adversaries in Transnistria was, in many respects, the final straw for VoMi personnel. Even without the cacophony of denunciations that Sonderkommando R’s personnel faced, the SS believed that Transnistria’s Volksdeutsche compared unfavorably with other ethnic German groups. This perception was a legacy of Sonderkommando R’s personnel continuity with earlier VoMi resettlement units that operated in Eastern Europe. As noted in [Chapter 2](#), between 1939 and 1941, most of the unit’s leaders and a substantial portion of its rank-and-file staff had participated in VoMi operations to relocate ethnic Germans from the newly established Soviet sphere of influence to German-occupied Poland. This shared experience shaped their understanding of ethnic Germanness.

Although VoMi forces under Hoffmeyer’s command had encountered diverse ethnic German populations during these deployments, these Volksdeutsche groups shared two characteristics that Sonderkommando R found lacking in the Black Sea Germans. First, many of the ethnic Germans whom the VoMi had relocated from Eastern Europe prior to the invasion of the Soviet Union had strong cultural, educational, economic, and linguistic ties to Germany.¹⁰³ Some ethnic Germans, particularly those whom the VoMi had recruited, had expressed support for National Socialism. And second, the ethnic Germans who sought the VoMi’s assistance had ample reason to conceal any supposed racial or political issues that might arouse VoMi suspicions. Fleeing the mounting Soviet presence in Eastern Europe for the perceived safety of German-dominated Poland, these would-be immigrants presented themselves as model National Socialist Volksdeutsche.

Transnistria’s ethnic German inhabitants were unable to live up to this VoMi ideal. As discussed in [Chapter 1](#), the Black Sea Germans had maintained circumscribed historical relations with Germany. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they turned to the Black, not the Baltic Sea for trade. Their small intelligentsia looked to more established

102 Aussage von H. J. G., August 1, 1962, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589–001, Band 2, 98.

103 On connections that other Eastern European Volksdeutsche groups maintained with Germany prior to and during the Second World War, see Mariana Hausleitner and Harald Roth, eds., *Der Einfluss von Faschismus und Nationalsozialismus auf Minderheiten in Ostmittel- und Südosteuropa* (Munich: IKGS Verlag, 2006).

Germanophone communities in the tsarist empire rather than to Germany. Soviet rule exacerbated these trends. Under Stalin, Soviet authorities distrusted the alleged counterrevolutionary potential of foreign contact, particularly with Germany. Following the Nazi seizure of power, Soviet isolationism became yet more acute. In comparison to other ethnic German groups, the Black Sea Germans were, for Sonderkommando R, something of a “lost tribe.”

And they were a restive one at that. Unlike the Volksdeutsche groups that Hoffmeyer’s command had relocated to occupied Poland before summer 1941, the Black Sea Germans were initially less interested in presenting themselves as ideal Nazis than in revenge. Instead of deflecting suspicion for fear of being left behind to live under Soviet rule, the Black Sea Germans exploited Sonderkommando R’s paranoia of Jews and communists to punish their local enemies. SS scrutiny, however, was double-edged. Although it permitted area informers to vanquish their local opponents under the guise of advancing the Nazi agenda, it also left the Germans deeply skeptical about local residents’ racial and political suitability for the Volksgemeinschaft.

Sonderkommando R’s suspicions about local ethnic Germans reached such proportions during fall 1941 that the unit’s senior leaders acknowledged that Transnistria’s Volksdeutsche failed to meet the SS’s expectations. In December 1941, Hoffmeyer shelved the ethnic German classification criteria that Himmler had codified ten months earlier.¹⁰⁴ In lieu of the multitiered categories of the Deutsche Volksliste used to classify Volksdeutsche in occupied Poland, Hoffmeyer’s new schema for Transnistria jettisoned criteria other than ancestry.¹⁰⁵ Sonderkommando R’s personnel were to distribute a *Volkstumsausweis* (ethnic German identification) to Volksdeutsche with two “purely” ethnic German parents and to Volksdeutsche who lived with “a purely foreign race or predominately foreign race individual.”¹⁰⁶ In the latter case, Hoffmeyer directed his subordinates “to decide on a case to case basis” according to their “overall impression” of the family.¹⁰⁷

Siebert articulated why Sonderkommando R developed uniquely simplified Volksdeutsche classification criteria for Transnistria during a subsequent 1942 staff order. As he explained:

The preconditions for registering persons of German ethnicity in the former Soviet territories are noticeably different from what has been experienced in the German

104 *Ibid.*, 244.

105 Rundsanweisung Nr. 11/Betrifft [sic] namentliche Erfassung und Registrierung aller Volksdeutschen in Transnistrien, December 28, 1941, BB, R 59/66, 132.

106 *Ibid.*, 132.

107 *Ibid.*, 132.

Eastern Territories. The Volksdeutsche in the Soviet Union were never able to participate in politics because every political activity meant death or at least deportation and exile. The cultural activity of individuals of the German ethnicity was likewise standardized and prescribed by the Soviet regime.¹⁰⁸

Hoffmeyer's realization that established Volksdeutsche identification criteria were ill-suited for Transnistria left Sonderkommando R with an ad hoc and diluted classification schema. In essence, the unit's senior commanders washed their hands of identifying ethnic Germans in Transnistria. Their staff in the field, they supposed, would know real Volksdeutsche when they found them.

With minimal instructions on how to identify ethnic Germans in Transnistria, local VoMi commanders began to classify area residents independently. Even Hoffmeyer and Siebert's extemporaneous instructions were, in the words of one former VoMi official stationed in Transnistria, "not implemented completely systematically."¹⁰⁹ This was an understatement. Scattered throughout Transnistria with little guidance on how to identify suitable Volksdeutsche, Bereichskommandos simply made up the rules as they went along.

VOMI ETHNIC CLASSIFICATION IN ODESSA

Recovering the local practice of ethnic classification in Transnistria is difficult. Its only uniformity was nonuniformity. Surviving records from Transnistria's Bereichskommandos, moreover, are fragmentary and provide little information about how Hoffmeyer's subordinates culled the region's Volksdeutsche. As a rule, postwar inquiries into Sonderkommando R's activities focused on the unit's involvement in the Holocaust and not its ethnic classification project. There was, however, one exception, thanks to a fortunate mistake on the part of West German prosecutors. During the mid-1960s, the State Attorney's Office in Hamburg investigated Sonderkommando R's activities in Odessa, doing so under the mistaken assumption that the VoMi unit stationed there, Bereichskommando XXV, had orchestrated the Holocaust in Transnistria. The inquiry yielded little information about mass murder, but dozens of detailed statements that illuminate Nazi ethnic classification in the city.

108 Rundandweisung Nr. 89/Betr.: Stellungnahme zu dem Entwurf des Reichskommissars für die Ukraine II a-2 vom 3.11.42/Aufnahme der Volksdeutschen in der deutsche Volksliste, December 15, 1942, BB, R59/66, 32–33.

109 Aussage von E. M. C., August 6, 1962, BAL, B162/2293, 174.

VoMi efforts to identify ethnic Germans in Odessa were exceptional, but nevertheless illustrative. As southern Ukraine's entrepôt, the city presented Sonderkommando R with a cosmopolitan urban landscape that unsettled the SS. Prewar Odessa had had the highest proportion of Jews of any Soviet city, and the SS feared that earlier interaction between the city's Volksdeutsche and Jews had eroded the "racial purity" of local ethnic Germans.¹¹⁰ In addition, unlike Volksdeutsche in rural Transnistria, Odessa's ethnic Germans had escaped Einsatzgruppe D's earlier murderous sweep through southern Ukraine, an operation that claimed the lives of perhaps hundreds of alleged "communists" or members of "mixed race" marriages with Jews. In Odessa, the SS confronted what it considered an exceptionally suspect local Volksdeutsche population.

Rather than offer guidelines on how to proceed, Bereichskommando XXV's superiors merely reiterated the VoMi's suspicion of Odessa's Volksdeutsche. As noted earlier, to prevent further Volksdeutsche "contamination," the SS in Landau banned ethnic Germans in rural Transnistria from migrating to the city.¹¹¹ As for Volksdeutsche already in the metropolis, Sonderkommando R's leaders could only wring their hands. Hoffmeyer's December 1941 guidelines, for example, explicitly ordered Bereichskommando XXV *not* to use Sonderkommando R's new Volksdeutsche classification schema in Odessa.¹¹² Barred from employing Sonderkommando R's revised Volksdeutsche identification guidelines, the Volksdeutsche identity cards that Bereichskommando XXV distributed remained valid only in Odessa. According to Sonderkommando R's regulations, Volksdeutsche who registered with the VoMi's Odessa office and then moved to rural Transnistria were to be reevaluated and have permanent record of their residence in the city.¹¹³ Although the VoMi remained convinced that it could identify ethnic Germans in East-Central and Eastern Europe, and after a fashion even in rural Transnistria, it considered the candidates in Odessa so questionable that it failed to offer the city's SS personnel any guidelines on how to proceed.

110 Ekkehard Völkl, *Transnistrien und Odessa (1941–1944)*, vol. 14, Schriftenreihe des Osteuropainstituts (Regensburg: Buchdruckerei Michael Laßleben, 1996), 24. German officials often feared that contact with Jews in Eastern Europe had diluted the racial purity of local Volksdeutsche. See Doris L. Bergen, "The Nazi Concept of 'Volksdeutsche' and the Exacerbation of Antisemitism in Eastern Europe, 1939–45," *Journal of Contemporary History* 29, no. 4 (1994): 569–582.

111 Reichsführer-SS Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle/Der Verbindungsführer beim Zivilgouverneur von Transnistrien/an das Zivilgouvernement von Transnistrien Verwaltungsdirektion Tiraspol/Betr.: Fahrten der Volksdeutschen ohne Passierschein, August 3, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opus 1, Ed. Hr. 1088, 140.

112 Rundanweisung Nr. 11/Betrifft [sic] namentliche Erfassung und Registrierung aller Volksdeutschen in Transnistrien, December 28, 1941, BB, R 59/66, 137.

113 Rundanweisung Nr. 31, April 7, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 103.

Although Sonderkommando R faced what it perceived to be unique challenges in identifying Odessa's Volksdeutsche, Bereichskommando XXV's practices of ethnic classification illustrate the VoMi's efforts to find ethnic Germans in southern Ukraine. Arriving on the heels of German and Romanian military forces, which wrested the port city from the Red Army in October 1941, the three-man unit that Sonderkommando R initially assigned to Odessa distributed provisional ethnic German identification papers haphazardly. Sometimes, German personnel granted Volksdeutsche status to solicitous residents who had helped them navigate the conquered city.¹¹⁴ In other instances, the VoMi rubberstamped, quite literally, the ethnic German identification papers that German military and SS formations already had issued to free Volksdeutsche prisoners from Romanian custody.¹¹⁵ Preliminary efforts at ethnic classification bore little resemblance even to the criteria that Hoffmeyer had forbidden Bereichskommando XXV from employing in the city.

The material privileges that the VoMi afforded Odessa's Volksdeutsche and the imprecisions of SS categories invited many Odessians to apply for recognition as ethnic Germans. VoMi staff feared that Jews abounded among the more than 8,000 Odessians who responded to Bereichskommando XXV's newspaper, placard, and loudspeaker invitations to apply for Volksdeutsche status.¹¹⁶ An anonymous February 1942 denunciation sent to the VoMi's Odessa office warned that "[i]n our city there are still very many Jews with German and Russian passports."¹¹⁷ The denouncer beseeched the VoMi "[a]bove all [to] pay attention to cleansing the city . . . Volksdeutsche . . . because at most 50 percent of them are really Germans and the rest are Jews."¹¹⁸ Although the informant blamed the Jews' German-sounding surnames and accents for their ability to pass as Germans, the reality was probably more prosaic. As Bereichskommando XXV's staff

114 Aussage von E. S., Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 5, 725.

115 Aussage von E. M. C., August 6, 1962, BAL, B162/2293, 174.

116 Absent Bereichskommando XXV's internal documents, it is impossible to determine how many ethnic Germans Sonderkommando R identified in Odessa. Völkl estimates that between 7,580 and 9,016 Odessians successfully registered with Bereichskommando XXV as Volksdeutsche. Völkl, *Transnistrien und Odessa*, 88. Based on the numbering of Volksdeutsche identity cards occasionally included in 1944 ethnic German naturalization applications, this estimate appears plausible. Johannes Volk, for example, received Volkstumsausweis number 6,686. Einbürgerungsantrag Johannes Volk, July 25, 1944, NARA, A3342-EWZ50-1075, 1298. According to the Russian Empire's 1897 census, Odessa was home to 9,900 Germans, or 2.6 percent of the city's population. Völkl, *Transnistrien und Odessa*, 24.

117 An das deutsche Kommando./Mitteilung, February 1942 in Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. 3, 1145.

118 *Ibid.*

suspected – probably correctly – Romanian authorities pilfered Volksdeutsche identity papers and sold them on the black market.¹¹⁹ Although the number of Odessa's Jews cloaked as Volksdeutsche remained small, they constituted a perpetual bogeyman for local SS officials.¹²⁰ Experience identifying, relocating, and evaluating the racial “worth” of other Volksdeutsche groups failed to provide Bereichskommando XXV's staff with a viable means of identifying Odessa's Volksdeutsche. It did, however, equip it with a deep suspicion of local ethnic Germans and a rabid fear of Jewish “infiltration.” Even if local VoMi officials could not fashion a definition of an ethnic German, their experience told them that their initial selections had failed.

Dissatisfied with the results of its preliminary efforts to identify Volksdeutsche, Bereichskommando XXV found a solution: if it could not find the city's ethnic Germans, then it would simply hire local employees who could. Although retained as administrative support staff, the VoMi's local employees – who were overwhelmingly local Volksdeutsche women – soon began to interview and classify would-be ethnic Germans.¹²¹ The VoMi granted its female helpers considerable latitude. Edith Herrlich, a local secretary whom the unit employed, later recounted her own role in ethnic classification. Sometimes, she overruled her superior, SS-Oberscharführer Erich-Meinert Claasen, Bereichskommando XXV's second-in-command. As Herrlich described one such instance: “an acquaintance of mine, a teacher named Else A., applied for an ethnic German identification card [Volkstumsausweis] from Claasen. Because Claasen construed the last syllable of her surname ‘son’ as the Jewish name ending ‘sohn,’ she was not going to receive a Volkstumsausweis. It was also the case that she had a slightly curved nose. Since I knew her parents from the Baltic, I could verify that she was not of Jewish ancestry. She therefore received the ID card.”¹²² As Herrlich's anecdote demonstrates, under the SS's supervision the unit's female Volksdeutsche employees often remained the ultimate arbiters of Germanness in Odessa.

Recruiting its Volksdeutsche classifiers from the initial candidates who applied for a Volkstumsausweis, the VoMi had significant choice in whom

119 Aussage von P. M., August 29, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-002, Band 4, 583.

120 Aussage von H. J. G., August 1, 1962, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-001, Band 2, 98.

121 Aussage von H. E. K., March 18, 1966, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-004, Band 8, 1377.

122 Aussage von E. F., December 15, 1966, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-004, Band 8, 1361.

to hire as a Volksdeutsche evaluator.¹²³ In addition to being women, Bereichskommando XXV's interpreter-classifiers fit a three-point profile. First, because of their job's linguistic requirements, Bereichskommando XXV's interpreters frequently had university training, making them better educated than most of the unit's Reich German personnel. Second, like many Soviet Volksdeutsche, they had suffered under Soviet rule. And third, although most interpreters long had lived in the region and fully understood the area's ethnic topography, many of them retained familial ties to other Volksdeutsche groups.

Herrlich typified these trends. Born in Moscow and a longtime local resident, the thirty-four-year-old's parents were members of Riga's Baltic German bourgeoisie; they had moved to Odessa after her father's German employer transferred him there in 1908. Attending Odessa's German-language primary school, Herrlich then studied at the short-lived Germanophone Lyceum that German occupiers established at the end of the First World War. With the Russian Revolution, Civil War, and concomitant closing of Odessa's German schools, Herrlich enrolled in a two-year pedagogical course at Odessa's Institute for Literature and Language and embarked on a teaching career. Shortly after she married in 1930, Soviet authorities arrested both her husband and her father; the latter died in prison the following year. Following her spouse into exile in Poltava, where new circumstances frayed their relationship, she returned to Odessa. They divorced in 1935. Working as a teacher in Odessa until the city's occupation in 1941, Herrlich registered with Bereichskommando XXV and "from its first days" served on its staff.¹²⁴ Capable, unemployed, and embittered, Herrlich was an eager helper.

Retaining members of a suspect population to define that group's boundaries proved disastrous for the amorphous category's integrity. By divulging confidential selection guidelines to applicants, Bereichskommando XXV's Volksdeutsche assistants helped fellow Odessians navigate the VoMi's complex and potentially lethal classification quagmire. Volksdeutsche with Jewish spouses profited from insider information on a key loophole in Bereichskommando XXV's classification criteria. Although Hoffmeyer barred Claasen and his staff from applying Sonderkommando R's Volksdeutsche

123 Aussage von M. S., November 7, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 5, 714. Aussage von N. R., November 7, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 5, 707-08.

124 Einbürgerungsantrag Edith Herrlich, June 30, 1944, NARA, A3342-EWZ50-C074, 1281-32. Quoted on frame 1232.



Figure 3.1. Eugenie Beck, left, an employee of Bereichskommando XXV in Odessa, probably 1942. Source: LAV NRW W, Q 234 Staatsanwaltschaft Dortmund, Zentralstelle Nr. 2795.

classification procedure for Transnistria to Odessa, that is precisely what they did.¹²⁵

When, for example, the SS ordered an Australian-born ethnic German to register his family at the VoMi's Odessa office, he turned to his former student Eugenie Beck (Figure 3.1), a local woman who worked as the Bereichskommandoführer's secretary. Apparently denounced by a local informant, Beck's former teacher feared revealing his Jewish wife and half-Jewish son to the SS. Aware that Jewish relatives would doom his application, Beck suggested that he present his Russophone wife as an ethnic Russian.¹²⁶ With a gentile "foreign race" spouse, the man stood a good chance of presenting a positive "overall impression" at the interview and receiving a Volkstumsausweis that would shield his family from murder. By helping their non-German and even Jewish acquaintances obtain ethnic German identity cards, many of the VoMi's female helpers sabotaged the SS's efforts to identify Odessa's Volksdeutsche.

125 Aussage von E. M. C., August 6, 1962, BAL, B162/2293, 174.

126 Aussage von E. S., November 12, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-003, Band 5, 746.

Despite the SS's dependence on its Volksdeutsche interpreters, post-war testimony indicates that they were not above suspicion. Beck's rapid advancement within the VoMi hierarchy in Transnistria, a rise that included serving as Hoffmeyer's interpreter, combined with her haughtiness toward both Volksdeutsche and low-ranking SS personnel, chaffed her coworkers.¹²⁷ Her colleagues spread rumors about her Jewish ex-husband – now allegedly an NKVD officer – and her supposedly half-Jewish child hidden at her family's former summer residence in nearby Lustdorf. Herbert Kirschstein, a former waiter who had joined the VoMi to avoid a Wehrmacht draft notice, took these rumors seriously enough to hunt for the imaginary child in suburban Odessa.¹²⁸

SS reservations about the unit's female employees were not, however, an obstacle to romantic unions. Unlike ubiquitous casual liaisons between the unit's German personnel and local Volksdeutsche women, Odessa's VoMi administrators maintained long-lasting relationships with the unit's office staff.¹²⁹ Soon after starting as his secretary, for example, Beck began a very public affair with Odessa's married Bereichskommandoführer Hans-Joachim Goerbig and even accompanied him to official functions.¹³⁰ In 1942, Beck ordered a local jeweler to smelt gold rubles into two ersatz wedding rings that she presented to Goerbig.¹³¹ After the Germans and many of the ethnic Germans evacuated Odessa in March 1944, Goerbig tracked Beck down in the VoMi's Gymnasialstrasse Resettlement Camp (*Umsiedlungslager*) in Ostrowo, Poland, and whisked her off to a romantic getaway in Vienna, where they conceived a child.¹³² Similarly, after her stint as Claasen's assistant, Herrlich began a relationship with her supervisor, the

127 Aussage von O. G., October 19, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589–002, Band 4, 687.

128 Aussage von E. S., November 12, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589–003, Band 5, 735. Kirschstein confirmed the embellished rumor concerning Beck's former husband, but denied searching for the child. Verantwortliche Vernehmung von E. A. H. K., February 9, 1965, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589–003, Band 6, 935.

129 Among local Volksdeutsche women, Kirschstein developed a particular reputation as a womanizer. Aussage von A. G., August 30, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589–002, Band 4, 588. Aussage von O. G., October 19, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589–002, Band 4, 687.

130 Aussage von A. J., September 3, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589–002, Band 4, 601. Photos that Beck presented to the Hamburg police during its postwar investigation show her accompanying Goerbig to a series of social functions at the German consulate and the Deutsches Haus. Lichtbildmappe I gg. Goerbig u.a., Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589–007, Beiakte 3.

131 Aussage von E. S., November 12, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589–003, Band 5, 751–752.

132 *Ibid.*, 728–729.

head of Sonderkommando R's accounting office, SS-Oberscharführer Hans Franck.¹³³ The two married after the war.¹³⁴ Kirschstein's disdain for Beck did not extend to Bereichskommando XXV's other female interpreters. Soon after deploying to Transnistria with the unit, he began a relationship with Ingeborg Hirsh, the polyglot daughter of the prewar German vice consul in Kishinev and sole Reich German secretary assigned to Bereichskommando XXV.¹³⁵ When Hirsch and the still-married Kirschstein evacuated Odessa, she was four months pregnant.¹³⁶ Focused on matters of the heart, the VoMi's SS staff overlooked – either intentionally or unintentionally – continued abuses of its ad hoc identification procedures by its Volksdeutsche interpreters.

VOMI ETHNIC CLASSIFICATION IN RURAL TRANSNISTRIA

Recovering how Sonderkommando R identified ethnic Germans in the countryside surrounding Odessa is more difficult. Surviving records indicate that, as in Odessa, the SS's ethnic classification program in rural Transnistria depended on local assistance. Unlike in Odessa, where area inhabitants schemed to receive ethnic German identification cards, outside of the city local residents scrambled for militia membership. During fall 1941, VoMi commanders in rural southern Ukraine focused on establishing militia units to contest Romanian hegemony. With limited German personnel, they delegated militia formation to supposedly reliable local residents, who created the militia roster. Preoccupied with other responsibilities and understaffed, rural Bereichskommandos conflated militia membership with ethnic Germanness. Who could be more German than residents who assisted the SS in its running struggle with the Romanians?

As in Odessa, rural Transnistrians grasped this circular logic. Bereichskommando XI's militia formation around the Volksdeutsche settlement of Rastatt during fall 1941 is illustrative. After establishing the unit's headquarters in the parsonage of Rastatt's abandoned Catholic church

133 Abschrift/Fernspruch/Verbindungsstab der Deutschen Wehrmacht für Transnistrien, April 5, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opus 1, Ed. Hr. 1085, 169. German Police Decodes No. 1 Traffic: 22.5.44, May 30, 1944, BNA, HW 16, Piece 41, 2. According to wartime documentation, SS-Unterscharführer Franck's duties included liaising with other German units in Odessa. Abschrift/Fernspruch/an: Verbindungsstab der Deutschen Wehrmacht für Transnistrien, April 5, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opus 1, Ed. Hr. 1085, 169.

134 Aussage von E. F., December 15, 1966, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589-004, Band 8, 1360.

135 RuSHA Akte Herbert Kirschstein, NARA, RG 242, A3343, RS-C5436, 1132, 1142, 1190.

136 *Ibid.*, 1132.

during October 1941, the Bereichskommandoführer, SS-Obersturmführer Rudolf Hartung, and his three subordinates, SS-Untersturmführer Johann Stettler,¹³⁷ NSKK-Oberscharführer Walter Petersen,¹³⁸ and NSKK member Hans Gleich,¹³⁹ toured their Bereichskommando's three other Volksdeutsche villages and two collective farms.¹⁴⁰ When they arrived at the Bogdanovka collective farm some 12 kilometers north of Rastatt, the farm's prospects as a German bulwark in Ukraine appeared mixed. Perhaps due to its small size, the Bogdanovka collective farm's machinery and livestock had survived the Soviet retreat and evaded Romanian pillaging.¹⁴¹ From Hartung's perspective, however, the farm's ethnic composition constituted a concern. During collectivization, Soviet authorities had formed the Bogdanovka collective farm from two distinct hamlets – one German and one Ukrainian. Although the predominately ethnically Ukrainian Comintern settlement and the largely Germanophone Neudorf village had enjoyed a degree of administrative autonomy during the Soviet period, the collective farm's ethnic boundaries remained fluid.¹⁴²

The multiethnic Ebenal family – the Neudorf settlement's dominant clan – typifies the village's permeable prewar ethnic borders. Some fifty people, virtually all of the hamlet's inhabitants, could claim membership in the family by blood or by marriage in 1941.¹⁴³ This extended family included non-Germans. Veterinary assistant Ivan Pastushchenko, for example, had married into the family in 1935 and fathered several children.¹⁴⁴

137 SS Offizier Akte Johann Stettler, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SS0 158B, 1297–1368.

138 Although the protocol of Petersen's 1971 West German police interview provides valuable biographical information, only fragments of his SS personnel file survived. The majority of Petersen's SS officer file appears to have been burned. SS Offizier Akte Walter Petersen, NARA, RG 242, A3343, 510–521. Verantwortliche Vernehmung von W. J. G. P., June 29, 1971, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2703, 125–126.

139 Very little information about Hans Gleich exists. As a likely member of the NSKK, his personnel information did not survive the war. His 1962 death prevented West German investigators from interviewing him. Verfügung über H. G., October 16, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 258. Gleich was promoted to the rank of SS-Obersturmführer and deployed to Crimea in April 1943. Stabbefehl Nr. 101, April 10, 1943, BB R 59/67, 104.

140 Aussage von A. B., January 3, 1962, BAL, B162/2290, 155–156. Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von L. B., January 16, 1962, BAL, B162/2290, 165. Aussage von K. T., January 24, 1962, BAL, B162/2291, 141. Protokol doprosa/Ionusa Aleksandra, April 6, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8445. Protokol doprosa/Ionusa Aleksandra, June 1, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8525–8526.

141 Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von L. B., January 16, 1962, BAL, B162/2290, 164. Protokol doprosa/Kokha Floriana, January 11, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8858.

142 Protokol doprosa/Kokha Floriana, October 1, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8546. Protokol doprosa/Kokha Floriana, October 10, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8590.

143 A local resident estimated the collective farm's prewar population to be roughly 45. Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von L. B., January 16, 1962, BAL, B162/2290, 162.

144 Einbürgerungsantrag von Johann Pastushchenko, 1944, NARA, RG 242, A3342-EWZ50-G019, 110–122.

Pastushchenko's brother-in-law, Alexander Orgiganov, the Comintern collective's ethnically Russian tractor driver, had likewise joined the family.¹⁴⁵ Distant cousin Valdemar Hübner and his Russian wife Nina also lived in the German part of the Bogdanovka collective farm.¹⁴⁶ Although the farm's existing infrastructure and German-speakers were appealing, Hartung and his colleagues recognized the need to identify the town's Volksdeutsche.

Disregarding imprecise superior orders on how to determine ethnicity, Hartung, like his colleagues in Odessa, simply retained allegedly reliable local ethnic Germans to conduct the classification. In Neudorf, Hartung appointed Josef Faltis as mayor¹⁴⁷ and Johann Büchler as the local militia commander.¹⁴⁸ Acceding to Büchler's request that local residents Johann Kühlwein and Josef Hass serve as his deputies, Hartung instructed Faltis and Büchler to establish Neudorf's militia unit.¹⁴⁹ By delegating the militia's creation to his Volksdeutsche subordinates, Hartung asked area inhabitants to define the boundaries of Germanness.

Local residents found militia membership highly desirable because their classification, or more accurately, their self-identification as Volksdeutsche entitled them to the bounty that the Third Reich promised cooperative ethnic Germans. Unlike their non-German neighbors, the Bogdanovka collective farm's militiamen received expanded, choice garden plots, effectively ending collective agriculture.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, on Hartung's orders, Büchler confiscated the Bogdanovka collective farm's livestock and the local Atmecheskoi MTS's equipment – which had been shared with local Ukrainians – and distributed them exclusively to Selbstschutz members. As the tractors and horses that each ethnic German militiaman received were

145 Protokol doprosa/Ionusa Aleksandra, April 6, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8454.

Protokol doprosa/Kokha Floriana, October 1, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8556.

146 Protokol doprosa/Kokha Floriana, October 1, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8555. Protokol doprosa/Kokha Floriana, November 14, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8703.

147 During their postwar interviews witnesses described the position of mayor differently to West German and Soviet investigators. In West German statements, witnesses termed the position as *Bürgermeister* (mayor), whereas in testimony to Soviet authorities they described the position as *starosta* (village elder), an equivalent pre-Revolutionary position that German occupation authorities revived in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine during the war.

148 Romanian authorities, who occupied the Bogdanovka collective farm prior to Sonderkommando R's arrival, had named Faltis and Büchler to their posts. Protokol doprosa/Kokha Floriana, October 1, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8851.

149 Protokol doprosa/Ionusa Aleksandra, March 6, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 9052. Protokol doprosa/Ionusa Aleksandra, March 9, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8308–10. Protokol doprosa/Kokha Floriana, October 1, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8552.

150 Protokol doprosa/Kokha Floriana, March 9, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8378. On Sonderkommando R's decision to maintain collective agriculture, see Dienstanweisung Nr. 2, September 22, 1941, BB, R59/66, 152. Rundandweisung Nr. 7, October 14, 1941, BB, R59/66, 143.

the only way to plant crops in the coming spring, the SS's initial property distribution provided Neudorf's inhabitants with a glimpse of the new German-imposed racial hierarchy.¹⁵¹

As militia membership was an avenue to privileged status, the multi-ethnic Ebenal family conspired to staff the unit along familial, rather than ethnic, lines. Faltis and Büchler's decision to include Alexander Orgiganov, the Comintern village's Russian tractor driver, in the militia is illustrative. Word about the material advantages that militia membership and thus Volksdeutsche classification afforded permeated the closely related enclave. As the two local leaders gathered to pen the unit's roster, Orgiganov's ethnic German wife, Silvia, burst into the unit's makeshift command post and beseeched her kinsmen to include her husband in the militia. Taking pity on their distant cousin and her family, Neudorf's local leaders included Orgiganov in the militia.¹⁵² Accounting for as much as 20 percent of the Neudorf unit, the Ebenal clan's non-German family members compromised the SS's ethnic designs for the village. As in Odessa, local participation in ethnic classification permitted area residents in rural Transnistria to manipulate the boundaries of Germanness to achieve their own ends. During fall 1941, Sonderkommando R unwittingly invited Transnistria's indigenous inhabitants to sabotage the core of its *völkisch* enterprise in the region.

CONCLUSION

Widespread upheaval and violence marked the opening months of Sonderkommando R's control over Transnistria's Volksdeutsche communities. In the countryside surrounding Odessa, Hoffmeyer's skeleton VoMi staff established local militias to contest with the Romanians for control of rural Transnistria. What escalated into a low-level shootout between Sonderkommando R's local auxiliaries and Romanian forces was tempered only by the unit's dependence on the Romanian civil administration for scarce and finished goods. Unable to rid themselves of the Romanians, Sonderkommando R's staff solidified an economically dominant position for area ethnic Germans and reengineered the region's demographics to expand VoMi authority in Transnistria.

151 On the distribution of livestock to militia members see Protokol ochnoi stavki, April 26, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8902. Protokol doprosa/Kokha Floriana Frantsevicha, March 9, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8842-8843. On the distribution of agricultural machinery – presumably along similar lines – see Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von L. B., January 16, 1962, BAL, B162/2290, 64.

152 Protokol doprosa/Ionusa Aleksandra, April 6, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8454.

Area residents were careful observers of Sonderkommando R's policies. Adept navigators of Soviet categories, they soon applied these skills to manipulate Nazi classifications to their own advantage, often with deadly consequences for their neighbors. No sooner had Hoffmeyer's unit assumed its responsibilities in southern Ukraine than area residents began to denounce their local enemies to the SS as Jews and Soviet agents. Unprepared for this scale of denunciation, Sonderkommando R's local commanders sought to snuff out perceived racial and political resistance to the Nazi project through an impromptu but systematic campaign to kill the "Judeo-Bolshevik" enemies in their midst. Although many local inhabitants surreptitiously enlisted the VoMi's help in settling Soviet-era scores, these seemingly endless denunciations shook Sonderkommando R's confidence in the racial and political suitability of a group of ethnic Germans that already ranked poorly in its estimation. Unwilling to apply the VoMi's standard ethnic classification criteria in Transnistria, Hoffmeyer and Siebert instructed their subordinates to use uniquely diluted Volksdeutsche identification criteria. Overwhelmed local VoMi officials turned to supposedly reliable local helpers to conduct the classification for them. Granting area residents the power to include or exclude their neighbors from a materially privileged category proved disastrous. Aware that membership in the Nazi racial community afforded substantial advantages, local ethnic classifiers identified many Slavs and Jews as ethnic Germans. From its very inception, local inhabitants quietly dismantled the VoMi's demographic enterprise from within while purporting to advance the Nazi agenda. By the time that a change in Romanian anti-Jewish policy moved Sonderkommando R's leaders to participate in the mass murder of Jews during winter 1941–1942, the VoMi had launched a muscular, yet internally corroded attempt to establish the basis for Nazi rule in Transnistria. How the unit and its local helpers became so deeply complicit in the Holocaust in southern Ukraine within months of Transnistria's occupation is the subject of the next chapter.

*The Mass Murder of Transnistria's Jews,
December 1941–April 1942*

During the last weeks of 1941, Sonderkommando R evolved from a Volksdeutsche affairs agency charged with mustering Transnistria's ethnic Germans for the Nazi cause into a frontline killing formation in the Holocaust. Within weeks, Hoffmeyer's subordinates mobilized poorly led, untrained, and ill-equipped militias of dubious "Aryan" ancestry on shooting deployments that rivaled the Einsatzgruppen's killings in organization, scope, and barbarism. Why and how did an organization that was barely staffed and equipped to manage Transnistria's Volksdeutsche settlements begin killing Jewish deportees in Romanian-occupied territory? This chapter addresses this question by recovering the antecedents, implementation, and conclusion of Sonderkommando R's participation in the mass murder of Jews in Transnistria during late 1941 and early 1942.

Sonderkommando R's role in mass murder was an unanticipated consequence of the Third Reich's alliance with Romania. As noted in the introduction, Antonescu's Romania pursued murderous anti-Semitic policies that frequently complemented but also periodically collided with Nazi Germany's aims and timetable. One key difference was conceptual. For Germany, the Final Solution meant the continental eradication of European Jewry. For Romania, "solving" the "Jewish question" meant eliminating Jews from territory that it claimed and controlled. So long as Jews disappeared from its sphere of influence, Romania's leadership cared little about their fate. In southeastern Europe, these parallel wars against the Jews created friction between the two allied powers over the fate of area Jews – a dispute in which Sonderkommando R became directly involved. Although Hoffmeyer's command relished projecting its authority in Transnistria, German authorities could, when it suited them, understand the area fundamentally as a Romanian occupation zone. For the Germans, it was thus Romania's responsibility to pull its weight in the Final Solution and to

“solve” the “Jewish problem” in the region without impinging on German interests. Intent on clearing Jews from Romanian-controlled territory, the Antonescu regime regarded Transnistria as an intermediary deportation destination for Jews from Bessarabia and Bukovina prior to their planned eventual expulsion into German-occupied Soviet territory. The Germans’ refusal to permit their Romanian allies to deport Jews farther east into the Reichskommissariat Ukraine derailed Romanian plans and created a bottleneck of Jewish deportees in northeastern Transnistria – the epicenter of the efforts of the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle (Ethnic German Liaison Office) or VoMi to mobilize the Black Sea Germans.

Although conflicting German and Romanian policies on the “Jewish question” lay the dry tinder for Sonderkommando R’s participation in mass murder, the initial spark that ignited the murderous conflagration came from a typhus outbreak among area Jewish prisoners. In anticipation of being able to deport Jews into German-occupied Ukraine, during fall 1941 Romanian authorities had concentrated Jewish expellees from Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Transnistria in camps and ghettos along the Bug River. Owing to the abhorrent sanitary conditions in these facilities, many of the prisoners contracted typhus, and the epidemic threatened to spread to the surrounding population – a prospect that terrified Sonderkommando R. In cooperation with local Romanian authorities, Sonderkommando R decided to deploy its Selbstschutz to assist the Romanians in murdering Jewish inmates. During this initial wave of killing, Sonderkommando R’s ethnic German militiamen murdered some 25,000 Jewish inmates at the Bogdanovka (Bogdanivka) camp on the Bug River’s right bank during late December 1941 and early January 1942. In anticipation of killing techniques later used at German extermination centers in occupied Poland and by Sonderkommando 1005 in the occupied Soviet Union, the Selbstschutz incorporated both cremation and Jewish forced laborers for body disposal into the killing process.

While this shooting operation was underway, Romanian expulsions of Jews into northeastern Transnistria intensified. Concerned that the increasing number of Jews housed in facilities around Odessa constituted both a security threat and a public health hazard in a militarily sensitive area, Antonescu ordered his local commanders to remove Jews from the city’s environs. Still hopeful that future Jewish deportations into German-controlled territory might yet be possible and aware that Hoffmeyer’s command had become a partner in mass killing, Romanian authorities began deporting more Jews from the Odessa area into northeastern Transnistria. Hoffmeyer and his subordinates responded to this resurgent epidemic threat by again mustering local ethnic German militiamen to murder Jews. A

detailed examination of Selbstschutz units in Bereichskommando XI based in Rastatt – units that were the most active and remain the best documented – reveals not only the scale and brutality of Volksdeutsche involvement in mass killing operations, but also how local commanders refined the tactics that they had developed at the Bogdanovka camp. These killings continued until Romania scaled back its deportation in the face of mounting German diplomatic pressure and decreasing Romanian enthusiasm for mass murder. By the time that Romanian deportations slackened during spring 1942, Sonderkommando R's militiamen had murdered nearly 50,000 Jews.

ROMANIAN JEWISH DEPORTATION TO THE BUG RIVER

The Romanian decision in late 1941 to deport Odessa's Jews to the right bank of the Bug River, the edge of the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, was the latest in a series of Romanian Jewish deportations. Of the some 315,000 Jews who inhabited Bessarabia and northern Bukovina prior to the invasion, approximately 125,000 fled with or were deported by Soviet authorities, leaving roughly 190,000 under Romanian and German control in the region.¹ Romanian preparations to deport Bessarabia's and northern Bukovina's remaining Jews started shortly after the provinces' occupation by Romanian and German forces early in the campaign. During early October 1941, fewer than six weeks after the Treaty of Tighina had designated Transnistria as a Romanian occupation zone, Antonescu ordered the wholesale expulsion of Jews from Bessarabia and northern Bukovina across the Bug River and into Transnistria.² Romanian authorities incarcerated local Jews in either makeshift ghettos or transit camps, such as those in Secureni, Edineți, Mărsulești, and Vertujeni. Bessarabia and northern Bukovina's occupiers gave little thought to public hygiene or to provisioning these facilities. Perpetual theft by Romanian guards exacerbated the already dire living conditions of the growing number of Jewish captives. Radu Ioanid estimates that of the 190,000 Jews that the Romanians attempted to deport to Transnistria, only 125,000 Jews survived long enough to cross the Dniester River between 1941 and 1942. The territories' remaining 65,000 Jews were either murdered on the spot by Romanian and German forces or died as a result of the deplorable living conditions that their Romanian captors had created for them as they awaited deportation to Transnistria.³

1 Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 172–173.

2 *Ibid.*, 142, 155.

3 *Ibid.*, 172–174.

Although Romanian deportations largely emptied Bessarabia and northern Bukovina of Jews, these coordinated expulsions increased Transnistria's Jewish population. Based on the problematic 1939 Soviet census, the portion of southern Ukraine designated as Transnistria by the Treaty of Tighina had a Jewish population of 311,000, of whom more than 200,000 Jews lived in Odessa, accounting for approximately a third of the city's population.⁴ As in Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, Soviet authorities had relocated (either voluntarily or involuntarily) a sizable proportion of local Jews to the Soviet interior. Informed estimates suggest that Soviet officials removed between one third and one half of the region's Jews prior to the arrival of German and Romanian forces.⁵ Soviet authorities were unable to maintain this rate of evacuation in Odessa, which the invaders besieged from August until October 1941. Many of Odessa's Jews were thus unable to flee ahead of the Red Army's retreat.⁶ Ironically, the number of Jews who escaped roughly equaled the number of Jews whom Romanian authorities deported to Transnistria. Owing to their country's policy of coordinated Jewish expulsion, Romanian officials administered a territory in which the total number of Jews at the start of the occupation was virtually unchanged from 1939.

Transnistria's Romanian occupiers made two incorrect assumptions that ultimately doomed Romanian attempts to "solve" its "Jewish problem" through the continuous expulsion of Jews yet deeper into the Soviet Union. First, Romanian planners, Antonescu included, assumed that the Treaty of Tighina's prohibition against the deportation of Jews across the Bug River and into German-occupied Ukraine was temporary. Given German military advances during September and October 1941 and the rapid evaporation of an earlier ban on expelling Jews across the Dniester River, the Romanians believed quite plausibly through fall 1941 that further deportation remained possible. Second, Romanian authorities had anticipated that most of Transnistria's Jews would flee with the Soviet retreat.⁷ The few remaining Jews, the Romanians concluded, could be expelled farther east along with the newly arrived Jewish deportees from Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, thereby making Transnistria also *judenrein*. Germany's refusal to open its portion of occupied Ukraine to Jewish deportees and the unexpectedly large number of local Jews who remained in Transnistria hamstringed Romanian

4 Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. 1, 17.

5 Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 177.

6 Dallin argues convincingly that Soviet authorities placed greater emphasis on dismantling and removing Odessa's industrial base and port facilities than on evacuating local residents. Dallin, *Odessa*, 34.

7 Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. 1, 63.

anti-Jewish plans – a reality that would have dire consequences for area Jews.

Based on these flawed presuppositions, during fall 1941 Romanian authorities incarcerated both local Jews and Jewish deportees in temporary concentration camps and ghettos located near the Bug River so that when German authorities approved a resumption of expulsions, Jews could be sent into German-occupied territory.⁸ Transnistria's Romanian administrators forced tens of thousands of Jews into camps and ghettos that were a testimony to Romanian authorities' murderous indifference. These facilities were never anticipated to house the number of Jewish inmates that Romanian authorities imprisoned, nor were they meant for long-term use. Romania's Jewish captives in Transnistria suffered from abysmal sanitation. What food the Romanians provided was frequently unfit for human consumption.⁹ As Dennis Deletant, who has studied Transnistria's Jewish ghettos and concentration camps, suggests, conditions may well have been worse than at comparable sites of internment in German-occupied Poland. Whereas in occupied Poland, German authorities frequently established ghettos in cities with large prewar Jewish populations that provided an infrastructure on which Jews could draw for support, their Romanian counterparts created concentration camps and ghettos in proximity to likely points of departure for subsequent deportation. Similarly, whereas Polish Jews ghettoized in their home towns could live off saved resources, Jewish deportees arrived in Transnistria destitute. During winter 1941–1942, the mortality rate of Transnistria's ghettos was more than twice as high as that of the Warsaw ghetto.¹⁰ Romanian plans to expel Jews across the Bug River in short order collided with contradictory German plans and an unexpectedly large remaining local Jewish population. The result was what Raul Hilberg described as a "prolonged disaster."¹¹

THE GERMAN FEAR OF EPIDEMIC TYPHUS

Sonderkommando R's involvement in the mass murder of Jewish deportees departed from the unit's established tasks of supporting the region's Volksdeutsche and mobilizing them for National Socialism. Although Hoffmeyer's subordinates had targeted the Nazi regime's racial or political

8 *Ibid.*, 56.

