Genocide in a Small Place: Wehrmacht Complicity in Killing the Jews of Krupki, 1941

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Introduction: A Landscape of Graves

On an overcast Thursday afternoon in September 1941, the Jews of Krupki in central Belarus wind their way out of town, across the highway. Somewhere in this group is also a female opera singer from Minsk. Military trucks follow slowly behind carrying the elderly and the infirm. SS men from Einsatzkommando 8 await their arrival about two and a half kilometres away, as storm clouds gather overhead. German army soldiers guard the column as it marches. Here and there, they beat the Jews with rifle butts when they do not move fast enough.1 Among the soldiers guarding this column is 20-year-old private Walter K. As he walks, he notices a small child whose pants had fallen down around his ankles. Though his mother tries to help him keep up, the child is in danger of being trampled by those behind. Walter pulls the mother and child out of line and allows her to pull up his pants. They then rejoin the column and are soon shot into an open pit. He remembered 25 years later that this incident caused him ‘great distress’ as he was already married and had two children of his own.2 In this way, the entire Jewish community of Krupki (1,000 people and over half the town) disappeared, on a Thursday afternoon.

Over 1.5 million Jews died at the hands of the Einsatzgruppen and the Wehrmacht in the occupied East. When the Germans launched Operation Barbarossa on 22 June 1941, they attempted both a huge military operation and an immense genocide. Following conventional units were specially trained and indoctrinated killing units whose primary task was the elimination of ‘potential enemies’ in the Soviet Union. This included former communists, intelligentsia, and above all Jews. By August, this had come to encompass all Jews, regardless of age or sex. In many ways, this ‘Holocaust by Bullets’ was the precursor of and one of the contributing factors to the decision for the death camps
and gas chambers that have become the popular image of the Holocaust. For a variety of reasons, political, historical, and geographical, the ground level participation of the Wehrmacht in these killings has remained relatively unexplored. Yet these murders are equally important for our understanding of how Nazi genocide as a whole unfolded.

If Auschwitz represents the faceless, industrial nature of the Holocaust, with thousands arriving in endless streams from ramp to gas chamber, the killings in the East were profoundly personal in all aspects. Jews were pulled from their homes, in the communities in which many of them lived their whole lives. They were roughly gathered together in market squares and synagogues where they had worked and worshipped. They were marched out of these towns, past their neighbours and colleagues whom they saw on a daily basis. Finally, they were shot in intimate closeness in the forests and fields where they had played as children.

This story is one that has remained somewhat obscured and deserves to be told. As theatre for this tragedy, Belarus was without rival. Timothy Snyder rightly calls it ‘the deadliest place in the world between 1941 and 1944’. Approximately a third of its inhabitants died during the war and it has yet to reach its pre-war population. Participating in and enabling this slaughter in many cases were German soldiers. It is, therefore, vital to investigate how these two stories converged in the towns and villages of Belarus, how the racial policies and directives from Berlin were translated into action, and how these killings took shape on the ground. As Snyder continues, ‘the absence of Belarus from discussions of the past is the clearest sign of the difference between memory and history’.

This study will seek to investigate the convergence of victim and perpetrator and of policy and execution through the Krupki. How and why did a regular Army infantry unit come to be complicit in the murder of 1,000 Jewish men, women, and children? How did these soldiers participate in this action? And, finally, how does understanding the local experience of Krupki inform our understanding of the Holocaust as a whole?

Awareness of the Wehrmacht’s participation in atrocities and complicity in the Holocaust developed along two parallel tracks: one public, the other academic. For several decades following the end of World War II, the German Army enjoyed the benefits of the ‘Clean Wehrmacht’ myth. Beginning at Nuremburg, where the Army was not
termed a criminal organisation as the SS was, the *Wehrmacht* portrayed itself as a purely military force that fought a purely conventional war in the East and was, thus, aloof from Nazi political and genocidal policy. Former Army generals themselves propagated this image and wrote their own highly edited histories of the war. In addition, the political exigencies of the Cold War and the need for German rearmament against the Soviet threat led to a tendency to ‘rehabilitate’ the *Wehrmacht* and overlook its crimes in the East. This trend coincided with popular opinion as well. Germans sought honour and heroism in the *Wehrmacht* and were more than willing to ignore the possibility that their husbands, fathers, and sons had committed the basest of Nazi crimes. Indeed, in 1953, when asked whether ‘German soldiers could be reproached for their actions in the occupied countries’, 55 per cent of Germans said ‘no’, 21 per cent said ‘in some cases’, and only 6 per cent answered with an unequivocal ‘yes’. The Eichmann Trial in 1961 and the release of the mini-series *Holocaust* in 1978 increased awareness of the Holocaust in German memory but the history of the German Army remained mostly undisturbed in the public mind. In 1995, the Hamburg Institute for Social Research presented an exhibition on the *Wehrmacht*’s complicity in the many crimes of the Nazi regime such as POW killing, deportations, murders of non-Jewish civilians, and the Holocaust. This exhibition focused public attention and debate on the German Army in a way that had not been done before. The damning photos and frank depictions of atrocities in the words of German soldiers on display created a volatile public mixture of anger, suspicion, shock, and outrage whose repercussions are still being felt.