9 Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 202–217.

10 In comparison to the Warsaw ghetto, which had a 12 to 15 percent mortality rate, during winter 1941–1942, Transnistria's ghettos had a 30 to 50 percent mortality rate. Deletant, "The Ghetto Experience in Golta, Transnistria, 1942–1944," 28.

11 Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 3rd ed., 3 vols (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 283.

opponents in Transnistria's Volksdeutsche settlements, these localized killings were a far cry from the mass shootings that Sonderkommando R carried out during winter 1941–1942. In principle, Einsatzgruppe D's sweep through southern Ukraine during summer 1941 had been the German contribution to the murder of the region's Jews – an enterprise that, by fall 1941, the Nazi regime regarded as an exclusively Romanian affair. Why did Sonderkommando R, a unit whose personnel remained mired in a low-level conflict with Transnistria's Romanian rulers, agree to assist Romanians in murdering Jews when established German precedent dictated that the Romanians alone were responsible for “solving” the region's “Jewish problem”?

The decision of Sonderkommando R's commanders to cooperate with the Romanians in the mass murder of Jews in rural Transnistria was both a consequence of a deep-seated German perception that Jews were carriers of communicable disease and an incremental response to the escalation of Romanian Jewish deportations. Both Romanian and German authorities – including Sonderkommando R – recognized that the Romanian policy of ghettoizing Jews along the Bug River bred epidemic disease, especially typhus. During fall 1941, typhus erupted throughout Romanian ghettos in Transnistria. By December 1941, it had reached such proportions that Alexianu and Antonescu discussed the issue frequently.¹² The typhus epidemic that raged among Transnistria's Jewish prisoners posed not simply a public health hazard beyond the ghettos, but also fueled established German anti-Semitic fears that Jews were especially prone to spreading the disease. According to German medical assumptions that predated the Nazis, because of their alleged poor hygienic habits Jews were often infested with body lice that carried the typhus-causing *Rickettsia* bacteria.¹³ For many German physicians, the medical term for typhus, *Fleckenfieber* (spotted fever), quickly evolved into *Judenfieber* (Jew fever).¹⁴ To combat this public health hazard, German medical personnel in occupied Poland were among the first to advocate ghettoization to quarantine the supposedly infectious Jews from gentiles.¹⁵ Given the appalling overcrowding, lack of sanitation, and scarcity of food, typhus became what Hilberg described as “the ghetto disease

12 Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. 1, 89, 224.

13 Christopher R. Browning, “Genocide and Public Health: German Doctors and Polish Jews, 1939–1941,” in *The Path to Genocide: Essays on Launching the Final Solution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 148. Paul Julian Weindling, *Epidemics and Genocide in Eastern Europe, 1890–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 273.

14 *Ibid.*

15 Browning, “Genocide and Public Health,” 149.

par excellence.”¹⁶ German authorities created a “self-fulfilling prophecy” whereby supposedly diseased Jews were placed in a situation that was almost guaranteed to make them contract typhus.¹⁷ Limited typhus outbreaks in Breslau, Dresden, and Nuremberg during winter 1940–1941, which German authorities attributed to forced laborers and prisoners of war from Eastern Europe, reinforced the German medical assumption that there was a connection between typhus and supposedly racially inferior peoples.¹⁸ As German authorities in German-occupied Poland escalated ghettoization under the guise of disease control, they created a situation in which their racist fears became medical reality.

During Operation Barbarossa, typhus prevention measures became inexorably linked with mass murder. Even prior to the invasion, the German Army’s medical staff was concerned with the Wehrmacht’s susceptibility to typhus. Given that the German Army was to operate in the western Soviet Union, and precisely in the area of a 1921 typhus epidemic, the German military’s medical staff anticipated that the region’s inhabitants would have a higher natural immunity to typhus than German soldiers from the typhus-free Reich. Although neither Hitler nor the German General Staff initially shared these concerns, during winter 1941–1942 typhus prevention became a German military priority. Disease control assumed two forms. First, German personnel attempted to exterminate the bacteria-carrying lice that spread typhus. The Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories constructed delousing stations and the German Army issued strict personal hygiene guidelines to soldiers. Second, the SS ordered the murder of suspected typhus carriers under the pretext of a proactive public health campaign.¹⁹ Although German policy precipitated a high rate of typhus infections among Jews and Slavs, by late 1941, the SS had drawn a connection between genocide and public health in the occupied Soviet Union.

During 1941 and 1942, German forces in Transnistria, including Sonderkommando R, remained highly sensitive to the typhus threat. A British signals intelligence report noted that during late December 1941 and January 1942 “the prevention of typhus continues to occupy the [German] authorities both at home and in Russia.”²⁰ A May 1, 1942, report circulated to the Wehrmacht’s agricultural advisors attached to the Romanian prefectures in

16 Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 272.

17 Browning, “Genocide and Public Health,” 152.

18 Weindling, *Epidemics and Genocide in Eastern Europe*, 271

19 *Ibid.*, 284–288.

20 German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 16th December–15th January 1941, February 14, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 9.

Transnistria described typhus as the region's "most important epidemic."²¹ It bemoaned the woeful inadequacy of local medical supplies.²² It also informed the region's German agricultural advisors that, per an agreement with the Romanians, "in urban areas with Jewish dwellings Jews will be sought out and made responsible for carrying out special disease prevention measures."²³ For their part, Sonderkommando R's Bereichskommandoführer were to report Volksdeutsche typhus infections at staff meetings.²⁴ In an April 1, 1942, staff order, Siebert reminded his subordinates that "if new cases of typhus have appeared since the last notification deadline ([the] B[ereichskommandoführer] meeting on March 3, 1942), the number of sick, their gender, previous place of residence and current whereabouts (at home, in a hospital, etc.) are to be forwarded [to Landau]. Deaths are obviously also to be reported."²⁵ As late as February 1943, VoMi headquarters in Berlin so feared typhus that it notified Sonderkommando R's Landau headquarters that six ethnic Germans had contracted typhus in Zhytomyr and that two of them had succumbed to the illness.²⁶ Even before Romanian-imposed conditions in camps and ghettos along the Bug River precipitated a typhus epidemic, German authorities in Transnistria, including Sonderkommando R, were primed to understand typhus both as a serious public health hazard and a component of the "Jewish question."

SONDERKOMMANDO R'S DECISION TO MURDER

Before attempting to reconstruct why Sonderkommando R's leaders intensified their anti-Jewish measures in response to a change in Romanian policies, it is necessary to acknowledge the difficulties inherent in this undertaking. Recovering the decision-making process in which Sonderkommando R opted to participate in mass murder during winter 1941–1942 is challenging for four reasons. First, although the general outline of the escalation of Romanian anti-Jewish violence from deportation to mass killing during December 1941 is clear, future research by Romanian specialists likely will add new detail to Romanian decision making surrounding the killings, particularly on the local level in Transnistria.²⁷ Second, with a number of

21 Meldung des Sonderführers Neurath/an den Landwirtschaftlichen Berater beim Gouverneur Transnistrien beim Verbindungsstab der Deutschen Wehrmacht für Transnistrien, May 1, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1086, 46.

22 *Ibid.*, 47.

23 *Ibid.*

24 Rundandweisung Nr. 31, April 7, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 103.

25 *Ibid.*

26 German Police Decodes Nr 2 Traffic: 8.1.43, January 21, 1943, BNA, HW 16, Piece 37, Part 1, 1.

27 Armin Heinen's recent study, which uses predominately Romanian sources, largely confirms the following reconstruction of Romanian and German moves in Transnistria leading up to and during

important exceptions, few of Sonderkommando R's wartime records on the subject survive. Postwar testimony strongly suggests that prior to and during its retreat in early 1944 Sonderkommando R destroyed some or most of its internal records and presumably gave special attention to eradicating documents that implicated the unit in mass murder.²⁸ Third, postwar testimony by the unit's officers on this issue is particularly unreliable. Key leaders, including Hoffmeyer, died during the war.²⁹ Other high-ranking members of the unit, including Siebert, refused to speak to West German investigators, a tactic that hamstrung the initial criminal probe.³⁰ The records of Soviet interrogations of Sonderkommando R's leaders during and immediately after the war typically portray the unit as a specially created death squad – an assertion that most of the surviving documentation suggests is implausible. Finally, many of the available wartime and postwar records about Sonderkommando R's decision to participate in the killings are contradictory. Evidence gathered by West German and by Soviet investigators, for example, provides competing chronologies as to when Sonderkommando R's commanders decided to assist the Romanians in murdering Jews in rural Transnistria. The following reconstruction of the decision-making process of Sonderkommando R's leaders is based on incomplete and frequently incongruous evidence.

Sonderkommando R's involvement in the mass shooting of Jews in rural Transnistria during winter 1941–1942 has been the subject of past scholarship. Although the issue was peripheral to their central research interests,

mass murder during winter 1941–1942. Armin Heinen, *Rumänien, der Holocaust und die Logik der Gewalt* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2007), 130–140.

28 A wartime notation in Gerhard Wolfrum's SS officer file indicates that Sonderkommando R was unable to evacuate all of its files from Landau during its March 1944 withdrawal. Given the length of the unit's preparations to retreat, it appears likely that its commanders ordered the destruction of key documents that could not be evacuated. Brief von SS-Obersturmführer Wolfrum an den SS-Obersturmbannführer Brückner, November 24, 1944, in SS Offizier Akte Dr. Gerhard Wolfrum, NARA, RG 242, A 3343, SSO 001C, 728. In addition to intentional document destruction, much of Sonderkommando R's equipment and many of its records appear to have been destroyed during its withdrawal from the region. In her April 1944 request for expedited permission to marry, Ingeborg Hirsch complained that "all of our command's large pieces of luggage," which contained her fiancé's records, were lost during the retreat. Brief von Ingeborg Hirsch an das RuSHA, April 28, 1944, in RuSHA Akte Herbert Kirschstein, NARA, RG 242, A 3343-RS-C5436, 1143. According to unconfirmed postwar testimony by a former ethnic German resident of Transnistria, who evacuated with Sonderkommando R in mid-1944, the remainder of Sonderkommando R's records were transported to SS-Untersturmführer Erich von Fircks's recently acquired family estate in the Warthegau. There, former members of the unit attempted unsuccessfully to destroy the records before Soviet forces closed in. Aussage von V. S., April 14, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 56–57.

29 Protokoll doprosa/A. M. G., September 20, 1944, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2902, 34.

30 During Siebert's 1963 interview with the West German police, he telephoned his attorney during a lunch break and refused to answer further questions. Aussage von K. S., October 30, 1963, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2690, 77.

both Jean Ancel and Andrej Angrick have touched on it, drawing primarily on Romanian and German sources, respectively.³¹ Although their accounts of Sonderkommando R's initial participation in the mass shooting of Jews in rural Transnistria appear largely accurate, a careful examination of previously unused wartime German documents as well as wartime and postwar Soviet investigative records suggests two new insights into the killings. First, German involvement appears to have begun earlier than suspected. And second, Sonderkommando R's midlevel leadership frequently responded to events on the ground with little or, at best, delayed input from the unit's commanders.

As Ancel and Angrick have recognized, during December 1941 and January 1942, Transnistria's Romanian administrators successfully exploited Sonderkommando R's fears that typhus-carrying Jews posed an immediate public health hazard to the region's ethnic Germans and enlisted the unit's assistance in mass murder. Both scholars correctly note that early January 1942 marked the beginning of an intense period of cooperative mass shooting operations between Romanian- and German-led forces in the region. Yet, based on compelling Soviet investigative records, it appears that Sonderkommando R's initial shooting deployments actually began in mid-December 1941 around and eventually at the Bogdanovka concentration camp.

Established by Colonel Modest Isopescu, the Romanian prefect of Golta (Pervomaisk) on the Bug River's right bank some 45 kilometers northwest of Nikolaev, the Bogdanovka concentration camp appeared to the Romanians ideally located to house Jews. From there victims could be pushed into the German-occupied Reichskommissariat Ukraine. Romanian administrators created the camp at a former collective farm (*sovkhos*) by relocating the farm's predominately ethnically Ukrainian inhabitants to the nearby village of Bogdanovka. Under the guard of Romanian gendarmes and their Ukrainian auxiliaries, Romanian authorities began deporting Jews from Bessarabia, northern Bukovina, and elsewhere in Transnistria to the camp.³² Upon the Jews' arrival, Romanian authorities confiscated their remaining valuables and food. Bogdanovka's guard staff systematically denied their Jewish captives food and water and prevented local residents from succoring the camp's prisoners.³³ The camp's density

31 Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. 1, 292–338; Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*, 254–294.

32 Akt No. 49, October 10, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 75, 203.

33 Protokol/Samoil Isakovich Soifer, May 10, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 77. Protokol/Stoioiga Pavl, May 10, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6,

was appalling. Its inmate population of 1,000 in September 1941 increased more than fiftyfold by the year's end.³⁴ According to a 1944 report by the Soviet Extraordinary State Commission, the camp's more than 56,000 prisoners were housed in and around the farm's former outbuildings. Initially, inmates simply were left outdoors to fend for themselves.³⁵ As winter set in, the camp's Romanian guards moved some prisoners under shelter. In one instance, the camp's administrators housed 2,000 inmates in a pigsty designed for just 200 animals.³⁶ Despite this overcrowding, Romanian authorities ignored sanitation and hygiene, with predictable consequences. At Bogdanovka, the Romanians created starvation conditions and fueled epidemic typhus. If, as Ancel has described, Golta was the "kingdom of death," then the Bogdanovka camp was its capital.³⁷

By December 1941 it had become clear to the camp's Romanian administrators – and indeed to Romanian officials throughout northeastern Transnistria – that disease among Jewish prisoners had reached epidemic proportions and that their expulsion across the Bug River was not imminent. Unwilling to wait for eventual deportation, Isopescu enlisted Sonderkommando R to help murder the Bogdanovka camp's inmates. Precisely how is unclear from the available German and Soviet documentation. Owing to wartime document destruction and a postwar conspiracy of silence among suspected surviving German perpetrators, West German prosecutors were unaware of the Bogdanovka camp's existence – let alone Sonderkommando R's involvement in the murder of its inmates – until years into their investigation, when Soviet authorities shared excerpted Extraordinary Commission material with their German counterparts.³⁸ The reason why Sonderkommando R participated in this initial mass killing operation must therefore remain a matter of speculation. There are, however, two likely possibilities: either the local Bereichskommandoführer, whose Volksdeutsche militia forces participated in the killing, ordered the operation

Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 71. Protokol/Nunershein Petr, May 10, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 72. Protokol/Litvinanko Nadzhda, May 10, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 73. Pokazala Vera Pavlovna Nabanets, May 1, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 71.

34 Protokol/Nunershein Petr, May 10, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 72. Protokol/Samoil Isakovich Soifer, May 10, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 77.

35 Akt, May 2, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 44. Protokol/Litvinanko Nadzhda, May 10, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 73.

36 Protokol/Samoil Isakovich Soifer, May 10, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 77.

37 Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. 1, 447.

38 Verfügung, April 4, 1969, BAL, B 162/2311, 1–2.

independently or Sonderkommando R's senior leadership directed the mission.

As a consequence of Sonderkommando R's laissez-faire organizational culture and the uncharacteristic independence of the local Bereichskommandoführer, who commanded the Selbstschutz during these initial mass shootings, it is conceivable that Sonderkommando R's midlevel leaders ordered the start to such an operation and later sought approval from their superiors.³⁹ SS-Obersturmführer Rudolf Hartung, who supervised the Selbstschutz's murder spree at the Bogdanovka camp, enjoyed unique independence and powerful patrons beyond the VoMi. Hartung remains one of Sonderkommando R's most mysterious officers. Despite (or perhaps because of) Hartung's involvement with the Nazi party in Berlin, neither his Nazi party card nor his SS officer file survives, and his suicide in Berlin in April 1945 robbed investigators of the opportunity to interview him.⁴⁰ Postwar statements by his family, former colleagues, and erstwhile Volksdeutsche subordinates provide a partial biography.

Hartung was born in Bucharest in 1905 and spent much of the interwar period in Galicia. To avoid a Polish Army draft notice, Hartung relocated to Berlin in 1926. An early Nazi party member, in 1934 he joined the staff of its Berlin regional leadership (*Gauleitung*), which the minister of propaganda, Josef Goebbels, headed.⁴¹ Perhaps due to his previous experience in Eastern Europe, Hartung's superiors seconded him to Hoffmeyer in 1939.⁴² Although part of the VoMi unit until his transfer back to Berlin's *Gauleitung* in 1943,⁴³ Hartung maintained close connections with his former superiors. Following his deployment to Transnistria, they sent him scarce equipment, including hunting rifles for his SS subordinates and special dress uniforms for his Volksdeutsche militiamen.⁴⁴ Despite a noticeable speech impediment caused by a severe overbite,⁴⁵ Hartung was an accomplished linguist whose mastery of Russian fueled wild rumors that he was alternatively

39 For a similar example of low-level German officials deciding independently to begin murdering Jews, see Jürgen Matthäus, "Jenseits der Grenze: Die ersten Massenerschießungen von Juden in Litauen (Juni–August 1941)," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 44 (1996): 101–118.

40 Hartung's former secretary in Berlin testified after the war to his probable suicide to avoid capture by Soviet forces. Aussage von L. K., November 1, 1966, BAL, B162/2306, 270–272.

41 Aussage von E. H., March 22, 1966, BAL, B162/2306, 41.

42 Hartung's service is referenced in a 1942 request that he be promoted. German Police Decodes Nr 2 Traffic: 12.12.42, January 15, 1943, BNA, HW 16, Piece 37, Part 1, 2. Aussage von E. H., March 22, 1966, BAL, B162/2306, 41.

43 *Ibid.*

44 Verantwortliche Vernehmung von W. J. G. P., June 29, 1971, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2703, 128.

45 Aussage von E. H., March 22, 1966, BAL, B162/2306, 41.

the son of an exiled White Army officer,⁴⁶ a former German spy in the Soviet Union,⁴⁷ and an erstwhile NKVD agent.⁴⁸ He was so comfortable in Russian that, upon taking up his command as Bereichskommandoführer in Rastatt in September 1941, he joked with a local resident that SSSR (USSR) should stand for “sachar stoit sto rublei” (sugar costs one hundred rubles).⁴⁹ Hartung’s humor was lost on many of his Volksdeutsche charges. Like other Bereichskommandoführer, he reputedly beat local ethnic Germans.⁵⁰ As one of Rastatt’s former residents recounted, “Hartung was generally known as a swine. He was the worst of them all.”⁵¹ A committed National Socialist whose rising star in Berlin’s Gauleitung proffered a promising career after his stint in the East, Hartung was both inclined and uniquely positioned to spearhead Sonderkommando R’s initiation to mass murder. At the very least, Hartung’s biography explains why his command embraced its “dirty work,” as he described his duties to his wife in a letter home.⁵²

A second possibility supported by admittedly circumstantial evidence is that the unit’s senior leadership, and perhaps Hoffmeyer, coordinated the shooting operations with Isopescu in mid-December 1941. According to testimony that Sheremet Karp, one of the Bogdanovka camp’s few survivors, gave to the Soviet Extraordinary State Commission after liberation, on December 18, 1941, two German officers arrived at the camp, examined the terrain, and photographed both the inmates and the nearby ravine, where the mass shooting began a few days later.⁵³ Although after the war Bauer, Sonderkommando R’s photographer, denied photographing mass shooting sites in Transnistria, other postwar testimony contradicts his assertion.⁵⁴ Beck, the secretary and mistress of Odessa’s Bereichskommandoführer, later testified that Bauer had photographed execution sites and presented his snapshots to his fellow SS officers.⁵⁵ As Bauer was frequently a member of Hoffmeyer’s entourage, it is possible that the two German officers whom Karp observed touring the Bogdanovka camp before the shootings were

46 Protokol doprosa/A. M. G., September 20, 1944, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2902, 52.

47 Aussage von E. A., August 18, 1964, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2684, 29.

48 Aussage von E. S., October 17, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 37–38.

49 Aussage von F. F., April 13, 1967, BAL, B162/2307, 476.

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

51 Aussage von G. K., September 18, 1963, BAL, B162/2302, 281.

52 Aussage von E. H., March 22, 1966, BAL, B162/2306, 41.

53 Pokozal/Karp Karneevich Sheremet, May 10, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 75.

54 Aussage von G. B., December 13, 1966, BAL, B162/2307, 330.

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

Hoffmeyer and Bauer on a reconnaissance mission.⁵⁶ If Hoffmeyer or one of his immediate subordinates had examined the site before the unit deployed the Selbstschutz to assist the Romanians in the killing, then it would suggest that Isopescu or perhaps Alexianu coordinated the killing directly with Sonderkommando R's commanders in Landau.

Whether Sonderkommando R's initial cooperation with Romanian authorities in murdering Jews was a result of a midlevel SS officer's initiative or decisions that the unit's senior leaders took, during December 1941 Hoffmeyer's command assisted the Romanians in murdering Jews in and around the Bogdanovka concentration camp. In that area Sonderkommando R had only a handful of German personnel, of whom more than half were NSKK members whose commitment to the Nazi project and its murderous agenda their SS superiors rightly questioned. Blocked by treaty from transferring additional personnel from German-occupied Ukraine – in the unlikely event that other potential killers had been available – Sonderkommando R deployed members of the ethnic German Selbstschutz from nearby Bereichskommando XI in Rastatt. Although the structure, collective biography, and decision-making context of the ethnic German militia force that operated in and around Rastatt is covered in [Chapter 6](#), it is important here to highlight that Sonderkommando R's decision to deploy an auxiliary force of local Volksdeutsche was a reflection of the unit's ad hoc participation in the mass murder of Jews in Romanian-controlled territory. This ragtag irregular force, which was barely capable of projecting Sonderkommando R's influence in its running confrontations with Romanian authorities, numbered among Hitler's least prepared executioners.

SONDERKOMMANDO R'S INAUGURAL KILLING OPERATION AT THE BOGDANOVKA CAMP

The Selbstschutz's participation in mass murder began during mid-December 1941 with killing operations designed to cordon off the Bogdanovka camp before German and Romanian forces murdered the camp's prisoners. Apparently even after Romanian and German authorities reached at least a tentative agreement to murder Jews at the Bogdanovka camp, Romanian gendarmes and their Ukrainian auxiliaries continued to march Jewish prisoners to the Bogdanovka camp in a quixotic effort to facilitate their expulsion into the Reichskommissariat Ukraine. Rather than permit the Jews to reach the facility and thus exacerbate its overcrowding and the

56 Aussage von F. M., October 9, 1967, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2699, 4.

typhus epidemic that Romanian administrators and Sonderkommando R hoped to contain, local Romanian and German commanders diverted these transports to area Volksdeutsche settlements en route to the Bogdanovka camp. There, Romanian gendarmes and their Ukrainian auxiliaries transferred their Jewish prisoners to ethnic German militia forces that Hartung controlled. Under the careful supervision of Hartung and his immediate German subordinates, who circulated peripatetically to intercept the Romanian Jewish transports and to mobilize their ethnic German subordinates, members of Bereichskommando XI's hastily organized Selbstschutz shot hundreds of these newly arrived Jews within their own Volksdeutsche communities.⁵⁷

According to Soviet investigative records, the joint Romanian and German killing operation at the Bogdanovka camp began in mid-December 1941. On December 13 or December 14, Isopescu visited the camp in a final effort to collect remaining valuables from its prisoners. He ordered local Ukrainians in the nearby village of Bogdanovka to bake bread, which his subordinates sold to emaciated camp residents at the exorbitant price of five rubles per half kilogram. According to Boris Nilimov, one of the camp's inmates, Isopescu transferred the bread sale's proceeds back to Golta before departing the camp. A few days later, on December 18 or December 19, the Romanian gendarmerie, which guarded the camp, sealed the entrances to two large pigsties in which they had housed more than 2,000 of the camp's more infirm prisoners and set the sheds alight, incinerating all but a few of the inmates.⁵⁸ The following day, a detachment of sixty Selbstschutz members, whom Hartung had mustered from the towns of Rastatt, München, Michailovka, Mariankova, and Leninental as well as the collective farms of Neu-Amerika and Bogdanovka, arrived at the Bogdanovka camp by horse and buggy.⁵⁹ Many of these men were fresh from the recent killing deployments that Hartung had led against transports to the Bogdanovka camp.⁶⁰

57 Protokol doprosa/Kokha Floriana, October 14, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8639–8640.

58 Pokozal/Boris Filipovich Nilimov, May 10, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 74.

59 Protokol doprosa/Ionusa Aleksandra, April 3, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8445.

60 Pokozal/Karp Karneevich Sheremet, May 10, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 75. Karp indicated that the detachment's commander was named Gitchel' (pronounced Hitchel'). It appears that he misunderstood Hartung's name. According to interviews that the KGB conducted with former Selbstschutz members during the 1960s, it is evident that Hartung was in command. See, for example, Protokol doprosa/Kokha Floriana, October 10, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8597–8598.

On December 21, the mass killing operations at the Bogdanovka camp commenced. As survivors frequently failed to differentiate Romanian- from German-led perpetrators and the rank-and-file Volksdeutsche killers whom Soviet authorities interviewed after the war were not privy to arrangements between Hartung and his Romanian counterparts, it is possible only to speculate on how Romanian and German authorities coordinated the joint operation.⁶¹ Although survivors indicated that the sixty Volksdeutsche militiamen and the roughly seventy Romanian policemen and Romanian-led Ukrainian auxiliaries participated in the shootings, the role of forces under Romanian command is more opaque because Soviet authorities did not focus on their participation as heavily after the war.⁶² Romanian-led forces possibly operated in tandem with Hartung's militiamen. Before the killings, German or more likely Romanian authorities culled more than a hundred young, able-bodied Jewish men from the camp's population to assist with body disposal and segregated them in a so-called "labor brigade" (*raboचाia brigada*).⁶³ As he had done in previous smaller-scale deployments, Hartung divided his militiamen into three roughly equal squads, possibly organizing these teams around the local militia units in which each of his militiamen served. The first squad rounded up groups of forty to fifty Jews, often driving them out of their cramped accommodations in the former farm's outbuildings and gunning down prisoners who were too infirm to move. The second Selbstschutz squad guarded the prisoners during the one-and-a-half-kilometer forced march from the camp to the ravine that been surveyed, allegedly by the Germans, a few days earlier.

Approximately 30 meters behind the ravine near the right bank of the Bug River, the final squad of ethnic German militiamen received the Jewish inmates, forced them to undress to their undergarments, and collected any remaining valuables that Isopescu had missed. The Selbstschutz led its victims in groups of twenty-five to thirty individuals to the edge of the ravine. There, the militiamen and, at times, the Jewish members of the labor brigade bludgeoned the captives into the ravine. Under the supervision of Hartung and his German subordinates, groups of five to six militiamen took aim at the base of their victims' skulls as their German superiors

61 Neither the camp's surviving inhabitants nor former Selbstschutz members interrogated after the war were privy to these arrangements. Nevertheless, the Selbstschutz's participation that is well documented in Soviet records suggests that Ancel underestimates German participation in the killings. Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. 1, 124–127.

62 Pokazal/Boris Filipovich Nilimov, May 10, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 74.

63 *Ibid.* The handful of these men who survived the shootings and several years of captivity until being liberated by Soviet forces were among the only survivors of the Bogdanovka camp.

had instructed them and fired their rifles at their victims at the bottom of the ravine from a distance of three to five meters. Between volleys, as the militiamen reloaded the five-round clips at an ammunition box some ten meters behind the firing line, members of the Jewish labor brigade began stacking the corpses into a pyre.⁶⁴ The killings continued with such speed that members of the labor brigade found themselves working in pools of blood up to their knees. Soviet investigators later would describe the effluent as “a river of blood.”⁶⁵

When the number of corpses at the bottom of the ravine reached a critical mass capable of fueling a sustained fire, the perpetrators ignited the pyre, presumably with gasoline. As the fire burned, the members of the Selbstschutz arranged their Jewish victims at the edge of the inferno and shot them so that their bodies tumbled directly into the blaze. The operation's commanders ordered members of the labor brigade to stoke the fire by throwing onto the fire the bodies of victims that had not fallen directly into the flames. The putrid stench of burning flesh was so pungent that local residents on both sides of the Bug River could have had little doubt about what fueled the fire.⁶⁶ The shootings continued from December 21 through Christmas Eve, when the Selbstschutz and their Romanian-led counterparts broke for Christmas and at least some militiamen returned home to celebrate.⁶⁷ The killing recommenced three days later, on December 27, and continued into the first week of 1942 with declining intensity.⁶⁸ According to the Soviet Extraordinary State Commission, by the conclusion of the main killings at the Bogdanovka camp on January 15, 1942, German and Romanian forces had murdered some 52,000 Jews – virtually all of the camp's prisoners.⁶⁹

The German and Romanian killing operation at the Bogdanovka camp was at once conventional and innovative. On the one hand, Hartung and his Romanian colleagues applied a template for mass shootings that German and, to a lesser extent, Romanian forces elsewhere in the Soviet Union – including Einsatzgruppe D during its earlier deployment to southern Ukraine – had developed. On the other hand, the use of cremation

64 Protokol doprosa/Kokha Floriana, March 3, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8831.

65 Akt, May 2, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 51.

66 Protokol doprosa/Kokha Floriana Frantsevicha, June 3, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8953.

67 Protokol/Stoioaga Pavl, May 10, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 70. Nihilov stated that the shooting recommenced on December 28, 1941. Pokazal/Boris Filipovich Nilimov, May 10, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 74.

68 *Ibid.*

69 Akt, May 2, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 53.

and Jewish slave labor for body disposal anticipated procedures that German authorities would deploy in their clandestine extermination centers in occupied Poland. Although it may seem informative to trace these continuities, cremation and use of Jewish laborers to feed pyres near the Bogdanovka camp appears to have been an extemporaneous response to the obstacles that Romanian and German forces faced in murdering the camp's prisoners. Mass cremation proved attractive to German and Romanian authorities at the Bogdanovka camp for two practical reasons. First, as German and Romanian forces cooperated in the operation to prevent the spread of typhus, body burning promised to stop the epidemic. Second, during the unusually severe winter of 1941–1942, burial, the other option for body disposal, was impractical, as it would have been extraordinarily difficult, if not impossible, for the killers to excavate a mass grave without heavy equipment. The Romanian and German decision to cremate the bodies of their victims at the Bogdanovka camp was a response to the specific situational pressures that they faced.

The Germans' and Romanians' use of Jews to stoke the pyres was a response to an acute manpower shortage. With perhaps 130 shooters to kill more than 50,000 Jews, the operation's Romanian and German leaders had to mobilize available manpower sources – including Jews. It is unclear why the killing operation's leaders did not draw more heavily on local Ukrainians from the town of Bogdanovka for logistical support. That local Ukrainians had attempted to feed the camp's inmates during fall 1941 perhaps suggested to Romanian authorities that they might be uncooperative helpers. Alternatively, it is possible that the mass shooting's Romanian and German orchestrators depended on Jewish labor simply because the number of potential victims permitted them to find Jews who, despite the inhumane conditions in which they had been housed, were still physically fit enough to conscript into the effort. The ethnic German militia assigned twenty-nine-year-old Petr Nunershein, one of the Bogdanovka camp's few survivors, to the labor brigade for precisely this reason. Nunershein hailed from Kamianka, a town in extreme southwestern Ukraine, and Romanian authorities had deported him and his family to the Bug River's right bank relatively late in December 1941. His transport was not intercepted by *Bereichskommando XI's* *Selbstschutz* in the surrounding countryside, and he arrived in one of the last forced marches to the Bogdanovka camp, on December 16, five days before the shooting operation began.⁷⁰ Although Nunershein's Romanian and Ukrainian guards had pilfered his food and water en route,

⁷⁰ Nunershein later indicated that local residents, whom he had passed during his family's forced march to Bogdanovka, warned him that he was likely to be murdered near the Bug River.

as a recently arrived inmate in the Bogdanovka camp, Nunershein had yet fully to succumb to the camp's deadly overcrowding and lack of sanitation and food. On December 23, the Selbstschutz removed Nunershein and his family from the pigsty in which they had been imprisoned and marched them to the shooting site at the nearby ravine. As Nunershein and his family were waiting to proceed to the shooting line, an ethnic German militiaman asked him his occupation. When Nunershein replied that he was a barber, the militiaman pulled him aside and assigned him to the labor brigade. Nunershein watched as the Selbstschutz shot his mother, his wife, and their five-year-old son. Nunershein was then made to throw their corpses onto the pyre.⁷¹ As Nunershein's tragic case underscores, German and Romanian authorities at the Bogdanovka camp deployed Jewish forced laborers opportunistically quite probably because Jews, like Selbstschutz members, were a manpower pool of last resort.

Sonderkommando R's participation in the killings at the Bogdanovka camp was perhaps the most concentrated participation of Soviet Volksdeutsche in the Holocaust. Within little more than three weeks, German and Soviet estimates suggest that Hartung's sixty militiamen murdered more than 25,000 Jews.⁷² Assuming that Romanian and Romanian-commanded

Protokol/Nunershein Petr, May 10, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 72.

71 *Ibid.*

72 Establishing the number of Jews that Bereichskommando XI's Selbstschutz murdered at the Bogdanovka camp is difficult. Nevertheless, both Soviet and German estimates are remarkably consistent. The 1944 Soviet State Extraordinary Commission summary report concludes that German and Romanian-led forces murdered between 52,000 and 54,000 Jews at the camp. Akt, May 2, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 53. Protokol/Litvinanko Nadzhda, May 10, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 73. During the 1960s, suspected former Selbstschutz members recounted to the KGB that they had each shot 30 Jews per day during their deployment to the Bogdanovka camp. Protokol doprosa/Kokha Floriana, October 13, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8611. If, as the Soviet Extraordinary State Commission report indicates, Hartung mustered 60 militiamen and deployed them to the Bogdanovka camp for 14 days during late December 1941 and early January 1942, then it is conceivable that the Selbstschutz murdered approximately 25,000 Jews. Alexander Jonus, one of the former militiamen, estimated that he and his compatriots murdered approximately 30,000 Jews at the Bogdanovka camp. Protokol doprosa/Ionusa Aleksandra, June 2, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8537. Wartime and postwar German sources support this estimate. According to the marginalia on a May 12, 1942, letter from the German Foreign Office to the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories, the ethnic German auxiliary police murdered at least 28,000 Jews. Abschiebung von rumänischen Juden am Bug, May 12, 1942, NARA, T120/3132/E510806. If Franz Rademacher's notation referred only to the killings at the Bogdanovka camp, then it is similar to later Soviet estimates. In 1957, Walter Vahldieck attempted to blackmail his former comrades Gerhard Wolfrum and Wilhelm Stutzmann for the sum of 20,000 Deutschmarks. SS Offizier Akte Wilhelm Stutzmann, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SSO-169B, 662. Urteil gegen den Kaufmann Walter Paul Vahldieck, April 10, 1958, BAL, B162/2295, 23. In his blackmail letter, Walter Vahldieck estimated that Hartung had orchestrated the murder of 36,000 Jews, approximately 20,000 more victims than Liebl, a neighboring Bereichskommandoführer, who had not deployed to the Bogdanovka camp. 50 000 Juden aus Odessa/Tatsachenbericht von W. V., 1957, BAL, B162/2295, 26.

Ukrainian forces killed a roughly comparable number of Jews at the camp, then the number of victims in this operation exceeded those of Babi Yar a few months earlier, in which German forces shot more than 33,000 Jews. In spite or rather perhaps because of the intensity of these killings, Sonderkommando R apparently regarded its operations at the Bogdanovka camp as the limit to its unexpected participation in the mass murder of Jews in rural Transnistria. With epidemic typhus contained, Hoffmeyer and his subordinates reverted to the established German position that murdering the region's Jews was an exclusively Romanian responsibility. Local Romanian authorities, however, seemingly drew the opposite lesson. Aware that fear of epidemic typhus moved Sonderkommando R to mass murder, Romanians authorities concluded, quite correctly, that this same anxiety could mobilize German support for future killing operations.

THE INTENSIFICATION OF ROMANIAN DEPORTATIONS

Sonderkommando R could not have augured that the Romanians would again enlist local ethnic Germans in the mass murder of Jews during early 1942; the origins of this second wave of killing were the result not of local circumstances, but of a radicalization of Romanian anti-Jewish policy. During winter 1941, Romanian military setbacks prompted Romanian authorities to intensify their anti-Jewish measures – a move that exacerbated the increasingly unviable policy of concentrating Jewish deportees near the Bug River in preparation for future, but perpetually postponed, expulsion farther into the Soviet Union.

Even after the murder of tens of thousands of Jews in and around Odessa during October 1941, Transnistria's Romanian occupiers saw the continued presence of Jews near the city as a twofold military threat – the first real and the second wholly imagined. On the one hand, Romanian authorities remained concerned about the spread of epidemic typhus among Jewish prisoners near Odessa. A supply artery for Romanian forces both in the region and fighting alongside the Wehrmacht deeper in the Soviet Union, southern Transnistria was key to the Romanian war effort. Although purely a product of Romanian ghettoization and deportation policies, the spread

The murder of 16,000 Jews under Liebl's command is confirmed by Soviet counterintelligence records. Protokol doprosa/A. M. G., September 20, 1944, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2902, 51. Even after admitting to attempted blackmail, Vahldieck testified that the information included in the report was true. Aussage von W. V., August 30, 1957, BAL, B162/2295, 6. A former ethnic German resident of Transnistria offered a similar estimate of 17,000 to 18,000 victims to the West German police in 1962. Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von N. E., January 16, 1962, BAL, B162/2290, 184.

of typhus among Jewish prisoners housed along the Romanian military's central supply route alarmed the Romanian leadership, which feared that infection might spread to Romanian personnel. On the other hand, the Romanians remained convinced that Jews constituted a security threat. To them, the destruction of the Romanian military headquarters in Odessa in late October 1941 served as a reminder not of the failures of Romanian counterintelligence, but of the continued threat that the city's Jewish civilians posed. During late 1941, Romanian intelligence reported that the Red Army planned to land behind the front near Odessa and that the city's Jews likely would operate as a fifth column for Soviet forces – a report that Antonescu took seriously.⁷³ For Romanian authorities both in Transnistria and Bucharest, the presence of Jews near the Romanian military's key supply lane became increasingly intolerable.

These fears erupted during a December 16, 1941, cabinet meeting in Bucharest. Alexianu described Romanian anti-Jewish policy in and around Odessa. Downplaying the typhus epidemic that raged among Odessa's increasingly ghettoized Jews, Alexianu proposed putting able-bodied Jews to work and imprisoning remaining Jews in the former Soviet naval base near Ochakov.⁷⁴ Frustrated by a lack of progress on the “Jewish question” and the continued threat that he suspected that Jews posed to the Romanian military, Antonescu admonished Alexianu:

The Germans want to bring all the Yids from Europe to Russia and settle them in specific areas, but it will take time until this is actually carried out. What will we do with [the Jews] in the meantime? Wait for a decision that affects us? Guarantee their safety? Pack them into the catacombs! Throw them into the Black Sea! But get them out of Odessa! As far as I'm concerned, a hundred can die, a thousand can die, they can all die!⁷⁵

Immediately after the cabinet meeting, Alexianu ordered the Romanian Third Army, stationed in Odessa, to begin deporting Jews.⁷⁶

Alexianu and his subordinates selected the northern Ochakov and southern Berezovka districts as deportation destinations for Jews in concentration camps and ghettos around Odessa. These destinations likely had two advantages for the Romanians. First, like the Bogdanovka camp, they were comparatively close to the Bug River and could facilitate further expulsion to the Reichskommissariat Ukraine – a “solution” to the “Jewish problem” that, at least publicly, Alexianu still regarded as imminent in December 1941. Despite damage to the region's rail network during the

73 Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. 1, 89, 224–226.

75 Quoted in *ibid.*, 226.

74 *Ibid.*, 223–224.

76 *Ibid.*, 227.

campaign's opening months, connections between Odessa and Berezovka remained largely intact.⁷⁷ As the typhus epidemic among Jewish prisoners had halted deportations to Golta, the northern Ochakov and southern Berezovka districts may have appeared to Alexianu and his subordinates as the next best place to relocate Jews in anticipation of the planned but repeatedly postponed expulsion farther east.⁷⁸ Second, it seems probable that local Romanian authorities selected these deportation destinations precisely because they were a geographical focus of the VoMi's mission in Transnistria. Sonderkommando R's participation in the murder of prisoners at the Bogdanovka camp, a process that still continued during late December 1941, likely underscored to local Romanian leaders that the fear of epidemic typhus could secure that unit's participation in mass murder despite Germany's established position that the Romanians alone were responsible for murdering Jews in Transnistria.⁷⁹ The killings at the Bogdanovka camp apparently provided Alexianu and his subordinates with a strategy that they applied to subsequent deportations from Odessa.

The Romanians began to deport Jews into rural northern Transnistria in early January 1942, surprising Sonderkommando R.⁸⁰ Although Sonderkommando R's Bereichskommando XXV was located in Odessa, Goerbig, the local Bereichskommandoführer, failed to alert his superiors in Landau. Hoffmeyer's command first learned about Romanian deportations from the Odessa area shortly after New Year's Day, 1942, when SS-Untersturmführer Bernhard Streit, the Bereichskommandoführer based in Worms, decried an influx of Jewish deportees into VoMi-controlled territory.⁸¹ As one of his former comrades recounted after the war, Streit appeared at the unit's headquarters in Landau and reported that "tens of thousands of Odessa Jews were marching through his territory in a northeasterly direction. Hundreds of them lay [dying] along the route from hunger and hypothermia."⁸² Fearing that the Jewish deportees might "infiltrate" Volksdeutsche settlements in his Bereichskommando, Streit inquired about how to proceed.⁸³ Aware that Hartung and his militia forces were still carrying out a mass shooting operation at the Bogdanovka camp and likely

77 *Ibid.*, 292.

78 *Ibid.*, 228–229.

79 Ancel suggests that "the convoys transported to Berezovka and Veselinovo were not directed immediately to the German villages there; rather, these Jews were marched straight to the Bug with the aim of getting them to the other side, come what may." *Ibid.*, 309. Although Ancel's hypothesis is plausible, it perhaps underestimates the degree to which Romanian authorities anticipated a German reaction.

80 *Ibid.*, 247.

81 SS Offizier Akte Bernhard Streit, NARA, RG 242, A 3343, SSO 166B, 1347–1348.

82 50 000 Juden aus Odessa/Tatsachenbericht von W. V., 1957, BAL, B162/2295, 26.

83 *Ibid.*

suspecting that the newly arrived Jewish deportees also were infected with typhus, Streit's superiors ordered him to use all necessary force to prevent the deportees from reaching the region's ethnic German settlements.⁸⁴

Over the following weeks, Sonderkommando R's leaders expanded Bereichskommando XI's initial participation in mass shooting at the Bogdanovka camp into the unit's standard operating procedure. This decision resulted from a consultative process, the precise contours of which remain unclear. According to postwar German sources that historians, including Angrick, have used to reconstruct this decision-making process, Hoffmeyer contacted Einsatzgruppe D and requested that it return to Transnistria to shoot the Jewish deportees.⁸⁵ Citing the restrictions imposed on German forces in Transnistria by the Treaty of Tighina, SS-Standartenführer Otto Ohlendorf, Einsatzgruppe D's commander, refused. Hoffmeyer then traveled to Berlin, where he met with either Himmler⁸⁶ or Lorenz and his deputy, SS-Standartenführer Walter Ellermeyer.⁸⁷ While in Berlin, Hoffmeyer learned about the Nazi regime's decision to murder European Jewry and received orders for Sonderkommando R to emulate Einsatzgruppe D's earlier murderous sweep through the region by killing the Jews whom the Romanians were expelling from the Odessa area.⁸⁸

Although this explanation is generally plausible, it is one that is not well supported by circumstantial evidence from available fragmentary wartime German records. It is unlikely that Hoffmeyer met with Himmler personally to discuss the matter. Himmler's day planner does not record a meeting with Hoffmeyer during December 1941 or January 1942. Moreover, there is no record of a face-to-face meeting between the two men until early April 1942 – an appointment for which, as noted in chapter two, Hoffmeyer had to wait more than four months.⁸⁹ Likewise, although Sonderkommando R had previously used its police band radio transmitters in Landau both to

84 While Vahldieck contended that Wolfrum issued Streit orders on how to proceed, this appears unlikely given Wolfrum's position in the unit. Given the unit's typical chain of command, it is far more likely that Siebert issued Streit his initial orders on how to handle the Jewish deportees. 50 000 Juden aus Odessa/Tatsachenbericht von W. V., 1957, BAL, B162/2295, 26–27.

85 *Ibid.*

86 During her 1966 interview, Hoffmeyer's wife recounted to the West German police that her husband had received directly from Himmler the order for Sonderkommando R to expand its killing operations. Aussage von A. H., April 22, 1966, BAL, B162/2306, 92–93. As noted earlier, to cover his own involvement as Hoffmeyer's direct superior, Lorenz improbably suggested that Hoffmeyer enjoyed a close relationship with Himmler. Vernehmung von Werner Lorenz, April 16, 1973, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2787, 102.

87 Vahldieck advanced the latter version. 50 000 Juden aus Odessa/Tatsachenbericht von W. V., 1957, BAL, B162/2295, 26–27. Andrej Angrick, "The Escalation of German-Rumanian Anti-Jewish Policy after the Attack on the Soviet Union," *Yad Vashem Studies* 26 (1998): 233–234.

88 50 000 Juden aus Odessa/Tatsachenbericht von W. V., 1957, BAL, B162/2295, 26–27.

89 Witte et al., *Der Dienstkalender Heinrich Himmlers 1941/42*, 524.

contact Einsatzgruppe D⁹⁰ and to notify Berlin about Hoffmeyer's travel plans, neither an alleged appeal to Ohlendorf's command nor a last-minute trip by Hoffmeyer to Berlin during December 1941 or January 1942 appears in messages that British signals intelligence intercepted.⁹¹

Intercepted German radio traffic indicates that Hoffmeyer did not make a hasty visit to Berlin, but traveled to Bucharest in early January 1942 for six days of "urgent conferences" with the Romanian government.⁹² Although the summit's agenda cannot be reconstructed from the decoded messages, it is clear that Hoffmeyer's Bucharest trip provoked the ire of his superiors, who chastised him for not having consulted with SS-Obergruppenführer Hans-Adolf Prützmann, the Higher SS- and Police Leader for the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, prior to the journey.⁹³ That the Office of the Reichsführer-SS berated Hoffmeyer for overstepping his authority suggests that, at least as of early January 1942, he had not yet communicated with his superiors in Berlin. Although Hoffmeyer may have traveled to Berlin eventually to consult with the VoMi's leadership, previously unexamined records suggest that, when confronted with the unexpected arrival of additional Jews in northeastern Transnistria, Hoffmeyer's initial impulse was to seek clarification from Bucharest rather than to confer with other responsible German authorities.

In Hoffmeyer's absence, Romanian forces continued to deport Jews by rail to Berezovka and then on foot in forced marches northeast in the direction of Voznesensk on the Bug River. In addition to Bereichskommando XIV based in Worms under Streit, who had reported the initial expulsions, Bereichskommandos XI and XX, based in Rastatt and Lichtenfeld respectively, lay in the immediate path of the deportations. With Hartung still supervising the final stages of the mass killing operation at the Bogdanovka camp, responsibility for intercepting Romanian-guarded Jewish transports fell to Streit and his counterpart in Lichtenfeld, SS-Untersturmführer Franz Liebl, both of whose command posts were closer to the railheads in Berezovka. Although their neighboring commander Hartung had spearheaded the shootings at the Bogdanovka camp, initially both Streit and Liebl reacted

90 German Police Decodes: 30.11.41, December 19, 1941, BNA, HW 16, Piece 32, 3.

91 German Police Decodes: No. 2 Traffic: Addenda to G.P.D. 891 (20.6.42), August 13, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 46, 1.

92 German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 16th December–15th January 1942, February 14, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 3.

93 *Ibid.* Given Vahldieck's relatively low post in the unit and the fact that he may not have been informed about Hoffmeyer's travel plans, it is plausible that he assumed that Hoffmeyer's destination was Berlin rather than Bucharest. 50 000 Juden aus Odessa/Tatsachenbericht von W. V., 1957, BAL, B162/2295, 26–27.

more cautiously and interpreted their orders to mean that they were simply to interdict the Jewish deportees before they reached the area's Volksdeutsche settlements. To this end, both commanders ordered militiamen under their command only to stop the Jewish deportees from transiting through local Volksdeutsche settlements.⁹⁴

There are two possible explanations for Streit and Liebl's apparent reluctance to begin murdering Jewish deportees without explicit orders to do so. First, that neither SS officer enjoyed Hartung's high-level patronage may have made them reticent to exceed their orders, fearing to run afoul of their superiors.⁹⁵ Second, and more likely, they may have misunderstood the beginning of wholesale Romanian deportations from Odessa's environs to rural Transnistria as simply a continuation of earlier Romanian ghettoization efforts – initiatives that a November 1941 agreement permitted the Romanian civil administration to pursue.⁹⁶ On January 9, 1942, for example, Liebl demanded from the Romanian prefecture in Berezovka that "Jews not be driven through the German town of Kartekai."⁹⁷ Still apparently unaware of Romanian aims, Liebl warned his counterpart that "beginning today I will post Selbstschutz guards, who will stop the marches."⁹⁸ Without clear orders on how to deal with the Jewish deportees or unusually independent and bloodthirsty midlevel officers, Sonderkommando R's Bereichskommandoführer initially responded cautiously to Romanian deportations.

SONDERKOMMANDO R'S SECOND WAVE OF KILLING

That Sonderkommando R began to murder Jewish expellees shortly after Hoffmeyer's return from Bucharest suggests not only that Hoffmeyer coordinated the mass shootings with the Romanians, but also that by the second week of January 1942 he had received from Berlin the necessary authorization to proceed. Within days, Selbstschutz units from Bereichskommandos in Lichtenfeld, Rastatt, and Worms began to murder the Jewish deportees in coordination with local Romanian authorities. Reconstructing individual shooting operations within each of the three Bereichskommandos

94 Aussage von P. W., October 21, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 72. Aussage von P. S., May 25, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 155.

95 Although both Streit and Liebl were Nazi party members, it is apparent from their personnel files that neither man enjoyed Hartung's connections. SS Offizier Akte Bernhard Streit, NARA, RG 242, A 3343, SSO 166B, 1347–1348. SS Offizier Akte Franz Liebl, NARA, RG 242, A 3343, SSO 260A, 1596–1600.

96 Verordnung Nr. 23, November 11, 1941, NARA, T120/3132/E510822–E510825.

97 SS-Unstf. Liebl an den Prefikten Oberst Loghin Berezovka/Betr.: Juden, January 9, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 20, Fond 2361, Opis 1s, Ed. Hr. 7, 104.

98 *Ibid.*

is infeasible both because of the number of deployments in which each Selbstschutz unit participated and because of the limitations of postwar investigative records. From January through April 1942, Volksdeutsche militia units in all three Bereichskommandos conducted dozens of individual shooting deployments of varying magnitudes, ranging from approximately 150 to 1,000 victims each. Absent wartime German records, which Sonderkommando R probably haphazardly maintained at the time and likely destroyed toward the war's end, it is difficult to document individual shooting operations with precision. Moreover, postwar statements that suspected perpetrators and occasionally survivors gave to West German and Soviet investigators provide the most detailed accounts of the killings and yet suffer from two limitations. First, postwar testimony rarely distinguishes one murder operation from another. And second, the historically useful information available in postwar testimony frequently is shaped by the questions that investigators posed. The result is an uneven geographic focus that provides greater information about the activities of militia units that Hartung commanded, because of their earlier operations at the Bogdanovka camp, than about neighboring Selbstschutz formations subordinated to Bereichskommandos based in Lichtenfeld and Worms. Given this documentary imbalance and that militias from all three Bereichskommandos operated in a similar fashion, the following description focuses on the Selbstschutz's crimes in the area of Bereichskommando XI near Rastatt to provide an overview of this phase of Sonderkommando R's involvement in the mass shooting of Jews in rural Transnistria.

As in other Bereichskommandos, mass shootings that Bereichskommando XI's Selbstschutz spearheaded during January and February 1942 were the conclusion of a killing process that had begun with murderous Romanian expulsions from camps and ghettos on Odessa's outskirts. Romanian deportations during early 1942 were an effort not simply to remove Jews from the militarily sensitive area around Odessa, but also to ensure that as few Jews as possible reached their destinations in the surrounding countryside. Weakened and frequently ill with typhus because of the conditions in which their Romanian captors had housed them, Jewish prisoners often were in fragile health even prior to deportation. Transit to Berezovka in overcrowded, poorly ventilated, unheated cattle cars during the exceptionally frigid month of January 1942 – when temperatures reached as low as –35 degrees Celsius – further endangered the deportees.⁹⁹ Upon arriving in Berezovka, Romanian gendarmes and their Ukrainian helpers

99 Aussage von R. S., September 17, 1964, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2671, 69.

unloaded the surviving expellees and led them on circular forced marches, doing so to kill prisoners through starvation and exposure. The deportees' lack of clothing surprised even some of their suspected murderers. As one alleged Selbstschutz member recounted after the war, the deportees "were partially without shoes, ragged, and physically completely finished."¹⁰⁰ As at the Bogdanovka camp during late 1941, during these death marches Romanian authorities systematically prevented local residents from providing their Jewish prisoners with food and water.¹⁰¹ Romanian-led guards either simply abandoned or shot deportees who were physically unable to continue on the march. Local Volksdeutsche later recounted corpses strewn along the sides of the road.¹⁰² Even before transferring their prisoners to the Selbstschutz, Romanian authorities had subjected their Jewish prisoners to murderous conditions.

It is unclear whether Hartung's Selbstschutz units began mass shooting operations in Bereichskommando XI at the same time or slightly after their counterparts in Bereichskommandos XIV in Worms and XX in Lichtenfeld. It appears, however, that following the conclusion of mass shooting operations at the Bogdanovka camp, Hartung and his German subordinates deployed their Volksdeutsche militiamen to murder recently arrived Jewish prisoners almost immediately.¹⁰³ Although Hartung and his subordinates applied and even refined the killing techniques that they had honed at the Bogdanovka collective farm, this new escalation of Romanian deportations presented Bereichskommando XI with new challenges. Unlike at the Bogdanovka camp, at which the Selbstschutz's victims were concentrated and Sonderkommando R merely had to deploy its killers, the Jewish deportees who arrived in Bereichskommando XI under Romanian-led guard during early 1942 had to be intercepted, guarded for up to several days, transported to a preselected killing site, and ultimately murdered. Despite the scale of mass shootings at the Bogdanovka camp, the Selbstschutz's subsequent killing operations in Bereichskommando XI were logistically more complex and placed great manpower demands on Hartung and his staff. Bereichskommando XI's German personnel responded by increasing the

100 Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von J. F., January 17, 1962, BAL, B162/2290, 170–171.

101 Aussage von M. R., May 26, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 89.

102 Aussage von L. G., May 14, 1962, BAL, B162/2292, 142.

103 According to the findings of the 1944 Soviet Extraordinary State Commission investigation, the killings at the Bogdanovka camp wound down during the second week of January 1942, although members of the Jewish labor brigade continued to cremate victims' corpses into February 1942. Akt, May 2, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 53–54. After the end of operations at the Bogdanovka camp, former militiamen testified that they deployed in other, local killing operations. Protokol/D.T. Drozov, April 26, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8985, 8906.

number of ethnic German militiamen assigned to participate in the killing operations. Whereas at the Bogdanovka camp Hartung deployed roughly sixty militiamen, during subsequent local killing operations, he mustered over 250 Selbstschutz members.¹⁰⁴ For earlier deployments at the Bogdanovka camp, Hartung and his subordinates could draw on militias in Volksdeutsche settlements near the Bug River and appear, at least anecdotally, to have assigned relatively young ethnic German men to the killing missions. To interdict Romanian Jewish marches, which might materialize throughout his domain, Hartung deployed Volksdeutsche militiamen from all of his territory's major ethnic German settlements. Occasionally, Hartung called up all able-bodied ethnic German men of military age in a particular locality. Sonderkommando R's manpower needs for its localized mass shooting operations during early 1942 precipitated an exceptionally high level of Volksdeutsche involvement – either direct or indirect – in the Holocaust.

If German and Romanian authorities coordinated expulsions into Bereichskommando XI, they did so poorly. Jewish deportees arrived under Romanian and Ukrainian guard – often to the surprise of local ethnic Germans – at Rastatt, its daughter settlement Klein Rastatt, Gradovka,¹⁰⁵ Michailovka, München, and the Neu Amerika collective farm (*sovkhos*).¹⁰⁶ Volksdeutsche riders informed Hartung and his Rastatt-based staff about the arrival of each transport, and Bereichskommando XI's German personnel darted among settlements to intercept the deportees, muster the local militiamen, and begin killing.¹⁰⁷ Unlike Sonderkommando R's operations at the Bogdanovka collective farm, hurried treks across a frozen countryside locked in winter's grip characterized this second phase of killing.

104 Pokozal/Sheremet Karneevich Karp, May 10, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 75. Akt, May 2, 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M, Reel 6, Fond 7021, Opis 69, Delo 342, 48. Protokol doprosa/A. M. G., September 20, 1944, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2902, 52.

105 When the shootings occurred in January and February 1942, Gradovka was a predominately ethnically Ukrainian village. After March 1943, Sonderkommando R transferred local residents to the Bogdanovka collective farm (*kolkhoz*) and relocated ethnic German residents to Gradovka, renaming the town Neustadt (New City). Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von L. B., January 16, 1962, BAL, B162/2290, 164. Protokol doprosa/Kokha Floriana Frantsevicha, February 7, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8772.

106 Protokol doprosa/Ionusa Aleksandra, April 3, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8445.

107 Hartung and his subordinates were almost always present at mass shooting operations. Protokol doprosa/Ionusa Alexandra, November 3, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 9014. Protokol doprosa/Kokha Floriana, October 13, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8610. Given that Sonderkommando R depended on local riders to communicate, particularly in winter when automobile transportation was unreliable, mounted messengers appear to have been the only way for local residents to notify Bereichskommando XI's staff about the arrival of a Jewish transport. German Police Decodes Nr 2 Traffic: 21.12.41, January 6, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 32, 2.

After intercepting the Romanian-led Jewish deportees, Bereichskommando XI's militiamen imprisoned their captives for up to several days prior to murder. As at the Bogdanovka collective farm, Bereichskommando XI's militiamen converted the outbuildings of former collective farms into makeshift prisons that Selbstschutz sentries guarded.¹⁰⁸ To contain the spread of typhus, the militiamen selected structures typically some distance from the nearest ethnic German settlement.¹⁰⁹ For Hartung and his underlings, imprisonment prior to murder served two purposes. First, it permitted Bereichskommando XI's staff to assemble a critical mass of both victims and shooters. As Hartung and his colleagues had learned at the Bogdanovka camp, a large-scale killing operation was a more economical use of finite manpower than smaller deployments, particularly when the perpetrators had to travel during winter. Romanian gendarmes and their Ukrainian auxiliaries often escorted relatively small groups of 50 to 100 Jews from Berezovka into Bereichskommando XI.¹¹⁰ As it was impractical to gun down these smaller transports as they arrived, local Selbstschutz units frequently assembled prisoners from four or five transports before organizing a mass shooting operation. The delay that imprisoning Jews afforded also allowed Hartung and his subordinates to muster militiamen from neighboring Volksdeutsche settlements to assist in the killings. Occasionally, Bereichskommando XI's staff ordered their local ethnic German helpers to transport their Jewish captives from one makeshift prison to another, either on foot or by sled and wagon, to equalize the ratio of intended victims to available perpetrators.¹¹¹ Short-term incarceration thus permitted Bereichskommando XI to streamline mass murder and to stretch its manpower.

Second, and perhaps equally important for the perpetrators, temporary imprisonment created an opportunity to steal. Volksdeutsche militiamen guarding these hastily organized prisons often promised to release their Jewish captives in exchange for valuables.¹¹² Sonderkommando R emulated

108 Aussage von V. H., September 7, 1964, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2684, 53–54. Aussage von N. R., November 3, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 99. Aussage von L. V., October 8, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 4–5.

109 Aussage von M. B., June 10, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 196.

110 Romanian Jewish transports appear to have had an average size of 50 to 100 prisoners. Aussage von V. A., November 19, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 147. Witnesses and suspected perpetrators reported shooting deployments that targeted between 150 and 1,000 Jewish prisoners. Aussage von G. K., September 18, 1963, BAL, B162/2302, 286. Aussage von M. B., June 10, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 195.

111 For larger shootings operations, Selbstschutz units deployed for multiday shooting missions to neighboring towns, villages, and collective farms. Aussage von V. H., September 7, 1964, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2684, 53–54.

112 Aussage von F. F., April 13, 1967, BAL, B162/2307, 478. Aussage von V. H., September 7, 1964, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2684, 53–54.

Romanian authorities at the Bogdanovka camp, where Isopescu sold bread to starving Jewish prisoners at exorbitant prices to strip them of their remaining property immediately before death. Impetus for theft came from Bereichskommando XI, which profited from the robbery. Hartung and his staff's lust for Jews' valuables was legendary among local residents. According to Eugen A., a suspected Selbstschutz member from Rastatt, Hartung and his German subordinates "were always after the Jews' gold."¹¹³ This cupidity continued even after the conclusion of shooting operations. As Josef F., then a seventeen-year-old Rastatt resident, later recounted: "I saw how the SS men pulled rings off the victims' fingers and rummaged through what little food the victims had brought with them because they knew from experience that some of the Jews had baked their gold pieces into cakes and bread."¹¹⁴ Hartung's office cabinet, according to another Rastatt resident, was crammed full of jewelry and gold coins that the militiamen had stripped from their victims.¹¹⁵ Hartung later passed many of these items, including "a man's pocket watch [and] a gold wrist bracelet," to his wife in preparation for "difficult times" ahead and to his secretary as parting gifts at the Gauleitung in Berlin during April 1945.¹¹⁶ In one of the most macabre episodes of the postwar West German investigation, Hartung's wife gave police investigators a wedding band, engraved with date 1933, which she had received from her husband at the war's end and which their daughter continued to wear during the mid-1960s.¹¹⁷

Hartung was not alone in his avarice. Bereichskommando XI's haul was so large that it shared its ill-gotten gains with their superiors in Landau. According to one of Hartung's fellow SS officers, Bereichskommando XI's staff "delivered a massive quantity of gold rubles, watches, rings, and chains to headquarters."¹¹⁸ Hartung and his fellow local commanders also forwarded gold fillings to their superiors, permitting Niessner,¹¹⁹ the unit's dental technician, to open a practice.¹²⁰ At his Landau office, Niessner smelted both fillings and ten-ruble gold pieces to use as dental gold for Sonderkommando R's German personnel.¹²¹ Germans, from SS officers

113 Aussage von E. A., August 18, 1964, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2684, 32.

114 Aussage von J. F., September 20, 1963, BAL, B162/2302, 300.

115 Aussage von V. A., November 19, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 148.

116 Aussage von E. H., March 22, 1966, BAL, B162/2306, 44. Aussage von L. K., November 1, 1966, BAL, B162/2306, 272.

117 Aussage von E. H., March 22, 1966, BAL, B162/2306, 44. According to West German investigators, who examined the ring during their interview, it was engraved with the number "33." Aussage von E. H., August 3, 1966, BAL, B162/2306, 170.

118 50 000 Juden aus Odessa/Tatsachenbericht von W. V., August 14, 1957, BAL, B162/2295, 133.

119 SS Offizier Akte Erwin Niessner, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SSO-350A, 512.

120 50 000 Juden aus Odessa/Tatsachenbericht von W. V., August 14, 1957, BAL, B162/2295, 134.

121 Aussage von E. N., October 20, 1967, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2699, 47–48.

to German Red Cross nurses, used the opportunity to repair their inferior dental work at no cost.¹²² SS-Oberscharführer Friedrich Marx, the unit's paymaster, kept remaining stolen Jewish valuables, which were either ill-suited or unnecessary for Niessner's services, in a large wooden chest, which Sonderkommando R sent to Ellermeyer in Berlin during the unit's 1944 retreat.¹²³ Despite incessant German complaints about Romanian corruption, for Sonderkommando R robbery became both a motivation and a reward for murder.

Sonderkommando R's German staff, however, was not the sole beneficiary of mass murder. When local Selbstschutz units had assembled enough Jewish inmates in their makeshift prisons, militiamen summoned their German superiors, and typically Hartung personally, to oversee the operation.¹²⁴ Selbstschutz guards escorted groups of Jews from their temporary jails to predetermined killing sites. There, ethnic German sentries instructed the victims to strip to their underwear and collected their clothes, shoes, and remaining personal items.¹²⁵ Selbstschutz members, who received the items, sometimes began dividing up their spoils during killing operations.¹²⁶ Hartung encouraged Volksdeutsche theft.¹²⁷ Militiamen were keen to acquire what they regarded as luxury items from their often more affluent victims. Shoes, leather boots, gold coins, suits, and even women's undergarments were prized booty.¹²⁸ The scale of robbery was so great that Hartung could not give all the proceeds away to the executioners and warehoused many of the items in Rastatt. Franz F., who lived next to the impromptu warehouse, described its contents: "On the neighboring farm there was a cow barn, approximately 10 × 8 m[eters] in size, which was full of articles of clothing that had come from the [Jewish] victims. A member of the Selbstschutz stood guard there through the night. Photos and identification papers from the victims lay on the field in front of the barn

122 Aussage von F. M., October 9, 1967, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2699, 6. Aussage von R. F., BAL, August 8, 1967, B162/2309, 63. Aussage von F. W., October 13, 1967, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2699, 25. Aussage von J. K., August 17, 1967, BAL, B162/2309, 80.

123 Aussage von F. M., October 9, 1967, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2699, 5. Aussage von O. H., August 15, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 236.

124 According to former militiamen, Hartung personally participated in the shootings, including those of children. Protokoll doprosa/Ionusa Alexandra, November 3, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 9014.

125 Protokoll doprosa/A. M. G., September 20, 1944, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2902, 52. Aussage von V. H., September 7, 1964, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2684, 53–54.

126 Aussage von J. S., October 9, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 15–16.

127 Protokoll doprosa/Ionusa Aleksandra, June 1, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8510, 8528.

128 Protokoll doprosa/Renner Yakov Yakovich, May 20, 1948, USHMM, RG-38.018M, Reel 79, 3701. Protokoll doprosa/Ionusa Aleksandra, May 29, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8510.

and children picked them up and played with them.”¹²⁹ To ensure that no hidden valuables escaped him, Hartung selected a couple of old ethnic German women to search the items for hidden valuables.¹³⁰ Except for the most choice pieces, which he and his fellow Germans kept for themselves or which Bereichskommando XI sold in local stores, Hartung ordered the Selbstschutz to distribute the remaining clothes to area Volksdeutsche.¹³¹ In Bereichskommando XI, greed shaped the involvement of German and local perpetrators alike.

Hartung and his German subordinates instructed their Volksdeutsche militiamen to murder Jews in one of two ways. The first drew on tactics that Hartung’s command had developed during deployments to the Bogdanovka camp and the second was an effort to correct problems with precisely those procedures. Initially, Bereichskommando XI’s militiamen escorted their victims from barns in which they had been held to shooting pits near Rastatt. A so-called cadaver pit (*Kadavargrube*), which local residents had used before the war to discard the carcasses of their dead cattle, roughly two kilometers from Rastatt, required little excavation.¹³² The Selbstschutz also dug out other naturally occurring hollows to reach the desired depth for a mass grave.¹³³ Once at the murder site, Bereichskommando XI’s Selbstschutz selected the few still physically robust male Jewish prisoners to assist in building a pyre in the pit, using a combination of gasoline and straw.¹³⁴ The militiamen forced the victims to undress and hand over any property. Selbstschutz members then killed groups of five to twenty Jews with aimed shots to the base of the skull.¹³⁵ The Selbstschutz’s Jewish forced laborers then threw the victims’ corpses onto the fire. As one group of militiamen shot, a second group of Selbstschutz members transported the next group of victims to the shooting pit – a procedure that continued until the Selbstschutz had murdered all of the Jewish captives except the men selected to help with the fire. The militiamen then shot the forced laborers and incinerated their bodies before returning home with the property stolen from the Jews they had murdered.¹³⁶

129 Aussage von F. F., April 13, 1967, BAL, B162/2307, 478.

130 Aussage von E. K., March 3, 1965, BAL, B162/2303, 321–322.

131 Protokol doprosa/Ionusa Aleksandra, May 29, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8510. Protokol doprosa/Ionusa Aleksandra, March 6, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8370–8371.

132 Aussage von M. B., June 10, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 196. Aussage von K. D., December 7, 1964, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, 92.

133 Aussage von N. R., November 3, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 98–99.

134 Protokol doprosa/A. M. G., September 20, 1944, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2902, 52. Aussage von N. A., June 30, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 132.

135 Aussage von E. S., October 17, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 40.

136 According to a former suspected Selbstschutz member, the ethnic German militia permitted some Jewish prisoners to purchase a position on the labor brigade and thereby to stave off murder, albeit

Nikolaus R., a Rastatt resident and suspected Selbstschutz member, later described one shooting operation:

In Rastadt [sic], roughly 500 to 600 Jews were housed in the cow barn at the fork in the road to München and Neu-Rastadt [Klein Rastatt]. . . . From a distance of about 600 meters I witnessed hundreds of [Jews] shot on a hill north of Rastadt. I could tell that these people had to strip naked. They were brought to a specially dug pit and shot. When the wind blew in the right direction, one could hear the screams and whimpers of these people clearly. The mass executions at this place continued for many days and each time several hundred Jews were shot. One evening after an execution I was standing near the pit and saw that it was 5 × 6 meters in size and had a depth of 15 meters. In the pit a kind of grate had been constructed and under the grate a fire burned constantly. The victims fell onto the grate and burned up. One could clearly see charred human remains in the pit.¹³⁷

Despite the assembly line model for these mass shootings, the militiamen periodically failed to kill all of their victims and encountered survivors. As R. continued:

As I was standing next to the pit with a group of people a completely naked Jew jumped out and attempted to flee. [Georg E., a local militiaman] yelled in the direction of the Selbstschutz's headquarters that Jews were still running around here. . . . After about 10 minutes Eugen G. [another militiaman] appeared with a rifle. There was snow on the ground and the Jew did not get far, having lain down from exhaustion. He kneeled and begged for his life. Georg E. took G.'s rifle and shot the Jew right there. E. and G. then strapped a belt around his neck and dragged him the 50 meters back to the pit and threw him in.¹³⁸

In another instance, while sorting through their victims' clothing, Rastatt's Selbstschutz discovered a live infant in a rucksack that they had stolen. According to one ethnic German witness, "one of the SS officers [present] stated that he wanted to shoot or to bludgeon the child to death, whereupon one of his colleagues said that he should not strain himself and rather throw the child onto the pyre alive, which he did."¹³⁹ During yet another mass shooting, a Jew escaped, overpowered his would-be killer, and wounded a militiaman in the leg with a stolen rifle before being killed by other Selbstschutz members.¹⁴⁰ Mass shootings near Rastatt were gruesome and occasionally dangerous affairs that required both German and Volksdeutsche perpetrators to carry out "mopping up" operations even after the conclusion of their primary killing deployments.

very temporarily. Aussage von V. H., September 7, 1964, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2684, 53–54.

137 Aussage von N. R., November 3, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 98–98.

138 *Ibid.*

139 Aussage von J. E., September 20, 1963, BAL, B162/2302, 300.

140 Aussage von E. E., April 13, 1967, BAL, B162/2307, 478–479.

During initial shooting operations near Rastatt, Hartung's command applied the tactics that it had used earlier at the Bogdanovka camp. In other parts of Bereichskommando XI, however, it adapted its procedures to address Sonderkommando R's depleting supply of ammunition. Although at the Bogdanovka camp fewer than 100 Selbstschutz members had killed perhaps 25,000 Jews in less than a month, the militiamen had expended an extraordinary quantity of ammunition. Sonderkommando R was ill-equipped and poorly supplied for this type, much less scale, of operation. A unit tasked with mobilizing southern Ukraine's ethnic Germans, Sonderkommando R had issued its German personnel small arms for personal defense.¹⁴¹ To arm the Selbstschutz, a move that VoMi planners apparently had not anticipated, Sonderkommando R had distributed both old hunting rifles, some of which had been confiscated from local non-Germans, and a conglomeration of captured Soviet firearms.¹⁴² Some weapons were so decrepit that Sonderkommando R's leaders instructed their subordinates to inspect and confiscate defective firearms.¹⁴³ The Selbstschutz possessed so few weapons that militiamen frequently shared rifles, which they signed out of local armories as needed.¹⁴⁴ Where Sonderkommando R had no rifles it armed its militiamen with clubs.¹⁴⁵ Ammunition scarcity also limited Selbstschutz firearms training.¹⁴⁶ Lack of safety instruction precipitated negligent accidents.¹⁴⁷ When militiamen obtained ammunition they were so careless that Siebert issued strict guidelines on firearms safety.¹⁴⁸ Sonderkommando R's Selbstschutz was as limited by ammunition constraints as it was in the skills necessary to use its weapons.

Initially, during their operations at the Bogdanovka camp, Hartung's militiamen had ample captured Soviet rifles and ammunition. One of the militiamen later recounted that he had had a seemingly limitless supply of cartridges, which he and his fellow killers carried in their pockets and in ammunition chests.¹⁴⁹ Where Sonderkommando R obtained this arsenal is unclear. Given the unit's weapons shortage, it seems unlikely that Bereichskommando XI fielded such well-armed militiamen independently. Hartung possibly drew on stores of captured Soviet weapons and ammunition

141 Aussage von F. D., November 27, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 207.

142 Sonderkommando R scrambled to find weapons for the Selbstschutz in October 1941. Rundanweisung Nr. 5, October 13, 1941, BB, R 59/66, 148.

143 Rundanweisung Nr. 8, n.d., BB, R 59/66, 142. Stabbefehl Nr. 115, August 28, 1943, BB, R 59/67, 35.

144 Vernehmungsniederschrift von J. S., July 31, 1962, BAL, B162/2296, 108.

145 Aussage von J. E., August 20, 1962, BAL, B162/2302, 170.

146 Aussage von O. F., November 17, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 130.

147 See, for example, Aussage von P. H., September 10, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 281.

148 Rundanweisung Nr. 39/Betr.: Schießübungen des Selbstschutzes, April 22, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 93.

149 Protokoll doprosa/Ionusa Alexandra, November 1, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 9002.

in Landau, from German forces on the Bug River's left bank, or from the Romanians.¹⁵⁰ Regardless of where Hartung obtained what by Sonderkommando R's standards was a dizzying armory, the rate at which his militiamen consumed their ammunition at the Bogdanovka camp was unsustainable. The unit's orders to reduce ammunition use during 1942 are illustrative. In March 1942, when, in the wake of its most intense mass shooting operations, Sonderkommando R was able to reevaluate its ammunition supply, Hoffmeyer ordered local Bereichskommandoführer to curtail firearms use and chided his men for wasting rounds "in pointless shootings."¹⁵¹ Although he noted that "German and Russian rifle ammunition is available in sufficient quantities," Hoffmeyer warned his subordinates that "the supply of pistol ammunition is very limited and [that] there is no possibility of expanding or supplementing [it]."¹⁵² The same was also true of submachine gun ammunition, which Hoffmeyer ordered his staff to use "strictly sparingly."¹⁵³ He concluded by forbidding his staff members from expending more than ten rounds each, after which they would be charged one Reichsmark per cartridge.¹⁵⁴ Sonderkommando R's mass shootings in rural Transnistria, and especially its killings at the Bogdanovka camp, merely exacerbated the unit's ammunition shortage.

In response to ammunition and personnel constraints, Hartung changed tactics. Rural Ukraine provided Bereichskommando XI with precisely the facilities to streamline the killing process. Large brick lime kilns dotted southern Ukraine's countryside. As they had throughout western and central Europe from the Middle Ages until the nineteenth century, these kilns produced lime, a substance with uses ranging from mortar to fertilizer. A lime kiln was essentially a bricked-in shaft with three sections. The center of the shaft was a combustion chamber in which either wood or charcoal burned at high temperature. Limestone, a common sedimentary rock in southern Ukraine, was then dropped through the top of the furnace. When heated, limestone produced lime, which fell through to the lowest of the three chambers. Under Hartung's command, the Selbstschutz transformed these furnaces into crematoria.

In Rastatt, Klein Rastatt, and München, where no lime kilns existed, Bereichskommando XI's militiamen relied on mass shootings before open air pyres. In Gradovka and at the Neu Amerika collective farm (*sovkhos*),

150 Of these, the first appears to be the most plausible. Sonderkommando R allegedly mustered Volksdeutsche youths to collect unexpended and discarded munitions. Aussage von E. E., November 19, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 152.

151 Einheit Feldpost Nr. 10528/Betr.: Munitionsverbrauch und Gebrauch von Schußwaffen, March 14, 1942, BB, R. 59 / 66, 111.

152 *Ibid.*

153 *Ibid.*

154 *Ibid.*

lime kilns provided Hartung and his subordinates with the infrastructure for this alternate killing method.¹⁵⁵ Perhaps in consultation with local Volksdeutsche, Hartung determined that these kilns made excellent crematoria because, unlike open air pyres, they were already built and burned hotter, making body disposal both quicker and less labor intensive. Gradovka was a choice killing location because its two furnaces permitted the militiamen to stagger their use.¹⁵⁶ While one furnace burned bodies, the second could be cleaned and prepared for service. The twin kilns, which had a roughly five- to six-meter diameter and a depth of six to eight meters, were recessed into a hill outside town, presumably because this configuration made it easier to transport limestone to the top of the furnace.¹⁵⁷ Gabriel K., a Rastatt resident and suspected Selbstschutz member, described one of the initial killing operations at the Gradovka lime works:

I remember an instance in which roughly 150 to 200 Jews were shot at the lime works. The victims had to strip to their underwear and had to leave their valuables in a particular place. I still remember that it was winter and bitter cold. The women and children also had to undress. The shootings proceeded in the same way as had been the case in Rastadt [sic] before. [After being shot] the victims fell forward into the lime works' furnace. The bodies that did not fall directly into the furnace were thrown into the furnace by their Jewish fellow sufferers. These scenes played out like a conveyer belt. I can confirm that [during January and February 1942] several thousand Jews were killed in this fashion.¹⁵⁸

As shootings at the Gradovka lime works continued, Hartung and his subordinates introduced two additional refinements to the killing process that further economized Selbstschutz manpower and ammunition. First, perhaps because as the winter progressed the militiamen could find fewer able-bodied Jews to assist them with body disposal, they recruited local Ukrainians, either voluntarily or forcibly, for the purpose.¹⁵⁹ Second, Bereichskommando XI's German and Volksdeutsche perpetrators eventually positioned a machine gun at the top of the lime kilns and used it rather than

155 Aussage von V. A., November 19, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 147. Aussage von E. S., October 17, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 38. Outside Bereichskommando XI, lime kilns also were used as crematoria in Speyer and at Sucha Verba in Bereichskommando XX based in Lichtenfeld. Aussage von R. W., October 15, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 30. Aussage von K. E., February 16, 1965, BAL, B162/2303, 314. Aussage von H. Z., November 5, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 110. Aussage von A. L., April 4, 1962, BAL, B162/2292, 45.

156 Aussage von V. H., September 7, 1964, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2684, 53–54.

157 Aussage von F. H., July 2, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 143. Soviet records describe a similar configuration. Protokol doprosa/Renner Yakov Yakovich, May 28, 1948, USHMM, RG-38.018M, Reel 79, 3703.

158 Aussage von G. K., September 18, 1963, BAL, B162/2302, 285–286.

159 Although H. identified these additional prisoners as Russians, they identified themselves almost certainly as ethnic Ukrainians. Aussage von F. H., July 2, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 144.

their rifles to shoot their victims.¹⁶⁰ This innovation reduced ammunition consumption because, unlike in shootings in front of open-air pyres, the perpetrators could be less precise. Any victim thrown into the furnace dead or alive was unable to survive the kiln's intense heat. The shootings and body incinerations at the Gradovka lime works constituted an evolution in hastily devised killing tactics that Hartung and his subordinates had first deployed at the Bogdanovka camp a few weeks earlier.¹⁶¹

As their Volksdeutsche militiamen became expert killers, Hartung and his German staff began deploying Selbstschutz units beyond VoMi-administered localities so as to control Romanian deportations into Bereichskommando XI. Rather than permitting Romanian authorities to deport Jews to Bereichskommando XI's strongholds for the Selbstschutz to murder, Hartung brought the Selbstschutz to the Jewish deportees. As early as during the shootings at the Bogdanovka camp in January 1942, Bereichskommando XI had dispatched some of its more seasoned militia units to conduct autonomous operations against Jewish expellees in nearby towns and villages such as Velikovka and Anetovka.¹⁶² During the shooting operations in Bereichskommando XI, Hartung's militiamen targeted both Domanevka and Mostovoi – regional centers that Romanian forces used to stage forced marches into VoMi-administered territory.¹⁶³ Thanks to survivor testimony, the outlines of the Selbstschutz's missions to Mostovoi can be reconstructed. To stem Romanian deportation directly into local Volksdeutsche communities, Hartung sent militiamen to intercept Romanian transports at the rail terminus in Berezovka. Local Romanian officials initially rebuffed German demands to relinquish the Jews in Berezovka.¹⁶⁴ Local Romanian and German authorities later compromised, whereby Romanian gendarmes and their Ukrainian auxiliaries marched their prisoners north to Mostovoi, some five kilometers to the west of Rastatt. There, Hartung and his subordinates took custody of the prisoners and incarcerated them temporarily in Mostovoi's previously abandoned fortress, a capacious one-story structure with imposing towers.¹⁶⁵ One of the prison's few surviving inmates later

160 Protokol doprosa/Renner Yakov Yakovich, May 28, 1948, USHMM, RG-38.018M, Reel 79, 3703.

161 Anecdotally, it appears that militia units subordinated to Bereichskommando XX in Lichtenfeld employed similar tactics. Aussage von J. N., February 24, 1965, BAL, B162/2303, 337.

162 Protokol doprosa/Kokha Floriana Frantsevicha, February 27, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8803.

163 On Domanevka see, Protokol doprosa/Ionusa Aleksandra, May 29, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8519. Protokol doprosa/Kokha Floriana, October 14, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8626.

164 Aussage von R. S., September 17, 1964, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2671, 69.

165 Aussage von M. K., July 29, 1969, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2786, 137.

testified that “traces of criminal acts” were readily apparent from the blood-spattered walls, covered with polyglot warnings that previous inmates had scratched.¹⁶⁶ Typically, the Selbstschutz transported Jews from the fortress to be murdered at Rastatt, or likely more often to Gradovka’s lime kilns, which were closer to Mostovoi.¹⁶⁷ Sometimes, perhaps when a backlog of victims made removal to either Gradovka or Rastatt impractical, Hartung’s ethnic German militia murdered the deportees at the fortress.¹⁶⁸ As Bereichskommando XI’s capabilities expanded, so too did its desire to control how and where its victims perished.

Based on imprecise, yet consistent, postwar estimates by West German and Soviet investigators, Hartung’s militiamen murdered more than 10,000 Jews in and around Bereichskommando XI, in addition to the some 25,000 Jews that they killed at the Bogdanovka camp.¹⁶⁹ These murders were common knowledge. The number of victims meant that no one in this part of Transnistria plausibly could claim ignorance about the murders. In some localities the entire adult male population participated, if indirectly, in the killings. Many area inhabitants benefited from the theft of Jewish property. These open air shootings and particularly pyres used for body cremation were even visible from the air. Returning to their base at Martinovka (Martiniv’ske) to the northeast of Rastatt, a Luftwaffe squadron of trimotor Junkers Ju-52 transport aircraft overflew one of the pyres. The pilots later drove to Rastatt to see the killing first hand and, according to witness testimony, took a turn at shooting Jews.¹⁷⁰ For area Volksdeutsche the perpetual reminder that they lived at an epicenter of mass murder was the smell. Even former residents, who denied direct knowledge of the killings, recounted the “bestial smell” of burning flesh and hair that wafted into the region from Rastatt’s pyres and from Gradovka’s lime works.¹⁷¹

166 Aussage von R. S., September 17, 1964, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2671, 69.

167 Survivors, who escaped from the fortress, did not accompany the victims on the final leg of their journey and therefore simply stated that the Selbstschutz murdered them near Rastatt. Aussage von R. S., September 17, 1964, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2671, 69–70.

168 Aussage von M. K., July 29, 1969, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, 137.

169 During his interrogation by Soviet counterintelligence in 1944, Assmann estimated that Selbstschutz units under Hartung and Liebl’s command murdered more than 15,000 Jews near Berezovka. Protokoll doprosa/A. M. G., June 7, 1945, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2902, 100–101. In his 1957 blackmail report, Vahldieck estimated that Hartung’s command killed 36,000 Jews and Liebl’s 16,000. 50 000 Juden aus Odessa/Tatsachenbericht von W. V., 1957, BAL, B162/2295, 26. If one were to assume that Hartung’s units murdered 25,000 Jews at the Bogdanovka camp, then it appears that his command killed 11,000 Jews in localized killing operations.

170 Zeugeschaftliche Vernehmung von N. E., January 16, 1962, BAL, B162/2290, 184. Aussage von V. H., September 7, 1964, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2684, 54–55. Aussage von M. B., June 10, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 195–196.

171 Aussage von J. T., October 16, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 36. Aussage von M. E., May 19, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 113. Aussage von V. A., November 19, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 147. Aussage

Josef F., a former resident of Klein Rastatt, may well have been telling the truth when he claimed that “these things were simply not discussed among us.”¹⁷² There was little need to converse about events that were “a very open secret.”¹⁷³

Under Hartung, robbery not only propelled the killings; it had the effect of defeating one of Sonderkommando R's central rationales for mass murder. As mentioned earlier, the unit's original mission was not to murder Jews, but rather to mobilize local Volksdeutsche for National Socialism. Hoffmeyer's command took on this additional murderous responsibility as a disease prevention measure, designed to avert the spread of epidemic typhus to the region's Volksdeutsche settlements. Sonderkommando R tasked its Bereichskommandoführer and their Selbstschutz units with murdering Jewish deportees simply because those Germans and Volksdeutsche were the only available personnel who could carry out a mission of this scale. By dangling the personal effects and particularly the clothing of Jewish deportees before local militiamen as an enticement to participate in mass shooting operations, however, Hartung and his fellow Bereichskommandoführer facilitated the spread of typhus – the very threat that the killings were to prevent. Unaware of the fact that bacteria carried on parasites embedded in their victims' clothes was the primary means of contagion, Hartung and his colleagues' greed fueled epidemic typhus. As statements that former militiamen gave to both Soviet and West German investigators indicate, from the very beginning of operations militiamen who pilfered and wore unwashed clothing contracted typhus.¹⁷⁴ Rather than preventing the disease, mass murder and robbery spread infection, sabotaging one of Sonderkommando R's main reasons for mass murder.