Similar emotional reactions could not be avoided in the academic realm, either. However, historians and academics focused on other significant issues. While the exhibition was successful in raising public awareness, challenging conventional beliefs, and provoking violent emotional responses and debates, its overall historical value is questionable. Academically, the investigation into the crimes of the *Wehrmacht* must be seen first and foremost in the development of Holocaust historiography. In the 1960s, historians began to investigate organisation and activities of the Nazi regime, with a particular emphasis on the higher levels. Raul Hilberg’s seminal *Destruction of the European Jews* began mapping the process of the Holocaust while Hans Buchheim’s *Anatomie des SS-Staates* laid out the structures and organisations involved. Helmut Krausnick further exposed the
complicity of the Wehrmacht (at least at the highest levels) with the SS and Einsatzgruppen. Later, scholars began to explore in more detail the policies and behaviours of the German Army. Christian Streit, for example, has described the Army’s murderous POW policy. Others have explored the Wehrmacht and occupation policy from a regional perspective. More recently, some historians have begun looking at the motivations of soldiers and the complicity of the Wehrmacht in atrocities, not just in the Soviet Union. One area that needs more detailed investigation is what Wehrmacht participation looked like at the local level and how and why these soldiers participated in the Holocaust. Christopher Browning and Harald Welzer have contributed much to the discussion of killing units (in their case, police battalions). This article seeks to add to this scholarship.

18 September 1941: Death of a Community

As we were just about ready to leave, a Russian came running after us. He apparently had the task of covering the grave. He said something in Russian that was translated and one of us was sent back. I myself had a look around and saw a three-year-old child sitting on the pile of bodies crying. The child was shot by the man who had been sent back.

(Willi K., member of SS-Teilkommando Schönemann)

Krupki is still a small town today. The name comes from a word meaning ‘grist’, which likely alludes to its early history as a mill town. Located 69 miles north-east of Minsk on the main highway to the regional capital of Mogilev, the town is situated on a gentle rise, surrounded by fields and forests to the north. Small, brightly coloured houses line the streets leading from the formerly Jewish quarter to the nondescript main square. A few hundred yards north is the bright red school building as well as the house of a nineteenth-century nobleman situated in a shady park. Krupki’s Jewish community was first recorded in the 1700s. In 1939, approximately 870 Jews lived there, representing 25 per cent of the total population of 3,455. According to Yad Vashem, approximately 40 per cent of the Jewish population consisted of craftsmen and labourers. The majority lived on Lenin and Sovetskaya streets. Beyond some moderate growth, the town seems little changed from midsummer 1941 when the 3rd Battalion of the 354th Infantry Regiment entered.
These German soldiers were mainly blue collar labourers while the officers were a mixture of lower middle class officials, professionals, and reserve officers. The regiment’s ages reflected its second-rate quality; the average age in 1941 was 32. Officers and NCOs averaged 36 and 34 respectively. In short, there was nothing exceptional in these men from a training or unit perspective. The regiment arrived in the Soviet Union immediately behind the frontline units in June 1941. After helping secure the Bialystok pocket against breakout attempts, it arrived in Minsk at the beginning of July. From 6 to 17 July, Major Johannes Waldow’s 3rd Battalion guarded the immense POW ‘camp’ just outside of Minsk, most likely Drozdy. The camp was a precursor to events in Krupki as it may have been the first exposure of the battalion to the harsh realities of Nazi policy in the Soviet Union. Over 100,000 Soviet POWs were confined in an open area, surrounded by barbed-wire and bounded on one side by a stream, which lay outside the wire. A quartermaster officer in 4th Panzer Army wrote that the conditions in the camp were ‘untenable’ and the prisoners were ‘completely exposed to the searing heat’. Moreover, as transports of prisoners to the rear (which had only been allowed in open railway cars) had been discontinued by 4th Panzer Army due to ‘hygienic reasons’ (the cleanliness of the cars), the numbers of prisoners continued to rise on a daily basis. A lieutenant in the 354th Infantry Regiment remembered that ‘the conditions in the camp were indescribable’ and that ‘there were rumours that the prisoners had eaten each other’. As part of their guard duty, soldiers often killed prisoners, either when the starved men rushed the field kitchens or when they crossed into off-limits areas. A soldier on Waldow’s staff recalled that a prisoner was found in possession of a nail or a straight razor and brought to Waldow, who remarked that there were already enough POWs and to execute him. When the prisoner broke down crying and could no longer finish digging his own grave, soldiers shot him in the vicinity of the battalion headquarters.

However, the men of the 3rd Battalion witnessed more than these abuses. This camp was also divided into sections for commissars and Jews containing both Jewish Red Army soldiers and civilian Jews from Minsk. Jews were permitted water only twice a day. The soldiers witnessed the SS conduct frequent selections of these prisoners who were then shot in the vicinity of the camp; men from the 3rd Battalion also witnessed these killings and visited the open graves. Knowledge of these shootings was widespread, as was the participation of the
*Einsatzgruppen* in these killings. One diary from a 3rd Battalion soldier states that the unit itself shot Jews there. The brutalising impact of the Drozdy camp may be best seen in a report from a Nazi official on 10 July 1941, which noted ‘the limited guard force, which bears the burden of guarding, without being replaced for days on end, turns to the prisoners in the only possible language, and that is the language of weapons, and they do this mercilessly’.