GERMAN DIPLOMATIC PRESSURE AND THE END OF MASS KILLING

Although Sonderkommando R's mass killings in rural Transnistria failed to contain typhus, the unit stopped murdering Jews in large-scale operations

von G. B., January 12, 1965, BAL, B162/2303, 178. Aussage von F. W., October 13, 1967, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2699, 23. Aussage von F. H., July 2, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 143–144. Aussage von E. K., March 3, 1965, BAL, B162/2303, 321.

172 Aussage von J. F., September 20, 1963, BAL, B162/2302, 298.

173 Aussage von L. N., August 16, 1963, BAL, B162/2302, 290.

174 Reconstructing the number of militiamen who contracted typhus is not possible from the available records. Based on postwar testimony from some of the most heavily implicated perpetrators, this was a fairly common way to contract the disease. See, for example, Protokol doprosa/Kokha Floriana Frantsevicha, March 7, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8838. Aussage von J. N., February 24, 1965, BAL, B162/2303, 338. Aussage von F. V., June 24, 1970, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2702, 85. Aussage von A. W., April 23, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 80.

only when Romanian authorities ceased to provide victims. To understand this Romanian policy shift, it is necessary to return to high-level negotiations between Romania and Germany on how best to solve the “Jewish problem,” a discussion that ironically had little to do with Sonderkommando R.

Beginning in mid-January 1942, Romanian occupation authorities ramped up deportations from the Odessa area. At least one and as many as three trains departed from Odessa to northeastern Transnistria almost daily during the next six weeks. Given the harsh winter and the poor quality of coal available, this rate of deportation is particularly impressive.¹⁷⁵ Just as Romanian deportations intensified during the first week of February 1942 (three transports departed on February 2, two on February 3, and two on February 4), German civil administrators on the Bug River’s opposite bank began to protest.¹⁷⁶ Apparently unaware of Sonderkommando R’s participation, on February 9, 1942, Generalkommissar Erwald Oppermann in Nikolaev called his patron and fellow Königsberger Reichskommissar Erich Koch in Rowno by radio telephone and complained that “a large number of Jews, who are hardly being properly buried, are dying daily” on the other side of the Bug.¹⁷⁷ In Oppermann’s view, “this impossible situation will pose a great danger for the ethnic German villages in Transnistria and for the bordering area of the Reichskommissariat Ukraine.”¹⁷⁸ Four days later, Oppermann again complained to Koch that the Romanians had deported 6,500 Jews to the west bank of the Bug immediately opposite his station in Nikolaev, and that in nearby Voznesensk the Romanians had delivered an additional 8,000 Jews “without sufficient security.”¹⁷⁹ Some Jews apparently had attempted to cross the Bug into the Reichskommissariat Ukraine.¹⁸⁰ According to a Romanian border patrol officer, Oppermann reported, the Romanians were deporting up to an additional 60,000 Jews toward the Bug. He reiterated that unless the deportations stopped, typhus would be a serious threat both to the German military and to Transnistria’s Volksdeutsche settlements. Acknowledging that their Romanian allies were “practically deporting” Jews in violation of the Tighina Treaty, Koch authorized Oppermann to keep a fifty-kilometer swath of the Bug River’s west bank clear – an order with which their Romanian counterparts refused

175 Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. 1, 247.

176 *Ibid.*, 259–260.

177 Funkspruch Gen. Komm. Nikolajew Oppermann an der Reichkomm. Ukr. Rowno, February 9, 1942, NARA, T120/3132/E510845.

178 *Ibid.*

179 Funkspruch Gen. Komm. Nikolajew Oppermann an der Reichkomm. Ukr. Rowno, February 12, 1942, NARA, T120/3132/E510844.

180 *Ibid.*

to comply.¹⁸¹ Koch was so concerned about the threat of typhus from Jewish deportees that he ordered his subordinate to operate in territory that, according to the Tighina Treaty, fell inside the Romanian occupation zone.

Why both Oppermann and Koch seemingly did not know about Sonderkommando R's participation in the killings remains unclear. There are, nevertheless, two likely possibilities. First, given Sonderkommando R's coveted institutional independence, as a matter of principle it may have refused to inform other German agencies, and especially the Sicherheitspolizei und Sicherheitsdienst (Security Police and Security Service) or SiPo-SD and German civil administration in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, about its activities in Transnistria. It seems unlikely that Sonderkommando R would have involved a competing organization, whose jurisdiction did not extend to Transnistria, in the sole region where Hoffmeyer operated without outside interference. If Hoffmeyer had objected to increases in non-SS personnel under his command in Transnistria, then it is improbable that he would have volunteered information about his unit's activities, especially to rival German agencies, or to ones that Sonderkommando R at least regarded as unaffected by its actions.

Aside from Hoffmeyer's natural disinclination to cooperate with other German bureaucracies in Ukraine, a second reason why Hoffmeyer did not inform his colleagues in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine's civil administration may have been because he was physically incapacitated. According to British signals intelligence, Hoffmeyer became so seriously ill during early February 1942 that his staff had him airlifted from Novo Archangelsk, a town near Uman, to Kiev for treatment.¹⁸² Hoffmeyer's precise malady is unclear and he returned to work later that year without any apparent lasting effects. The timing of his illness – at the height of Sonderkommando R's mass shooting operations in Transnistria – and that the infirmity was not referenced in his personnel file or by his wife after the war, raises the possibility that Hoffmeyer's affliction was psychological. One may speculate that, as he was an officer inexperienced in murdering civilians, Hoffmeyer may have buckled under the pressure of mass killing. Regardless of its origins, Hoffmeyer's illness may have prevented him from communicating effectively with German units elsewhere in Ukraine. As Hoffmeyer was

181 Koch an Generalkommissar Oppermann/Fernschreiben, Rowno, February 20, 1942, NARA, T120/3132/E510838. Telegrama an Generalkommissar [sic] Oppermann Nikolajev [sic], February 27, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1084, 249.

182 Teleprinter Message, 7.2.42, n.d., BNA, HW 16, Piece 54, 6.

the primary contact between Sonderkommando R in Transnistria and the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, his incapacity may have severed links between the VoMi's Landau headquarters and German units stationed elsewhere in the occupied Soviet Union. Either because of Hoffmeyer's disinclination or inability to do so, available evidence supports the conclusion that Sonderkommando R failed to communicate its participation in the mass murder of Jews in Transnistria to German officials elsewhere in Ukraine.

As the situation escalated, both the Germans and Romanians applied lessons that they had learned during their diplomatic skirmish over Romanian expulsions across the Dniester River some six months earlier. Apparently oblivious to Sonderkommando R's role killing Jews on the other side of the Bug River, Koch attempted to stop Romanian deportations into northeastern Transnistria. He complained to the German Interior Ministry and the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories, which asked the Foreign Office to intervene.¹⁸³ Although the Foreign Office quickly forwarded these complaints up the chain of command, Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop concluded on February 13, 1942, "that the imprecise claims of a local commander are not sufficient cause for diplomatic intervention."¹⁸⁴ Likely cognizant of the ultimately futile diplomatic wrangling over earlier Romanian expulsions of Jews from Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, the Foreign Office hesitated to press the Romanians. From the Foreign Office's perspective, there was little reason to act when, as before, the situation likely would resolve itself on the ground.

Despite the Foreign Office's reluctance, after continued complaints from the Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories, it eventually raised the issue with the Romanian government in late March 1942.¹⁸⁵ According to Ambassador Manfred von Killinger's report to the Foreign Office on March 26, 1942, he broached the issue with Mihai Antonescu, the vice president of the Council of Ministers. During their meeting, the latter had assured Killinger that although he would seek a mutually convenient solution to the problem, he would first have to consult his subordinates because "he was not informed about the details."¹⁸⁶ Given that Mihai Antonescu was a member of the Romanian Council of Ministers and,

183 Although it is unclear when Koch's office contacted the Foreign Office, given that Unterstaatssekretär (Under State Secretary) Martin Luther forwarded a memo to Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop on February 11, 1942, the Foreign Office must have received these complaints almost immediately. Vortragsnotiz, February 11, 1942, NARA, T120/3132/E510849.

184 Büro RAM, February 13, 1942, NARA, T120/3132/E510850.

185 Karl Leibbrandt forwarded the appropriate materials to the Foreign Office on February 19, 1942. Brief von Leibbrandt an das Auswärtiges Amt, February 19, 1942, NARA, T120/3132/E510847.

186 Verschiebung von rumänischen Juden in die besetzten Ostgebiete, March 26, 1942, NARA, T120/3132/E510804.

as indicated by his extensive postwar testimony, intimately familiar with Romania's deportations of Jews, it appears that his excuses to Killinger were a stalling tactic to permit Alexianu to complete the Odessa expulsions.¹⁸⁷ Like the German Foreign Office, the Romanian leadership drew inspiration from the earlier diplomatic row over deportations of Jews across the Dniester. As Mihai Antonescu and his compatriots aptly concluded from this previous episode, continued diplomatic negotiations bought valuable time. As before, either German policy might change or, at the very least, the delay would permit events on the ground to unfold, including Sonderkommando R's continued participation in mass killing. This supposition proved correct and Sonderkommando R sustained its killing operations, with declining intensity, until spring 1942.

Why Romanian expulsions of Jews from the area around Odessa to northeastern Transnistria tapered off after February 1942 warrants further investigation by Romanian specialists. It appears, however, that two factors were at work. First, German diplomatic pressure, which continued well into early June 1942, may have prompted the Romanians to halt deportation.¹⁸⁸ Second, and perhaps more important, the deportations had cleared Jews from the Odessa region. Sonderkommando R's killings began and ended with the Romanian deportations.

CONCLUSION

During winter 1941–1942, Sonderkommando R transformed from a third-rate occupation unit charged with realizing Nazi demographic fantasies in occupied Ukraine into a tremendously lethal killing force. It evolved in response to competing German and Romanian anti-Jewish policies. Ion Antonescu sought to eliminate Jews from the Romanian sphere of influence. The Romanians followed the most convenient possible interpretation of German plans – namely that Jews simply would be deported farther east and thus cease to be Romania's problem. This understanding propelled Romanian expulsions of Jews first across the Dniester River during August 1941 and then a policy of Jewish deportation to and internment in northeastern Transnistria, a way station for imminent expulsion across the Bug River into the Reichskommissariat Ukraine. Although this plan suited Romanian goals, it failed to satisfy Nazi ambitions for the continent-wide

187 Ancel highlights Mihai Antonescu's familiarity with Romanian deportation policy in the official's postwar statements. Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. 1, 87–88.

188 Der Chef der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD an das Auswärtiges Amt./z.Hd. von Herrn Konsultatssekretär Engelke, June 8, 1942, NARA, T120/3132/E510795.

elimination of Jews. With Nazi plans to murder a significant portion of Soviet Jewry from the beginning of Operation Barbarossa, it made little sense for the Germans to accept more Jews into the Reichskommissariat Ukraine. From the Third Reich's perspective, Transnistria's Jews were Romania's problem alone.

Unable to deport Jews across the Bug and unwilling to stop expulsion to that river's right bank, the Romanians created the perfect conditions to enlist German support to "solve" their "Jewish problem." As the concentration camps and ghettos along the Bug River took on what seemed to be a measure of permanence, conditions for the facilities' inmates plummeted and epidemic typhus spread. Fearing that the disease might infect local ethnic German communities and thereby jeopardize its mission in Transnistria, Sonderkommando R, the only available German unit, partnered with local Romanian authorities to murder prisoners at the Bogdanovka camp. Before these killings had concluded, the Romanians accelerated deportations, predicated on alleged military necessity, from Odessa's environs into the heart of Sonderkommando R's Transnistria operations. Effectively, Romania brought its "Jewish problem" to Hoffmeyer's doorstep. Confronted with a greater threat to the welfare of local ethnic Germans, Sonderkommando R expanded the Selbstschutz's operations at the Bogdanovka camp to intercept and murder Jewish deportees as Romanian authorities expelled them to the area. These deportations continued until German diplomatic pressure, initiated by German occupation officials in Ukraine, and a drought of victims halted Romanian expulsions during spring 1942. Within four months, Sonderkommando R's militiamen murdered nearly 50,000 Jews.

For the VoMi, mass murder was an unplanned detour from its central mission of mobilizing Transnistria's Volksdeutsche as the demographic vanguard of Nazi rule in the occupied Soviet Union. Following these killings, it returned to its Germanization project. Whereas Sonderkommando R had been deeply suspicious about the racial and political worth of local ethnic Germans in the early months of Nazi rule, it realized by early 1942 that local Volksdeutsche were willing perpetrators. This conclusion, and the temporary confidence that it inspired, had important implications for the course of Sonderkommando R's Nazification efforts in Transnistria. This is the subject of the next chapter.

The Volksgemeinschaft in Transnistria, 1942–1944

During winter 1941–1942, Sonderkommando R and its local militias became mass killers. Within weeks, this eclectic collection of professional Nazi *völkisch* organizers, German automobile enthusiasts, and ostensibly Germanic Ukrainian peasants gunned down tens of thousands of Jews on the Bug River's right bank. With virtually no preparation they became effective, innovative, and brutal genocidaires. For the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle (Ethnic German Liaison Office or VoMi), mass murder was a detour from Sonderkommando R's primary mission. Although the killings had eliminated some of the Third Reich's racial enemies, they had done little to further the VoMi's specific mission in Transnistria. By early 1942, the real work of marshaling Transnistria's Volksdeutsche as a bulwark of Germandom in the East remained unfinished.

In mass murder's wake, Sonderkommando R unfurled its Germanization project in Transnistria in earnest.¹ Between spring 1942 and early 1944, the latter date when German and Romanian forces evacuated southern Ukraine ahead of the Red Army's return, Sonderkommando R mobilized local residents to support Nazi rule in the occupied Soviet Union. In Transnistria, VoMi-administered communities became, at least in embryo, the militarized, German agricultural settlements with which the SS planned

1 Although it is tempting to seek parallels between the Nazi seizure of power in Germany and German occupation policy in Transnistria, doing so would miss two key differences between Germany in 1933 and Transnistria in 1942. First, whereas in Germany the Nazis established control over a decade and attempted to hide mass murder from the Germans, in Transnistria, German authorities established control in mere weeks, publicly murdered local individuals whom they found objectionable, and enlisted area residents to perpetrate the Holocaust within their own communities. And second, the interwar histories of Weimar Germany and Soviet Ukraine conditioned local residents to respond to Nazi rule in radically different ways. Unlike "ordinary Germans," local inhabitants of southern Ukraine endured the Russian Civil War, collectivization, "dekulakization," and continuing harassment by Stalinist security forces. This Soviet experience primed many residents of Transnistria to respond to Nazi rule's unique dangers and opportunities.

to populate conquered Soviet territory after the war. Hoffmeyer enjoyed unique latitude to implement this fantasy in Romanian-occupied portions of Ukraine. Free from concern for German public opinion, which had stymied some of the SS's more radical proposals for the Reich in drafting the Nuremberg Laws and at the Wannsee Conference, or competitive German civil and military administrators elsewhere in conquered territory, the SS had virtually free reign in Transnistria. There, its only adversaries were the Romanians, allies in a lopsided partnership, who generally could be bowled over by armed Nazi bands in a running contest for mastery over rural southern Ukraine. Uniquely positioned in Hitler's empire to carry out the SS's designs, Sonderkommando R pursued its plans virtually unimpeded.

As the number of mass shootings that it organized declined during spring 1942, Sonderkommando R grew increasingly confident in its local helpers. Although initially the unit's officers had to threaten, cajole, and encourage local residents to kill Jewish deportees, rural Transnistrians had answered the SS's murderous call. Within weeks, militiamen embraced mass killing. Why this occurred is the subject of the final chapter. Here the SS's reaction is important. Sonderkommando R's realization that local residents would kill Jews when called upon to do so lessened – very temporarily – its earlier suspicions about the racial and political worth of local residents. The unit's new confidence in its militiamen had two implications. First, after months of torturous efforts to identify ethnic Germans in Transnistria, Sonderkommando R issued provisional Volksdeutsche identity papers to area militiamen and their families during spring 1942. By participating in genocide, local residents had, at least briefly, clarified their previously suspect racial worth in SS eyes. And second, Sonderkommando R built these militias into an effective fighting force that could do more than kill malnourished, unarmed civilians. Heartened by the Selbstschutz's genocidal prowess, Sonderkommando R developed its militias into a private army that became the envy of the SS.

To solidify Volksdeutsche economic dominance and reward area ethnic Germans for their contribution to the Holocaust, Sonderkommando R found new and increasingly macabre ways to enrich them. Robbing Jews gave Transnistria's Volksdeutsche militiamen and their families a taste for purloined Jewish property. This method of material distribution, however, proved problematic. Despite local surpluses of plunder, Sonderkommando R's killers could not steal enough property from Jewish deportees to satisfy the material needs of Transnistria's Volksdeutsche. The SS also discovered that the theft of Jewish garments by militiamen spread typhus to the very

communities that the killings were designed to protect from the epidemic. The SS found a safer way to share genocide's spoils with local members of the German racial community. In Transnistria, the SS's largesse was a byproduct of mass murder – a fact not lost on area residents.

As Sonderkommando R secured a materially privileged position for Transnistria's Volksdeutsche, it also cemented their devotion to Nazi ideology. Here, the SS faced a daunting obstacle. Historically, the Black Sea Germans were a deeply religious people for whom confession was a primary identity. Many area residents welcomed the invaders because they believed that the Germans would reverse decades of Soviet antireligious policies that had effectively ended church life before the war. Like the Nazi leadership in the Reich, however, Sonderkommando R regarded Christianity as a potent competitor whose universalist claims of salvation contradicted Nazi racism. Initially unprepared for a religious renaissance in Transnistria's VoMi-administered communities, Sonderkommando R attempted to quash religious observance altogether – a policy that the Nazi leadership may have wished to implement in the Reich, but never dared to try during wartime. When a combination of activist German clergy and deep local attachment to Christianity made a complete religious ban infeasible, Sonderkommando R contented itself with more modest aims. Perpetually suspicious of the Catholic Church's alternative religious and cultural milieu, Sonderkommando R resisted its reintroduction into southern Ukraine. Its stance toward the Protestant Church was somewhat different. To ensure that local Volksdeutsche received appropriate ideological instruction, Sonderkommando R recruited Protestant pastors from the thoroughly Nazified German Christian Movement (Glaubensbewegung "Deutsche Christen"). Unimpeded by Hitler's concerns for German domestic popular opinion during wartime, in Transnistria Sonderkommando R had a free hand to remold Christianity in its own image.

With Protestant and Catholic Churches contained, Sonderkommando R spread the National Socialist gospel. It unveiled a muscular propaganda apparatus that used newspapers, newsreels, and an elaborate cultural center in Odessa to disseminate the Nazi message of Germanic superiority and the dangers of the "Judeo-Bolshevik" cabal. Sonderkommando R suspected (probably correctly) that its propaganda efforts were lost on older ethnic Germans, who had been socialized under the Soviets and thus were inexorably tainted from the SS's perspective. The VoMi therefore focused its propaganda on Transnistria's Volksdeutsche youth. It imported German teachers, fashioned a Nazi educational curriculum, and formed local National

Socialist youth organizations modeled on the Hitler Youth. Tellingly, a preponderance of Sonderkommando R's educational efforts focused on German language training for a generation of would-be Volksdeutsche whose connection to Germany was at best tenuous.

As the Nazi regime refashioned the material circumstances and ideological orientation of Transnistria's Volksdeutsche, an old problem reappeared. Despite repeated German efforts to clear the region's VoMi-administered communities of Jews and alleged communists, Sonderkommando R discovered more racially and politically suspect residents. Although many communities had hidden some local Jews and alleged communists through early 1942, these conspiracies of silence began to disintegrate. Volksdeutsche once again divulged the identities of their Jewish, "mixed race," and "communist" neighbors to the Germans. The SS's discovery that area residents continued to hide some targeted individuals precipitated a violent response. The VoMi not only murdered the handful of newly identified Jews and communists, but unleashed a fresh campaign to punish supposedly noncompliant ethnic Germans. SS measures to stamp out ethnic German dissent, which remained more a figment of Sonderkommando R's imagination than a reality, quickly spiraled out of control. By early 1943, Sonderkommando R's brutality had reached such proportions that even the SS recognized that it was self-defeating. The VoMi curtailed abuses by sacking local commanders and establishing a concentration camp to systematize Volksdeutsche punishment.

The year 1943 was the high-water mark of Nazi rule in Transnistria's Volksdeutsche settlements. By early 1944 the Red Army's advance made the VoMi's mission there untenable and Sonderkommando R prepared its retreat. The occupation's end was nearly as bloody as its beginning. For more than two years Sonderkommando R restricted (often unsuccessfully) membership in the Nazi racial community to local residents who met the SS's racial and political ideals. During its final weeks in southern Ukraine, Sonderkommando R did a remarkable volte-face. To deny manpower and materiel to the Soviets, the VoMi evacuated local residents, livestock, and agricultural machinery to German-occupied Poland. Many area residents who had sided with the Germans scrambled to escape the Soviets. Sometimes, however, Sonderkommando R strong-armed area inhabitants who had grown tepid about the Nazi project as a German defeat became increasingly probable. What began as an effort to identify and mobilize racially and politically worthy Transnistrians ended in a melee of shuttling some uncooperative area inhabitants off to an uncertain new life in occupied Poland.

MILITIAMEN INTO GERMANS

The Selbstschutz's key role in the mass murder of Jewish deportees in rural Transnistria during winter 1941–1942 had two primary implications for the area's Volksdeutsche and their self-defense forces. First, it clarified, albeit temporarily, the Germanness of area residents for the SS. During fall 1941, the VoMi had been unwilling to evaluate Transnistria's Volksdeutsche using the criteria that it had employed for ethnic Germans elsewhere in Eastern Europe. It reasoned that Volksdeutsche living under Soviet rule had enjoyed no opportunity to engage in the prewar National Socialist political agitation that denoted Germanness for the SS. Sonderkommando R concluded that mass murder of Jews during winter 1941–1942 provided precisely such an opportunity. How better to demonstrate commitment to the Nazi cause, its staff reasoned, than by murdering the Third Reich's racial enemies?

Documenting this shift in VoMi ethnic classification in the wake of its winter mass murder campaign is difficult. The change appears to have been one of local practice rather than a high-level policy revision. It was therefore one that left comparatively little wartime documentation. Sonderkommando R's surviving staff orders make no reference to an alteration in the VoMi's official position. To the contrary, existing directives highlight how suspicious the unit's senior leaders remained about local would-be Volksdeutsche throughout the occupation. The practice was also uneven. In Odessa, for example, Bereichskommando XXV's staff became only more convinced that "Judeo-Bolsheviks" had infiltrated the ranks of the city's Volksdeutsche as the unit solidified its position. This belief later would propel it down a path of increasing violence, culminating in the creation of a miniature killing unit.²

In Bereichskommandos with militia units that had taken an active role in mass murder, SS officials began to admit previously suspect local residents to the Volksgemeinschaft. The previous fall, for example, Hartung had asked area inhabitants to form militias and funneled scarce resources to the Selbstschutz. As discussed in [Chapter 3](#), this ad hoc local ethnic classification practice had permitted area inhabitants to channel the Third Reich's bounty to their non-German relatives and neighbors. It was hardly a permanent delineation of the Volksgemeinschaft. As Sonderkommando R's involvement in mass shootings slackened, Hartung revisited the issue. During April 1942 he issued permanent ethnic German identification cards to

2 For further information about this process, see Eric C. Steinhart, "Policing the Boundaries of 'Germanism' in the East: SS Ethnic German Policy and Odessa's 'Volksdeutsche,' 1941–1944," *Central European History* 43, no. 1 (2010): 85–116.

militiamen and their families in Bereichskommando XI.³ Local residents, who, a few months earlier, had been so suspect that the VoMi declined to recognize them as Volksdeutsche, now were admitted, albeit provisionally, into the Nazi racial community. VoMi commanders in rural Transnistria allowed local residents to demonstrate their Germanness through mass killing.

The second consequence of the Selbstschutz's mass shooting campaigns was that it convinced the SS that local residents could become an effective fighting force. When Sonderkommando R inherited and expanded Selbstschutz units during fall 1941, it aimed simply to exert German influence in Transnistria's countryside at Romanian expense. Its ragtag militias barely managed to do that. Mustering these units to murder Jews en masse put tremendous strain on the militias. Yet, despite the pressures, militiamen embraced their murderous new responsibilities. The enthusiasm that many Selbstschutz members demonstrated in killing Jews convinced Sonderkommando R that these units could be cultivated by pouring in time, energy, and resources. Eager genocidaires would become potent Nazi auxiliaries under Sonderkommando R's tutelage.

This process began during the mass shootings. During early 1942, Sonderkommando R revamped its Selbstschutz forces. To staff killings at the Bogdanovka camp, Hartung deployed almost every available militiaman, about sixty men in all. These units were of unequal quality. Some Selbstschutz detachments contained experienced local Nazi enforcers. Other Selbstschutz units from remote Volksdeutsche communities had maintained little contact with Bereichskommando XI during fall 1941. Although Hartung deployed enough shooters to contribute to a joint killing operation at a stationary site, the Selbstschutz's capabilities were inadequate for more complex operations. Its limitations became apparent as Sonderkommando R ramped up its killing operations in rural Transnistria – an undertaking that required forces capable of interdicting, guarding, and ultimately murdering Jewish expellees in any one of three Bereichskommandos.

In response, Sonderkommando R's increased the Selbstschutz's size by mobilizing virtually all Volksdeutsche men of military age. Reconstructing how Sonderkommando R converted an ethnic German auxiliary police force into a mass organization is difficult from the surviving

3 Fragmentary ethnic German registration records from Bereichskommando XI are preserved in the 1944 German naturalization records that the SS generated for the region's Volksdeutsche when they arrived in German-occupied Poland. For example, Ludwig Braun, an ethnic German from München, another settlement under Hartung's command, received his Volkstumsausweis on April 10, 1942. Einbürgerungsantrag von Ludwig Braun, 1944, NARA, A3342-EWZ50-A77, 793.

documentation.⁴ After the war, many suspected militiamen distinguished between “active” (*aktiv*) and “passive” (*passiv*) Selbstschutz formations.⁵ The former units purportedly were more directly involved in implementing Sonderkommando R’s policies, including the mass murder.⁶ Unsurprisingly, most alleged militiamen classified themselves as members of the latter units.⁷ Although these labels were self-serving, the ubiquity of this distinction and the fact that it appears in statements that both West German and Soviet investigators collected suggests that Sonderkommando R created active and what might more accurately be termed reserve Selbstschutz formations to better meet its expanded manpower demands.⁸ In Bereichskommandos XI, XIV, and XX, this expansion responded to personnel pressures that local commanders faced. That other Bereichskommandos also beefed up their Volksdeutsche militias suggests that Sonderkommando R’s senior leadership directed its subordinates to take these steps.⁹ It is conceivable that Sonderkommando R feared that Romanian authorities would expand their Jewish deportations into other areas of Transnistria, and that the Germans increased the Selbstschutz’s size as a precaution. Alternatively, Sonderkommando R’s amplified manpower needs for more sophisticated deployments near Berezovka may have offered a convenient pretext for the unit to expand the militia, which was, after all, also a key weapon against the Romanians. Both factors likely played a role in Sonderkommando R’s militia development during early 1942.

How local Bereichskommandoführer established active duty and reserve militia forces is uncertain. Based on postwar testimony, during early 1942, Sonderkommando R ordered all able-bodied Volksdeutsche men in Transnistria to join the Selbstschutz.¹⁰ Exemptions from militia service

4 Stabbefehl Nr. 102, April 18, 1943, BB, R 59/67, 99. Stabbefehl Nr. 109, June 22, 1943, BB, R 59/67, 59.

5 Aussage von W. R., December 11, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 222. Aussage von E. A., August 18, 1964, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2684, 30. Aussage von G. M., September 7, 1964, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2684, 102–103.

6 Aussage von E. A., August 18, 1964, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2684, 30.

7 Aussage von G. M., September 7, 1964, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2684, 102–103.

8 Protokol doprosa/Ionusa Aleksandra, May 29, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8504.

9 On Hoffnungsthal, see Aussage von J. A., December 4, 1962, BAL, B162/2301, 100. Aussage von J. F., November 29, 1963, BAL, B162/2301, 18. On Helenenthal, see Aussage von C. K., December 3, 1963, BAL, B162/2301, 37. On Katherinenthal, see Aussage von D. B., November 20, 1962, BAL, B162/2301, 76. On Landau, see Aussage von J. M., July 23, 1962, BAL, B162/2300, 4. Vernehmung von J. B., November 15, 1962, BAL, B162/2299, 253. On Mannheim, see Aussage von B. B., November 13, 1962, BAL, B162/2300, 54. On Mühlenbach, see Aussage von J. E., August 20, 1962, BAL, B162/2302, 170. On Speyer, see Aussage von C. B., December 16, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 241.

10 Former militia members later testified about Sonderkommando R’s efforts to expand militia membership. Aussage von J. E., November 17, 1962, BAL, B162/2299, 264.

were rare and reserved for Volksdeutsche of allegedly questionable racial and political reliability.¹¹ Younger ethnic German men who had participated in the shootings at the Bogdanovka camp or in other killings formed an active, hard core of this expanded militia force.¹² Sonderkommando R assigned older Volksdeutsche men, whose age and greater prewar interactions with the Soviet regime made them less desirable recruits, to reserve units.¹³ Active duty unit members served full time as German auxiliaries and assisted Sonderkommando R in its ongoing struggle with the Romanians and in eliminating Nazi racial and political enemies. Their older reserve colleagues, by contrast, maintained other full-time employment and could be mustered for special deployments at the local militia command post's signal, usually a rifle fire volley.¹⁴ Although the Selbstschutz's active duty formations sufficed for most daily operations, mass shootings required both active and reserve militia units. Sometimes, Bereichskommandoführer may have detailed their more experienced active duty militiamen to conduct the actual shootings. In most large-scale killing operations, however, Bereichskommandoführer used active duty and reserve militia forces interchangeably.¹⁵ Evidence, although scant, suggests that both groups of militiamen could be equally vicious.

Sonderkommando R also intensified militia training. Departing from the earlier sporadic attempts to instruct militiamen, Bereichskommandoführer throughout Transnistria organized mandatory Selbstschutz training courses beginning in late December 1941 and early January 1942.¹⁶ Based typically near a Bereichskommando's headquarters, training usually lasted for several days, focusing on military tactics, drills, and marksmanship.¹⁷ Perhaps most important, Bereichskommando staff provided Selbstschutz members with National Socialist ideological instruction that was largely absent from earlier training regimens. Indoctrination served two purposes. It bolstered units that Sonderkommando R had deployed to participate in the mass murder.

11 Despite postwar claims by suspected militiamen, having served as a choir director appears to have been an implausible reason for an exemption from Selbstschutz service. Aussage von A. R., May 26, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 161. The Selbstschutz did, however, occasionally discharge teachers from service. Aussage von R. G., April 1, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 45.

12 Protokol doprosa/Kokha Floriana, February 20, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8787.

13 Aussage von G. M., September 7, 1964, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2684, 102–103.

14 Aussage von J. S., March 17, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 8.

15 Protokol doprosa/Ionusa Aleksandra, March 16, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8959.

16 Aussage von A. E., November 16, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 123–124. Aussage von A. K., April 22, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 68–69. Aussage von A. K., October 10, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 18. Aussage von E. R., August 29, 1967, BAL, B162/2309, 117. Aussage von J. R., May 5, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 103.

17 Aussage von K. U., January 28, 1963, BAL, B162/2301, 143.

It also integrated older Volksdeutsche militiamen, whom the Germans suspected were compromised by their earlier Soviet interactions. Selbstschutz training during winter 1941–1942 was designed as much to hone practical skills as it was to provide an ideological foundation for militiamen's new murderous role.

The so-called Day of National Rising (*Tag der nationalen Erhebung*), marking the ninth anniversary of the Nazi seizure of power in Germany, became the capstone of Sonderkommando R's early indoctrination program. Siebert ordered the area's Bereichskommandoführer to organize elaborate, fire-bathed ceremonies for all Selbstschutz members. These were to commence simultaneously at 7 P.M. on January 30, 1942. Perhaps to appeal to local residents' religious convictions, the pageants resembled a high liturgical church service, complete with a confession of faith in National Socialism. Following an elaborate flag ceremony, which was eerily reminiscent of the procession of the cross at the beginning of the liturgy, local militiamen were to sing a medley of "the songs of the nation."¹⁸ Bereichskommandoführer were then to homilize the Nazi movement and the "juxtaposition of National Socialism and Bolshevism."¹⁹ They were to impress the "duties and responsibility of the Selbstschutz."²⁰ Siebert instructed his subordinates to conclude by ordering all militiamen to swear a personal oath to Hitler: "As a carrier of German blood I swear to you, Adolf Hitler, the Führer of all Germans, to be true unto death, to do my best, and to be absolutely obedient to all of my superiors. So help me God."²¹ Given the detail in which former militiamen recounted this ceremony decades later, it apparently was memorable.²²

Sonderkommando R continued local Selbstschutz training well into 1942. As the unit's involvement in mass shooting operations wound down,

18 Rundanweisung Nr. 17/Betr.: *Feier des Tages der nationalen Erhebung*, January 20, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 125.

19 *Ibid.*

20 *Ibid.*

21 *Ibid.* British signals intelligence intercepted a slightly different oath that Siebert allegedly ordered all Volksdeutsche in Transnistria to take. It read: "I solemnly promise to be loyal to the Leader of all German peoples, Adolf Hitler; I pledge myself to unconditional obedience to all officials of the Reich set over me; I will serve my German people with all my powers, so help me God." German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 15th January–16th February 1942, March 17, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 12.

22 See, for example, *Aussage von E. T.*, May 20, 1965, BAL, B162/2304, 72. *Aussage von K. U.*, January 28, 1963, BAL, B162/2301, 143. *Aussage von P. H.*, September 10, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 280–281. *Protokol doprosa/Ionusa Aleksandra*, November 10, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 9018. *Protokol doprosa/Ionusa Aleksandra*, May 29, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8505. *Protokol doprosa/Kokha Floriana*, October 4, 1966, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8553. Although less frequently, even some of Sonderkommando R's German staff remembered the ceremony. *Verantwortliche Vernehmung von W. J. G. P.*, June 29, 1971, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2703, 127.

however, the sophistication and scale of its training increased. No longer content to delegate training responsibilities, Sonderkommando R centralized instruction in Selbstschutz academies in larger ethnic German settlements, including Hoffnungsthal, where the unit converted former Red Army barracks into a militia school.²³ It staffed these facilities with trainers from both Landau and the Wehrmacht Liaison Office for Transnistria (Verbindungsstab der Deutschen Wehrmacht für Transnistrien). During four- to six-week training courses, Sonderkommando R provided its militiamen with military and, although less well documented, presumably also ideological instruction.²⁴ Militiamen, who arrived at the training unarmed, often received captured Soviet rifles as graduation gifts.²⁵ Insofar as the garments were available, militiamen also received pieces of Wehrmacht uniforms that Sonderkommando R had stripped of rank insignia.²⁶ The attention that Sonderkommando R lavished on Transnistria's Selbstschutz during 1942 is evident from the disproportionate number of both training schools and militiamen in the region. Across occupied Ukraine, Sonderkommando R trained more than 12,500 Volksdeutsche militiamen at some 27 Selbstschutz academies. More than 7,000 of these militiamen and more than half of all Selbstschutz training schools were in Transnistria.²⁷ Even accounting for the concentration of Volksdeutsche in Transnistria, this geographic focus is telling.

Selbstschutz academies identified promising ethnic German candidates for subsequent instruction (Figure 5.1). Sonderkommando R recalled adept and generally young Volksdeutsche militiamen for multimonth training courses at elite Selbstschutz schools that the unit ran in conjunction with the Wehrmacht in Odessa, Nikolaev, and Gut Rauch, a converted collective farm.²⁸ These facilities were themselves feeder institutions. Initially, Sonderkommando R assigned advanced training graduates to active duty service in one of the unit's cavalry squadrons (*Reiterschwadronen*). As Sonderkommando R's cavalry squadrons were not the focus of postwar investigations, comparatively little information about these formations exists. According

23 Aussage von A. E., November 23, 1962, BAL, B162/2299, 130.

24 In some instances Sonderkommando R permitted militiamen to return home early if they demonstrated military training that they had received in the Red Army. See, for example, Aussage von A. K., April 22, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 68–69.

25 Aussage von H. J., May 19, 1965, BAL, B162/2304, 62–63.

26 Aussage von G. M., September 7, 1964, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2684, 102–103. Aussage von F. V., June 24, 1970, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2702, 83.

27 Selbstschutz, c. 1942, NARA, T175/72/2589180.

28 Aussage von H. S., July 6, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 152. Aussage von E. T., May 20, 1965, BAL, B162/2304, 69. Aussage von J. B., October 6, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 336. Aussage von H. S., September 30, 1966, BAL, B162/2306, 263–264.



Figure 5.1. The Selbstschutz in Johannesfeld, c. 1942 or 1943. *Source:* LAV NRW W, Q 234 Staatsanwaltschaft Dortmund, Zentralstelle Nr. 2726.

to information from British signals intelligence, the cavalry squadrons were active by mid-1942.²⁹ In Transnistria, fragmentary evidence suggests that the cavalry squadrons, often staffed by seasoned mass murderers, functioned as Sonderkommando R's rapid reaction force and occasionally hunted escaped Jews.³⁰ The cavalry squadrons appear to have been one of the few German units to have operated in both Transnistria and the Reichskommissariat Ukraine.³¹ Their large deployment area and high-caliber personnel made them attractive potential reinforcements for the Sicherheitspolizei und Sicherheitsdienst (Security Police and Security Service or SiPo-SD) and the Wehrmacht, both of which attempted to wrest them from Sonderkommando R.³² Although the Wehrmacht lost its bid for the units, at least in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, Hoffmeyer apparently had to share

29 German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 1st May–30th June 1942, July 17, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 12.

30 Aussage von G. Z., May 19, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 107.

31 German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 1 August–31st August 1942, September 7, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 20.

32 G.C. & C.S. Air and Military History, Vol. XIII, The German Police, n.d., BNA, HW 16, Piece 63, 221–222.

his authority over the detachments with the Higher SS- and Police Leader.³³ Sonderkommando R's cavalry squadrons remained active in Ukraine until 1944, when, after covering the VoMi's withdrawal, Hoffmeyer's superiors compelled the units' transfer to Hermann Fegelein in occupied Poland.³⁴

Although a private Volksdeutsche army suited Hoffmeyer, Germany's declining military position after Stalingrad prompted the unit to begin transferring its most able militiamen to the Waffen-SS.³⁵ Beginning in early 1943, Sonderkommando R started mustering young Volksdeutsche Selbstschutz members to appear before Waffen-SS physicians in Landau.³⁶ Sonderkommando R then transferred eligible Volksdeutsche recruits to Odessa, where the Waffen-SS sent them via Germany to the Netherlands for basic training in artillery and cavalry units.³⁷

Sonderkommando R surrendered perhaps a quarter of the Selbstschutz's most promising militiamen to the Waffen-SS during 1943. Yet, Transnistria's Volksdeutsche militias continued operations until the March 1944 German retreat. Immediately before the evacuation, Sonderkommando R deployed Selbstschutz personnel to kill many of the unit's prisoners.³⁸ During the retreat, Selbstschutz units, like the cavalry squadrons, provided security for the columns of Volksdeutsche refugees, whose evacuation route through southeastern Europe became precarious as the Red Army approached.³⁹ The Waffen-SS drafted virtually all remaining militiamen upon their arrival in Poland.⁴⁰ Sonderkommando R's ambitions to create an independent

33 German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 1st July–31st July 1942, August 11, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 8.

34 German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 1st–30th May 1944, June 5, 1944, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, Part 2, 7. German Police Decodes No. 1 Traffic: 20.4.44, April 26, 1944, BNA, HW 16, Piece 40, 3. German Police Decodes No. 1 Traffic: 27.4.44, May 8, 1944, BNA, HW 16, Piece 40, 6. Aussage von J. R., August 24, 1962, BAL, B162/2302, 3.

35 Siebert first warned Hoffmeyer of this possibility in October 1942. Addenda to G.P.D. 1094 (1.10.42 No 2 Tfc.), November 21, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 36, 4.

36 German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 7th March–7th April 1943, April 8, 1943, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 4. Protokol doprosa/Ionusa Aleksandra, April 3, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8442–8443. Aussage von J. F., November 29, 1963, BAL, B162/2301, 19.

37 German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 8th April–8th May 1943, May 9, 1943, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 3. German Police Decodes Nr. 3 Traffic: 21.4.43, May 9, 1943, HW 16, Piece 25, 2. German Police Section Weekly Report No. 9 for week ending 16.4.43, n.d., BNA, HW 16, Piece 69, 1. Aussage von J. F., November 29, 1963, BAL, B162/2301, 19. Protokol doprosa/Ionusa Aleksandra, May 29, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8506. Verantwortliche Vernehmung von G. E., April 25, 1962, BAL, B162/2292, 100–101. Vernehmungsniederschrift von L. H., August 7, 1962, BAL, B162/2296, 145. Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von R. F., August 10, 1962, BAL, B162/2296, 157.

38 Aussage von H. J., May 19, 1965, BAL, B162/2304, 64–65. Aussage von W. M., May 24, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 148. Aussage von A. F., May 22, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 134.

39 German Police Decodes No. 1 Traffic: 20.4.44, April 26, 1944, BNA, HW 16, Piece 40, 3.

40 Aussage von H. S., November 10, 1962, BAL, B162/2299, 116. Protokol doprosa/Ionusa Aleksandra, February 25, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8337. Protokol doprosa/Kokha Floriana, January 10, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8745.

fighting force in Transnistria were ultimately sacrificed to the German military as its fortunes waned.

Militia participation in the mass murder of Jews in rural Transnistria during winter 1941–1942 constituted a departure from the Selbstschutz's established mission of guarding local Volksdeutsche settlements. Yet it proved decisive in its institutional development. Before mass murder, Sonderkommando R's leaders conceived of their militia forces as a small auxiliary force to project German influence in the region and ferret out remaining internal enemies within local Volksdeutsche settlements. Ever short of manpower for mass shooting operations, Sonderkommando R expanded the Selbstschutz and intensified its ideological and military training. When the Selbstschutz acquitted itself well during mass killings, Sonderkommando R invested the resources necessary to make ragtag irregulars into an effective fighting force that its German institutional competitors coveted.

ENRICHING TRANSNISTRIA'S ETHNIC GERMANS

As Sonderkommando R built up its militia during 1942, it also succored Transnistria's Volksdeutsche with clothing and personal effects stolen from Jews. The previous winter, Sonderkommando R already had permitted ethnic German militiamen to steal victims' clothing. These extemporaneous thefts illustrated the potential and limitations of using the property of Jews to improve the general material condition of local Volksdeutsche. Active perpetrators benefited disproportionately from clothing that ethnic German militias stole during killings. There were, however, too few quality items. The murdered Jewish deportees, who originated primarily from Bessarabia, Bukovina, and elsewhere in Ukraine, were generally poorer than their Central or East Central European counterparts and had less desirable garments. Moreover, Romanian authorities and their Ukrainian helpers already had fleeced the Jewish deportees repeatedly, leaving slim pickings for the Selbstschutz. That Transnistria's Volksdeutsche militiamen snapped up apparel that even the Romanians had neglected to steal speaks to the abject poverty of many local ethnic Germans. Well into 1943, Germans deployed to Transnistria encountered poorly clad Volksdeutsche.⁴¹ The situation of some local ethnic Germans was so dire that Sonderkommando R repeatedly explored manufacturing straw shoes for Volksdeutsche so that they would not go barefoot in winter.⁴² As Rafael H., an ethnic German from

41 Aussage von G. B., June 16, 1966, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2694, 146.

42 Rundanweisung Nr. 71/Bettriff.: Arbeiten von Strohschuhen, September 22, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 56. Rundanweisung Nr. 95, February 22, 1943, BB, R 59/66, 26.

Katharinenthal later explained, “given our circumstances then, . . . Jews’ clothes (*Judenkleider*) . . . were very good.”⁴³ To help local Volksdeutsche achieve a dominant economic position, Sonderkommando R would need substantially more property – more than could be found in southern Ukraine.

Sonderkommando R’s solution was a centralized system for distributing to Volksdeutsche in Transnistria the personal effects of Jews murdered in German-occupied Poland. At Himmler’s request, the SS Economic and Administrative Main Office (SS-Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt) provided Sonderkommando R with murdered Jews’ personal property that was stored in warehouses in Lublin, Poland.⁴⁴ As the terminus for the region’s rail system, Odessa was the logical hub for this macabre network. During early 1942, Sonderkommando R established a warehouse there to store, process, and sort victims’ stolen clothing in preparation for the garments’ transfer to rural Transnistria. Under the control of Odessa’s Economic Group (Wirtschaftsgruppe), the “clothing camp” (*Kleiderlager*) was a substantial facility. Elvira G., a German secretary for the Odessa-based SS Wirtschaftsgruppe, later recounted that “the [clothing] camp was housed in a school-type building. In [its] many rooms, clothing and underwear from Jews was stacked 1.5 to 2 meters high, so that the windows were partly covered.”⁴⁵ A communiqué from Hoffmeyer to Landau on February 13, 1943, illustrates this operation’s scale. He notified his subordinates to expect a forty-five-car train with “27,800 men’s coats, 25,925 men’s jackets, 32,325 pairs of men’s pants, 14,825 men’s vests, 9,800 pairs of men’s shoes, 10,025 pairs of men’s underpants, 4,700 panties, 5,100 women’s stockings, 4,200 pairs of women’s shoes, 7,780 pairs of children’s shoes, 9,000 boy’s coats, 850 boy’s jackets, 600 pairs of boy’s pants, 23,700 men’s shirts, 600 pairs of men’s socks, 44,000 women’s jackets, . . . [and] . . . 29,085 miscellaneous pieces of women’s clothing, including shirts . . . [and] 2,500 blouses.”⁴⁶ As

43 Aussage von R. H., March 19, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 18.

44 Der Reichsführer-SS an den Chef des SS-Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt SS-Obergruppenführer Pohl/Chef des Hauptamtes Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle SS-Obergruppenführer Lorenz, October 20, 1942, USHMM, International Tracing Service Digital Archive [hereafter ITS Digital Archive], 1.1.0.2, Reichssicherheitshauptamt, Folder 14, 82342101, 82342098. When interrogated by SMERSH during September 1944, Assmann noted that Bereichskommando Halbstadt had received twelve to fifteen truckloads of Jewish clothing from Odessa. According to Assmann, the clothes originated from a camp in Poland’s Lublin District. Protokoll doprosa/A. M. G., September 20, 1944, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2902, 45. Vahldieck’s 1955 blackmail letter identified the source of the clothing as Auschwitz. “50 000 Juden aus Odessa. Tatsachenbericht von Walter Vahldieck, *Holokost i Suchasnist’: studiiiv Ukraïni i sviti*, no. 4 (2008): 112.

45 Aussage von E. G., December 2, 1966, BAL, B162/2307, 321.

46 German Police Decodes Nr 2 Traffic: 13.2.43, February 24, 1943, BNA, HW 16, Piece 37, Part 1, 2.

Johanna W., an NS-Frauenwerk organizer attached to Sonderkommando R, later recounted: “the clothes of at least 10,000 people, and probably more, passed through this camp.”⁴⁷

By February 1943, Odessa’s SS warehouse for goods looted from Jews was bustling. To oversee daily operations of its Odessa clothing warehouse, Sonderkommando R selected Pius W., the former Volksdeutsche mayor of Worms, whose purported anti-Semitism, enthusiasm for mass murder, and avarice made him the ideal manager of this ghoulis enterprise.⁴⁸ With each shipment’s arrival, a team of local Volksdeutsche women sorted, washed, and mended the clothes before trucks transported the garments to rural Transnistria under Selbstschutz guard.⁴⁹ This procedure served three purposes. The first was disease prevention. To protect area Volksdeutsche from the very illnesses that Nazi ghettoization policy had fueled among Jews, Sonderkommando R took disinfection seriously. Sonderkommando R threatened to beat ethnic Germans who procured unwashed garments.⁵⁰ At the project’s height, the unit transferred as many as 300 Selbstschutz members from rural Transnistria to guard the facility from sticky-fingered Volksdeutsche who might remove unwashed clothing, and from interlopers who might discover the warehouse.⁵¹ Nevertheless, cleaning was haphazard. As the warehouse’s staff later testified, the sheer volume of clothing often required them to send unwashed items into the countryside.⁵² This system collapsed during mid-1943. Initially, Hoffmeyer complained about “inadequately” cleaned clothing and ordered that raiment “for the entire Black Sea area [be] returned to Odessa.”⁵³ In October 1943, Sonderkommando R closed the “clothing camp.”⁵⁴ Cleaning Jews’ clothing devolved to Gertrude Braun and her NS-Frauenwerk staff, who created special laundry facilities in Alexanderfeld, Johannesfeld, Worms, Speyer, Hoffnungstal, Selz, Groß-Liebenthal, and Odessa.⁵⁵ Dubious about these

47 Aussage von J. W., March 5, 1968, BAL, B162/2309, 257.

48 Aussage von P. W., October 21, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 70–71.

49 Aussage von P. M., June 1, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 180. German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 15th January–16th February 1942, March 17, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 12.

50 Aussage von A. E., November 16, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 126.

51 Vernehmungsniederschrift von L. D., July 21, 1962, BAL, B162/2297, 50–51.

52 Aussage von P. W., October 21, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 70–71.

53 German Police Decodes No. 1 Traffic: 10.3.43, March 17, 1943, BNA, HW 16, Piece 37, Part 1, 1. Disinfecting clothing stolen from Jews remained a problem for Sonderkommando R through much of 1943. German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 29th June–28th July 1943, August 10, 1943, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 4.

54 Zusatz zum Stabbefehl Nr. 116, October 10, 1943, BB, R 59/67, 27.

55 Stabbefehl Nr. 116, October 8, 1943, BB, R 59/67, 24. Aussage von G. B., June 16, 1966, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2694, 146.

localized disinfection centers, Sonderkommando R shifted responsibility for the cleanliness of the newly acquired apparel onto local Bereichskommandoführer and ethnic German mayors, and warned teachers to be on the lookout for Volksdeutsche children wearing unwashed clothes.⁵⁶

Second, sorting the items permitted Sonderkommando R's commanders to reward cooperative Volksdeutsche with the most desirable articles of clothing. Despite Himmler's order that the garments were to be given as Christmas gifts, Sonderkommando R's leaders forbade their subordinates from distributing the clothes randomly to Volksdeutsche.⁵⁷ According to a March 1943 staff order, "the items of clothing are not gifts, but rather for Volksdeutsche to purchase."⁵⁸ In rural Transnistria, Sonderkommando R authorized Bereichskommandoführer to barter the clothes for grain, whereas in Odessa the unit expected ethnic Germans to pay cash.⁵⁹ Sonderkommando R provided its Bereichskommandoführer with a macabre price list. They were to charge ethnic Germans between fifteen and fifty RKKS (Reichskreditkassenschein, Reich's Credit Treasury Note; the script issued in areas under German occupation) for men's coats and two to ten RKKS for children's shoes, depending on their condition.⁶⁰ Sonderkommando R provided reliable local ethnic Germans with free or privileged access to the apparel. Volksdeutsche mayors, teachers, and other VoMi employees had first claim on the garments.⁶¹ Remaining items were to be sold first to communities that "had performed exemplary service" to the unit.⁶² Volksdeutsche families who had lost a son or father in Waffen-SS service were to receive items free of charge.⁶³

Finally, cleaning and mending the garments was a feeble attempt to hide their provenance. Beyond the SS's immediate public health concerns, the raiment could not be distributed to area Volksdeutsche because it still bore the stains of genocide. As Elvira G. later testified, in the Odessa warehouse it was apparent "that a portion of the clothes still had a Jewish star attached and also were spattered with blood."⁶⁴ Other garments had visible bloodstained bullet holes.⁶⁵ The SS instructed its female employees to search the clothes

56 Zusatz zum Stabbefehl Nr. 116, October 10, 1943, BB, R 59/67, 27.

57 Der Reichsführer SS an den Chef des SS-Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamtes SS-Obergruppenführer Pohl/Chef des Hauptamtes Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle SS-Obergruppenführer Lorenz, October 24, 1942, USHMM ITS Digital Archive, Reichssicherheitshauptamt, 1.1.0.2, Folder 14, 82342101, 82342098.

58 Rundandweisung Nr. 99, March 27, 1943, BB, R 59/66, 9.

59 *Ibid.*, 8.

60 *Ibid.*, 11.

61 Rundandweisung Nr. 98, March 21, 1943, BB, R 59/66, 17.

62 *Ibid.*

63 Stabbefehl Nr. 120, December 9, 1945, BB, R 59/67, 27.

64 Aussage von E. G., December 2, 1966, BAL, B162/2307, 321.

65 *Ibid.*

for hidden valuables that the garments' previous owners had sewn into the linings, the discovery of which would have divulged their origins.⁶⁶

This subterfuge was ineffective. Sonderkommando R's efforts to find and remove Jews' valuables failed. Whether the NS-Frauenwerk continued to look for valuables in the garments after it inherited responsibility for cleaning them in 1943, or if Sonderkommando R abandoned this measure is unclear. Regardless, Volksdeutsche began finding hidden items, ranging from Polish bank notes to silverware, in garments that they referred to as their new "Jews' clothing."⁶⁷ In response, Sonderkommando R ordered all Volksdeutsche to surrender these hidden valuables to their local mayors, who were to forward them to Bereichskommandoführer.⁶⁸ This directive merely spread word about potential finds to local residents. Greed got the better of some ethnic Germans. When, for example, the Volksdeutsche mayor of Peterstal refused to turn over a watch that he had found while distributing clothing to local ethnic Germans, Groß-Liebenthal's Selbstschutz allegedly shot him.⁶⁹

Why Sonderkommando R sought to obscure the clothing's origins is uncertain. With the physical evidence of genocide still apparent, recipients would have doubted Sonderkommando R's cover story that German donors had provided the garments.⁷⁰ Yet, by virtue of their participation in mass killings, area Volksdeutsche were unlike most of Hitler's other "beneficiaries."⁷¹ Because of the bureaucratized and theoretically clandestine "machinery of destruction," most Germans in the Reich could bury their heads in the proverbial sand and claim blissful ignorance about the whereabouts of their former Jewish neighbors, as "Aryans" acquired the victims' property at bargain prices. Having murdered Jews in Transnistria, area ethnic Germans had no such luxurious distance. Attempting to obscure the origins of their new "Jews' clothing" from area ethnic Germans amounted to denying the ongoing mass murder of Jews to a population that was exceptionally implicated in it. Predictably, except for a handful of prevaricators, both the former Sonderkommando R members and area

66 Aussage von P. M., June 1, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 180.

67 Aussage von J. W., March 5, 1968, BAL, B162/2309, 257. Aussage von H. E., September 16, 1966, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2695, 54.

68 Although no written documentation of this orders exists, both German Sonderkommando R personnel and area Volksdeutsche confirmed this order. Aussage von J. W., March 5, 1968, BAL, B162/2309, 257. Aussage von M. B., June 10, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 197.

69 Aussage von V. R., July 31, 1962, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2671, 156.

70 Aussage von H. E., September 16, 1966, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2695, 54. Aussage von K. D., December 7, 1964, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2682, 93.

71 Götz Aly, *Hitler's Beneficiaries: Plunder, Racial War, and the Nazi Welfare State*, trans. Jefferson Chase (New York: Metropolitan, 2007).

Volksdeutsche admitted after the war that they delighted in their new “Jews’ clothes.”⁷²

KULTURKAMPF IN TRANSNISTRIA

Sonderkommando R sought not only to remake the material circumstances of Transnistria’s Volksdeutsche, but also their worldview. In this undertaking, the VoMi faced a substantial obstacle: Christianity. Before the 1917 Russian Revolution, the region’s ethnic Germans maintained a deep commitment to the Church, whose practices ordered their daily lives. Roughly 60 percent of southern Ukraine’s Volksdeutsche were Roman Catholics and the remaining 40 percent were Protestants.⁷³ Perhaps because Germanophone settlements were segregated by confession and farming proved lucrative for Catholics and Protestants alike, ethnic Germans appear not to have imported interconfessional strife. Although Catholics and Protestants rarely intermarried before 1917, probably because Volksdeutsche communities in rural Odessa oblast’ were generally segregated, their faith constituted a key ethnic marker that differentiated both groups from their non-German neighbors. The role of confession in defining their ethnic identity as a minority population merely compounded the Church’s spiritual importance for local Volksdeutsche.

Soviet rule precipitated a caesura in the religious life of area ethnic Germans and added a political significance to religion for local Volksdeutsche. Beginning during the late 1920s, the Soviet regime targeted churches in its antireligious campaign. As they did for other confessions, Soviet authorities circumscribed religious services, arrested and deported clergy, and confiscated ecclesiastical property for secular uses. Soviet efforts to curtail Volksdeutsche religious observance reflected a broader antireligious campaign. Local ethnic Germans, however, did not perceive it as such. Although, at least initially, Soviet antireligious policies did not intend to erode the ethnic identity of area German-speakers, local residents correctly understood that Soviet measures had precisely that effect because they threatened a primary marker of Germanness.⁷⁴ Against the background of dekulakization

72 For an unusual and implausible claim of ignorance surrounding the clothing’s origins, see Aussage von I. S., February 26, 1965, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2680, 96. For more realistic descriptions, see Aussage von A. E., November 16, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 126. Aussage von H. E., November 25, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 190. Aussage von P. M., June 1, 1965, BAL, B162/2305, 180. Aussage von P. W., October 21, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 70. Aussage von V. A., November 19, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 149.

73 Völkl, *Transnistrien und Odessa*, 84–85.

74 Heinrich Roemmich, “Die evangelische-lutherische Kirche in Russland in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart,” in *Die Kirchen und das religiöse Leben der Russlandsdeutschen*, ed. Joseph Schnurr (Stuttgart: Landsmannschaft der Deutschen aus Russland, 1972), 262.

and collectivization, southern Ukraine's ethnic Germans interpreted Soviet moves against religion as part of a broader and ever-intensifying assault. Volksdeutsche hopes for a religious renaissance were not simply spiritual in origin, but rather reflected a desire to roll back the Sovietization of southern Ukraine. Although also anti-Soviet in orientation, Christianity posed a formidable alternative to Sonderkommando R's National Socialist agenda.

The VoMi's initial religious policy in Transnistria was a ban by omission. The unit consciously failed to prepare for a religious renaissance in Transnistria's Volksdeutsche communities because it regarded the Church as an undesirable potential competitor to National Socialism. After all, why should Sonderkommando R reintroduce an institution known to its leaders to retard the National Socialist project when decades of Soviet antireligious policy had already done the dirty work of closing churches? Despite widespread Volksdeutsche wishes, Sonderkommando R's leaders were content to make the Soviet regime's anti-religious measures permanent.⁷⁵

The Catholic Church's reappearance surprised Sonderkommando R. It was the personal mission of Father Nikolaus Pieger, a forty-one-year-old Franconian priest. Pieger had no apparent personal connection to this ministry. Decades after the war he recalled that a boyhood geography lesson on ethnic Germans in the Russian Empire had first kindled his interest in Volksdeutsche.⁷⁶ After his 1932 ordination Pieger became the director of a Catholic school in Nuremberg, where his interactions with Volksdeutsche pupils from Eastern Europe reawakened his interests in the group.⁷⁷ To follow this calling, Pieger transferred to the German Catholic archdiocese in Bucharest in 1936. Ever eager to minister to ethnic Germans, Pieger peered farther east from Bucharest toward the Soviet Union. In 1938, Soviet authorities halted Pieger's plans to celebrate mass in the German Embassy in Moscow by refusing him a visa.⁷⁸

As Pieger later recounted, Germany's June 1941 invasion "fulfilled my wish to go to Russia."⁷⁹ With the opportunity to expand his ministry to the Soviet Union, he "pulled out all of the stops to get to Russia."⁸⁰ This was no easy task. He first used his connections at the German Embassy in

75 This tension between local religious beliefs and increasingly repressive German religious policy also existed in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine. See Karel C. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine Under Nazi Rule* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 232–252.

76 Nikolaus Pieger, "Die religiösen Verhältnisse in der Südukraine (Transnistrien)," in *Die Kirchen und das religiöse Leben der Russlandsdeutschen*, ed. Joseph Schnurr (Stuttgart: Landsmannschaft der Deutschen aus Russland, 1972), 43.

77 Aussage von N. P., November 13, 1961, BAL, B162/2289, 74. Pieger, "Die religiösen Verhältnisse in der Südukraine (Transnistrien)," 43.

78 *Ibid.*

79 *Ibid.*

80 *Ibid.*

Bucharest in August 1941 to obtain permission to enter what was then a combat zone. According to Pieger, securing the necessary authorizations from his ecclesiastical superiors was a greater challenge. After his bishop denied him permission to travel to recently occupied Soviet territory, Pieger turned to the papal nuncio to Romania, Andreas Cassullo. Despite Cassullo's initial inclination to seek Vatican authorization for such a journey, Pieger convinced him that the dire situation of the faithful in southern Ukraine necessitated an immediate response, and the nuncio authorized his exploratory mission.⁸¹

Pieger persuaded Father Josef Arnold, a Catholic priest serving as a Wehrmacht medic, to smuggle him into the military's rear area disguised as his authorized passenger. Arriving in Transnistria on August 20, 1941, Pieger began a three-week survey of the region's major Volksdeutsche Catholic settlements, including Strasburg, Baden, Kandel, Selz, Landau, Karlsruhe, Rastatt, Speyer, and Sulz. After his sojourn to Transnistria, Pieger returned to Bucharest during early October 1941 imbued with missionary zeal. He lobbied the Vatican to send a permanent mission. Perhaps aware that, by defying his bishop, he had become *persona non grata* with his superiors, Pieger recommended that Dr. Martin Glaser, a former member of the diocese of Saratov and current regent of the German Catholic seminary in Iași, be head of the mission. Glaser became apostolic visitor ten days later. Glaser, Pieger, and their colleague in Bucharest, Father Walter Kampe, departed for Transnistria immediately. Without transportation or any apparent authorization from the German or Romanian militaries, the party followed Pieger's earlier route by entering the occupation zone with the aid of another Catholic priest working as a Wehrmacht ambulance driver. Arriving in Odessa a few weeks after the city's occupation by German and Romanian forces, the mission located St. Clemens Cathedral, which Soviet authorities had converted into a warehouse, stables, and ordinance depot. Tellingly, a gigantic portrait of Stalin had replaced the original altar painting of the assumption of Mary.⁸²

Initially housed in "a primitive room" in the home of a local ethnically Polish family, the three priests began reestablishing the Catholic community by rebuilding churches.⁸³ The mission restored St. Clemens Cathedral as "the center of religious life" in southern Ukraine.⁸⁴ Under Glaser's supervision, local artisans renovated both the cathedral's marble floor and replaced Stalin's likeness with the original altar painting that Pieger and his colleagues

81 *Ibid.*

83 *Ibid.*, 49.

82 *Ibid.*, 44–49.

84 *Ibid.*

identified on display in an area museum. Local Romanian administrators later gave the mission a large building on Risel'evskaya Street near the cathedral to expand its growing administrative offices.⁸⁵ Although the mission never had enough priests to serve all of rural Transnistria, it reached agreements with the Romanians to satisfy “the most urgent pastoral needs.”⁸⁶ By early June 1942 the mission had some fifteen priests, most of them ethnic Germans from Romania and Bessarabia.⁸⁷ The Catholic Church's revival was so successful that Glaser's superiors elevated him to bishop in 1943.⁸⁸ Notwithstanding these accomplishments, Germany's deteriorating military situation forced the mission to quit Transnistria little more than a year later. Pieger later reflected that “[t]his work, however, was not for nothing. Our faithful witnessed that the Church did not leave them in the lurch and are today still thankful for that.”⁸⁹

Sonderkommando R resisted Catholic activities in Transnistria. Pieger became a focus of the SS's wrath. The SS put a stop to Pieger's inconvenient visits to rural Transnistria, where signs of mass murder abounded, by chasing him out of the countryside at gunpoint.⁹⁰ Pieger returned to Odessa, where the SS pursued him. Tipped off by one of Bereichskommando XXV's Volksdeutsche employees to planned SS efforts to detain him there, Pieger took refuge with the city's Romanian occupiers, who happily thumbed their noses at the SS.⁹¹ In early April 1942, Sonderkommando R warned its staff that Pieger's activities were henceforth banned.⁹²

Although Sonderkommando R quarantined Pieger in Odessa, it failed to dislodge the Catholic mission. Unlike German-occupied Soviet territory, in which the German civil administration had banned German clergy from operating, in Transnistria religious policy was a Romanian purview. Instead of banning the Catholic Church, the Romanians protected it from Hoffmeyer. Alexianu's involvement is illustrative. Perhaps because of threats to Pieger's safety, Glaser beseeched the papal nuncio in Bucharest and the Romanians for assistance. Surviving records only hint at what transpired. From what can be recovered, Cassullo wrote Hoffmeyer on February 8, 1942, to press the Catholic Church's rights in Transnistria, in general, and to complain that Sonderkommando R had banned area priests from

85 *Ibid.* Völkl, *Transnistrien und Odessa*, 85–86.

86 Pieger, “Die religiösen Verhältnisse in der Südukraine (Transnistrien),” 50.

87 Völkl, *Transnistrien und Odessa*, 85–86.

88 Pieger, “Die religiösen Verhältnisse in der Südukraine (Transnistrien),” 49.

89 *Ibid.*, 51.

90 Aussage von N. P., November 13, 1961, BAL, B162/2289, 75.

91 *Ibid.*, 76–77.

92 Rundanweisung Nr. 38, April 9, 1942, BB, R. 59/66, 95.

celebrating mass during Christmas, in particular.⁹³ Hoffmeyer replied to Cassullo in early March 1942 and circulated a copy of his response to Alexianu, suggesting that Romanian authorities also had raised these issues with Sonderkommando R.⁹⁴ Hoffmeyer was undoubtedly truthful when he explained to Cassullo that “I also worry about the development of the Catholic ministry in Transnistria and have observed it with much concern,” but probably for reasons that differed dramatically from those of the papal nuncio. According to Hoffmeyer, he had denied Glaser’s request to hold services the previous Christmas because Glaser was unable to demonstrate that his ecclesiastical superiors sanctioned his activities in Transnistria.⁹⁵ Furthermore, Hoffmeyer complained that “Prelate Dr. Glaser was unable to offer any constructive suggestions for the development of an orderly Catholic Church. Above all, in all of these months he has been unable to name a single Catholic priest who would like to take up his responsibilities in Transnistria for the long term.”⁹⁶ In Hoffmeyer’s eyes, Pieger apparently lacked sincerity.

Despite Hoffmeyer’s efforts to rationalize his role, he remained sensitive to Romanian support for the Catholic Church. Romanian patronage was both bureaucratic and material. Contrary to Sonderkommando R’s wishes, during 1941 and 1942, the Romanian civil administration authorized a steady stream of Catholic priests to operate in Transnistria, including the troublesome Father Pieger.⁹⁷ Why the Orthodox Romanians assisted the German Catholic Church in Transnistria is unclear. It seems likely, however, that the Romanians supported Glaser precisely because his mission irritated Sonderkommando R. The running feud between the Romanians and the SS made for strange bedfellows.

Outmaneuvered by the Catholic Church, Hoffmeyer backpedaled. A few weeks after his reply to Cassullo and Alexianu, Sonderkommando R instructed Bereichskommandoführer that “every form of struggle against

93 Copie/Sonderkommando der Volksdeutschen Mittelstelle/An den Zivilgouverneur von Transnistria, Herrn Professor Alexianu, Tiraspol, March 16, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1085, 119.

94 A March 28, 1942, letter from Alexianu to Glaser indicates that Romanian authorities had raised the Catholic Church’s concerns with the SS. Given that Hoffmeyer felt compelled to provide Alexianu with a copy of his reply to Cassullo, the evidence suggests that Romanian and Vatican authorities approached Hoffmeyer about this issue at roughly the same time. Către Profiatul romano/catholic Odesa la mâna Sf. Sale Prelatului Dr. M. Glaser, March 28, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1085, 118.

95 Copie/Sonderkommando der Volksdeutschen Mittelstelle/An den Zivilgouverneur von Transnistria, Herrn Professor Alexianu, Tiraspol, March 16, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 1085, 119.

96 *Ibid.*

97 Rundanweisung Nr. 38, April 9, 1942, BB, R. 59/66, 94.

the Church is to cease.”⁹⁸ “Above all,” the unit’s leadership warned its subordinates “to refrain from all childish harassment and mockery” of the Catholic Church.⁹⁹ At least publicly, Sonderkommando R promised to end its anti-Catholic campaign in Transnistria.

Sonderkommando R’s orders, however, were not to halt its *Kulturkampf*, but simply to conceal it. Hoffmeyer’s improbable March 1942 assurance to Cassullo that Glaser had been “given freedom to carry out his pastoral duties” was a lie.¹⁰⁰ The same staff order that tamped down the unit’s openly anti-Catholic stance simultaneously ramped up covert restrictions in rural Transnistria’s ethnic German communities, where Sonderkommando R enjoyed exclusive authority. It commanded the unit’s Bereichskommandoführer to restrict Catholic religious observance. Catholic school books were not to be distributed and texts that had already been disseminated were to be confiscated. Aside from baptism and funerals, church services were to take place only on the weekend, so as not to interfere with agricultural production. Priests were also enjoined from performing baptisms or marriages without the SS’s oversight, presumably because both sacraments threatened to blur racial and ethnic distinctions.¹⁰¹ These measures also promised to eliminate “the influence of the Catholic Church on the selection of given names.”¹⁰² The orders noted further that although “the distribution of rosaries, confessional schedules, icons, etc., cannot be prohibited, it is undesirable.”¹⁰³ Sonderkommando R struggled against the Catholic Church well into 1943. In June of that year, Hoffmeyer informed his subordinates that he had pressured Glaser to recall the apparently meddling Father T., who was now banned from preaching.¹⁰⁴ Although Sonderkommando R bent to Romanian pressure and curbed its most blatant attacks on the Catholic Church, Hoffmeyer nevertheless continued a clandestine anti-Catholic campaign.

Sonderkommando R responded to the Protestant Church in Transnistria differently. Like their Catholic counterparts, Protestant clergy arrived in Transnistria with the German army’s assistance. Protestant pastors, serving as Wehrmacht chaplains, were among the first Germans to pass through Transnistria during late summer 1941. Some pastors, including Heinrich Roemmich, were natives of the region for whom, like Pieger, Operation Barbarossa was a chance to establish ties with area Volksdeutsche.¹⁰⁵ These

98 *Ibid.*, 95.

99 *Ibid.*

100 *Ibid.*, 120.

101 Rundanweisung Nr. 38, April 9, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 94.

102 *Ibid.*, 95.

103 *Ibid.*

104 Stabbefehl Nr. 109, June 22, 1943, BB, R 59/67, 59.

105 Roemmich, “Die evangelische Kirche in Russland in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart,” 254.

initial peripatetic forays into Transnistria by Wehrmacht chaplains quickly gave way to a more permanent Protestant presence. On Sunday, December 7, 1941, without any apparent authorization from Sonderkommando R, Protestant clergy reconsecrated Odessa's St. Pauli Church, less than two months after Romanian and German forces had captured the city.¹⁰⁶

Hoffmeyer apparently took no immediate action against Protestants. Perhaps because the Catholic Church had been a competitive political force in Germany, Sonderkommando R regarded Protestants as a lesser threat. According to wartime records, Hoffmeyer focused on the Protestant Church only after he failed to remove the Catholics. The Catholic alliance with the Romanians may have shaped his policy toward the Protestant Church. Perhaps fearing that Protestant clergy might seal a similar marriage of convenience with the Romanians, Hoffmeyer authorized a Protestant ministry for Transnistria's Volksdeutsche – a move that permitted Hoffmeyer to control its theology.

To harness the Protestant Church in Transnistria, Hoffmeyer forged an agreement with the German Christian Movement in Hermannstadt (Sibiu).¹⁰⁷ The German Christian Movement was an influential minority within the German Protestant Church that sought to harmonize National Socialism with Protestant theology – a project that required German Christians to try to repudiate Christianity's Jewish roots. Its outpost in Romania, the Transylvanian Protestant Church, was a creation of its bishop, Wilhelm Staedel, a fervent German Christian and committed Nazi. Born in 1890, Staedel followed a Transylvanian Saxon's typical education track, studying theology in Jena, Budapest, and Berlin. After serving as a field curate during the First World War, *völkisch* nationalism and ultimately National Socialism attracted Staedel's devotion. A prime mover in the Nazification of the region's Volksdeutsche youth movement, Staedel was a member of the fascist German Peoples' Party in Romania (Deutsche Volkspartei in Rumänien). Although Staedel's political activities prompted the presiding bishop to sack him, a subsequent National Socialist groundswell in Transylvania propelled his reinstatement and his election as bishop in February 1941. As bishop, Staedel strengthened German Christian grip on the Transylvanian Protestant Church, creating a branch of the Jena-based Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Church Life (Institut zur Erforschung und Beseitigung des jüdischen Einflusses auf das

106 Völkl, *Transnistrien und Odessa*, 85.

107 Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. 3, 1455.

deutsche kirchliche Leben) in Hermannstadt.¹⁰⁸ Under Staedel's supervision, the German Christian Movement became the new Protestant orthodoxy in Transylvania – an ideological position that Staedel maintained well after 1945.¹⁰⁹ In Staedel, Hoffmeyer found an ideal partner to reestablish Transnistria's Protestant Church.

Not surprisingly, Hoffmeyer regarded his arrangement with Staedel as completely satisfactory. Hoffmeyer's initial agreement with Staedel yielded four Transylvanian pastors for congregations in Odessa, Johannestal, Lichtenfeld, and Helenenthal.¹¹⁰ Staedel assigned Waldemar Keintzel, Helmut Hoffman, Hellmut Hochmeister, and Erwin Barth to take up these assignments. Later in 1942, Hoffmeyer authorized Staedel to send a further nineteen pastors to Transnistria.¹¹¹ During April 1943, Hoffmeyer toyed with introducing the Transylvanian Protestant Church's liturgical calendar to Transnistria "as a counterweight to the propaganda of the Catholic Church" and invited his staff's commentary.¹¹² Although Hoffmeyer's partnership with Staedel was born out of a failed attempt to exclude the German Catholic Church from Transnistria, it provided Sonderkommando R with exceptional control over Protestantism. If Hoffmeyer had to suffer Christianity's reintroduction into Transnistria's Volksdeutsche communities, it was at least a form of his choosing in the case of the Protestants.

ENLIGHTENING AND EDUCATING TRANSNISTRIA'S VOLKSDEUTSCHE

With Christianity contained, Sonderkommando R launched its propaganda and education campaign. To supervise the VoMi's Volksdeutsche propaganda in Transnistria, Sonderkommando R sent for Friedrich Hallenberger, a thirty-one-year-old SS-Sturmabteilungsführer from the Reich Propaganda Office (Reichspropagandaamt) in Saxony. A longtime right-wing agitator, who protested the French occupation of the Ruhr in 1923 and suffered arrest for his membership in the fledgling Nazi party, Hallenberger was, as his personnel file noted, "a model National Socialist" and veteran propagandist.¹¹³ During the 1940 Bessarabian Volksdeutsche resettlement,

108 Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 129–131.

109 Doris L. Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 52, 227–228.

110 Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. 3, 1455.

111 Völkl, *Transnistrien und Odessa*, 85.

112 Stabbefehl Nr. 102, April 18, 1943, BB, R 59/67, 99.

113 SS Offizier Akte Friedrich Hallenberger, NARA, RG 242, A3343 SSO 055A, 536.

Hallenberger selected politically appropriate reading materials for ethnic German youngsters. On his own initiative, Hallenberger edited periodicals entitled *Wir sind daheim* (*We Are at Home*) and *Deutschland grüßt Euch* (*Germany Welcomes You*), the latter of which the VoMi trucked from Dresden to Transnistria.¹¹⁴ After Hallenberger's 1942 transfer to Odessa, Sonderkommando R tasked him with a multimedia propaganda campaign, giving him a truck with a radio receiver and speakers.¹¹⁵ During September 1942, Sonderkommando R established an Odessa-based newspaper, *Der Deutsche in Transnistrien* (*The German in Transnistria*), to trumpet its efforts on behalf of the area's ethnic Germans.¹¹⁶ Assisted by local Volksdeutsche women, Hallenberger edited the weekly periodical that the SS distributed throughout the city and its environs from July 1942 until March 1944.¹¹⁷ Advertising the VoMi's efforts on behalf of area ethnic Germans, the newspaper served as the SS's primary local mouthpiece.¹¹⁸ Frank Görlich, who has surveyed the publication in detail, plausibly suggests that the newspaper's articles focused less on naked anti-Semitism than on casting mass murder as a component of a broader ideological struggle against "Judeo-Bolshevism."¹¹⁹ Görlich concludes that the periodical transmitted the Third Reich's "blood and soil ideology" to raise local Volksdeutsche awareness of their Germanness.¹²⁰

To supplement Hallenberger's propaganda, the SS established a National Socialist cultural center in the recently confiscated Odessa Jewish theater. The Deutsches Haus (German House) opened in a lavish June 13, 1942 ceremony, to which Hoffmeyer invited Alexianu.¹²¹ The building sported a lecture hall, a cinema (complete with Volksdeutsche ushers), a library, a

114 *Ibid.*, 518–562. Aussage von F. H., July 24, 1962, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589–001, Band 2, 181.

115 German Police Decodes Nr. 2 Traffic: 7.10.42, October 11, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 36, 4.

116 German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 1st May–30th June 1942, July 17, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 12; Dallin, *Odessa*, 200.

117 Aussage von E. S., November 12, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589–003, Band 5, 727–728. Aussage von F. H., July 24, 1962, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589–001, Band 2, 181. Frank Görlich, "Volkstumspropaganda und Antisemitismus in der Wochenzeitung 'Der Deutsche in Transnistrien' 1942–1944," in *Holocaust an der Peripherie: Judenpolitik und Judenmord in Rumänien und Transnistrien 1940–1944*, eds. Wolfgang Benz and Brigitte Mihok (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2009), 95.

118 The newspaper's publishers were under orders to advertise Sonderkommando R's welfare efforts on behalf of local Volksdeutsche. "Rundanweisung Nr. 75," November 6, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 50. "Stabbefehl Nr. 102," April 18, 1943, BB, R 59/67, 98. "Auswertung der Zeitung 'Der Deutsche in Transnistrien'," n.d., BAL, B162/2289, 29–35.

119 Görlich, "Volkstumspropaganda und Antisemitismus in der Wochenzeitung 'Der Deutsche in Transnistrien' 1942–1944," 103.

120 *Ibid.*, 99.

121 Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle SS-Sonderkommando BK XXV, Odessa/Herr Zivilgouverneur von Transnistrien Minister Prof. Alexianu, Tiraspol, June 6, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 2, Fond 2242, Opus 1, Ed. Hr. 1087, 47. Rundanweisung Nr. 42, BB, R 59/66, 88. Dallin, *Odessa*, 200. Völkl, *Transnistrien und Odessa*, 91.

restaurant, and even an extensive German-language phonograph record collection – all of which were accessible only to German and Volksdeutsche patrons.¹²² To keep Volksdeutsche abreast of the Reich's latest propaganda, Odessa's Bereichskommandoführer personally supervised weekly screenings of the *Deutsche Wochenschau* (*German Weekly Newsreel*), Nazi Germany's official newsreel.¹²³ Over the next year and a half the Deutsches Haus became a hub for Sonderkommando R's Nazification project in Transnistria.

Education constituted the second major component of Sonderkommando R's efforts to mobilize the Black Sea Germans for National Socialism. The unit's aims were both ideological and practical. Sonderkommando R regarded area Volksdeutsche youth as the most receptive to the Nazi agenda and prioritized elementary education as a propaganda vehicle. Yet the unit realized that it would first need to teach local children German. Local ethnic Germans had historically maintained German-language elementary schools, even during the early years of Soviet rule. During the late 1930s, however, pressure from increasingly suspicious Soviet authorities circumscribed Ukraine's Germanophone schools, creating a generation of Volksdeutsche with little formal training in German. With the invasion, the region's predominantly Russian-language school system collapsed, further limiting educational opportunities in rural Ukraine.¹²⁴ Sonderkommando R believed that Transnistria's Volksdeutsche might be particularly receptive to the Nazi message, if only they would learn German.

Language and ideological training shaped Sonderkommando R's initial education program. Shortly after establishing their rural Bereichskommandos, many local commanders reopened ethnic German schools on an ad hoc basis.¹²⁵ During early 1942, Sonderkommando R adopted more comprehensive elementary education measures.¹²⁶ In June 1942, for

122 Aussage von H. O., February 1, 1966, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589–004, Band 7, 1266, 69. Aussage von K. O., November 15, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589–003, Band 5, 762. Aussage von W. O., January 3, 1965, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589–004, Band 7, 1199. Rundanweisung Nr. 42, BB, R. 59/66, 88. Rundanweisung Nr. 67, September 8, 1942, BB, R. 59/66, 60.

123 Aussage von W. O., January 3, 1965, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589–004, Band 7, 1199.

124 Aussage von E. F., December 15, 1966, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589–004, Band 8, 1359–1360.

125 Bereichskommando XI in Rastatt reopened its schools almost immediately. Aussage von V. H., September 7, 1964, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2684, 52. Aussage von K. D., December 7, 1964, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2682, 91–92.

126 Sonderkommando R reported on these initiatives to the Romanian civil administration in early 1942. Verzeichnis über die in den deutschen Schulen des B.K. XVIII eingesetzten Lehrer, January 23, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 20, Fond 2361, Opis 1s, Ed. Hr. 7, 147–150. SS-Unstf. Liebl an den Prefakten Oberst Loghin Berezovka/Betritt: Bestätigung der Bürgermeister und

example, Sonderkommando R mandated that all ethnic German children begin school at age six.¹²⁷ It took attendance seriously, imposing fines and forced labor on the parents of truants.¹²⁸ Sonderkommando R expected Transnistria's Volksdeutsche children to attend eight years of school, after which they became eligible for a diploma required for employment or a land grant.¹²⁹ Sonderkommando R nevertheless found education an uphill battle. In November 1942, Hoffmeyer ordered a special course in Landau for all illiterate ethnic Germans aged fourteen to eighteen. The primer that Sonderkommando R selected for the class, *Sei Deutsche (Be German)*, was tellingly titled.¹³⁰ Siebert also ordered his subordinates to report all "blind, deaf-dumb, or idiotic" students to headquarters in Landau.¹³¹

Sonderkommando R controlled the content of ethnic German lessons. In November 1942 it banned the independent selection of pedagogical materials.¹³² Sonderkommando R's precise curriculum remains unclear. An undated book purchase order, however, highlights its thrust. Beyond pens, pencils, and paper, Sonderkommando R ordered 2,200 copies of *Mein Kampf (My Struggle)*, 1,000 copies of Philipp Bouhler's *Kampf um Deutschland: Ein Lesebuch für die deutsche Jugend (The Struggle for Germany: A Reader for German Youth)*, and 200 copies of Alfred Rosenberg's *Parteiprogramm (Party Program)*. In addition to nearly 20,000 copies of the desperately needed elementary German-language reader *Sei Deutsch*, the unit also purchased other books by "racial medicine" specialists, including Ernst Dobers and Martin Stämmeler. To ensure that this weighty material did not overwhelm local children, Sonderkommando R ordered 3,000 copies of the songbook *Lieder unseres Volkes (Songs of our People)*. Underscoring the language barrier that it faced, Sonderkommando R bought 50 copies of *Unterrichtsmethodik in mehrsprachigen Schulen (Instructional Methods for Multilingual Schools)*.¹³³

Lehrer, February 6, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 20, Fond 2361, Opis 1s, Ed. Hr. 7, 107. Liste der Lehrer die in den deutschen Gemeinden im Rayon Ontowo Kadinzova des BK 13 arbeiten, n.d., USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 18, Fond 2359, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 42, 1–2. Lehrer im Bereich Worms/BK-XIV, January 20, 1942, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 20, Fond 2361, Opis 1s, Ed. Hr. 7, 152.

127 Rundandweisung Nr. 43/Betr.: Anmeldungen von Schulneulingen, June 20, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 87.

128 *Ibid.*

129 German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 6th June–5th July 1943, July 9, 1943, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 3.

130 Rundandweisung Nr. 76, November 7, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 49–50.

131 Rundandweisung Nr. 43/Betr.: Anmeldungen von Schulneulingen, June 20, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 87. A year later, the unit banned handicapped Volksdeutsche children from local schools. Stabbefehl Nr. 107, May 24, 1943, BB, R 59/66, 65.

132 Rundandweisung Nr. 75, November 6, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 50.

133 Lieferung von Schulmaterial für volksdeutsche Siedlungen, n.d., NARA, T175/72/2589176–2589177.

Sonderkommando R remained suspicious of local teachers who were to supervise its curriculum. At the height of its operations in Transnistria, the unit's more than 200 schools enrolled some 22,000 pupils.¹³⁴ Without enough German teachers, Sonderkommando R had to make do with local instructors who had worked in the Soviet school system. Given the politically sensitive position of teachers under both Soviet and Nazi rule, instructors who served under the Soviets were automatically suspect in Sonderkommando R's eyes. As Görlich has noted, local Volksdeutsche functionaries who served under both regimes, including teachers, had to reformulate their ideology to satisfy their new masters.¹³⁵ Before reopening schools in fall 1941, local Bereichskommandoführer and ethnic German mayors screened instructors.¹³⁶ Initial efforts to weed out Volksdeutsche teachers with Soviet affinities failed to assuage Sonderkommando R's commanders. A half year later, Hoffmeyer continued to complain to Alexianu that many of the region's instructors had received their training in "Bolshevik teaching seminars."¹³⁷

Sonderkommando R implemented both short- and long-term solutions to wed local Volksdeutsche teachers to National Socialism. Initially, it identified promising local instructors and sent them to Germany for training. During late spring 1942 the unit dispatched ten ethnic German instructors to study in Berlin.¹³⁸ A further forty ethnic German teachers joined them later that summer in a month-long training course.¹³⁹ Perhaps to instill instructors with martial urgency, some of the teachers received pistols and ammunition for the trip, which a number of them failed to return promptly.¹⁴⁰

As this solution proved cumbersome, Sonderkommando R decided to train most Volksdeutsche instructors in SS-run teacher training institutes in Ukraine. Supervising these facilities fell to SS-Sturmbannführer Karl Götz, a long-time Nazi party member and professional *völkisch* writer, whose interwar research trips included sojourns to both Palestine and the

134 Zusammenstellung: der aufgebauten kulturellen Einrichtungen vom Sonderkommando "R," n.d., NARA, T175/72/2589167.

135 Görlich, "Volkstumspropaganda und Antisemitismus in der Wochenzeitung 'Der Deutsche in Transnistrien' 1942–1944," 107.