Around 28 July, the 3rd Battalion arrived in the vicinity of Krupki. Its mission there was the security of Highway 2 and the railroads between the towns of Borisov and Bobr, a distance of some 30 miles. The 11th Company appears to have been stationed outside town and not to have been involved in the killing while the 10th and 12th Companies were quartered in and around Krupki. The battalion used the town as its operating base for patrols in the surrounding countryside and combating sporadic partisan attacks on the road and railways and rounding up any bypassed Red Army troops. At least one soldier, however, testified that these patrols often had as their target Jews as well.

Particularly active in patrolling was Oberfeldwebel Schrade, platoon leader of 2nd Platoon, 12th Company. Schrade submitted an ‘experience report’ on anti-partisan patrolling on 13 October that was so well received at the highest levels that it was forwarded to all units in Army Group Centre (Rear). Among the recommendations was that ‘women and children be ruthlessly prohibited from leaving the village’ and also that ‘because the Russian fears the club more than the gun, beatings are the most effective method’. He continued by adding, ‘recently, women have been found in [partisan] camps. In almost every case, these were Jewish women whose task was to determine whether villages were free of the enemy. It is also women who do not appear Jewish.’ In addition, there is substantial evidence that the 3rd Battalion was already involved in anti-Jewish measures on their own initiative before the visit of Werner Schönemann’s *Einsatzkommando* in September 1941.

Schönemann was a 30-year-old Berliner and Gestapo officer. During his second semester of law school at the University of Berlin, he was ordered to Pretzsch where the *Einsatzgruppen* were assembling. Here, he joined *Einsatzkommando* 8, whose task was the murder of the Jews of central Belarus. Schönemann was an intelligent yet crude man who bragged of his sexual relationships and who sent an 11-year-old ‘Aryan-looking’ Belarusian girl home to live with his parents in Berlin. Yet in
his work, he was cold, single-minded, and without compromise. He often began the shootings himself, jumping into the pits and firing the first shot ‘to set an example and to show that he did not shirk his duty’. Yet he was not a sadist, was not comfortable with his task of mass murder, and therefore required that the killings take place very quickly and efficiently. Schönemann appeared glad when killings were over, but was ‘on edge’ and ‘hardly approachable’ afterwards. Upon his return to Berlin in October 1941, he attempted suicide twice by slitting his wrists.

It was this enigmatic yet effective killer who arrived at Major Johannes Waldow’s headquarters in Krupki a few days before the massacre in September 1941 to make arrangements for support from the Wehrmacht. Multiple testimonies by soldiers in the battalion headquarters help to recreate the scene. Schönemann and another SS officer were met in the orderly room by Waldow and his adjutant, Lieutenant Werner S. They then went into Waldow’s office. Schönemann apparently informed Waldow of the planned killing of the Jews of Krupki and requested two companies to support him. Waldow himself testified that Schönemann revealed that he was there to kill the Jews and his group consisted of only about 20 men and was far too small to carry out the operation on its own. Waldow said he would not participate in any shootings, to which Schönemann replied that he would not have to supply shooters but merely provide security for the operation. Schönemann also requested additional ammunition, which Waldow claimed to have refused. On his way out, Schönemann allegedly turned to Lieutenant S. and said, ‘We have to carry out this unhappy task, shooting all the way to the Urals. As you can imagine, it’s not pretty and one can only bear it with alcohol.’

Major Waldow, apparently still uncomfortable with this looming task, called regimental headquarters for clarification and perhaps to avoid participation. The regimental commander, Colonel von Rekowski, was not available, but Waldow spoke to the regimental adjutant, Captain Meyer-Schöller. Waldow asked whether he should participate to which Meyer-Schöller replied, ‘Jawohl! [definitely]’. Battalion adjutant, Lieutenant S., provides a possible explanation for this decision, noting that ‘there was an order that Army units should support the SS’. After the departure of the SS, preparations in the 3rd Battalion began in earnest. Waldow stated that he held a meeting with the company commanders where he informed them of the coming shooting
and allegedly added that the individual soldier ‘was not to come into contact with Jewish civilians’ or to ‘enter the wood where the killings would occur’. \(^{41}\) Sometime later that day the commanders of the 10th and 12th companies, First Lieutenants B. and L., met with their platoon leaders and passed on the order.

Probably the next day, Lieutenant N., a platoon leader in 12th Company, ordered a soldier to saddle two horses and the two rode wordlessly out of town. After about half an hour, they arrived in a swampy open area near the Starozhevitsa River and the village of Lebedevo. After inspecting an existing trench two metres deep, perhaps where peat had been harvested, the lieutenant remounted and the two rode back. He then turned to the soldier and asked him to estimate the distance to the site, which he guessed was about 800m. \(^{42}\) Lieutenant N. had just selected the Krupki execution site.