136 Aussage von J. S., October 9, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 12.

137 Sonderkommando der Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle/O.U., den 16. März 1942/An den Zivilgouverneur von Transnistrien, Herrn Professor Alexianu/Tiraspol in Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. 2, 986.

138 German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 1st May–30th June 1942, July 17, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 12.

139 Aussage von R. P., October 18, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 45. German Police Decodes Nr. 2 Traffic: 7.10.42, October 11, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 36, 6.

140 Rundandweisung Nr. 68, September 30, 1942, BB, R 59/66, 59.

United States.¹⁴¹ A celebrated author, Götz received a personal summons from Himmler in September 1941 to oversee the VoMi's educational policy in the occupied Soviet Union.¹⁴² Götz supervised the retraining of Volksdeutsche instructors in both Transnistria and the Reichskommissariat Ukraine. As Götz's primary base of operations was in Prischib in German-occupied Ukraine, everyday oversight of Sonderkommando R's ethnic German teacher training program in Transnistria became the responsibility of SS-Obersturmführer Fritz Dankert, a thirty-nine-year-old Magdeburg teacher.¹⁴³ Based first in Odessa and then relocated to the more centrally situated town of Selz, Transnistria's Teacher Training Institute (*Lehrerbildungsanstalt*) attempted to purge suspected Soviet contamination by exposing the largely sequestered participants to a heavy dose of National Socialist ideological instruction.¹⁴⁴ Whether these efforts succeeded is unclear. Any failures, however, were not for lack of effort. The unit supported the institute with a 125,000 Reichsmark grant.¹⁴⁵ Even after the unit evacuated Transnistria, Götz reestablished the institution in Lubrandau in the Warthegau and operated it until the Waffen-SS drafted the institute's able-bodied instructors in October 1944.¹⁴⁶

Sonderkommando R's final attempt to mobilize Transnistria's ethnic German children was to establish a National Socialist youth organization, the Deutsche Jugend (The German Youth). Modeled on the Hitler Youth, the Deutsche Jugend was an uncooperative cooperative venture between Sonderkommando R and the Office of the Reich Youth Leader (Reichsjugendführer). As noted in [Chapter 2](#), Sonderkommando R's commanders guarded the SS's autonomy in Transnistria jealously and limited access to the region by non-SS personnel, who might introduce competitive chains of command and thereby threaten the unit's independence. The creation of the Deutsche Jugend posed precisely such a challenge to

141 Götz published travelogues about his journeys prior to the war. See, for example, Karl Götz, *Der Deutsche in Palästina, Für Jugend und Volk* (Langensalza: J. Belts, 1932). Karl Götz, *Brüder über dem Meer: Schicksale und Begegnungen* (Stuttgart: J. Engelhorns, 1938).

142 SS Offizier Akte Karl Götz, NARA, RG 242/A 3343/A 3343/SSO-021A.

143 SS Offizier Akte Fritz Dankert, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SSO-035, 1001-1017. Aussage von O. D., July 25, 1967, BAL, B162/2309, 25-26. Aussage von M. K., March 8, 1962, BAL, B162/2292, 11. Aussage von F. B., November 26, 1962, BAL, B162/2299, 144.

144 Aussage von J. H., April 1, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 30. Aussage von K. G., BAL, B162/2304, 227. Aussage von L. S., October 3, 1962, BAL, B162/2300, 148-149. Aussage von M. G., September 12, 1962, BAL, B162/2302, 179-180.

145 German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 29th June-28th July 1943, August 10, 1943, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 4.

146 Aussage von E. E., November 19, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 152. Aussage von R. P., October 18, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 45.

Sonderkommando R's near-omnipotence. Hoffmeyer repeatedly fought the deployment of Hitler Youth personnel, who were responsible for establishing the youth movement. In mid-1942, for example, Hoffmeyer "strongly disapproved" of the immediate deployment of Hitler Youth workers to occupied Ukraine and advised the Office of the Reichsjugendführer that the Deutsche Jugend should be created only after the Bereichskommandos "are fully organised."¹⁴⁷ Tensions between the two organizations continued for months.¹⁴⁸ Because of Sonderkommando R's recalcitrance, earnest efforts to establish the Deutsche Jugend in Transnistria did not begin until early 1943, and likely stunted the youth movement's growth. During March 1943, Sonderkommando R ordered its staff to organize ceremonies to induct local children into the Deutsche Jugend.¹⁴⁹ Anecdotaly, the youth movement's organization and ideological content were similar to that of the Hitler Jugend in Germany.¹⁵⁰ Deutsche Jugend membership was mandatory for all youths aged ten to fourteen years old.¹⁵¹ To provide more intense ideological instruction, Sonderkommando R created a summer camp for the movement in May 1943.¹⁵² The Deutsche Jugend depended particularly heavily on area Volksdeutsche. It trained area ethnic German men and women to serve as local youth leaders (*Ortsjugendführer* and *Ortsmädelführerinnen*) and deployed them across rural Transnistria.¹⁵³ Despite the scarcity of clothing, in April 1943, Sonderkommando R ordered all local Deutsche Jugend leaders to wear uniforms.¹⁵⁴ Seven months later, the unit ordered the area's area youth leaders (*Bereichsjugendführer*) and local youth leaders to train with the Selbstschutz (Figure 5.2).¹⁵⁵ Although the Deutsche Jugend permitted Sonderkommando R to engage ethnic Germans whom Sonderkommando R recognized correctly were most receptive to its ideological agenda, its greedily guarded independence ultimately stymied this effort.

147 German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 1st May–30th June 1942, July 17, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 12.

148 German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 1st July–31st July 1942, August 11, 1942, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 8.

149 Rundanweisung Nr. 98, March 21, 1943, BB, R 59/66, 18.

150 On the Hitler Youth in Germany, see Michael H. Kater, *Hitler Youth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

151 Stabbefehl Nr. 103, April 24, 1943, BB, R 59/67, 95.

152 Stabbefehl Nr. 105, May 12, 1943, BB, R 59/67, 72.

153 Aussage von J. S., January 29, 1966, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589–004, Band 7, 1259–1260. Aussage von A. K., October 10, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 18–19.

154 Stabbefehl Nr. 102, April 19, 1943, BB, R 59/67, 100.

155 Stabbefehl Nr. 120, December 9, 1943, BB, R 59/67, 5.



Figure 5.2. Reich Youth Leader (Reichsjugendführer) personnel in Transnistria, probably 1943. Source: LAV NRW W, Q 234 Staatsanwaltschaft Dortmund, Zentralstelle Nr. 2726.

THE ESCALATION OF SONDERKOMMANDO R'S VIOLENCE IN TRANSNISTRIA

During mid-1942 an old problem reemerged. Sonderkommando R once again discovered local Jews, *Mischlinge* (persons of “mixed” Jewish and gentile ancestry), and “communists” living in its midst. After mass shootings the previous winter, local conspiracies of silence, which for months had protected a handful of thoroughly integrated local Jews, splintered as area gentiles began to denounce their Jewish neighbors to the SS. Sonderkommando R's discovery that local Jews had remained hidden in Transnistria's rural communities for nearly a year was deeply disconcerting. During fall 1941, when its staff first encountered local survivors of Einsatzgruppe D's summer killing campaign, Sonderkommando R saw the continued existence of Nazi racial and political enemies as evidence of the racial and political unreliability of area ethnic Germans. The unit's mass killing operations during winter 1941–1942 not only distracted the SS from its increasingly violent campaign against local residents, but permitted rural Transnistrians to clarify their membership in the Nazi racial community by participating in mass murder. Now, with the knowledge that their genocidal accomplices

had continued to shield some Jews from murder, the SS grasped that its decision to include these perpetrators in the Volksgemeinschaft was premature. Sonderkommando R again targeted Volksdeutsche for their perceived recalcitrance. What began as a new campaign to kill local Jews quickly escalated into a broader attempt to snuff out perceived ethnic German resistance. The SS launched a campaign against Transnistria's Volksdeutsche during 1942 that became steadily more radical than its efforts against local "Judeo-Bolshevik" enemies the year before.

Sonderkommando R's efforts to eliminate the last vestiges of Jewish "contamination" from Selz, a town of roughly 3,000 residents some 50 kilometers northwest of Odessa, typifies Sonderkommando R's renewed local killings during 1942. As elsewhere in Transnistria, during late summer 1941, Einsatzgruppe D had operated in the town, murdering many local Jews and Volksdeutsche "communists" and recruiting a handful of ethnic German men to serve as interpreters, some of whom accompanied the unit as far as Crimea.¹⁵⁶ Like their colleagues, the head of Bereichskommando XXIII, SS-Obersturmführer Norbert Pachschröll,¹⁵⁷ and his deputy, SS-Untersturmführer Johannes F.,¹⁵⁸ inherited a Volksdeutsche town that, unbeknownst to them, was only partially *judenrein*.

Prewar Selz had been home to a number of Jews, some of whom had anticipated the Nazi threat and evacuated with retreating Soviet forces during summer 1941.¹⁵⁹ For local Jews who had intermarried with the town's ethnic Germans, however, Selz appeared a refuge amid the invasion's chaos. Apparently judging that his Volksdeutsche wife Martha and their four young children afforded him protection from the Germans, Kasper Thielman, a collective farm worker known locally as "Kasper the Jew"¹⁶⁰ (*Judenkasper*), remained in Selz.¹⁶¹ Area ethnic Germans who were married to Jews likewise regarded Selz as a safe haven. For example, during the mid-1930s, Georg Deibert, a professional musician and choral director, had

156 Aussage von L. S., October 3, 1962, BAL, B162/2300, 146. On the recruitment of Volksdeutsche interpreters, including Hans Volk, see Aussage von L. D., August 7, 1967, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2698, 39.

157 SS Offizier Akte Norbert Pachschröll, NARA, RG 242, A3343 SSO-360A, 1041.

158 Aussage von J. E., July 19, 1962, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2671, 71.

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

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

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

moved to Odessa, where he married a Jew and fathered two children.¹⁶² When the Romanians arrested his wife, Deibert returned to his parents' home in Selz with their two children because his hometown appeared to offer them a better chance for survival than did Odessa, which, during fall 1941, was a focus of Romanian anti-Jewish violence.¹⁶³ Surprisingly, Thielman and Diebert were correct in assuming that they could find refuge in Selz, albeit only temporarily.

Reconstructing precisely how Pachschwöll and his subordinates discovered these families in Selz is difficult because most suspected perpetrators gave disingenuous statements to the West German police. Pachschwöll,¹⁶⁴ F.,¹⁶⁵ and Alexander Fetsch,¹⁶⁶ Selz's SS-appointed ethnic German mayor, provided differing accounts that ranged from absurdly denying wrongdoing, to blaming anonymous and perhaps phantom SS officers, to implicating one another. With the aid of an October 1944 report prepared for the Soviet Extraordinary State Commission and other testimony, however, a partial picture emerges.¹⁶⁷ During winter 1941–1942, both families succeeded in hiding. Deibert, whom some former residents remembered fondly as a featured performer at dances held in the town, apparently hid his children in plain sight.¹⁶⁸ Although other residents knew that both the Thielman and Deibert families had members with Jewish ancestry, no one in Selz denounced them to Pachschwöll or his subordinates, despite the fact that, by January 1942, all of them were aware of the SS's complicity in mass murder. This conspiracy of silence ended abruptly in April 1942, when Deibert's wife escaped her Romanian captors and arrived in Selz.¹⁶⁹ In a town of 3,000 residents, Bereichskommando XXIII's staff, some of whom

162 *Ibid.*, 134.

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

164 An Austrian citizen, and apparently unconcerned with appearances, Pachschwöll hid from West German authorities first in Austria and then in North Africa. Although never interviewed by West German investigators about the killing of these two families, in October 1971, Pachschwöll sent a letter to the German Embassy in Morocco. In it, he objected that the investigation was portraying the SS in an unfairly negative light. Brief von N. P. an die Deutschen Botschaft in Marokko/Betr.: Meine Tätigkeit während des Krieges in den Gebieten Ost- und Südost-Europas, October 29, 1971, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2787, 61.

165 F. provided a detailed and likely phony description of handing the "mixed race" children over to two anonymous SS officers, thereby conveniently distancing himself from their murder. Aussage von J. F., July 19, 1962, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2671, 81–82.

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

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

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

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

had just arrived from Germany, might not have detected Mrs. Deibert's return were it not for the permanent ethnic German identification cards that Sonderkommando R had begun issuing.¹⁷⁰ A few months earlier, both the return of ethnic German deportees and Sonderkommando R's mass murder campaign would have obscured a newcomer's arrival. By early April 1942, however, the absence of the appropriate SS-issued identification invited close scrutiny from Sonderkommando R's personnel. After determining that Mrs. Deibert was a Jew, Pachschwöll and F. arrested her at the family home near their command post, drove her a kilometer outside the village, and shot her.¹⁷¹ Mrs. Deibert's return and subsequent murder pierced the local conspiracy of silence. In short order, Pachschwöll and his subordinates identified Kasper Thielman as a Jew and shot him as well.¹⁷²

The two SS officers waited for more than a week before they murdered the families' "mixed race" children.¹⁷³ By mid-1942 Sonderkommando R's standing orders apparently instructed its staff to permit VoMi "experts" from Landau to inspect "mixed race" children for their biological suitability for inclusion in the Volksgemeinschaft. The experience of Wilhelm S., a local ethnic German truck driver employed by Sonderkommando R in Helenenthal, supports this possibility. After witnessing the murder of local Jews by Einsatzgruppe D and by Sonderkommando R, S. began to fear for the safety of his two half-Jewish grandchildren. He presented the situation to a sympathetic member of the local Bereichskommandos. That man requested direction from his superiors. The responsible Bereichskommandoführer and two SS officers from Landau evaluated the children and, as S. later described, "because of my duties at the Bereichskommando in Helenenthal and the fact that my grandchildren did not have a Jewish appearance, nothing happened

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

171 F. provided the most vivid account of the arrest. At the conclusion of that testimony he implausibly claimed that he handed her over to another SS officer. Aussage von J. F., July 19, 1962, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2671, 81–82. Fetsch stated simply after the war that Mrs. Deibert disappeared. Aussage von A. F., August 6, 1962, BAL, B162/2302, 70. Other residents confirm her disappearance. See Aussage von H. L., December 21, 1961, BAL, B162/2291, 26.

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

173 According to F., the SS rounded up Deibert's children eight to ten days after Mrs. Deibert's arrest. Aussage von J. F., July 19, 1962, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2671, 81.

to them.”¹⁷⁴ It is possible that the two mid-ranking SS officers, whom F. referenced in his postwar testimony and blamed for Mrs. Deibert’s disappearance, appeared in Selz to perform the same evaluation that S. described in Helenenthal.¹⁷⁵

A little more than a week after the murder of the parents, Bereichskommando XXIII’s staff moved against the youngsters. Early one April morning, with the assistance of Mayor Fetsch and two local ethnic Germans, Franz Wald and Rafael Wilhelm, Pachschwöll and F. collected the children in their staff car.¹⁷⁶ Under the pretext of taking the children to an orphanage, the SS asked Deibert to hand over his son and daughter.¹⁷⁷ Apparently without protest, Deibert bundled his children, eight-year-old Rafael and seven-year-old Lena, against the morning cold and permitted the SS and their helpers to load the youths into the staff car.¹⁷⁸ When the party arrived at the Thielman residence with the same request, Martha Thielman insisted on accompanying her children.¹⁷⁹ The SS obliged her and placed the woman and her children, Peter, Rosa, Wendelin, and Maria, into their vehicle.¹⁸⁰ Josef S., a fellow Selz resident, later described the scene: “the mother of the children did not want to live without them. I saw at a distance of several hundred meters how the children and the women were brought forward. The woman was holding a little one in her arms.”¹⁸¹ As the SS drove them out of town, Fetsch calmed the children by distributing candy.¹⁸² Upon arriving at the sand dunes between Selz and the neighboring town of Strasburg, the SS, perhaps aided by their local helpers, shot the

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

175 Aussage von J. F., July 19, 1962, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2671, 81.

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

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

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

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

180 *Ibid.*

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

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

entire party.¹⁸³ Upon returning to town, Pachschwöll banned local residents from burying the bodies in the local cemetery.¹⁸⁴ Remarkably, sometime later, Pachschwöll requested that Deibert reprise his role as the town choral director and he once again entertained Selz with his music.¹⁸⁵

Sonderkommando R's discovery that some residents of Jewish ancestry had survived in Transnistria's Volksdeutsche communities with local ethnic German assistance reignited earlier concerns within the unit about the viability of the VoMi's efforts in Transnistria. In aiding Jews and members of "mixed race" families, Transnistria's Volksdeutsche behaved no differently than many Reich Germans would have had the Nazis attempted to deport and murder Jewish spouses and Mischlinge in Germany. Yet, given Sonderkommando R's existing suspicions about the racial and political stock of Transnistria's Volksdeutsche, the realization that local Volksdeutsche had hamstrung repeated German efforts to kill targeted local residents simply reinforced Sonderkommando R's negative perceptions of the Black Sea Germans. If, even after Sonderkommando R had called upon area Volksdeutsche to assist in mass murder, many local ethnic Germans continued to aid their Jewish and "mixed race" neighbors, then what else might they be hiding? Amid growing suspicion, Sonderkommando R's staff began to regard any Volksdeutsche recalcitrance or misbehavior as opposition to the Nazi project. The SS's solution was to nip this perceived (and likely imaged) Volksdeutsche resistance in the bud.

During 1942, punishing Volksdeutsche offenders became a pretext for Hoffmeyer's subordinates to mistreat local ethnic Germans. Frequently, mere and perhaps fabricated suspicion was sufficient to merit sadistic assault. The severe beating and attempted rape of Rebecca B., a domestic servant for Sonderkommando R in Worms, by a local SS noncommissioned officer illustrates the level of violence to which these attacks rose.¹⁸⁶ Rebecca B.'s SS employer accused her of having stolen five Reichmarks from his quarters and, on his orders, members of the Worms Selbstschutz arrested the cleaning

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

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

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

186 The NCO's alleged surname may not be published because of German archival restrictions. His identity was unclear to West German prosecutors. One witness confused him with another German, whom Sonderkommando R removed in late 1941 for cattle rustling. Aussage von H. S., January 6, 1965, BAL, B162/2303, 263. Two other witnesses, however, identified him as Rebecca B.'s attacker. Aussage von H. S., January 6, 1965, BAL, B162/2303, 263. Aussage von A. D., August 13, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 218.

woman. At the noncommissioned officer's behest, the Selbstschutz paraded Rebecca B. through the town on a rope and forced her to admit her guilt publicly. He then incarcerated Rebecca B. in a cell in the basement of the town's former hospice care facility; the cell contained three other women – all suspected Jews whom the SS had recently arrested.¹⁸⁷ The next morning, the noncommissioned officer returned to the cell, ordered the women to strip naked, and paraded them in a circle through the town's main square. He then pulled Rebecca B. into a nearby ditch, apparently to rape her. When Rebecca B. attempted to fight off her attacker, he pulled her out of the ditch by the hair and beat her “black and blue” with a rubber truncheon.¹⁸⁸ Only the intervention of Rebecca B.'s aunt and other local residents, who heard her screams, saved the woman from further injury.¹⁸⁹ For local residents, this attack rekindled unpleasant memories of prewar violence at the hands of Soviet authorities.¹⁹⁰

Although the noncommissioned officer was promptly removed, this assault was by no means isolated.¹⁹¹ Sonderkommando R's personnel frequently attacked area ethnic Germans when the latter objected to the unit's property redistribution. For example, when Peter B., an ethnic German married to a Ukrainian, hesitated to surrender his horse to the local mayor, an SS enlisted man pistol whipped him so severely that he was bedridden for a month in Landau's hospital. More than twenty years later, his facial scars were still visible to the West German officials who interviewed him.¹⁹² Similarly, in Rastatt, Hartung repeatedly imprisoned and ultimately ordered one of his subordinates to beat Franz K., who had gone over Hartung's head to remove squatters.¹⁹³ Alcohol fueled many of these beatings. SS-Hauptsturmführer Paul Eisenreich, based in Mannheim, for example, frequently beat Volksdeutsche indiscriminately while intoxicated.¹⁹⁴ The reasons for other beatings were even more idiosyncratic. Adam R., an ethnic German from Rastatt, later testified that Hartung pummeled him for doing a sloppy job of grooming his horse.¹⁹⁵ Johann D., a resident of Speyer, perhaps best captured area Volksdeutsche reaction to Sonderkommando R's

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

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

189 *Ibid.*, 218–219.

190 *Ibid.*, 219.

191 *Ibid.*

192 Aussage von P. B., October 20, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 57–58.

193 Aussage von F. K., September 11, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 286–287.

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

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

unrestrained brutality: “we suffered almost more than during Soviet times because we were never beaten by the Russians.”¹⁹⁶

SONDERKOMMANDO R’S EFFORTS TO REIN IN LOCAL SS VIOLENCE

Poor supervision combined with the mounting animus that much of Sonderkommando R felt toward local ethnic Germans created an environment that permitted the unit to vent its frustrations on local residents. Whereas, during early 1943, Sonderkommando R’s staff orders emphasized benign treatment for ethnic Germans, Sonderkommando R’s surviving staff orders ignored the issue throughout 1942. Many Bereichskommandoführer likely interpreted the absence of criticism as tacit authorization to attack ethnic Germans who ran afoul of Sonderkommando R. Christine F., a former resident of Guldendorf, summed up the situation: the town’s Bereichskommandoführer “was very unpopular because he never hesitated to beat us ethnic Germans when things did not go as he wanted.”¹⁹⁷

Beginning in early 1943, however, Sonderkommando R cracked down on the abuse of local Volksdeutsche. This change coincided with the dismissal of Hoffmeyer’s deputy in Transnistria and a reduction in the number of Bereichskommandos. Siebert, Hoffmeyer’s subordinate and Sonderkommando R’s de facto commanding officer in Transnistria, deployed to Ukraine as one of the VoMi’s most able field officers. Yet, his performance during 1941 and 1942 was mediocre. That he had done little to protect local ethnic Germans from Sonderkommando R’s brutality was symptomatic of his detached leadership style, which merely exacerbated the effects of Hoffmeyer’s itinerant aloofness. An avid hunter, Siebert was a lackadaisical supervisor.¹⁹⁸ His laissez-faire managerial ethos endeared him to his subordinates, one of whom described Siebert as “a very calm and matter-of-fact man.”¹⁹⁹ In Landau, Siebert interacted casually with his command’s SS and non-SS members. As Thorwald R., the NSKK’s second-in-command assigned to Sonderkommando R in Transnistria, later recounted: “Siebert was actually one of the very few [SS officers] who did not fit in with the other higher SS leaders. He was not as exclusive as the others, who regarded themselves as a special master race.”²⁰⁰ This informality, however, made for

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

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

198 Aussage von H. S., March 17, 1966, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2693, 142.

199 Aussage von V. R., July 31, 1962, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2671, 151.

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

ineffective leadership. In March 1943, Hoffmeyer reassigned Siebert to command Sonderkommando R's Einsatzgruppe Shitomir in German-occupied Ukraine.²⁰¹ Presumably for old time's sake, Hoffmeyer wrote Siebert a glowing evaluation two months later, complimenting him as "a particularly active SS leader."²⁰²

Following Siebert's departure, as one of Sonderkommando R's former radio operators described, "a very different wind blew in Landau."²⁰³ SS-Sturmbannführer Erwin Müller, the forty-year-old former bicycle shop owner whom Hoffmeyer selected to replace Siebert, brought a more engaged and aggressive leadership style to Sonderkommando R in Transnistria.²⁰⁴ Whereas Siebert's staff liked his easygoing manner, Müller's subordinates described him as "an outspoken, vulgar character" (*ein ausgesprochener Landsknechtstyp*).²⁰⁵ Müller, the former Bereichskommandoführer of Nikopol in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, had a background that was eerily similar to Siebert's. Like Siebert, Müller had received an SS commission during the early 1930s and served as an SD officer before his supervisors seconded him to the VoMi in 1939.²⁰⁶ Müller also had participated in all of Hoffmeyer's major Eastern European Volksdeutsche resettlement operations during 1939 and 1940.²⁰⁷

Müller began his tenure in Transnistria by cleaning house. He lambasted his new subordinates' complacency. Müller warned them that, amid total war, up to two-thirds of the unit's staff might be removed from their cushy occupation jobs and sent to the front.²⁰⁸ Müller denounced the evils of personal enrichment: "the longer that one is tied to a particular locale, the more one acquires. To speak about private property is in most cases nonsense [*Quatsch*]. It is uncomradely to live 'luxuriously' while a recently transferred comrade has only the bare necessities."²⁰⁹ Müller likewise signaled that he was aware that Sonderkommando R personnel had embezzled some of the unit's funds and he threatened to punish the culprits.²¹⁰ Financial improprieties were not Müller's only concerns. He also ordered all Sonderkommando R members to report venereal disease.²¹¹

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

202 *Ibid.*

203 Aussage von H. S., March 17, 1966, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2693, 142.

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

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

206 SS Offizier Akte Erwin Müller, NARA, RG 242, A3343 SSO-328A, 1105B, 1110.

207 *Ibid.*, 1216.

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

209 *Ibid.*

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

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

Müller dramatically reorganized Transnistria's Bereichskommandos. During June 1943, Müller cut the number of Bereichskommandos in Transnistria from eighteen to twelve,²¹² eliminating Bereichskommandos in Bischofsfeld, Halbstadt, Janovka, Lichtenfeld, Mannheim, and Marienburg, and expanded the geographical boundaries of remaining Bereichskommandos to compensate. In part, this move made good Müller's earlier warnings that the demands of total war would necessitate freeing up personnel for combat service.²¹³ It was also a convenient opportunity for Müller to sack corrupt, inefficient, and incompetent personnel. Eisenreich's unceremonious dismissal, for example, coincided with Müller's decision to shutter Mannheim's Bereichskommando.²¹⁴ Eisenreich, originally an SS noncommissioned officer assigned to Sonderkommando R, had received both his command and his commission as an SS-Hauptsturmführer only on March 1, 1943, a few days shy of his fiftieth birthday.²¹⁵ Eisenreich's perpetual intoxication, incompetence, and indiscrete extramarital liaison with a DRK nurse were sufficiently spectacular, even by Sonderkommando R's low standards, that his own staff requested his removal after only six weeks. When Müller summoned him to a scheduled Bereichskommandoführer conference in Odessa to account for himself, Eisenreich inexplicably appeared a day late. Müller relieved Eisenreich in April 1943, transferring him back to Stahnsdorf.²¹⁶ Eisenreich's command disappeared a few weeks later. Back in Germany, Eisenreich's superiors bounced him from one dead-end posting to another until March 1944, when the Reich Criminal Police Office (Reichskriminalpolizeiamt) in Auschwitz arrested him for accepting bribes and stealing state property. The SS stripped Eisenreich of his commission the following month.²¹⁷ Müller was, no doubt, happy to reshuffle Bereichskommandos to rid himself of troublesome subordinates.

Müller took two additional steps to stem Sonderkommando R's rampant brutality against local Volksdeutsche. First, he did something that his predecessor apparently never attempted – he simply ordered his subordinates to stop abusing area Volksdeutsche. On March 21, 1943, Müller warned his

212 Protokol doprosa/A. M. G., September 20, 1944, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2902, 56. Einheit FP. Nr. 10 528 B.K. XI/An den Herrn Präfekten Oberst Leonidas Popp, Beresovca, August 9, 1943, USHMM, RG-31.004M, Reel 18, Fond 2361, Opis 1, Ed. Hr. 70, 67.

213 Protokol doprosa/A. M. G., September 20, 1944, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2902, 56–57.

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

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

216 Aussage von F. B., November 27, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 211–212.

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

staff that area Volksdeutsche were not to be mistreated. Müller emphasized that “the education and maintenance of the ethnic Germans is a duty that necessitates the fullest attention of the responsible SS officers and NCOs.”²¹⁸ Müller reminded his men that “we will have won no man over to us or the ideas of our Führer with poor and uncomradely treatment.”²¹⁹ He underscored his order the following August, promising that “starting today every beating that comes to Oberführer [Hoffmeyer’s] attention will be punished harshly.”²²⁰ Müller threatened that the responsible staff member would have to travel to Kiev to face Hoffmeyer’s wrath personally.²²¹

Second, Müller created an ethnic German concentration camp under his control to centralize responsibility for disciplining Volksdeutsche offenders. This initiative grew out of earlier Sonderkommando R efforts to halt Bereichskommandoführer from summarily executing Volksdeutsche in rural Transnistria.²²² Within a month of assuming command, Müller eroded the authority of the unit’s mid- and low-ranking members still further. On April 3, 1943, Müller ordered SS-Untersturmführer Walter Nadolny, the local Bereichskommandoführer based in Johannesfeld (Figure 5.3), to create a concentration camp for 100 Volksdeutsche inmates.²²³ Nadolny remodeled a large, eighty-meter by seven-meter building, which had been a prewar communal dormitory.²²⁴ Local laborers constructed between eight and ten cells, each designed to house up to ten prisoners. The facility also contained a kitchen and mess hall.²²⁵ According to German Sonderkommando R personnel and local Volksdeutsche, the unit recycled construction materials to remodel the dormitory from the warehouse complex in Dalnik, where the Romanian military had burned tens of thousands of Jews to death a year and a half earlier.²²⁶ Nadolny completed this so-called penal reeducation camp (*Straferziehungslager*) in a mere three weeks.²²⁷ The facility opened in late April 1943, when Müller ordered the transfer of all ethnic German prisoners held locally at Bereichskommandos throughout Transnistria to

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

219 *Ibid.*

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

221 *Ibid.*

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

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

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

225 *Ibid.*

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

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



Figure 5.3. Harvest Festival Celebration (Erntedankfest), Johannesfeld, 1943. *Source:* LAV NRW W, Q 234 Staatsanwaltschaft Dortmund, Zentralstelle Nr. 2726.

Johannesfeld.²²⁸ There, under Selbstschutz guard, Volksdeutsche inmates labored on the town's remaining collective farm until they completed the sentences that Müller and his staff in Landau now imposed.²²⁹

Müller's efforts to control his subordinates and to standardize punishments for area ethnic Germans in mid-1943 merely centralized his staff's brutality. Anecdotally, Müller's initiatives reduced some of the indiscriminate German violence against area Volksdeutsche. That Müller reemphasized his earlier ban on beating local Volksdeutsche in August 1943 suggests that the brutality continued, but a decline in postwar testimony references to assaults after mid-1943 suggests that his policies achieved some success. Beginning in 1943, however, both the severity of punishments that the unit meted out to Volksdeutsche and the Johannesfeld concentration camp's prisoner population mushroomed. The German defeat at Stalingrad precipitated both changes. First, as German victory appeared increasingly doubtful, some local Volksdeutsche began to question the Nazi enterprise. Ethnic Germans who

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

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

unwisely did so publicly or who were denounced by neighbors for private reservations found themselves imprisoned in Johannesfeld.²³⁰ And second, as German military fortunes declined, Sonderkommando R's staff imbued any perceived ethnic German recalcitrance with still greater political connotations and the SS increased punishments accordingly. During 1942, Bereichskommandos addressed informally petty crimes such as unauthorized butchering, illegal garbage burning, or black marketeering. Beginning in mid-1943, however, Sonderkommando R's headquarters began sentencing these comparatively petty ethnic German offenders to lengthy prison sentences in Johannesfeld.²³¹ Although the Johannesfeld concentration camp standardized penalties for ethnic German offenders, with the Nazi regime's worsening military fortunes, it enabled Sonderkommando R to punish ethnic Germans who were growing doubtful about the Third Reich's future.

Sonderkommando R also used the Johannesfeld concentration camp to house Red Army prisoners of war whom it exploited for forced labor. During the occupation's first six months, Sonderkommando R employed few, if any, Red Army POWs as forced laborers. During February 1942, for example, Bereichskommando XIV in Worms requested that the Romanian prefect for Berezovka collect a half-dozen Red Army POWs whom the Bereichskommando's staff had captured.²³² By 1943, both demographic realities and the SS's insatiable appetite for manpower prompted Sonderkommando R to deploy Soviet POWs as forced laborers. The Waffen-SS's conscription campaigns during 1942 and early 1943 had exacerbated the shortage of local ethnic German men. Evidence concerning Sonderkommando R's dependence on Red Army POW labor is limited. It is, however, evident that the unit incarcerated Soviet POWs in the Johannesfeld concentration camp, where they worked alongside ethnic Germans on the collective farm.²³³ Both Volksdeutsche inmates and Red Army POWs shared the final episode of Sonderkommando R's brutality. During March 1944, on the eve of the German retreat, Sonderkommando R closed the Johannesfeld concentration camp. The unit released ethnic German "minor criminals" and permitted them to join evacuation transports for the Warthegau. Ethnic Germans whom the unit regarded as serious offenders and the few surviving suspected Volksdeutsche "communists" remained in Johannesfeld along with

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

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

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

233 Aussage von H. B., September 8, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 270–271.

Sonderkommando R's forced laborers. After the main evacuation transport departed, the local Selbstschutz shot the remaining inmates on SS orders.²³⁴ Müller's reforms channeled, but never eliminated, the unit's use of violence as a panacea to the problem of supposedly uncooperative local residents.

THE RETREAT

Sonderkommando R's Volksdeutsche project in Transnistria faded with German military fortunes. Unlike the campaign's first eighteen months, when German forces and their allies penetrated deep into the Soviet Union, the year 1943 was marked by defeat. The German Sixth Army's destruction at Stalingrad early that year was followed by a failed Kursk offensive. Between late August and October 1943, the Third and Fourth Ukrainian Fronts advanced to Nikopol and the Dnieper River's banks. Despite clear evidence by early 1943 that the German position in the Soviet Union was increasingly untenable, Hoffmeyer refused to evacuate. Rather than concede defeat, Sonderkommando R's senior leaders maintained that Transnistria could still be held and directed Bereichskommandoführer in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine to relocate ethnic Germans from German-occupied Ukraine to Transnistria, where the German military was beginning to usurp Romanian control.²³⁵ Typical of Sonderkommando R's increasingly fanciful plans, Hoffmeyer ordered his subordinates in Transnistria to prepare quarters for thousands of Volksdeutsche from the Crimea and Halbstadt (a settlement in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine).²³⁶ Romanian authorities in Transnistria had a soberer assessment of their losing war against the Soviet Union. Having witnessed their Third and Fourth Armies' defeat at Stalingrad earlier that year, in November 1943, they began to evacuate.²³⁷ Hoffmeyer grumbled to the German military about the prematurity of the Romanian flight.²³⁸ Having invested so much time and energy in mobilizing the largest population of Soviet ethnic Germans under Nazi control, Hoffmeyer and his subordinates were loath to abandon their Volksdeutsche enterprise in Transnistria, particularly when doing so meant that Sonderkommando R's German personnel would be freed for combat.

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

235 G.C. & C.S. Air and Military History, Vol. XIII, The German Police, c. 1945, BNA, HW 16, Piece 63, 222.

236 German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 6th February–8th March 1943, March 7, 1943, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 5.

237 Völkl, *Transnistrien und Odessa*, 96–97.

238 Dallin, *Odessa*, 239.

Not until early 1944, when the Red Army penetrated into central Ukraine, recaptured Kiev, and threatened Germany's rail and road connections with Transnistria did the VoMi acknowledge reality.²³⁹ Hoffmeyer still dawdled. Only in early March 1944, with the Red Army poised to retake Nikolaev on the Bug River's left bank, did Hoffmeyer permit Transnistria's evacuation.²⁴⁰ In coordination with the Race and Settlement Main Office's SS-Obergruppenführer Richard Hildebrandt, Hoffmeyer began to transfer Transnistria's ethnic Germans to the Warthegau, where they again could serve as demographic building blocks for German territorial expansion.²⁴¹

The brutality of Sonderkommando R's two-and-a-half-year rule over Transnistria's ethnic Germans also typified its retreat. Emulating the Red Army's 1941 scorched-earth withdrawal from southern Ukraine, Sonderkommando R denuded Transnistria of its German-speakers and whatever else it could relocate to German-occupied Poland. Most local Volksdeutsche eagerly awaited evacuation. With memories of the bloody Soviet retreat from southern Ukraine still fresh and aware of their own privilege and complicity during the German occupation, most Volksdeutsche understood the threat posed by the imminent return of Soviet power. Unsure that it could depend on individual Volksdeutsche initiative to clear Transnistria of German-speakers, Sonderkommando R threatened reluctant ethnic Germans who failed to register for evacuation.²⁴²

Retreating at the eleventh hour, Sonderkommando R's escape routes from Transnistria were limited. At the beginning of March 1944 it evacuated a small number of ethnic Germans to Łódź by rail across a German-controlled Dniester River bridgehead. When the Red Army's advance cut this artery, Sonderkommando R was reduced to transporting the region's Volksdeutsche refugees overland by truck, wagon, and foot through Bessarabia and northern Bukovina. Hoffmeyer simply lost track of the more than 70,000 ethnic Germans who crossed the Dniester River during March and April 1944. Owing to poor planning and inadequate sanitation en route, many Volksdeutsche evacuees became ill. Sonderkommando R established temporary headquarters in Galați in eastern Romania to corral its increasingly disorganized Volksdeutsche transports. There, in consultation with

239 German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 2 Jan–20 Feb 1944, March 14, 1944, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, 3–4.

240 German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 1st March–9th April 1944, April 14, 1944, 1944, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6.

241 *Ibid.*

242 Aussage von J. G., July 30, 1962, BAL, B162/2297, 39. Aussage von L. L., October 15, 1963, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213/12 Staatsanwaltschaft Landgericht NSG 0589–002, Band 4, 668.

the Antonescu regime, Hoffmeyer drew on the playbook that he had developed during earlier Volksdeutsche resettlement campaigns in south-eastern Europe. As the VoMi had in 1940, Hoffmeyer sent more than 100,000 Volksdeutsche by steamer up the Danube to Belgrade, where they proceeded to German-occupied Poland.²⁴³ Hoffmeyer also dispatched a smaller ethnic German group along one of the Wehrmacht's primary supply lines overland to southeastern Hungary, where VoMi officials and the German Red Cross received the Volksdeutsche refugees and forwarded them to the Warthegau.²⁴⁴ By the end of May 1944, the VoMi had relocated most Volksdeutsche from southeastern Hungary to German-occupied Poland. With the last of southern Ukraine's Volksdeutsche in the Reich, the VoMi decommissioned Sonderkommando R at its suburban Berlin headquarters in early July 1944.²⁴⁵

The war's final ten months were grim for the German former personnel of Sonderkommando R and for Transnistria's erstwhile Volksdeutsche residents. Hoffmeyer, whose performance during the evacuation Himmler praised "with my full recognition and thanks," returned to Romania heading a special SS unit to defend the Ploiești oil fields.²⁴⁶ Staffed with many of his former subordinates from Sonderkommando R – some of whom had served under Hoffmeyer since 1939 – this new unit arrived in Romania in mid-July 1944. During his brief deployment, Hoffmeyer did little more than irk his superior, Hildebrandt, who also served as the Higher SS- and Police Leader Black Sea (Höhere SS- und Polizeiführer Schwarze Meer). Hildebrandt complained vociferously about Hoffmeyer's rudeness and insubordination.²⁴⁷ Shortly after Hoffmeyer's forces arrived in Romania, Soviet military pressure toppled Ion Antonescu and with him Romania's alliance with Germany. The new Romanian government declared war on Germany and detained captured German personnel, including Hoffmeyer and his subordinates, as POWs. The Romanian military held Hoffmeyer and many of Sonderkommando R's former senior and midlevel commanders, interning them in Craiova. There, Hoffmeyer and some of his compatriots

243 Extract from GPD 2650 No. 1 Traffic: 22.4.44, April 30, 1944, BNA, HW 16, Piece 69, 1. German Police Activities in the Soviet Union, Summary Covering the Period of 1st–30th May 1944, June 5, 1944, BNA, HW 16, Piece 6, Part 2, 7.

244 G.C. & C.S. Air and Military History, Vol. XIII, The German Police, c.1945, BNA, HW 16, Piece 63, 222.

245 *Ibid.*, 231.

246 Der Reichführer-SS an SS-Obergruppenführer Lorenz, June 28, 1944, in SS Offizier Akte Horst Hoffmeyer, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SSO-109A, 1465.

247 Abschrift/Aktenvermerk/über Rücksprache Obergruppenführer u. General d. Pol. Hildebrandt mit SS-Brigadeführer u. General Major d. Pol. Hoffmeyer, July 24, 1944, in SS Offizier Akte Horst Hoffmeyer, NARA, RG 242, A3343, SSO-109A, 1430–1431.

committed suicide with pistols that they had smuggled past their Romanian guards.²⁴⁸ The Romanians turned some of Sonderkommando R's surviving former officers over to SMERSH (Smert' Shpionam, Death to Spies), which interrogated them.²⁴⁹ After a speedy trial, Soviet forces executed some of the SS officers and repatriated a handful of them to West Germany only during the 1950s.²⁵⁰

After arriving in German-occupied Poland, ethnic Germans from Transnistria fared little better. Housed in often-primitive VoMi resettlement camps near Łódź, Volksdeutsche from southern Ukraine underwent further SS ethnic classification.²⁵¹ The SS finally registered Transnistria's Volksdeutsche according to the Deutsche Volksliste's criteria. The consequences of receiving permanent Volksdeutsche status became immediately apparent to the Black Sea Germans, as the Waffen-SS drafted virtually all able-bodied men. Many of them perished during the war's final months. Soviet authorities captured thousands of Transnistria's former ethnic Germans in Waffen-SS uniform and deported them to special NKVD penal camps in Central Asia, where they faced secret trials and executions. A similar future awaited the region's former Volksdeutsche whom Allied forces captured and forcibly repatriated to the Soviet Union during 1945. Ethnic German civilians also faced compulsory return to the Soviet Union. During late 1944, with the Red Army advancing through central Poland, many recently arrived Black Sea Germans fled west to avoid capture. Soviet authorities deported many former ethnic German residents whom they captured to "special settlements" in the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic. Volksdeutsche who avoided the Red Army filtered into the Allied occupation zones of Germany. A handful of Black Sea Germans, many of whom were among the most heavily implicated in the mass killing of Jews in the occupied Soviet Union, later applied for Displaced Persons status and moved to North America, where, with varying degrees of success, they avoided postwar detection.²⁵² Most Black Sea Germans, however, remained in what would become the Federal Republic of Germany and, despite maintaining *Heimat* organizations, such as the Territorial Association of Germans

248 Aussage von A. H., April 22, 1966, BAL, B162/2306, 91.

249 See, for example, Protokol doprosa/A. M. G., September 20, 1944, LAV NRW W Q 234 StA Dortmund, Nr. 2902, 28.

250 Aussage von A. P. W., February 20, 1968, BAL, B162/2309, 218–219.

251 For a discussion of conditions in these facilities see Valdis O. Lumans, "A Reassessment of Volksdeutsche and Jews in the Volhynia-Galicia-Narew Resettlement," in *The Impact of Nazism: New Perspectives on the Third Reich and its Legacy*, eds. Alan Steinweis and Daniel Rogers (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 81–99.