Early on the morning of 18 September 1941, the soldiers of 10th and 12th companies assembled. They were told of the task ahead of them or had already been told the night before (as in the case of

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**FIGURE 1**

3RD BATTALION OFFICERS


Lieutenant Kerker’s 4th Platoon, 12th Company). ‘Men’, Kerker allegedly announced, ‘we have a serious task ahead of us tomorrow. Whoever doesn’t trust himself to handle a sensitive and serious assignment does not need to be ashamed and can back out.’\(^{43}\) According to a soldier in headquarters, the Jews of Krupki had also been notified by the mayor the night before that they were going to be resettled in the morning.\(^{44}\)

At first light, soldiers tasked with conducting the outer Absperrung or cordon took position outside of Krupki. They were told that no Jew was to be allowed to leave the village and that any who tried were to be shot.\(^{45}\) Though no one admits personally shooting, several soldiers remember hearing isolated shots all morning. Paul W. recalls a fellow soldier telling a Jewish man driving his cattle out of town to turn around.\(^{46}\) The First Sergeant of 12th Company, Hans H., recalls hearing from his men that night that ‘young Jewish women ran to the sentries begging for their lives and pleading that they were too young to be simply shot’.\(^{47}\)

After the cordon had been established around 7 am, Schönemann’s Teilkommando of killers arrived in the small market square. One of his men remembered that Schönemann spoke briefly with a Wehrmacht officer and then said, ‘Let’s get started.’\(^{48}\) As the mayor of Krupki rang a bell, the round-up of the Jewish inhabitants of the town began.\(^{49}\) Lieutenant N. and a group of 15–20 volunteers reported to the SD men and began pulling Jews from their houses.\(^{50}\) Slowly, the market square filled with people. They arrived in family groups with their belongings. They had been told to take only money and valuables and to leave their houses unlocked and surrender their keys to the mayor.\(^{51}\) German soldiers guarded them there. Once the approximately 1,000 Jews of Krupki were assembled, an SS-man or possibly the mayor stood on a platform and read out a list of names.\(^{52}\) This registration lasted around two hours after which the Jews were formed into columns to be marched out of town. The elderly and infirm were roughly thrown onto waiting trucks and wagons, supplied by the Wehrmacht.

In the late morning, the Jews began marching out of town along Sovetskaya Street, escorted by German Army soldiers. During the 45-minute walk, SS men and the soldiers drove them on with rifle butts when they did not move fast enough. As they neared the execution site selected by Lieutenant N., soldier Bruno H. recalled that ‘someone told them they could throw away their things as they were going to be shot anyway. Some did this and the people became very agitated. Someone
else then said that they had to take their things with them anyway. The execution trenches were located in a field, bordered on the east by a swampy area and a forest. As the Jews arrived here, they understood what was to happen. As one soldier remembered, ‘many started to scream and cry. The SS-men beat them until order was restored.’

Margarita Kosenkova was five years old and lived in the village of Lebedevo. She remembered that the ‘procession was peaceful but once they reached the pit they started to scream. There was an awful scream that they could hear in Lebedevo’. Walter K., who had escorted the toddler and its mother to the killing site observed a ‘panicked state among them, but the guards kept the Jews together’.

However, the 3rd Battalion’s work was not yet complete. Wehrmacht soldiers were also responsible for guarding the execution site along with local Belarusian police while the SS shot. The Einsatzgruppen men selected groups of ten from the mass of Jews forced to sit or kneel in a sandy meadow a short distance away. Erich S., in the Absperrung, watched as the Jews approached the grave. He saw an SS man shouting, ‘Undress and give up your jewellery.’ The Jews then removed their shoes and outer coats, throwing them onto a pile near the trench and were forced to deposit their jewellery and watches in a nearby box. Erich continued, ‘finally, most of them were pushed into the pit because they were afraid to go on their own.’

Soldiers surrounding the graves watched as men, women, and children were forced to enter the pit, lay down on the bodies of those already shot, and then were themselves shot by a squad of SS men standing above. The SS men, who were drinking as they worked, would hold babies up by their legs and then shoot them. A local Belarusian bystander, Petr Bulakh, observed the killings. He was 12 at the time and was so shocked by what he saw that he spoke with a stutter for the rest of his life. Schönemann explained the killing process in a bizarre attempt at appearing more humane. ‘I ordered’, he said, ‘that each time, the next group would lay their heads on the backs of the previously shot people so that they wouldn’t touch the gunshot wounds [of the dead]. I must say frankly that I tried, under the circumstances, to find the relatively best method of shooting.’ The soldiers had set up machine guns around the site to secure it. One witnessed several Jews stand up and attempt to run away but they were beaten with clubs. One of those who escaped was Maria Shpunt. She first attempted to convince the Germans that she and her baby were not Jewish. Apparently, she fell into the pit alive after the rest of her group was
shot. When they went to get the next group of victims, she crawled out and ran into the brush. Though the Germans (most likely from the 3rd Battalion) shot at her, she managed to escape.65 Watching all of this from a small rise were a collection of officers from the battalion, including the commander Waldow, adjutant Lieutenant S., and 10th Company commander, Lieutenant Braun.

While the participation of soldiers in most of the operation is well-documented, one area remains only dimly illuminated: participation in actual killing. It is likely that the battalion killed Jews attempting to escape both the town and the shooting site; however, it also appears that its soldiers participated in the pit shooting alongside Schönemann’s SS men. Determining this kind of participation in the actual killing is difficult, as very few former soldiers are willing to discuss such participation. What is clear is that some men did shoot.