252 See, for example, Johannes Volk. CM-1 File for Johannes Volk, February 24, 1949, USHMM, ITS Digital Archive, CM/1 Files Germany, 3.2.1.1, 79891081–79891083.

from Russia (*Landsmannschaft der Deutschen aus Russland*), integrated, somewhat uneasily, into postwar West Germany.

CONCLUSION

Following *Sonderkommando R*'s winter 1941–1942 killing campaign, the VoMi launched its Nazification project in Transnistria's *Volksdeutsche* communities in earnest. Without competing German occupation authorities and with weak Romanian allies, the VoMi could reorganize the Black Sea Germans into the militarized, Germanophone, agricultural communities with which Himmler anticipated repopulating conquered Soviet territory. Unbridled by concerns for German domestic opinion, *Sonderkommando R* killed the Jewish spouses and "mixed race" children of *Volksdeutsche* and suppressed the Protestant and Catholic churches, measures that the Nazis dared not attempt in the Reich during wartime. The *Volksgemeinschaft* in Transnistria was one that the SS created in its own image.

Which area inhabitants were to participate in the SS's heady designs remained as convoluted in 1942 as it had a year earlier. That southern Ukraine's militiamen had embraced mass murder during winter 1941–1942 heartened the SS and, at least for time, blazed a trail out of Transnistria's ethnic classification quagmire. *Sonderkommando R* not only marshaled these willing participants in genocide into an effective fighting force; it also admitted them to the Nazi racial community. Membership in the *Volksgemeinschaft* afforded local residents material privileges, including access to murdered Jews' clothing, which the SS transported to Transnistria from occupied Poland. To ensure that these newly minted *Volksdeutsche* maintained the appropriate National Socialist orientation, *Sonderkommando R* suppressed the Church, to the extent that it was able, and introduced competing National Socialist educational and propaganda initiatives.

Sonderkommando R's mission to remake Transnistria's *Volksdeutsche* settlements ran aground during 1942. Its realization that local residents continued to hide local Jews, *Mischlinge*, and "communists" blurred the boundaries of Germanness almost as soon as the SS had drawn them into the wake of mass murder. In assisting their Jewish spouses and mixed race family members, Transnistria's *Volksdeutsche* behaved no differently than the Nazi regime believed that most Germans would have had Nazi authorities targeted those groups in the Reich. Nevertheless, amid *Sonderkommando R*'s deep skepticism about the racial and political reliability of Transnistria's residents, the continued existence of these targeted groups confirmed VoMi suspicions about local *Volksdeutsche*. Hoffmeyer's subordinates not

only murdered the handful of surviving Jews, “mixed race” individuals, and “communists,” but used their continued survival as a pretext for snuffing out perceived – and largely imaginary – ethnic German resistance. With minimal oversight from their superiors, local SS commanders tormented their Volksdeutsche charges for much of 1942. Abuses against local individuals, whom the SS intended to become the demographic foundations for German dominance in the conquered Soviet Union, reached such proportions that Hoffmeyer acted. The VoMi reshuffled Sonderkommando R’s senior leadership and created a concentration camp to standardize the unit’s terror apparatus. The apex of VoMi rule in Transnistria’s ethnic German communities was brief. During early 1944, Sonderkommando R withdrew ahead of advancing Soviet forces. Sonderkommando R’s ambitions of mobilizing Transnistria’s Volksdeutsche as a demographic bulwark of Nazi rule in the occupied Soviet Union disintegrated during a chaotic retreat.

Like their erstwhile German rulers, Transnistria’s former residents were left to face the consequences of their involvement in the Nazi project in voluntary or forced exile. Why did so many area residents participate the Third Reich’s *völkisch* enterprise in southern Ukraine? And, perhaps more importantly, why did so many of them take part in the Holocaust with such apparent enthusiasm? The book’s final chapter addresses these questions.

The Black Sea Germans and the Holocaust

The story of Transnistria's Volksdeutsche communities under Nazi rule has focused on the area's German occupiers and administrators. It was, after all, the world that they made. This study closes by analyzing what motivated the area's inhabitants to take part in the Nazi project. Why did so many of them eagerly participate in the Holocaust after mere months under Nazi rule?

Before answering this question, one must address the challenges to recovering the contemporary motivations of local residents. Wartime information is limited. Area residents, many of whom remained illiterate decades after the war, wrote relatively few letters and rarely kept diaries. Much of what they composed failed to survive the war and even less of it is preserved in archives. The lens of the Nazi racial agenda invariably filtered wartime German observations of area residents. Most relevant information comes from the postwar testimony of Transnistria's former inhabitants. The postwar context shaped how they and others recalled their motivations. By admitting that Nazi racial ideology had driven their participation in mass murder, they would have acknowledged their criminal liability, which would have led to prosecution in 1960s West Germany and perhaps even death in the Soviet Union. Using these sources to recover wartime motivations thus requires the researcher to excavate implausible postwar assertions for what animated local residents at the time.

A careful reading of wartime and postwar records suggests that many of Transnistria's ethnic Germans became attached to key aspects of the Nazi agenda, and especially its anti-Semitism, only incrementally during the occupation. When German forces first arrived in Transnistria, area ethnic Germans, unlike many gentiles in the Polish-Ukrainian borderlands, had not spontaneously attacked their Jewish neighbors. As local residents grasped that the Nazi search for the "Judeo-Bolshevik" enemy could be exploited

to settle prewar rivalries, they denounced some local Jews and gentiles to the Germans. Yet they identified other Jews, non-Germans, and former local Soviet officials as fellow sufferers under Stalin and presented them as *Volksdeutsche* to the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle* (Ethnic German Liaison Office or VoMi) to protect them from violence and material deprivation. By the eve of mass murder, local residents had not imbibed the Nazi agenda; they had hijacked it.

To understand the ideological transformation of Transnistria's *Volksdeutsche* perpetrators, it is valuable first to explore their backgrounds. A collective biography based on wartime records and the postwar testimony of some of the most heavily implicated militiamen suggests that, as a group, they differed little in socioeconomic terms from their non-German neighbors. *Sonderkommando R*'s militiamen were largely prototypical residents of rural Soviet Ukraine. *Selbstschutz* members, however, shared one common characteristic: virtually all of them had suffered under Soviet rule. As dispossessed farmers, the VoMi's militiamen, like most of the region's ethnic Germans, knew the evils of Soviet rule.

A careful comparison of the militia's initial deployment at the Bogdanovka collective farm during December 1941 with the much-studied inaugural killings that Reserve Order Police Battalion 101 perpetrated in occupied Poland the following year highlights the important situational pressures that animated the militiamen. Although anti-Semitism undoubtedly played a role, during *Sonderkommando R*'s initial killing operations it was secondary to social psychological factors, including a tendency to group conformity and obedience to authority. The specific historical context in which Transnistria's *Volksdeutsche* started to kill accentuated both of these pressures.

After beginning to kill, other motivations, including theft and anti-Semitism, became more pronounced. As elsewhere in occupied Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the prospect of stealing Jewish-owned property proved irresistible to many gentiles and constituted a key reason for participation in the Holocaust. For Hitler's new beneficiaries in Transnistria, who, as ethnic Germans, had access to the Third Reich's largesse, genocide's material rewards were unparalleled. Unlike other perpetrator groups, ethnic German killers could use mass killing as an admission ticket to the *Volksgemeinschaft*. As the killings accelerated during early 1942, *Sonderkommando R*'s propaganda also gained traction. Transnistria's *Volksdeutsche* had experienced Soviet brutality. The Germans simply needed to persuade area *Volksdeutsche* that murdering Jews would advance their struggle against Bolshevism. This leap proved frighteningly easy for many

Volksdeutsche because it justified their theft of Jews' property. That the conspiracies of silence that had hidden local Jews for months crumbled during mid-1942 speaks to the potency of Sonderkommando R's propaganda. In Transnistria, the VoMi won local residents over to National Socialism, at least temporarily, precisely because so many of them had participated in the Holocaust.

ORDINARY MILITIAMEN: A COLLECTIVE BIOGRAPHY OF
BEREICHSKOMMANDO XI'S SELBSTSCHUTZ

Who were the men who served in Sonderkommando R's Selbstschutz? A collective biography of militiamen in Bereichskommando XI, the most heavily implicated and best-documented Selbstschutz unit in Transnistria, provides a partial answer. Identifying their members is challenging. No roster survived the war and Sonderkommando R does not appear to have maintained individual personnel files for its militiamen. The ad hoc fashion in which Hartung mustered the Selbstschutz during late 1941 and early 1942 suggests that the Germans may not have known precisely who was in the militia. Nevertheless, it is possible to reconstruct a partial roster for Bereichskommando XI's Selbstschutz during winter 1941–1942 from the accused militiamen whom witnesses, victims, and suspected perpetrators implicated in postwar interviews.¹ This approach is admittedly problematic. It assumes that testimony taken years after the events is accurate enough to identify individual perpetrators. For the purposes of criminal justice in West Germany these statements were often insufficient evidence for conviction. Historians, by contrast, do not need to achieve judicial certainty and can operate in the realm of probability. That interviewees, interrogated years and vast distances apart by very different investigators with divergent procedural rules and agendas, frequently identified the same perpetrators bolsters the likelihood that these claims are accurate. Moreover, that this information corresponds very closely to wartime Volksdeutsche registration records adds additional support to the veracity of these postwar statements. Membership alone in Bereichskommando XI's Selbstschutz admittedly illuminates little about a given militiaman's role in the killings. The scale of the murder operations that Hartung supervised in Bereichskommando XI relative to the size of the local militia meant that virtually all militiamen participated. Nevertheless, aside from anecdotal evidence, it is difficult to determine

1 This is precisely the approach that West German investigators followed. *Einstellungsverfügung*, December 27, 1999, Staatsarchiv Münster, Nr. 2812, 11–18.

whether a particular militiaman killed only when carefully supervised by his German superiors or was an enthusiastic mass murderer who required little encouragement. Although far from ideal, aggregating accused militiamen implicated in West German and Soviet investigative records provides the most fruitful way to analyze the region's rank-and-file perpetrators, given the absence of comprehensive wartime records about Bereichskommando XI's militia membership.

Based on postwar testimony it is possible to locate immigration records that the SS-run Einwandererzentrale (Central Immigration Office, or EWZ) generated in occupied Poland for ethnic Germans who had fled Transnistria with Sonderkommando R during 1944.² EWZ screened Volksdeutsche resettlers to German-occupied Poland for their racial suitability as members of the Third Reich's planned demographic bulwark in the region. SS intake officers interviewed ethnic Germans as they appeared at EWZ offices, compiling biographical information about the Volksdeutsche that would facilitate their racial classification according to the Deutsche Volkliste's four-tiered categories. The intake records, including card indices as well as more detailed, but rarer, complete application files (*Anträge*), are organized by country of origin.³ Particular care must be used in reconstructing biographical information from these records. The Nazis collected this information for racial categorization, and analysis must account for the SS's racial worldview. Because SS personnel throughout occupied Poland used an array of forms to create these records, they do not provide uniform information. Classifications of occupation, attitude, and particularly "racial purity" of Volksdeutsche often reflected the whims of SS intake officers rather than systematic categorization guidelines. Notwithstanding these limitations, these records frequently provide the only surviving wartime biographical information about ethnic German men who likely participated in Bereichskommando XI's winter 1941–1942 mass killing campaign.

Using EWZ materials to recover biographical information about Selbstschutz members presents two obstacles – one related to the collection's organization and the second a product of naming practices in southern Ukraine's Volksdeutsche villages. This massive collection is organized alphabetically by male head of household and it is infeasible to search for ethnic

2 On the EWZ, see Andreas Strippel, "Race, Regional Identity and *Völksgemeinschaft*: Naturalization of Ethnic German Resettlers in the Second World War by the Einwandererzentrale/Central Immigration Office of the SS," in *Heimat, Region, and Empire: Spatial Identities under National Socialism*, edited by Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann and Maiken Umbach (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 185–198.

3 Although there is significant overlap among these three collections, records for some individuals appear in only one of them.

Germans by geographical area. As Selbstschutz membership did not constitute a criterion that EWZ intake officers used in determining the racial status of a particular ethnic German, intake personnel documented earlier militia service haphazardly.⁴ Without searching for individual names, there is no ready way to cull the collection for records about Selbstschutz membership.

Identifying individuals by name is itself difficult because many local ethnic Germans shared only a handful of common names. Within any given town, most residents had one of perhaps a dozen surnames. In most ethnic German settlements relatives frequently shared the same given names.⁵ Sometimes local Volksdeutsche men had virtually identical biographical profiles. Postwar testimony, for example, implicated two different ethnic German men, both named Jakob Thomä, of having served in München's Selbstschutz during its early 1942 shooting deployments. Both of the men were born in 1918, were of similar height and build, and, based on photographs taken of the two men in 1944, shared a strong family resemblance. The only discernible difference between the two men was that they were born two and half weeks apart in December 1918.⁶ Even with information on an individual's age and place of residence, locating EWZ records on accused militiamen is a painstaking process.⁷ Despite these difficulties, it is possible to identify EWZ records for 89, or roughly 30 percent, of the nearly

4 Occasionally SS intake officers noted Selbstschutz membership in narrative personal histories for ethnic Germans. Antrag von Johann Gärtner, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ50, B91, 2878–2904. Antrag von Philipp Obenloch, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ50, G5, 1092–1114. Antrag von Johannes Reichert, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ50, G61, 1618–1640. Antrag von Jakob Thomä, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ57, T75, 2692–2703. In some instances, SS intake officers included Selbstschutz identification cards as proof of identity in naturalization applications. Antrag von Georg Hanecker, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ50, C47, 1988–2016. Antrag von Franz Kniel, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ50, E21, 110–130. Antrag von Peter Mekler, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ50, F44, 626–652. Antrag von Jakob Nuss, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ50, G4, 2156–2184. Antrag von Eduard Redler, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ50, G58, 1198–1224. Antrag von Franz Thomä, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ50, I50, 402–428.

5 In a classic example, Bereichskommando XI was home to four men named Franz Heck, all of whom allegedly participated in shooting operations as part of the militia. E-G Karte von Franz Heck, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ57, L105, 972–980. E-G Karte von Franz Heck, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ57, L105, 984–994. Antrag von Franz Heck, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ50, C56, 2500–2502. E-G Karte von Franz Heck, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ57, L105, 998–1006. Also see E-G Karte von Jakob Feininger, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ57, K56, 1898–1906. E-G Karte von Jakob Feininger, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ57, K56, 1888–1898. E-G Karte von Josef Fröhlich, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ57, K112, 1598–1604. E-G Karte von Josef Fröhlich, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ57, K112, 2182–2184.

6 E-G Karte von Jakob Thomä, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ57, T75, 2692–2703. E-G Karte von Jakob Thomä, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ57, T75, 2704–2718.

7 After the war, accused former militiamen offered wildly divergent and often exculpatory descriptions of the age requirements for Selbstschutz service. The most plausible age cohort called up for militia service appears to have been local men aged 18 to 60. Aussage von J. S., August 13, 1962, BAL, B162/2292, 53.

300 militiamen identified in postwar testimony.⁸ These records paint a vivid if incomplete portrait of Bereichskommando XI's rank-and-file killers.

In occupation, education, and family life, alleged Selbstschutz members differed little from their non-German neighbors. Most accused militiamen worked in agriculture. In 1944, SS intake officers classified as farmers some 70 percent of those who, after the war, stood accused of having been Selbstschutz members.⁹ The SS identified a further 10 percent as agricultural administrators, including collective farm managers and bookkeepers, and roughly 7 percent as former tractor operators. According to EWZ intake officers, skilled laborers, including electricians and barbers, constituted a small but significant minority of 10 percent of the former militiamen. Teachers and students enrolled in higher education courses constituted only 3 percent of suspected perpetrators under Hartung's command. Even accounting for these outliers, militiamen were poorly educated. They had an average 4.3 years of elementary education in local German schools. Six percent of alleged militiamen had no formal schooling and, despite Sonderkommando R's educational initiatives, remained illiterate when SS intake officers registered them in occupied Poland in 1944. They married early and had large families. Based on EWZ records, the mean and median marriage age of alleged Selbstschutz members was twenty-three years old. Ninety-two percent of accused militiamen were married and had, on average, four children. Hartung's militiamen were, in many respects, prototypical rural Soviet residents.

Notwithstanding these similarities, confession distinguished the accused militiamen in Bereichskommando XI from most Soviet citizens. With one exception, all of the accused militiamen in Bereichskommando XI identified in EWZ records were Roman Catholic.¹⁰ Scholars (and Sonderkommando R's leadership) long recognized that the Catholic milieu sometimes immunized Germans against National Socialism. It is, therefore, tempting to

8 Postwar investigative records confirm wartime estimates of the number of militiamen under Hartung's command during early 1942. Whereas Hartung's fellow Bereichskommandoführer Assmann estimated that the former supervised roughly 250 Selbstschutz members, postwar West German and Soviet investigators identified 289 local ethnic German men, whom interviewees implicated conclusively in the mass murder of Jews during the early months of 1942. For a listing of the EWZ records consulted, see Appendix.

9 The SS drew a distinction between *Landwirt* (farmer) and *Landarbeiter* (agricultural laborer). As all ethnic German farmers in the region had been part of collective farms during the 1930s and early 1940s, the basis for this differentiation is unclear. Anecdotally, however, it appears that SS intake personnel may have distinguished agricultural laborers from farmers based on whether the ethnic German could make a strong claim to owning farmland.

10 For the one likely exception see, E-G Karte von Peter Ackermann, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ57, 14, 1386–1396.

highlight Bereichskommando XI's Selbstschutz as a counterexample, underscoring disproportionate Catholic participation in the Holocaust.¹¹ Doing so, however, would grant confession an inappropriate causal role in genocide. First, although almost all militia units were essentially monoconfessional, Selbstschutz membership did not depend on confession. In Transnistria, all ethnic German men aged 18 to 60, Protestants and Catholics alike, served in regionally organized militia units. During the nineteenth century, German-speakers had founded these settlements along strict confessional lines and their descendants' subsequent intermarriage and migration patterns ensured that, on the whole, Transnistria's Volksdeutsche enclaves remained largely confessionally segregated. Sonderkommando R's Selbstschutz units thus reflected the bifurcated religious affiliations of local ethnic Germans.

Second, Sonderkommando R assigned militia units to murder the Jewish deportees not based on confession, but rather on proximity to their Jewish victims. At the Bogdanovka camp, Bereichskommando XI's predominately Catholic militiamen spearheaded the unit's foray into mass murder. Yet confession played no role in their assignment. Bereichskommando XI mobilized its militiamen because of their propinquity to the camp. During the second wave of killing near Berezovka, Sonderkommando R mobilized militia units from Bereichskommandos XI, XIV, and XX – units that were again closest to Romanian deportation destinations. As before, the militiamen's confession played no role.

More so than occupation, education, family structure, or religion, the distinguishing biographical feature of Bereichskommando XI's militiamen was their brutal encounter with Soviet power. Virtually all of Bereichskommando XI's militiamen had suffered during the collectivization of rural Ukraine. Of the suspected militiamen identified in the EWZ materials, roughly a fifth had owned their own farms prior to 1917 and yearned for what they regarded as a golden era of independent agricultural production. Except for the youngest fifth of the militiamen, who were born between 1921 and 1926, all Selbstschutz members under Hartung's command would have remembered the Soviet confiscation of either their or their families' farms between 1929 and 1931. Notwithstanding a handful of ethnic

11 See Ian Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich, Bavaria 1933–1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 331–357. See also Waitman Beorn, "Negotiating Murder: A Panzer Signal Company and the Destruction of the Jews of Peregruznoe, 1942," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 23, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 204–205. By contrast, scholars including Michael Mann have noted a disproportionate number of Catholics in some groups of perpetrators. See Michael Mann, "Were the Perpetrators of Genocide 'Ordinary Men' or 'Real Nazis'? Results from Fifteen Hundred Biographies," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 14, no. 3 (2000): 343–366.

Germans whom Soviet authorities permitted to pursue higher education in cities such as Odessa, beginning in the early 1930s the Soviet state had forced virtually all of Hartung's militiamen to live and work on collective farms.¹² Soviet rule had transformed Bereichskommando XI's Selbstschutz members from prosperous farmers into landless laborers. Soviet policy had, in effect, created class enemies.

For future Selbstschutz members, expropriation began a precipitous decline in living standards. EWZ intake officers failed to keep systematic records about the lives of ethnic Germans under Soviet rule. Anecdotal evidence from these wartime immigration files is nevertheless compelling.

During the 1920s and 1930s, future militiamen suffered poor health and continued harassment by Soviet security forces. Likely owing to the effects of the 1932–1933 famine, some accused members of Bereichskommando XI's Selbstschutz were physically underdeveloped.¹³ According to EWZ data, the militiamen had an average height of five feet six inches (169 centimeters) and an average weight of only 143 pounds (65 kilograms). The latter figure is particularly startling, as the SS took these measurements in 1944, after years of German policy aimed at granting Volksdeutsche privileged access to food. Many future militiamen also suffered from epidemic disease during the 1920s and 1930s. Even allowing for incomplete EWZ records, which probably underrepresented earlier illnesses, 30 percent of the suspected militiamen suffered from serious contagious diseases, such as typhoid and cholera, at some point between 1917 and 1941. No less than one-fifth of the alleged future Selbstschutz members contracted malaria during a mid-1930s epidemic. Although perhaps not exceptionally so in comparison to their non-German neighbors, Soviet rule had been unhealthy for Hartung's future militiamen.

Soviet harassment was a fact of prewar life for Hartung's militiamen. Josef Mayer, an accused militiaman from the town of München, exemplifies the repeated arrests that many of Bereichskommando XI's future Selbstschutz members endured under Soviet rule. As Mayer explained to EWZ intake officers in 1944, during the early 1920s Soviet authorities arrested him twice as a class enemy. In 1924, Soviet security personnel again detained him for having provided an insufficient portion of his harvest to the state. Six years later, in 1930, Soviet officials confiscated what remained of Mayer's

12 Accused Selbstschutz member Michael Ehrmanntraut was a quintessential example of this exception. Antrag von Michael Ehrmanntraut, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ50, B36, 894–910.

13 As West German, let alone Soviet investigators rarely broached the issue of the 1932–1933 famine, fragmentary evidence from postwar testimony suggest that the death toll may have been significant. See, for example, Vernehmungsniederschrift von A. D., July 18, 1962, BAL, B162/2296, 98. Aussage von G. M., October 9, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 11.

land and compelled him to move onto a collective farm. During Ukraine's 1932–1933 famine, Soviet authorities again arrested and imprisoned Mayer for two months for having sold bread on the black market.¹⁴ Economic sabotage,¹⁵ corresponding with friends and relatives in Germany,¹⁶ and fascist espionage¹⁷ were among the most common crimes for which Soviet authorities had arrested Bereichskommando XI's alleged Selbstschutz members. Penalized for these offenses, some future suspected militiamen spent months and even years incarcerated and exiled in the Soviet Union.¹⁸

Although Bereichskommando XI's militiamen bore the brunt of the Soviet security apparatus's wrath, they remained among the lucky ones. Unlike many of their friends and relatives, accused militiamen had escaped permanent deportation to the Soviet interior. According to wartime German estimates, prior to fall 1941 Soviet authorities had deported some 17 percent of Transnistria's Volksdeutsche population – a figure in which male heads of household were overrepresented.¹⁹ The demographic gash that Soviet deportation left in local ethnic German communities was a perpetual reminder of ethnic Germans' precarious position under Soviet rule.

As members of a socioeconomically and increasingly ethnically suspect group, Bereichskommando XI's future militiamen were also largely excluded from advancement opportunities that the Soviet system afforded to other area residents. Soviet discrimination against ethnic Germans is apparent from both circumscribed employment opportunities and a low rate of Soviet military service. Anecdotally, future accused Selbstschutz members found that their ascribed class and ethnic backgrounds stunted their career prospects. Josef Schmidt, an ethnic German teacher from the town of München, was one of the few accused Selbstschutz members to have pursued advanced education. He attended the Agricultural Technical Middle School in Landau from 1930 until 1932 and completed a four-year agricultural mechanization course in Odessa. As Schmidt explained in a handwritten autobiography that he appended to his 1944 German naturalization application, after completing his studies he began work as a technician at Landau's MTS, "but could not stay there long, because they

14 Antrag von Josef Mayer, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ50, F21, 756–800.

15 Antrag von Josef Hirsch, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ50, D8, 1454–1470.

16 Antrag von Josef Gärtner, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ50, B91, 2930–2964.

17 Antrag von Johannes Thomä, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ50, I50, 550–576.

18 E-G Karte von Peter Ackermann, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ57, I4, 1386–1396.

19 Zusammenstellung: der aufgebauten kulturellen Einrichtungen von Sonderkommando 'R,' n.d., NARA, T175/72/2589157, 2589167.

wanted to remove me from the position as a class-enemy element . . . [and] I had to leave the job.”²⁰

Few suspected Selbstschutz members served in the Red Army. Of the suspected militiamen for whom EWZ records exist, only 7 percent had served in the Soviet military during the 1920s and 1930s. To be sure, some Selbstschutz members were Red Army veterans. Johann Fett, an ethnic German militiaman originally from Michailovka, for example, both served in Mongolia during the late 1930s and fought against Finland in 1940.²¹ Nevertheless, presumably because increasing tensions with Nazi Germany during the latter half of the 1930s discouraged the Soviet military from calling up Volksdeutsche, those alleged future Selbstschutz members who did serve in the Red Army almost invariably did so before 1935. Deemed first class and then also national enemies by the Soviet regime prior to 1941, Hartung’s local auxiliaries had been disenfranchised from the Soviet system.

For Bereichskommando XI’s accused Selbstschutz members, the preceding fifteen years of Soviet rule had been disastrous. Virtually all of the alleged militiamen had suffered from collectivization. Members of a once privileged and prosperous minority, during the late 1920s and 1930s, Hartung’s future militiamen had faced Soviet redistributive policies that had not only impoverished them, but had destroyed their traditional socioeconomic order. Like many of their non-German neighbors, Bereichskommando XI’s accused Selbstschutz members had suffered malnutrition and disease because of flawed Soviet agricultural policies. Moreover, as a socioeconomically and, increasingly, as an ethnically suspect population, during the latter half of the 1930s Bereichskommando XI’s accused Selbstschutz members had little chance to integrate into the new Soviet order. Constantly harassed by Soviet security services, denied career opportunities, and largely excluded from the Red Army, Hartung’s suspected militiamen had been deprived of precisely the advancement opportunities that the Soviet system had proffered to other non-Russian minorities. Bereichskommando XI’s killers, like the region’s Volksdeutsche more generally, were Stalin’s outcasts.

THE INITIATION TO GENOCIDE AND SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL PRESSURE

Scholarship on the Holocaust has long attempted to unlock what motivated perpetrators.²² Specialists have argued convincingly that different

20 Lebenslauf des Bürgers Josef Schmidt in Einbürgerungsantrag Josef Schmidt, 1944, NARA, RG 242, A3342, EWZ50, H46, 2330.

21 Protokol doprosa/Fet Ivan, May 18, 1948, USHMM, RG-38.018M, Reel 79, 3749.

22 On the German military, see Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front, 1941–45: German Troops and the Barbarisation of Warfare* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1986); Omer Bartov, *Hitler’s Army: Soldiers,*

constellations of factors shaped the decisions of different perpetrator groups. The explanatory weight that researchers grant to various factors thus varies from one group of killers to another.²³ The prodigious scholarship analyzing the motivations of Holocaust perpetrators has concentrated to a lesser extent on non-German killers. Focused on occupation policy²⁴ and recovering the role of perpetrators from the Soviet Union,²⁵ scholars, with some

Nazis, and War in the Third Reich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Thomas Kühne, *Kameradschaft: die Soldaten des nationalsozialistischen Krieges und das 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006); Waitman Beorn, "Negotiating Murder: A Panzer Signal Company and the Destruction of the Jews of Peregruznoe, 1942," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 23, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 185–213. On the Gestapo, see Robert Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society: Enforcing Racial Policy 1935–1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); Eric A. Johnson, *Nazi Terror: The Gestapo, Jews, and Ordinary Germans* (New York: Basic Books, 2000). On the Order Police, see Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, 2nd ed. (New York: HarperPerennial, 1998); Daniel J. Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996); Edward Westerman, *Hitler's Police Battalions: Enforcing Racial War in the East* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2005). Harold Welzer draws many of his examples from Order Police Battalion 45. Harold Welzer, *Täter: Wie aus ganz normalen Menschen Massenmörder werden* (Frankfurt: S. Fischer Verlag, 2005). On the Einsatzgruppen, see Andrej Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord; Helmut Krausnik, Hitlers Einsatzgruppen: die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges 1938–1942* (Stuttgart: Deutscher Verlags-Anstalt, 1985); Ralf Ogorreck, *Die Einsatzgruppen und die "Genesis der Endlösung"* (Berlin: Metropol, 1996); Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm, *Die Einsatzgruppe A der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD 1941/42* (Frankfurt: P. Lang, 1996). On the Reichssicherheitshauptamt (Reich Security Main Office), see Yaacov Lozowick, *Hitler's Bureaucrats: The Nazi Security Police and the Banality of Evil*, trans. Haim Wätzman (London: Continuum, 2002); Hans Safrian, *Die Eichmann-Männer* (Vienna: Europaverlag, 1993); Michael Wildt, *Generation des Unbedingten: das Führungskorps des Reichssicherheitshauptamtes* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2002). On concentration camp guards, see Tom Segev, *Soldiers of Evil: The Commandants of the Nazi Concentration Camps* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1987); Karin Orth, *Die Konzentrationslager-SS: sozialstrukturelle Analysen und biographische Studien* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2000). More generally, see Michael Mann, "Were the Perpetrators of Genocide 'Ordinary Men' or 'Real Nazis'? Results from Fifteen Hundred Biographies."

23 Browning, "Ideology, Culture, Situation, and Disposition," 66.

24 See, for example, Karel Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*; Christian Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde: Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weißrußland 1941 bis 1944* (Hamburg, Hamburger Edition, 1999); Dieter Pohl, *Nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung in Ostgalizien 1941–1944: Organisation und Durchführung eines staatlichen Massenverbrechens* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1996); Babette Quinkert, *Propaganda und Terror in Weissrusland 1941–1944: die deutsche "geistige" Kriegführung gegen Zivilbevölkerung und Partisanen* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2009); Thomas Sandkühler, "Endlösung" in Galizien: der Judenmord in Ostpolen und die Rettungsinitiativen von Berthold Beitz, 1941–1944 (Bonn: Dietz, 1996).

25 Christoph Dieckmann, *Kooperation und Verbrechen: Formen der "Kollaboration" im östlichen Europa 1939–1945*, vol. 19, Beiträge zur Geschichte des Nationalsozialismus (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003); Bernhard Chiari, *Alltag hinter der Front: Besatzung, Kollaboration und Widerstand in Weissrusland 1941–1944* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1998); Martin Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941–44* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000); Dieter Pohl, "Ukrainische Hilfskräfte beim Mord an den Juden," in *Die Täter der Shoah: fanatische Nationalsozialisten oder ganz normale Deutsche?*, ed. Gerhard Paul (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2002), 205–24. On Soviet Volksdeutsche, see Martin Dean, "Soviet Ethnic Germans and the Holocaust in the Reich Commissariat Ukraine, 1941–1944," in *The Shoah in Ukraine: History, Testimony, Memorialization*, eds. Ray Brandon and Wendy Lower (Bloomington: Indiana University Press in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2008), 248–271. Wendy Lower, "Hitler's 'Garden of Eden' in Ukraine: Nazi Colonialism, Volksdeutsche, and the Holocaust, 1941–44," in *Gray Zones: Ambiguity and Compromise in the Holocaust and Its Aftermath*, eds. Jonathan Petropoulos and John Roth (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 185–204.

exceptions, have infrequently dissected the motivations of this group of local murderers.²⁶ Exploring the motivations of Transnistria's Selbstschutz members expands the geographic focus of this rich vein of research.

Among other motivations, scholars have examined how social psychological pressures shaped interpersonal relations within groups of Holocaust perpetrators and catalyzed mass murder.²⁷ An analysis of the pressures that acted on Hartung's militiamen during their inaugural killing deployment helps explain their participation in the Holocaust. Rather than enumerating all of the social psychological factors that acted upon the militiamen during their first mission, it is useful to focus on two factors that operated exceptionally powerfully on the Selbstschutz members: obedience to authority and pressure to group conformity. A comparison between Bereichskommando XI's ethnic German militiamen with Christopher R. Browning's now paradigmatic reconstruction of Reserve Order Police Battalion 101's first killing action in Józefów, Poland, illustrates how these factors influenced Hartung's militiamen in Transnistria.

The situational pressures to obey murderous orders were far stronger for Hartung's militiamen during their initial deployment than they were for Police Battalion 101 at Józefów the following year. Although Browning draws on the findings of Stanley Milgram's classic study as a partial explanation for Police Battalion 101's initial role in the Holocaust, he identifies two structural discontinuities between the laboratory experiment and the 1942 mass shooting operation.²⁸ Neither of these differences applied in the case of Hartung's militiamen during their first genocidal mission. First, whereas Major Wilhelm Trapp, Police Battalion 101's commanding officer, permitted his subordinates to stand aside without penalty, Hartung ordered all of his militiamen to participate in the shooting.²⁹ Unlike Police Battalion 101's members, Bereichskommando XI's militiamen had no officially sanctioned avenue to avoid participating. Second, unlike Police Battalion 101's initial deployment, in which many of Trapp's men opted not to shoot

26 Dean suggests that social psychological pressures and group dynamics operated on non-German perpetrators in the occupied Soviet Union, but does not elaborate on this observation. Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust*, 76.

27 See, for example, Haney, Craig, Curtis Banks, and Philip Zimbardo, "Interpersonal Dynamics in a Simulated Prison," *International Journal of Criminology and Penology* 1 (1973): 69–97; Fred E. Katz, *Ordinary People and Extraordinary Evil: A Report on the Beguiling of Evil* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993); Herbert C. Kelman and V. Lee Hamilton, *Crimes of Obedience: Toward a Social Psychology of Authority and Responsibility* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989); Leonard S. Newman and Ralph Erber, *Understanding Genocide: The Social Psychology of the Holocaust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Ervin Staub, *The Roots of Evil: The Origins of Genocide and Other Group Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); James Waller, *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

28 Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).

29 Browning, *Ordinary Men*, 2.

when left unsupervised, Hartung's subordinates operated under the watchful eyes of their omnipresent German commanders, who cajoled them to continue killing throughout the operations.³⁰ The conditions under which Bereichskommando XI deployed its militiamen during its initial mass shooting more closely paralleled Milgram's experiment than did Police Battalion 101's first killing deployment at Józefów.

Beyond these structural differences, Bereichskommando XI's militiamen were biographically conditioned to comply with authority in ways that differed fundamentally from either Police Battalion 101's personnel or Milgram's American subjects. Hartung's militiamen, like Selbstschutz members generally, were more likely to obey their superiors because they understood the potential danger of directly challenging state authority. Both Soviet and Nazi rulers had reinforced this lesson. Under the Soviets, local administrators had targeted area ethnic Germans, first as class enemies and then as members of an ethnically suspect minority. This experience left Hartung's militiamen with little doubt about the hazards of challenging authority. If prewar encounters with Soviet power were an insufficient illustration, then the Red Army's vicious retreat through southern Ukraine during summer 1941 – a withdrawal that precipitated at least the temporary deportation of many area ethnic German men – provided the militiamen with a vivid reminder of the state's capacity to harm its uncooperative subjects.

This is not to suggest that the only lesson about authority that local Volksdeutsche learned under the Soviets was slavish compliance. Under Soviet rule, local ethnic Germans often withheld cooperation. Flight to another Volksdeutsche settlement was a particularly popular method of evasion.³¹ Although local ethnic Germans had often resisted Soviet authorities, direct confrontation was a tactic that, from personal experience, most Volksdeutsche knew was prone to disaster.

The violent German administration of Transnistria's Volksdeutsche settlements reinforced this lesson. German authorities were no less brutal than their Soviet predecessors and introduced violence that was generally more public. Einsatzgruppe D's murderous sweep through Transnistria and Sonderkommando R's continued campaign against local suspected racial and political enemies provided area ethnic Germans with stark examples of Nazi violence. That both units had targeted area Volksdeutsche deemed by their neighbors or determined by German authorities to be Jews or communists underscored that area ethnic Germans could become targets of Nazi

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 176.

³¹ Aussage von G. K., February 16, 1962, BAL, B162/2291, 61. Aussage von P. W., January 31, 1962, BAL, B162/2291, 168.

violence on behavioral and racial grounds. Although, during summer and fall 1941, Nazi violence focused on larger Volksdeutsche settlements, where both Einsatzgruppe D and Sonderkommando R operated, ethnic German residents in smaller hamlets, including the villages that Bereichskommando XI administered, undoubtedly knew that the Germans had targeted local residents. If anything, the events of the preceding six months had illustrated to local Volksdeutsche the lengths to which state authorities – both Soviet and Nazi – would go to achieve their ends and the possible consequences for local residents who opposed those aims.

How severe Hartung's militiamen judged the possible penalties for failing to obey their murderous orders is unclear. As scholars have long noted, after the war many accused German perpetrators defended their actions by claiming that they feared that they would have suffered dire and perhaps lethal punishment for failing to participate in the Holocaust. As no defendant has demonstrated that he or she risked death for failing to carry out murderous orders, specialists have aptly dismissed these postwar claims as prevarication.³² In light of this well-supported scholarly consensus, it is difficult to believe similar assertions that suspected militiamen and their relatives made to both West German and Soviet investigators.³³ In at least one permutation of Hartung's orders, before the militia's inaugural shooting deployment, he threatened to execute any militiamen who failed to participate.³⁴ Absent wartime records that demonstrate conclusively that Sonderkommando R shot Volksdeutsche militiamen for failing to murder Jews, a handful of postwar statements is insufficient evidence that German authorities explicitly threatened their ethnic German subordinates. Nevertheless, given the brutality of German rule in the region, it is possible that local Volksdeutsche understood this threat to be tacit. If Einsatzgruppe D and Sonderkommando R had been prepared to gun down ethnic Germans for alleged prewar collaboration with Soviet officials and would later do so for petty offenses, then what might have happened had ethnic German militiamen refused to obey Sonderkommando R's panicked orders to begin murdering Jews – an operation predicated on stopping the threat of an

32 As Browning notes, "in the past forty-five years no defense attorney or defendant in any of the hundreds of postwar trials has been able to document a single case in which refusing to obey an order to kill unarmed civilians resulted in the allegedly inevitable dire punishment." Browning, *Ordinary Men*, 170. Also see Herbert Jäger, *Verbrechen unter totalitärer Herrschaft. Studien zur nationalsozialistischen Gewaltkriminalität* (Olten: Walter-Verlag, 1967), 71.

33 Aussage von A. D., August 13, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 221. Aussage von H. H., June 30, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 131–132. Aussage von K. B., June 4, 1964, BAL, B162/2304, 118.

34 Protokol doprosa/Ionusa Aleksandra, June 1, 1967, USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 17, 8527–8528.

epidemic? Although Hartung may not have articulated the possible consequences for failing to participate in the Holocaust, it is unlikely that he or any of his fellow Bereichskommandoführer would have reacted as benignly as Police Battalion 101's Major Trapp did to his subordinates' decision not to shoot. Hartung likely did not have to make explicit threats to back up his orders. Nothing in the militiamen's backgrounds, particularly in light of their experiences during the previous six months, inclined them to test Hartung's lenience. A brutalized population under both Soviet and Nazi rule, southern Ukraine's Volksdeutsche militiamen were far more disposed than their German counterparts to obey orders to kill because they understood exceptionally if not uniquely well the likely penalties for confronting authority directly.

The pressure to group conformity also operated as a potent pressure on Bereichskommando XI's militiamen during their first shooting missions. Highlighting the peer pressure that Police Battalion 101's members experienced during their preliminary killing deployment, Browning concludes convincingly that members of the unit "who did not shoot risked isolation, rejection, and ostracism – a very uncomfortable prospect within the framework of a tight-knit unit stationed abroad among a hostile population."³⁵ A comparable, albeit more intense pressure to group conformity likely functioned within Bereichskommando XI's militia during December 1941. The different compositions of both units of perpetrators had important implications for the pressure to conform that each group experienced. Unlike Police Battalion 101's members, who knew that their close affiliation with one another would last only until the war's end, Hartung's militiamen had to negotiate familial relationships that existed independently of the conflict. A militiaman's recalcitrance would have risked negatively impacting his immediate family in the broader clan's eyes and potentially threatened the entire community vis-à-vis the Germans. The members of the ethnic German militia unit, put simply, were closely linked to their potential accomplices – a situation in which the pressures to conform and participate were particularly profound. Although research on Holocaust perpetrators from the Soviet Union has yet to consider comprehensively how social psychological factors influenced the decision of indigenous killers to participate in mass murder, the example of Selbstschutz units in Bereichskommando XI underscores the value of this inquiry and illustrates how specific historical circumstances could intensify social psychological pressures to participate in genocide.

35 Browning, *Ordinary Men*, 185.

THEFT, ANTI-SEMITISM, STATUS, AND THE CONTINUATION
OF MASS MURDER

An exploration of the key social psychological factors that propelled the Selbstschutz's first killing operations helps to explain why these local residents, who had only briefly lived under German rule, began to murder. As the killings progressed into 1942, however, other motivations augmented social psychological factors. Material gain and anti-Semitism increased in importance as they became integrally related in VoMi-administered Transnistria.

Tracing the evolution and growth of anti-Semitism during the occupation's first two years is difficult. Sources for reconstructing this period, postwar West German and Soviet investigative records, capture prewar and wartime anti-Semitism poorly. As noted earlier, interviewees, conscious that they were suspected of wartime crimes and acutely aware that naked anti-Semitism was officially impermissible in both countries, were careful to censor anti-Semitic statements from their testimony.

The easiest way for former ethnic Germans to do so was to avoid discussing their prewar interactions with Jews, tacitly suggesting to investigators that the two groups had maintained limited prewar contact. Although only a comparatively small number of postwar statements that former ethnic German residents gave to their interviewers mentioned local Jews, those that did frequently portrayed Jews as Soviet agents or protégées. Former Transnistrians depicted this relationship in one of two ways. First, they identified Jews as area communist party officials and collective farm administrators – the precise individuals who had enforced local Soviet rule.³⁶ Second, many former residents remained convinced that during summer 1941 the Soviets had evacuated loyal area Jews ahead of advancing German and Romanian forces.³⁷ It is unclear whether these perceptions reflected any reality. Given the region's proximity to Odessa, a city with a historically large Jewish population, it is conceivable that Jews constituted a large and perhaps disproportionately large number of local Soviet officials. It is also likely that many area Jews fled the German and Romanian advances under their own steam because they feared for their safety not as communists, but as Jews. In the minds of many ethnic Germans, however, at least some Jews

36 Vernehmungsniederschrift von J. M., August 7, 1962, BAL, B162/2296, 142. Aussage von R. B., November 28, 1962, BAL, B162/2301, 47–48.

37 Aussage von J. G., November 26, 1962, BAL, B162/2299, 142. Vernehmungsniederschrift von W. H., July 24, 1962, BAL, B162/2296, 68. Aussage von H. D., December 16, 1964, BAL, B162/2303, 238.

had contributed to their prewar suffering as Soviet agents – a belief that poured the foundation for wartime anti-Semitism.