Testimony points to two possible ways in which soldiers ended up shooting. The first comes again from the diary of one soldier Richard Heidenreich. In it, he claims that he volunteered for a special task. The lieutenant asked for ‘fifteen men with strong nerves’. He accurately describes the execution site and the rainy weather. Finally, he says that this group also shot Jews in the execution ditch.66 Some soldier testimony supports this possibility. Herbert C. of 12th Company testified that he was certain that ‘shootings were carried out by the 2nd Platoon led by Master Sergeant Schrade’. Moreover, he continued, he had seen photographs taken by a sergeant in the company in which Schrade was seen pointing a pistol at a group of ten Jews kneeling before a ditch.67 One soldier testified during his initial questioning that Schrade had, indeed, sought ‘fifteen men with strong nerves’ the night before (though in later questioning, he said only that Schrade had sought volunteers; in any case, he did not admit participating in any shooting).68 Perhaps, while not intending to provide the bulk of killers, Waldow had agreed to provide a ‘reserve’ squad of men. This would explain the 15-man squad mentioned by Heidenreich and others which was identified the night before. Then, when time or ammunition dictated, this group was added to the pool of available shooters. There is little evidence in the post-war testimonies to support this; however, it is also the last thing that most men would have admitted to. Thus it remains unclear whether this premeditated participation took place. The statement of one soldier leaves us wondering: he stated that a fellow company member ‘freely told me after the shootings that he himself had shot several Jews at the grave. I did not have the impression that he did this unwillingly.’69
Another possible scenario and one strongly supported by the evidence is that those soldiers tasked with the *Absperrung* of the execution site were then included in the shooting. It appears that, perhaps as a result of Waldow’s refusal to supply the *Teilkommando* with ammunition, Schönemann’s men were running short of bullets and *Wehrmacht* soldiers were then asked or ordered to assist with their rifles. Another reason that the men of the 3rd Battalion were included may have been to speed up the operation. Schönemann stated ‘it went incredibly fast, in order to avoid any delay, in the interest of both sides, the victims as well as those participating in the execution’. Certainly he did not have the victims’ interests in mind, but he was, as noted previously, uncomfortable during these operations and wanted them to go as quickly as possible. In addition, the weather was deteriorating. Storm clouds approached and it had begun to rain. A member of the SS *Teilkommando* testified that ‘clouds appeared and a thunderstorm approached. Schönemann therefore had things proceed very quickly.’

The battalion surgeon, Dr. G., reported that he and a platoon leader in 12th Company informed the adjutant, Lieutenant S., that 3rd Battalion soldiers were shooting Jews, at which he allegedly became angry and replied that ‘the participation of *Wehrmacht* soldiers in the shooting had not been ordered’. In the final analysis, *Wehrmacht* soldiers in Krupki took a direct hand in the work of the *Einsatzgruppen* perhaps according to plan, in an improvised, ad hoc sort of way or in a combination of both.

Around five in the afternoon, after the last Jew had been shot, Schönemann collected the victims’ confiscated valuables and, along with his men, drove away. The grave was most likely then strewn with lime and covered by local Russians. Both here and in the town, the non-Jewish inhabitants took the possessions left behind by the Jews. The soldiers who had been tasked with guarding the execution site marched back to the town and the Jewish community of Krupki was gone. As the local men were covering the grave, they discovered 21-year-old Sofia Shalaumova still alive. She had fallen into the trench, unhurt and survived. She asked the labourer, whom she knew as an acquaintance, not to bury her alive and he allowed her to escape. Local Belarusians remembered that individual Jews caught in the local area after the shooting were also shot. Margarita Kosenkova visited the site soon after the killings with a group of other children from her village. ‘The ground was moving’, she said, ‘and blood was coming out of the ground. For two years after, there was blood there.’
Schönemann reported the killing to Einsatzkommando 8 and a month later the following summary appeared in the operational summary of Einsatzgruppe B to Heinrich Himmler: “Two larger actions were carried out by the unit [Einsatzkommando 8] in Krupka and Sholopenitsche [sic]. In the first town 912 Jews were liquidated and in the second 822. With this, the Krupka region can be seen as Judenfrei.” A report from the 354th Regiment on the next day did not mention Krupki … nor did any other report from either the 3rd Battalion or the regiment. The whole incident had passed apparently without notice or was conspicuously ignored.

Explaining Wehrmacht Complicity: From Berlin to a Field in White Russia

The events in Krupki were the end result of both Nazi genocidal policy at the highest levels and its negotiation and implementation at the local level. Representing the bulk of the division’s combat power, the 354th Infantry Regiment was assigned the most important task of protecting the vital logistical rail and road links behind Army Group Centre. How, then, did the 3rd Battalion become so deeply involved in executing the racial policies of the Third Reich on the ground?

The answer lies at many levels. One must begin with the Army High Command, which had agreed before the invasion to support the killing units. Militaries are organisations with long institutional memories. This contributes to a development of shared values, methods of leadership and decision-making, and responses to certain situations. Thus, the Wehrmacht arrived in the Soviet Union not as a tabula rasa but as the offspring of an old military tradition and a modern ideology. Isabel Hull, for example, has traced a culture of extremity and of brutality toward civilians on the part of the German Army. Omer Bartov demonstrates in his work the increasing importance of Nazi ideology in the German Army. Edward Westermann, on the other hand, has employed an analysis of organisational culture to explain how cooperation between police battalions and the Army led to participation in genocide as well. A similar relationship also appears to have developed early on between the Army and the Einsatzgruppen, even in the absence of any real anti-partisan threat.

Army Group Centre (Rear), the corps-level unit to which the 354th Infantry Regiment belonged, stated clearly in an order dated 24 June 1941 that the Einsatzkommandos were ‘subordinate to the commander
[of Army Group Centre (Rear)] concerning march, supply, and accommodation. Thus, while the Army was not tactically employing the Einsatzgruppen, it was supporting them logistically. A November 1941 order from another division under Army Group Centre (Rear) laid out the areas of responsibility of the various security organisations, including the SD (Einsatzgruppen). It identified as keywords for the SD: ‘Politically suspect civilians, Bolsheviks, Jews, and Gypsies’ and under SD missions listed ‘Solution to the Jewish Question’ and ‘the Gypsy Question’. In addition, the well-known ‘Guidelines for the Behaviour of the Troops’, supplied to all units down to company level before the invasion, designated Bolshevism as the ‘mortal enemy of the German people’ and demanded ‘ruthless and aggressive action against Bolshevik agitators, snipers, saboteurs, and Jews and tireless elimination of any active or passive resistance’. These exhortations fell on fertile soil in a military organisation rife with anti-communists and steeped in a long tradition of extreme brutality toward perceived civilian resistance.

Coupled with the Führerbefehl of 14 May 1941, which suspended prosecution of Wehrmacht soldiers for any crimes committed against civilians in the Soviet Union, these high-level orders not only condoned, but encouraged brutal action against civilians in general and Jews in particular. In this calculus, all Jews were Bolsheviks, all Bolsheviks were partisans, all partisans were Jews. Army Group Centre (Rear) informed its units that ‘cooperation with the SD and GFP is to be made even closer in all actions by the divisions and their subordinate staffs … Requests for stationary operation from individual squads of SD Einsatzkommandos are to be submitted to the commander.’ The support provided to the Einsatzgruppen can also be seen at the division level. In its report for the period from September to December 1941, the intelligence section of the 286th Security Division (the 354th’s parent unit) appeared happy to report that ‘constant contact was maintained with the Security Service, specifically the Einsatzgruppe of Gruppenführer Neumann, the Einsatzkommando 8 of Sturmbannführer Dr. Bratfisch [sic], and in particular with Untersturmführer Reschke’s Orscha-based squad’. This statement hints at much more than merely a logistical relationship.

In addition to supporting the mobile killing squads, Wehrmacht organisational culture also propagated the message that Jews were a group distinct from the general civilian population, inferior and expendable. Jews were already targeted this way in the ‘Guidelines for the Behaviour of the Troops’. An Army Group Centre Rear order
concerning pay of road repair crews specified that Jews ‘may only be compensated in the form of food’. The 221st Security Division (also stationed in Army Group Centre Rear) ordered that Jews be rounded up and forced to gather straw and clean houses in preparation for a Wehrmacht unit’s arrival. On 18 July, the same Division ordered ‘hostages (particularly Jews)’ to be rounded up in reprisal for an attack on a German sentry and a messenger. The 354th Infantry Regiment itself reported on 7 September that, in cooperation with a signal battalion, the entire Jewish population of Tschereja was killed in reprisal for an attack on German troops. Nonetheless, the 403rd Security Division’s intelligence section observed that

not all soldiers have the proper attitude towards the Jews. They do not approach the Jewish labourers with the desirable ruthlessness and the distance that should be self-evident for national socialist soldiers. Emphasis must be given to intervene against this thoughtlessness.

Combined with popularly held antisemitic beliefs among the troops and a zero-sum vision of a clash of cultures, the organisational climate in the Army which condoned and propagated antisemitic feeling created the conditions for unreasoning violence against Jews behind the lines.

Finally, all these factors combined under the aegis of the anti-partisan war. In this calculus, all Jews were Bolsheviks and partisan supporters. Thus, the Jewish population was ‘militarised’. That is, they were transformed into combatants (as partisans or partisan supporters) and thereby speciously deemed legitimate targets for military action. Calling upon a long tradition of anticommunism in the German Army, this formulation sold the Nazi genocidal plan to the military in terms it could best relate to and support. This type of broad targeting occurred in the 3rd Battalion. In the 354th Regiment’s area of operations, little real anti-partisan war was occurring. Personnel records indicate that in the period from 22 June to 30 September, only 17 men were killed and 32 wounded in the entire division of 7,500. It is likely, therefore, that the unit was involved in the far less dangerous task of rounding up bypassed Red Army soldiers, communists and, perhaps, Jews. One soldier remembered:

We often carried out so-called raids, mostly at night. ... The resident Jews would be rounded up and assembled in the town. After they were assembled, a site would be chosen in the
surrounding woods and they would be shot. Sometimes non-Jews
would be taken along to dig the graves and they took the Jews’
possessions with them. 95

Major Waldow’s selection as a speaker and trainer at a corps-level anti-
partisan conference in Mogilev a week later is evidence that the actions
of his battalion in supporting the action in Krupki were in no way
condemned by his superiors, but on the contrary were viewed as an
accomplishment that qualified him for special assignment.

One of the benefits of investigating the Holocaust at the ground
level is that it enables one to take into account situational factors that
along with ideological and organisational preconditioning influenced
the behaviour of German soldiers. In addition to the overall policies
ordained from above, the local geography and conditions on the
ground as well as the military situation led to the battalion’s
participation in this massacre. Because Krupki was located on the main
artery between Minsk and Mogilev, it probably served as a small centre
for trading and commerce, which would explain the large Jewish
population. For the same reasons, it was an excellent base of operations
for securing 3rd Battalion’s stretch of road, given its access to the
highway and the buildings available to house soldiers. Finally, Krupki’s
location ensured that it would be a target of the Einsatzgruppen before
more distant, out of the way places. Thus, while later Jewish ‘actions’
would be coordinated with civilian authorities, Ortskommandanturen,
and local militias, the Krupki action would be a relatively early action
carried out with only the first units to arrive.