Superficially, the association between Soviet power and local Jews that many ethnic Germans articulated after the war appears analogous to the type of indigenous anti-Semitism that scholars conclude propelled pogroms in western Ukraine during summer 1941.³⁸ Despite some similarities, there were nevertheless two important differences. First, as discussed in [Chapter 1](#), until the 1917 Russian Revolution area ethnic Germans had maintained historically good relations with their Jewish neighbors. As ethnic and religious minorities who remained socioeconomically and linguistically distinct from the majority of the population, Volksdeutsche and Jews shared similar experiences, including being targeted by their largely Slavic neighbors for periodic violence.³⁹ There is also little evidence that area Volksdeutsche participated in anti-Jewish pogroms during the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. The Black Sea Germans, on the whole, were not historic anti-Semites who also became anti-Soviets, but rather were anti-Soviets who began to associate Jews with their Soviet tormentors.

And second, despite ethnic German perceptions that some local Jews had contributed to their suffering under Soviet rule, area Volksdeutsche did not murder Jews independently at the start of Operation Barbarossa. Volksdeutsche had ample opportunity to vent their frustrations on their Jewish neighbors during the brief interlude between Soviet and German rule, but there is little evidence that they engaged in locally organized anti-Semitic violence. This was likely because area ethnic Germans did not associate *all* Jews with Soviet power, but rather identified individual Jews as responsible for the Soviet regime's evils. Given that many of these supposedly implicated Jews had departed with Soviet forces before the occupation, there were few immediate targets for retribution.⁴⁰ That Volksdeutsche assigned Jews individual as opposed to collective blame for their suffering helps to explain why Volksdeutsche often denounced only some local Jews to Einsatzgruppe D and conspired to hide more thoroughly integrated Jews, whom area Volksdeutsche considered less culpable of Soviet-era repression,

38 See, for example, Jared McBride's recent work on Ukrainian violence against Jews in Olev'sk in Ukraine's Zhytomyr oblast' during mid-1941. Jared McBride, "Eyewitness to an Occupation: Collaboration and the Holocaust in Olev'sk, Zhytomyr Region," presented at the workshop Bringing the Past into the Present: Missing Narratives of the Holocaust in Ukraine (Washington, D.C.: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2009). John-Paul Himka has highlighted the centrality of anti-Semitism to the Ukrainian nationalist project. John-Paul Himka, "The Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and the Holocaust," presented at the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies Annual Convention (Boston, MA, 2009).

39 Fleischhauer, *Die Deutschen im Zarenreich*, 375.

40 Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung von E. H., December 29, 1961, BAL, B162/2290, 146.

from Sonderkommando R until well into 1942. Transnistria's Volksdeutsche had a more nuanced understanding of the supposed involvement of Jews in the Soviet regime than did many residents of other parts of Ukraine. That understanding shaped interactions between Transnistria's Volksdeutsche and Jews, which, at least early in the German occupation, were not marked by significant violence.

Anti-Semitism alone proved inadequate to move local ethnic Germans to violence during the interregnum between Soviet and German power and even months later, when Sonderkommando R first mustered area Volksdeutsche for mass killing. Yet, it proved a solid footing upon which the Third Reich's propagandists could build. Before Sonderkommando R could unfurl its propaganda apparatus, however, another incentive spurred local residents to anti-Semitism robbery.

Comparatively little scholarship exists on the role that material gain played in propelling the Holocaust. A couple of reasons explain why scholars have typically focused elsewhere. First, as much of the research on Holocaust perpetrators has been based on the German example, scholars have justifiably focused on other, more germane antecedents to genocide, such as anti-Semitism. Only recently, as research on these causes has matured, have historians, including Götz Aly, Martin Dean, and Jan Gross, explored the theft of Jewish property in greater detail.⁴¹

And second, researchers have cautiously avoided a materialist explanation for the Holocaust for fear of perpetuating the anti-Semitic myth that all Jews were wealthy. Although this issue must be treated delicately to prevent fueling this stereotype, simply avoiding this important feature fails to capture an essential historical dimension of the Holocaust in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Whereas theft and murder were often chronologically discrete activities in the Holocaust in Western, Central, and East Central Europe, they frequently occurred simultaneously in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Moreover, the relative poverty of Eastern European and Soviet perpetrators was such that local gentiles valued the material inducements to participate in murder far more than did their German counterparts. Few German perpetrators in occupied Poland, for example, killed because they were angling to obtain the personal effects of their victims. For killers from the rural Soviet Union, however, the access to scarce goods that murder facilitated operated as a powerful inducement to commit genocide.

41 Aly, *Hitler's Beneficiaries*; Martin Dean, *Robbing the Jews: the Confiscation of Jewish Property in the Holocaust, 1933–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Jan Tomasz Gross, *Golden Harvest: Events at the Periphery of the Holocaust* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Transnistria's Selbstschutz members were exceptional only in the degree to which the Germans enabled their cupidity. Research on the materialist dimensions to the Holocaust in the Soviet Union illustrates that local residents often robbed Jews with little or no involvement from the German security forces that oversaw or encouraged these killing operations.⁴² German killers, moreover, chastised their local helpers, and particularly their Romanian allies, for stealing their victims' property. Sonderkommando R not only tolerated but aided local theft of Jewish property. Robbery was a hallmark of militia deployments and even shaped how Sonderkommando R perpetrated mass shootings.

Sonderkommando R's leaders supported Volksdeutsche theft for two reasons. First, Sonderkommando R's German staff was, even by the Third Reich's low standards, exceptionally greedy. Corruption emanated from the unit's apex, exemplified by Siebert's robbery at Odessa's Museum of Western Civilization during October 1941.⁴³ Hoffmeyer and Siebert shared the spoils of genocide with their German subordinates, who lapped up these ill-gotten gains. Sonderkommando R authorized its dentist to smelt dental gold stolen from Jews for his practice. Despite knowing the gold's origin many Sonderkommando R members were content to have the material used to repair their own dental work. The loose control that Sonderkommando R exercised over its Bereichskommandoführer in rural Transnistria meant that especially avaricious local commanders, including Hartung, could siphon off Jewish property for their own use. Cupidity was a hallmark of Sonderkommando R's institutional culture.

Second, during winter 1941–1942, Sonderkommando R needed stolen Jewish property to secure a dominant material position for Transnistria's ethnic Germans. The reallocation of collective farms and other agricultural infrastructure granted area Volksdeutsche a privileged socioeconomic position, but it did not provide badly needed consumer goods to local German-speakers. Although the property that militiamen stole from Jews was insufficient to ameliorate Volksdeutsche poverty, it began a process that culminated in the transport of Jews' property from extermination centers in occupied Poland to Transnistria. The seduction of simultaneous disease prevention and material gain for Transnistria's ethnic Germans was so powerful that local commanders disregarded that Volksdeutsche theft of Jews' clothing could precipitate the outbreak of the very epidemic that the murders were designed to prevent.

42 Jared McBride, "Eyewitness to an Occupation."

43 Steinhart, "Policing the Boundaries of 'Germandom' in the East," 85.

As it became apparent to the VoMi's militiamen that Jews' property was theirs for the taking, theft became a potent inducement for Transnistria's Volksdeutsche militiamen to kill. Murder permitted the militiamen to acquire the most desirable clothing and personal effects. As Jewish deportees from Bessarabia, northern Bukovina, and Odessa typically were wealthier than their Volksdeutsche killers in rural Transnistria, this incentive was particularly powerful.

Privileged access to stolen clothing constituted but one (and perhaps the least important) of the material inducements that Sonderkommando R offered local Volksdeutsche. Membership in the Nazi racial community extended even more potent structural material incentives to kill. In Transnistria, Sonderkommando R underpinned the Third Reich's demographic claims by helping Volksdeutsche achieve a dominant socioeconomic position. Although this project remained embryonic until later in 1942, the contours of Sonderkommando R's initiatives were already apparent to local ethnic Germans. Hartung's redistribution of previously shared property during fall 1941, for example, provided area Volksdeutsche with a stark illustration of German plans to enrich area ethnic Germans at the expense of their non-German neighbors.

The very pliability of the category of "ethnic German" provided Sonderkommando R, somewhat unwittingly, with a powerful incentive to encourage area residents to murder Jews. Here, again, the way in which Bereichskommando XI formed its militias is illustrative. Even if Hartung and his colleagues failed to grasp the degree to which local leaders had packed the militia with non-Germans, the militiamen certainly did. Although the members of the Bogdanovka collective farm's Volksdeutsche militia could not have anticipated that the SS would order them to murder Jews when the Germans formed the unit months earlier, once asked to kill the militiamen used the opportunity to participate in the Holocaust to verify their Germanness. Although the militiamen were not privy to internal Sonderkommando R memoranda that grappled with how to classify the local population, they perceived, quite correctly, that failure to obey their murderous orders would have demonstrated an inadequate commitment to the National Socialist cause that for Sonderkommando R's staff defined Germanness. Volksdeutsche recalcitrance would have invited Bereichskommando XI to reexamine the provisional boundaries of Germanness that it had allowed area residents to establish and could have uncovered the local conspiracy to undermine the SS's ethnic categories. Exposure was a very real threat. In Bereichskommando XI and elsewhere, Sonderkommando R's local commanders did not issue permanent ethnic German identity

papers until April 1942, when Sonderkommando R's mass shootings concluded. Complicity in the Holocaust smoothed the entry of the unit's members and their families into the *Volksgemeinschaft*. Had any would-be ethnic German refused to dirty his hands in the Reich's service, he almost certainly would have doomed his application to join the Nazi racial community. It was thus the SS's inability to operationalize its definition of "ethnic Germanness" in Transnistria that unintentionally equipped it with a powerful inducement to encourage local residents to participate in the Holocaust.

Indigenous anti-Soviet sentiment, which associated at least some Jews with the evils of Soviet power, and the rampant local theft of Sonderkommando R's Jewish victims provided fertile soil for the VoMi to plant its propaganda. According on the available information, the unit's propaganda linked anti-Semitism with anti-Bolshevism.⁴⁴ Sonderkommando R's ideological instructional campaign before the mass killing was minimal. A handful of pep talks by SS commanders and the odd nocturnal ceremony would not have won over the "hearts and minds" of most listeners to the National Socialist justification for mass murder.

Sonderkommando R's militiamen, however, were not most listeners. Members of a repressed socioeconomic and ethnic minority under Stalin, many area ethnic Germans had already identified at least some Jews with the Soviet system before mass murder. By early 1942, local residents had also benefited tremendously from genocide. They had stolen their victims' property and entered (at least provisionally) the materially privileged Nazi racial community, and looked forward to future riches. Sonderkommando R's initially unimpressive propaganda merely had to provide a framework in which local *Volksdeutsche* expanded purported individual Jewish complicity in Soviet crimes into a wholesale conflation of Jews with the Soviet system. This, in turn, helped rationalize robbery and murder. Holding Jews responsible for *Volksdeutsche* suffering under Stalin justified, for many area residents, murder and robbery. A brutalized, *déclassé* population anxious for revenge against its Soviet enemies and feeling an imperative to vindicate its own cupidity, many local ethnic Germans clutched Sonderkommando R's justifications for mass murder.

The sea change in local anti-Semitism after the conclusion of mass killing operations illustrates the success of Sonderkommando R's propaganda. During 1941, area residents had hidden some local Jews, even amid the mass

44 Görlich, "Volkstumspropaganda und Antisemitismus in der Wochenzeitung 'Der Deutsche in Transnistrien' 1942–1944."

murder of Jewish deportees. These conspiracies of silence disintegrated just as Sonderkommando R's involvement in mass murder slackened. Throughout rural Transnistria area gentiles denounced to the SS the Third Reich's remaining declared enemies. Targeting these final Jewish, "mixed race," and "communist" residents in Transnistria's VoMi-administered settlements did not enjoy universal local support. Years after the war, many erstwhile Transnistrians bemoaned to investigators the murders of their friends and relatives. Although mourning the dead often was an expedient way to deflect suspicion, some of this outrage was genuine. West German authorities launched their initial inquiry into Sonderkommando R in response to a letter from a former area resident concerning the SS's murder of "mixed race" acquaintances.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, during 1942, a sufficient number of local residents were swayed by Nazi entreaties to root out the remaining "Judeo-Bolshevik" enemies in their midst. The local protection that some area Jews had enjoyed beginning in 1941 evaporated during 1942 as area residents responded to VoMi propaganda. Whereas most area Volksdeutsche were unprepared to regard all Jews as members of a "Judeo-Bolshevik" cabal before Sonderkommando R's involvement in mass murder, by the conclusion of the killing campaign, many of Transnistria's ethnic Germans had become committed anti-Semites.

CONCLUSION

Like most perpetrators, Transnistria's Volksdeutsche militiamen took part in the Holocaust for numerous reasons. This constellation of motivations was fluid and evolved as the killings expanded. When Sonderkommando R first mustered its militiamen to murder Jewish deportees during December 1941, situational factors, and specifically social psychological pressures, more so than anti-Semitism, animated local Volksdeutsche to kill.

As Sonderkommando R's involvement in the shooting of Jewish deportees intensified, new motivations moved area perpetrators to murder. For area inhabitants, genocide proved exceptionally lucrative. It provided them with access to coveted consumer goods absent under Soviet rule. More importantly, it allowed the killers to clarify their ethnic identities in the VoMi's eyes. As members of the Volksgemeinschaft, local residents could access the material rewards that the Third Reich offered members of the Nazi racial community. These rewards were virtually unparalleled. No other killers could gain entry into the Volksgemeinschaft through

45 Brief an die Zentralestelle, c. 1961, BAL, B162/2289/38.

murder. Although the VoMi would again scrutinize the boundaries of Germanness in Transnistria during 1942 and 1943, local participation in mass killing during winter 1941–1942 proffered an entry to Germandom.

Indigenous anti-Soviet sentiment, which had begun to identify at least some Jews with Soviet power prior to the occupation, combined with the material rewards of genocide nourished the VoMi's propaganda efforts in Transnistria. Eager for revenge against their Soviet foes and to justify the riches that mass murder had brought them, local ethnic Germans were a sympathetic audience. As illustrated by the betrayal of remaining Jewish and "mixed race" local residents to Sonderkommando R after months of German rule, many of Transnistria's ethnic Germans accepted VoMi propaganda about the "Judeo-Bolshevik" enemy. Transnistria's Volksdeutsche did not start to kill because they were anti-Semites; many of them became anti-Semites by taking part in the Holocaust.

Conclusion

The Third Reich launched the Second World War to obtain vast territories that Nazi ideologues believed were essential not only to project German power, but for the very survival of the German *Volk*. For the Nazis, however, acquiring this space was meaningless unless the right people inhabited it. In this monstrous “new order,” Jews, Slavs, Roma and Sinti, homosexuals, communists, the mentally and physically disabled, and members of other groups whom the Nazis targeted on racial, political, behavioral, or hereditary grounds were to disappear. In their place, ostensibly “racially pure” National Socialist Germans would populate Hitler’s new empire. In advancing these twin demographic goals during the war, the Nazis devoted greater attention and resources to killing targeted populations than to repopulating occupied territory with members of the Nazi racial community. During the conflict, the Third Reich had to content itself with modest efforts to establish bulwarks of “Germanness” “in the East.”

This book has examined the most developed such pilot program in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union. Transnistria was home to the largest population of Soviet ethnic Germans that came under the control of Germany and its allies during the Second World War. The SS regarded the region’s some 130,000 ethnic Germans as biological building blocks for German rule in conquered Soviet territory. Although most of the so-called Black Sea Germans lived in Romanian-occupied territory, the prospect of mobilizing such a large number of Volksdeutsche already in place in the occupied Soviet Union proved irresistible. Shortly after the beginning of Operation Barbarossa, Himmler dispatched Sonderkommando R, a special Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle (Ethnic German Liaison Office, or VoMi) unit, to the area to marshal local ethnic Germans under the Nazi banner.

In Odessa and the surrounding countryside Sonderkommando R reorganized the region’s ethnic German communities in anticipation of the

militarized, agricultural settlements that the Nazi regime expected would someday dominate the area. Its first move was a brutal program of murder and ethnic cleansing. Following earlier German sweeps through the region, Sonderkommando R killed local Jews, the members of “mixed race” families, and area “communists.” To identify the “Judeo-Bolshevik” cabal within Transnistria’s Volksdeutsche communities, Sonderkommando R depended on information from indigenous informants, inadvertently tapping decades of local antagonism that the brutality of Soviet rule had engendered. Rather than identify the Third Reich’s declared racial and political enemies, many area inhabitants exploited this opportunity to settle old scores. They denounced to the Germans local Jews and gentiles whom they deemed to be complicit in the evils of the Soviet system. Yet they hid other targeted individuals whom they believed to be innocent of Soviet-era wrongdoing. During late summer and fall 1941 these denunciations permitted local residents to steer Sonderkommando R’s targeted killings for their own ends – a tactic that would have serious consequences for them when the VoMi discovered their duplicity in 1942.

Believing that it had eliminated surviving Jews and communists from southern Ukraine’s Volksdeutsche communities, Sonderkommando R rearranged the area’s population to create homogeneous Germanophone settlements where none had existed previously. To fend off the Romanians, Sonderkommando R established a small yet potent Volksdeutsche auxiliary force that was to guard local ethnic German communities from outside interference and to search for internal enemies. With control over Transnistria’s ethnic German communities secured, the VoMi channeled the region’s scarce agricultural resources to local Volksdeutsche – an initiative that, to the delight to area residents, effectively dismantled collectivized agriculture and reversed decades of socioeconomic decline.

Despite aggressive efforts to refashion rural southern Ukraine, Sonderkommando R struggled to delineate the boundaries of Germanness. Before the invasion of the Soviet Union, much of Sonderkommando R’s staff and most of its leaders had spearheaded the SS’s Volksdeutsche population transfers in Eastern Europe. During these operations, the VoMi had developed an ad hoc ethnic classification schema that depended on a prospective ethnic German’s behavior. As Sonderkommando R realized, this criterion was badly suited to categorization in southern Ukraine, where Volksdeutsche had an exceptional historical divorce from Germany and circumscribed opportunities for the prewar National Socialist activity that heretofore had denoted Germanness for the SS. Spread thinly across Odessa and the surrounding region and without clear instruction on how

to classify area residents, Sonderkommando R's midlevel leaders deferred to supposedly reliable ethnic Germans to identify the area's Volksdeutsche.

This practice proved problematic. Local residents had been schooled in the brutal politics of Soviet agricultural production in which state classification had tremendous implications. They knew that, under Nazi rule, members of the Nazi racial community and particularly the VoMi's ethnic German militias secured privileged access to land, livestock, and agricultural equipment – necessities for subsistence agriculture. Just as they had denounced their neighbors to the Germans to settle local grievances, area inhabitants again manipulated Nazi categories for their benefit. They packed the VoMi's militia forces with their non-German relatives to ensure that they too shared in the Third Reich's material bounty. By December 1941, the SS governed ostensibly *judenrein* communities that hid Jews, and the SS commanded "Volksdeutsche" militiamen, many of whom were non-Germans. During the occupation's first few months local residents had stealthily diverted the VoMi's Germanization program to achieve their own ends.

As Sonderkommando R's mission in Transnistria foundered, local circumstances moved the VoMi to enlist area ethnic Germans in mass murder. From the beginning of Operation Barbarossa, German and Romanian forces had engaged in a diplomatic and periodically physical conflict over how to "solve" Transnistria's "Jewish problem." Romanian authorities preferred to deport the region's Jews farther eastward into German-occupied Soviet territory, where the Romanians believed that they would suffer a dire fate at German hands. The Germans, by contrast, regarded the murder of Transnistria's Jews as the primary responsibility of their Romanian allies, who formally occupied the region. Although accords between the two powers thwarted Romanian desires to relocate Jews across the Bug River to German-occupied Ukraine, nothing diminished the Romanian conviction that Jews, many of whom they had deported into Transnistria, constituted a Soviet fifth column and a security threat. Believing that advances at the front would soon permit the removal of Transnistria's Jews deeper into the occupied Soviet Union, throughout late 1941 Romanian authorities concentrated Jewish prisoners in camps along the Bug River's right bank. These facilities were located near the focal point of Sonderkommando R's mission in Transnistria. When a typhus outbreak at one of the area's major Romanian concentration camps threatened to spread the disease to local Volksdeutsche, Sonderkommando R deployed its ethnic German militiamen to assist Romanian authorities in murdering the camp's prisoners during a multiweek shooting operation. As these killings were

underway, the Romanian government determined that the continued presence of Jews near Odessa constituted an intolerable security threat and ordered their deportation toward the Bug River. Having already plunged into mass murder and suspecting that these Jews also constituted an immediate health hazard to the region's Volksdeutsche, Sonderkommando R again mustered its ethnic German militia forces to murder the deportees. Although fully congruent with the Nazi regime's wider aims and practices, Hoffmeyer's command in Transnistria committed mass murder in response to circumstances that the Romanians created. The Germans enlisted local Volksdeutsche assistance in genocide because they lacked other killers.

Volksdeutsche participation in the mass murder of Jewish deportees propelled Sonderkommando R's Germanization mission in Transnistria. During fall 1941, local VoMi personnel had serious reservations about including ethnic Germans from Transnistria in the Volksgemeinschaft because these putative racial brothers and sisters had not demonstrated their affinity for National Socialism as members of other Volksdeutsche minorities had done prior to the war. The VoMi's winter 1941–1942 mass killings provided precisely the opportunity for local residents to demonstrate to the SS their affinity for the Nazi cause. In its naiveté, Sonderkommando R reasoned that willing killers were sufficiently German for admission into the Nazi racial community.

With renewed, albeit temporary, confidence in local Volksdeutsche, Sonderkommando R intensified its Germanization program in Transnistria. It enhanced the material status of the area's ethnic Germans with property stolen from Jews. During the preceding winter's mass shooting operations, the SS had purloined Jews' valuables and facilitated widespread Volksdeutsche robbery. After the conclusion of the mass shootings, the VoMi expanded and institutionalized the theft of Jews' property to benefit ethnic Germans. It transported trainloads of pilfered Jewish property from extermination centers in occupied Poland to southern Ukraine's Volksdeutsche communities, which had an insatiable appetite for better "Jews' clothing."

To cement the ideological commitment of local ethnic Germans to National Socialism, Sonderkommando R attacked Christianity. Aware that Christianity offered a competitive ideology for Transnistria's deeply religious ethnic Germans, Sonderkommando R squelched the Catholic and Protestant Churches' renaissance in Transnistria's Volksdeutsche communities. It drove the Catholic clergy from rural Transnistria to shelter with the Romanians in Odessa and arranged for the thoroughly Nazified German Christian Movement to supply Transnistria with ideologically sympathetic

Protestant pastors. With Christianity neutralized, Sonderkommando R's propaganda apparatus kicked into gear, emphasizing the dangers of the "Judeo-Bolshevik" enemy. Fearing that Soviet rule had irredeemably tainted many adult Volksdeutsche, the VoMi focused its educational efforts on ethnic German youth.

During Sonderkommando R's intensified Germanization project, the VoMi confronted a major hurdle. Area residents once again began to denounce hidden Jews, individuals of "mixed race" ancestry, and communists. For the VoMi, which believed that it already had eliminated "Judeo-Bolshevism" from Transnistria's Volksdeutsche communities, this was a rude surprise. The knowledge that local residents had hidden some Jews and communists even while participating in the one of the war's most intense mass shooting campaigns confirmed the SS's earlier suspicions about the racial and political worth of Transnistria's Volksdeutsche. Local VoMi commanders used the continued survival of the targeted groups as a pretext to attack local residents. By 1943, the SS's treatment of Transnistria's Volksdeutsche had become so destructive that the VoMi sacked ineffective leaders and created a concentration camp to systematize Nazi violence. Nevertheless, having cast their lot with the invaders and perpetrated horrific crimes, most area Volksdeutsche fled the Soviets with the Germans.

Why so many of Transnistria's Volksdeutsche participated in the Holocaust is a complex question. It is one, moreover, that scholarship on German and Eastern European perpetrators is ill-equipped to answer. Ethnic Germans in southern Ukraine had lived under Nazi rule for mere months before becoming mass killers. Explanations for perpetrator behavior that turn on the German national political context, therefore, are of limited utility. Similarly, scholarship that points to deep-seated Eastern European anti-Semitism to explain the participation of non-German perpetrators imperfectly captures the orientation of Transnistria's Volksdeutsche. Had they been animated primarily by anti-Semitism at the beginning of mass killing, that animus likely would have manifested itself during the interregnum between Soviet and German power, when other residents of Ukraine targeted Jews in pogroms with little German encouragement.

To explain why Transnistria's Volksdeutsche murdered, it is useful to distinguish between why they began to kill and why they continued to do so. When Sonderkommando R first mustered the Selbstschutz to murder Jewish deportees during December 1941, area militiamen felt substantial situational pressures to kill. Two of these pressures are of particular importance. The first was the tendency to group conformity. Operating as extended families, the VoMi's militiamen enjoyed with their co-perpetrators

long-standing relations that exceeded the intimacy even of the tight-knit German military and police units that participated in the Holocaust. In such a setting, the social psychological pressure to group conformity was accentuated. The second was an historically conditioned response to authority. Having lived under Soviet rule for decades, Sonderkommando R militiamen were intimately aware of a potent authoritarian regime's capacity to punish uncooperative individuals. Although VoMi personnel likely did not threaten their indigenous helpers with dire consequences for failing to participate in genocide, nothing in the collective experiences of local residents encouraged them to challenge Nazi officials during a crisis. Situational pressures do much to explain why Transnistria's Volksdeutsche initially participated in genocide.

As the killings expanded, however, additional perpetrator motivations emerged. Mass murder proved lucrative for area Volksdeutsche. The Holocaust permitted them, with the SS's blessing, to steal much-needed consumer items from their Jewish victims. It also became apparent to area Volksdeutsche that, by taking part in the Holocaust, they could clarify their uncertain ethnic identity in the VoMi's eyes. As members of the *Volksgemeinschaft* they stood to benefit from the structural economic advantages that the VoMi had established. These rewards were comparatively more impressive than material inducements that the Third Reich offered to other perpetrator groups. Reich German killers, for example, already were members of the Nazi racial community. Similarly, non-German collaborators could never gain admission to the *Volksgemeinschaft*. Only ethnic Germans could secure their position in the Nazi racial hierarchy by participating in genocide. Transnistria's Volksdeutsche were not only well aware of this fact, but they also grasped that Germanness was a highly porous category. They had, after all, just conspired to include their non-German relatives in the Nazi racial community by including them in the militia. For Transnistria's Volksdeutsche, participation in the Holocaust was not simply a means to steal Jewish property. It cemented their position in the Nazi "new order" and granted them important structural economic advantages.

Anti-Semitism was not a primary motivation for Transnistria's Volksdeutsche at the beginning of the mass murder campaign. However, it grew in importance as the killings expanded. During 1941, what limited connections local ethnic Germans drew between Jews and Soviet power operated on an individual level. Area Volksdeutsche denounced some Jews to the Germans, yet shielded others from certain death. Although not especially anti-Semitic, Transnistria's ethnic Germans were vehemently anti-Soviet. A collective biography of some of the most heavily implicated

Volksdeutsche killers shows that, virtually to a man, they had suffered under Soviet rule.

This primed them to be receptive to VoMi propaganda. Although Sonderkommando R's initial ideological instruction was flimsy, its task was simple. Area ethnic Germans needed no reminder of the evils of Soviet power; decades of Soviet rule had been illustrative. VoMi propaganda simply had to cast Jews as the Soviet system's architects and the cause of ethnic German suffering. The Nazi image of the "Judeo-Bolshevik" enemy provided a ready justification for mass murder and the theft of Jews' property. Many of Transnistria's Volksdeutsche found the VoMi's propaganda convincing. During 1941, entire ethnic German communities had hidden Jews whom they considered innocent of Soviet-era crimes. Less than a year later these local conspiracies disintegrated as area Volksdeutsche denounced previously protected local Jews to Sonderkommando R, who would see to the murder. Transnistria's ethnic Germans were not National Socialists who participated in the Holocaust, but rather Holocaust participants who became committed National Socialists.

This book has recovered Sonderkommando R's efforts to mobilize ethnic Germans in Romanian-controlled southern Ukraine and the unit's involvement in the Holocaust. It has also reconstructed and analyzed the decision-making context in which the area's Volksdeutsche took part in mass murder. Beyond contributing new information about an under-studied episode of the Nazi occupation of territories of the Soviet Union during the Second World War, this study has two broader implications for future scholarship on the history of the conflict and of the Holocaust. First, it dissects the specific circumstances in which area Volksdeutsche chose to participate in genocide. Scholars have long rejected claims by accused perpetrators that they killed because they feared severe penalties for violating their murderous orders. Instead, social scientists and historians have charted myriad reasons why perpetrators killed; these include anti-Semitism, indoctrination, and social psychological pressures. This study explores how the Nazi regime created circumstances that left some prospective perpetrators with decisions that were not the "choiceless choices" of their victims, but nevertheless difficult ones.¹ It demonstrates that the Third Reich was able to create killers by combining a system of extreme reward and punishment with an exploitation of past resentments, which, in the case of the Black Sea Germans, were initially more anticommunist than anti-Semitic. This study

1 Lawrence L. Langer, *Versions of Survival: The Holocaust and the Human Spirit* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982), 146.

supports the need for explanations that are cognizant of particular contexts and circumstances – factors that are key to understanding the role of Soviet Volksdeutsche in the Holocaust.

Second, it highlights the value of local and regional studies to recover the antecedents to genocide in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union. Insofar as scholars have offered preliminary explanations for the participation of local residents in the Holocaust – reasons such as a historically high rate of anti-Semitism and venality – they have focused on large swaths of territory and extrapolated local conditions from one area to another, often without a detailed understanding of the occupation's dynamics or the local interethnic topography. Pogroms in western Ukraine during summer 1941, for example, have become either implicitly or explicitly the paradigm for understanding all indigenous complicity in the Holocaust. Yet ongoing research underscores that region's unique historical features and questions its representativeness for the occupied Soviet territories as a whole. This study's findings, moreover, suggest that very different local dynamics were at play in Transnistria's Volksdeutsche settlements. Further scholarship focused on the local and regional levels will help to nuance research on how the Nazis layered their plans for a demographic revolution over the Soviet borderlands' often violent interethnic milieu. The Holocaust, Jan Gross reminds us, was often a neighborhood affair.

Appendix

Einwandererzentrale (Central Immigration Office or EWZ) records for the 89 militiamen attached to Sonderkommando R's Bereichskommando XI in Rastatt can be found in Record Group 242: Captured German and Related Records on Microfilm at the United States National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in College Park, Maryland. Where both an EG-Karte and an UdSSR Antrag for the same individual exist, both records are listed under the same name. Names are spelled as they appear in the original records.

Surname	Given Name	Type of EWZ Record	NARA Subcollection	Reel Number	Starting Frame	Ending Frame
Ackermann	Adalbert	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	I3	2036	2038
Ackermann	Albert	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	I3	2046	2047
Ackermann	Andreas	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	I3	2210	2212
Ackermann	Bernhard	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	I3	2404	2406
Ackermann	Erasmus	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	I3	2792	2802
Ackermann	Eugen	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	I3	2860	2864
Ackermann	Peter	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	I4	1386	1396
Ackermann	Vincenz	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	I4	1778	1787
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	A3	778	804
Anton	Nikodemus	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	I34	1312	1319
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	A13	2340	2368
Belitzer	Johannes	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	I34	820	821
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	A42	916	934

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Surname	Given Name	Type of		Reel Number	Starting Frame	Ending Frame
		EWZ Record	NARA Subcollection			
Belitzer	Leonhard	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	I34	822	824
Bengert	Eugen	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	I92	1444	1445
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	A44	696	718
Benz	Johann	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	I93	1988	2000
Benz	Johannes	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	I93	1974	1982
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	A45	658	672
Benz	Peter	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	I93	2278	2285
Berger	Peter	E-G Kartei	EWZ 56	I98	1620	1621
		Rasse Kartei	EWZ 50	A32	426	437
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	A49	544	564
Bockmeier	Johann	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	I138	2168	2178
Bockmeier	Martin	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	I139	2324	2328
Ehrmanntraut	Christian	E-G Kartei	EWZ 56	K15	430	444
		Rasse Kartei	EWZ 57	B28	2252	2256
Ehrmanntraut	Leonhard	E-G Kartei	EWZ 56	K15	500	511
		Rasse Kartei	EWZ 57	B28	2270	2271
Ehrmanntraut	Michael	E-G Kartei	EWZ 56	K15	514	520
		Rasse Kartei	EWZ 50	A32	2272	2273
		UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	B36	894	910
Ehrmanntraut	Nikolaus	E-G Kartei	EWZ 56	K15	528	537
Ehrmanntraut	Nikolaus	Rasse Kartei	EWZ 57	B28	2276	2278
Ehrmanntraut	Pius	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	K15	538	548
Ehrmanntraut	Rafael	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	K15	552	562
Ehrmanntraut	Theodor	E-G Kartei	EWZ 56	K15	588	598
		Rasse Kartei	EWZ 57	B28	2288	2289
Eichstätter	Emil	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	K17	1268	1270
Fehrt	Johann	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	K55	1738	1738
Feiningner	Anton	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	K56	1748	1757
Feiningner	August	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	K56	1778	1788
Feiningner	Eugen	E-G Kartei	EWZ 56	K56	1798	1808
		Rasse Kartei	EWZ 57	B40	2504	2504
Feiningner	Heinrich	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	K56	1876	1885
Feiningner	Jakob	E-G Kartei	EWZ 56	K56	1898	1906
		Rasse Kartei	EWZ 57	B58	1478	1498
Feiningner	Jakob	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	K56	1888	1898
Feiningner	Josef	E-G Kartei	EWZ 56	K56	1938	1952
		Rasse Kartei	EWZ 57	B40	2512	2513

Surname	Given Name	Type of EWZ Record	NARA Subcollection	Reel Number	Starting Frame	Ending Frame
Feininger	Max	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	K56	2050	2060
Feininger	Nikodemus	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	K56	2064	2076
Feininger	Nikodemus	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	K56	2082	2083
Feininger	Robert	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	K56	2126	2136
Feininger	Thomas	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	K56	2162	2163
Fröhlich	Josef	UdSSR	EWZ 57	B84	1480	1488
		Antrag				
Fröhlich	Josef	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	K112	1598	1604
Fröhlich	Matheas	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	K112	2420	2429
		UdSSR	EWZ 57	B84	2176	2184
		Antrag				
Fröhlich	Matthias	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	K112	2430	2893
Fröhlich	Nikodemus	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	K112	2182	2184
Fröhlich	Peter	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	K112	2894	2896
		UdSSR	EWZ 57	B84	2406	2432
		Antrag				
Gärtner	Johann	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	K126	1204	1212
		UdSSR	EWZ 57	B91	2878	2904
		Antrag				
Gärtner	Josef	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	K126	1308	1316
		UdSSR	EWZ 57	B91	2930	2964
		Antrag				
Götzfried	Eustachius	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	L23	18	20
Götzfried	Nikodemus	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	L23	46	54
Götzfried	Theophilia	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	L23	72	73
Hanecker	Georg	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	L85	1890	1898
		UdSSR	EWZ 57	C47	1988	2016
		Antrag				
Heberle	Eugen	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	L104	906	907
Heberle	Franz	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	L104	912	916
Heck	Eugen	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	L105	864	871
		UdSSR	EWZ 57	C56	2298	2314
		Antrag				
Heck	Eugen	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	L105	872	877
Heck	Franz	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	L105	972	980
Heck	Franz	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	L105	984	994
Heck	Franz	UdSSR	EWZ 57	C56	2500	2502
		Antrag				
Heck	Franz	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	L105	998	1006
Heck	Ignaz	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	L105	1204	1211
Heck	Jakob	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	L105	1224	1232
Heck	Johannes	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	L105	1258	1265

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Surname	Given Name	Type of	NARA Subcollection	Reel Number	Starting Frame	Ending Frame
		EWZ Record				
Heck	Johannes	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	L105	1266	1273
Heck	Johannes	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	L105	1274	1281
Heck	Johannes	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	L105	1282	1290
Heck	Max	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	L105	1684	1686
		UdSSR	EWZ 57	C57	410	412
		Antrag				
Heck	Peter	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	L105	1794	1802
Heck	Peter	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	L105	1810	1812
Heck	Peter	UdSSR	EWZ 57	C57	592	604
		Antrag				
		E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	L105	1850	1858
Heck	Philipp	UdSSR	EWZ 57	C57	606	622
		Antrag				
		E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	L105	2014	2022
Heck	Siegfried	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	L105	2102	2110
Heck	Wilhelm	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	L105	1720	1727
Hekk	Max	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	L105	2806	2815
Hirsch	Georg	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	M15	454	456
Hirsch	Georg	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	M16	1454	1470
Hirsch	Josef	UdSSR	EWZ 50	D8	2722	2740
		Antrag				
		UdSSR	EWZ 57	D8	468	470
Hübner	Waldemar	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	M55	818	830
Hübner	Waldemar	UdSSR	EWZ 50	D27	110	130
		Antrag				
		UdSSR	EWZ 57	E21	2816	2826
Kniel	Franz	Antrag			1662	1690
		E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	N88	2562	2572
		UdSSR	EWZ 57	E26	1230	1467
Koffler	Christian	Antrag			2262	2290
		E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	N89	1468	1478
		UdSSR	EWZ 50	N106	1384	1394
Koffler	Peter	Antrag			1192	1202
		E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	N125	784	818
		UdSSR	EWZ 57	E32	1376	1381
Kopp	Johannes	Antrag				
		E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	N106	1468	1478
		UdSSR	EWZ 50	N125	1384	1394
Kopp	Josef	Antrag			1192	1202
		E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	N106	1468	1478
		UdSSR	EWZ 50	N125	1384	1394
Kopp	Johannes	Antrag			784	818
		E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	N106	1468	1478
		UdSSR	EWZ 50	N125	1384	1394
Kopp	Josef	Antrag			1192	1202
		E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	N106	1468	1478
		UdSSR	EWZ 50	N125	1384	1394
Kopp	Philipp	Antrag			784	818
		E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	N106	1468	1478
		UdSSR	EWZ 50	N125	1384	1394
Kowitz	Franz	Antrag			1192	1202
		E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	N106	1468	1478
		UdSSR	EWZ 50	N125	1384	1394
Kowitz	Peter	Antrag			784	818
		E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	N106	1468	1478
		UdSSR	EWZ 50	N125	1384	1394

Surname	Given Name	Type of EWZ Record	NARA Subcollection	Reel Number	Starting Frame	Ending Frame
Maier	Nikodemus	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	O145	2038	2048
		UdSSR	EWZ 57	F22	1228	1258
		Antrag				
Mayer	Gregor	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	O140	2304	2314
		UdSSR	EWZ 57	F20	1678	1706
		Antrag				
Mayer	Josef	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	O142	2344	2354
		UdSSR	EWZ 57	F21	756	800
		Antrag				
Mayer	Philipp	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	O146	1516	1520
Mayer	Raphael	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	O146	1712	1722
Mayer	Raphael	UdSSR	EWZ 57	F22	2442	2462
		Antrag				
		E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	O146	1742	1726
Meier	Raphael	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	O146	1742	1726
		E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	P40	1734	1744
		UdSSR	EWZ 57	F44	626	652
Mekler	Peter	Antrag				
		E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	O146	1742	1726
		E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	P40	1734	1744
Metz	Philipp	UdSSR	EWZ 57	F44	626	652
		Antrag				
		E-G Kartei	EWZ 56	P53	566	574
Nuss	Christian	Rasse Kartei	EWZ 50	F33	2856	2858
		UdSSR	EWZ 57	F50	846	858
		Antrag				
Nuss	Jakob	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	P155	1640	1648
		UdSSR	EWZ 57	G4	1730	1746
		Antrag				
Nuss	Thomas	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	P155	1946	1956
		UdSSR	EWZ 57	G4	2156	2184
		Antrag				
Obenloch	Eugen	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	P155	2402	2406
		E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	P156	1692	1699
		E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	P156	1794	1798
Obenloch	Philipp	UdSSR	EWZ 57	G5	1092	1114
		Antrag				
		E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	Q72	2260	2260
Pfoo	Eugen	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	Q72	2260	2260
		E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	Q147	174	181
		UdSSR	EWZ 57	G58	1198	1224
Redler	Eduard	Antrag				
		E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	Q147	174	181
		UdSSR	EWZ 57	G58	1198	1224
Reichert	Johannes	Antrag				
		E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	R6	1932	1934
		UdSSR	EWZ 57	G61	1618	1640
Reinhauer	Anton	Antrag				
		E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	R16	2192	2192

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Surname	Given Name	Type of		Reel Number	Starting Frame	Ending Frame
		EWZ Record	NARA Subcollection			
Renner	Jakob	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	R24	2636	2537
		UdSSR	EWZ 57	G70	80	86
		Antrag				
Scherger	Benno	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	R129	2708	2712
Scherger	Johannes	UdSSR	EWZ 57	H31	264	274
		Antrag				
		E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	R129	2674	2681
Scherger	Josef	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	R129	2690	2698
Schmidt	Eduard	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	S3	1178	1185
Schmidt	Jakob	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	S13	586	594
Schmidt	Johann	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	S13	2994	2998
Schmidt	Josef	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	S14	1306	1313
		UdSSR	EWZ 57	H46	2318	2336
		Antrag				
Schmidt	Matthias	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	S17	2106	2116
Seelinger	Georg	E-G Kartei	EWZ 56	S94	228	240
Seelinger	Gregor	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	S94	248	250
Seelinger	Peter	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	S94	486	494
Seifert	Adolf	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	S89	44	45
Seifert	Peter	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	S89	1844	1851
Selinger	Georg	Rasse Kartei	EWZ 57	I32	2712	2713
Steif	Johann	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	T13	258	264
Stolz	Peter	UdSSR	EWZ 57	I33	1154	1168
		Antrag				
		E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	T75	2556	2556
Thomä	Franz	UdSSR	EWZ 57	I50	402	428
		Antrag				
		E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	T75	2568	2576
Thomä	Jakob	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	T75	2684	2691
Thomä	Jakob	UdSSR	EWZ 57	I50	496	514
		Antrag				
		E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	T75	2692	2703
Thomä	Jakob	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	T75	2704	2718
Thomä	Johann a.k.a. Raphael	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	T75	2750	2758
		UdSSR	EWZ 57	I50	516	548
		Antrag				
Thomä	Johannes	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	T75	2762	2770
		UdSSR	EWZ 57	I50	550	576
		Antrag				

Surname	Given Name	Type of EWZ Record	NARA Subcollection	Reel Number	Starting Frame	Ending Frame
Thomä	Johannes	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	T75	2770	2778
Thomä	Johannes	UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	I50	578	594
Thomä	Johannes	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	T75	2788	2797
Thomä	Karl	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	T75	2860	2868
Thomä	Leonhard	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	T75	2918	2926
Thomä	Max	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	T76	32	40
Thomä	Michael	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	T76	44	54
Thomä	Michael	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	T76	56	64
Thomä	Peter	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	T76	122	135
Thomä	Peter	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	T76	136	139
Thomä	Peter	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	T76	140	147
Thomä	Wilhelm	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	T76	316	324
Vogt	Franz	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	U89	1206	1216
Vogt	Franz	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	U89	1218	1228
Weinberger	Johann	E-G Kartei	EWZ 50	U22	450	460
Weinberger	Johann	UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 57	J2	616	624
Weinberger	Johannes	E-G Kartei UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 50 EWZ 57	U22 J2	462 628	471 644
Wollbaum	Markus	E-G Kartei	EWZ 57	U101	2816	2816
Wollbaum	Mattias	E-G Kartei UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 50 EWZ 57	U101 J32	2824 1588	2826 1610
Wollbaum	Michael	E-G Kartei UdSSR Antrag	EWZ 50 EWZ 57	U101 J32	2836 1612	2843 1642
Zenther	Eduard	E-G Kartei		U131	1310	1313

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