Why did Major Waldow agree to allow his battalion to participate to
such a degree? It is likely that he refused to provide his soldiers as firing
squads, at least in the initial meeting. He did call his regimental
headquarters for clarification on whether he should assist Schönemann.
It is unclear whether this was a result of his objection to any
participation or merely his desire to have the action approved by his
superiors. It is probably the former, as little evidence exists to suggest
that Waldow was an extreme antisemite or pushed for the action on his
own initiative. One cannot necessarily assume that his objections were
based on moral grounds. No evidence exists explaining his reluctance
except that he found the whole thing distasteful. He stated during his
questioning that ‘my concern was to avoid members of the battalion
coming into immediate contact with the Jewish inhabitants of Krupki
or the SD’. 96 Such concerns that the killing of women and children was
a dirty job and not the mission of the regular Army were common but
did not necessarily represent disagreement with the policy itself. In any case, these reservations did not prevent him from fully assisting Teilkommando Schönemann, down to choosing the execution site for them. His support was vital, for the 10–20 men of the Teilkommando could never have carried out such a large action without the manpower of the Army.

**Among the Living and the Dead: Local Experiences of the Krupki Killing**

I want to mention here that those in the Absperrung were so depressed that evening that they wouldn’t eat anything. I had to really persuade them that they had to eat. I added, ‘Eat, men. Don’t worry about it because there are many atrocities in war. We are not responsible for it.’

(Lieutenant Hermann N., platoon leader, 12th Company)\(^97\)

I didn’t want to witness this. I was married then and had four children. I remember clearly that I thought of my family and felt that the imminent events were wrong. I simply couldn’t witness the shooting of these people. I went then to Lieutenant M. and told him he should release me from any further escorting of Jews to the shooting site. I know I told him I couldn’t watch it because I had four children at home. M. told me I could go and do guard duty.

(Martin S., soldier, 10th Company)\(^98\)

As we have seen, the majority of Wehrmacht soldiers participating in the Krupki ‘action’ were not volunteers. How then did they approach this experience and what does their experience and that of the victims tell us about such killings? We may start with their knowledge of the intent of the operation. Did these men realise that their actions were directly responsible for the murder of 1,000 human beings?

Naturally, most soldiers claimed to have had no idea that they were participating in the killing of the Jews, that they thought the Jews were to be deported to labour camps. This must be, for the most part, a post-war construction. Waldow and the company commanders clearly knew that the Jews were to be shot. It is almost certain that they passed this information on to their soldiers. In any case, a sufficient number of soldiers confessed knowledge of the real goal to cast serious doubt on any claims of ignorance. For example, Erich J. described a conversation
with a fellow soldier on the day of the shooting. ‘The stated reason for the registration was only a pretext’, he admitted, ‘from the way the conversation went it was clear to me that the Jews would be shot.’

Another soldier, recalling executions of Jews the unit had already witnessed in Minsk, said it was clear these Jews were to be ‘liquidated’ too.

Finally, Sergeant Paul D. related: ‘Supposedly we knew that these Jews were to be resettled. However, all Wehrmacht members, including me, would have known that these people were going to their deaths.’

Why, then, out of 130 former officers and soldiers questioned after the war, did only Private Martin S. report refusing to participate and requesting a different assignment? There are several explanations. First, many soldiers saw no way out or perhaps did not realise the full meaning of their participation until they were committed. One soldier’s statement is typical: ‘In this moment, it was clear to me that the Jews I was escorting would be shot and I had no further task. I would have not been able to change anything.’

Another said, ‘I didn’t dare do or say anything because I was only a simple soldier and couldn’t have changed anything.’

Many refer to their station as ‘simple soldiers’. Others refer to military discipline and orders. For example, Bruno H. stated: ‘when I am told that at the latest I must have known at the execution site that the civilians were to be shot and that it had nothing to do with war, this is true. I didn’t have the courage at the time to do anything against it or to refuse the order because I certainly had to count on being shot myself.’

Both statements are certainly partly a result of the post-war position of the witness and the ‘obedience to orders’ excuse, but there is also likely an element of truth in them. The men of the 3rd Battalion were not experienced in these sorts of mass killings and perhaps had not discovered the methods of evasion and refusal that other soldiers would later use.

Secondly, as Omer Bartov notes, ‘the strict obedience demanded from the troops, and the draconian punishments meted to offenders, doubtless played a major role in maintaining unit cohesion under the most adverse combat conditions’.

Though this was not a combat environment, the argument holds. While it was probably clear to most that soldiers would not be shot on the spot, the spectre of other types of punishment was undoubtedly present. Some men describe a fear that the SS men would shoot them for refusing to participate. This, too, was highly unlikely. German units (of any ilk) simply did not shoot each other out of hand, especially when the offender was not even a member of the unit. However, military culture functions by necessity under
increased disciplinary pressure and for some this pressure may have been enough to mute any resistance, especially as, unlike in later situations, those resistant to such participation had not yet discovered successful ways to resist.

There was a second fear that probably influenced these men (though was rarely mentioned directly in post-war testimonies). Surrounded by inhospitable terrain and potential ‘enemies’ everywhere, German soldiers deeply valued comradeship and a sense of belonging to the group. Thomas Kühne, who has written extensively on the subject, notes that ‘the threat of social death, exclusion from the mutual welfare and communication network, was the cement of military group culture’. Christopher Browning also identified similar social-psychological pressures in his study of Reserve Police Battalion 101. These pressures, described by Kühne as a ‘shame culture’, exerted a very real and powerful peer pressure which also incorporated elements of a conception of masculinity that viewed non-compliance as weakness.

Lastly, the division of labour provided some psychological protection for these men. First, the tactics involved were almost identical to those employed against partisans in terms of surrounding towns and identifying suspicious persons. This ‘tactical muscle memory’ may have allowed some soldiers to tell themselves that this operation was no different than previous operations of which they had been a part. Except for those who may have actually been shooting, soldiers could claim (both to themselves at the time and after the war) that they had not actually participated in the shooting. As one man stated after the war, ‘We merely had to carry out the Absperrung. At this time, we didn’t know what was actually going on.’ As we have seen, it is highly unlikely that many soldiers would not have known what they were enabling. However, such separation of tasks probably allowed some of them to believe or convince themselves that they were not assisting murder. The dichotomy is particularly clear in the following statement: ‘We soldiers were merely employed in the Absperrung ... We had nothing to do with the killings.’ Soldiers attempted to consciously divorce their actions from the whole, to intentionally avoid acknowledging that their participation was directly connected with the final killing step. Former Corporal L. told police, ‘I could not have changed anything. In answer to your question, I must say that as a result I found myself in no moral conflict ... I am therefore not aware of being guilty of anything.’ One is forced to wonder here whether L. is
protesting too much and whether he is talking more to himself than to his interrogators.

However, if some soldiers were reluctant participants swept up in the operation, others were very willing.\textsuperscript{112} We have already seen that volunteers were sought and found for the more distasteful duty of rounding up the Jews from their houses and possibly for shooting. There were soldiers in the unit whose antisemitism made these killings welcome. Reinhold L. recalls that one soldier aimed his rifle at a Jewish girl ‘for fun’ a few days before the execution.\textsuperscript{113} Certainly men such as this were not uncommon, but the testimonies do not contain many references to them. However, they do describe two junior officers who stand out as \textit{Draufgängers} or ‘go-getters’ of two different varieties and who most likely have their counterparts among the non-commissioned officers and men.

The first is Master Sergeant Schrade who led the 2nd Platoon in 12th Company. He was described by one soldier as ‘a pretentious person (\textit{Windhund})’ who ‘didn’t have any time for his people’.\textsuperscript{114} He often led ‘partisan hunts’ and ‘always had ‘his’ people who went with him’.\textsuperscript{115} Schrade used volunteers for these missions, which he conducted often in civilian clothes. As mentioned, he published a treatise on small-unit anti-partisan tactics that was disseminated throughout Army Group Centre (Rear). Clearly, he was an active and avid fighter. But what of his participation in anti-Jewish actions? Heidenreich was apparently in Schrade’s platoon and another 2nd Platoon soldier supported his contention that it was Schrade who sought the 15 men with ‘strong nerves’. He was also placed at the execution site by several witnesses. It appears that Schrade was certainly a dedicated soldier and an ambitious leader. He may have been involved in anti-Jewish shootings during his partisan patrols and during the execution. In any case, he ranks highly as a likely suspect in \textit{Wehrmacht} atrocities against Jews.\textsuperscript{116}

Another platoon leader in 12th Company was noted for his fanaticism as well. While Master Sergeant Schrade appears as a die-hard and zealous soldier, Lieutenant Hermann N. is remembered more as a brutal and fanatical man. He was ‘unpopular with all the soldiers because of his ruthless behaviour. He tormented those who gave him any opportunity.’\textsuperscript{117} One of his soldiers recalls that during one anti-partisan operation, N. had approximately 20–30 men pulled from their houses and shot on the spot … allegedly because shots had been fired from the village the day before.\textsuperscript{118} Some time after the Krupki shooting,
he tortured a local mayor for information regarding partisans by first repeatedly hanging him from a balcony and then forcing him into a freezing lake until he talked. On a different operation, the lieutenant allegedly burned down a house with a woman in it who was suspected of sheltering partisans. He and his men watched as the house burned to the ground with the woman inside, at the window. Finally, one soldier reported that he had personally seen N. shoot five to six children who peeled potatoes in the kitchen for extra food. It is probably no coincidence that it was Lieutenant N. who found the execution site and who was one of those responsible for the Absperrung there; he most likely participated in attacks on Jews as well.

Unlike the Einsatzgruppen who swooped into a town, conducted their killings, and left, the 3rd Battalion had been present in Krupki for over a month before the killings. The unit had, regardless of Major Waldow’s intentions, close contact with the civilian population including the Jews. The speed of the German advance, coming only six days after the invasion, ensured that most of the town’s Jews were trapped under German occupation. A ghetto had already been established in July for approximately 1,000 Jews, but probably was not closed or guarded.

Like Wehrmacht units elsewhere, the 3rd Battalion used Jews as forced labour for various tasks. One lieutenant recalls that they were used for repair work. However, most soldiers particularly remember the Jewish girls who were ‘employed’ as maids or janitors in the headquarters or barracks. Daily contact with these Jewish women would have bred familiarity, for it is almost exclusively these women who represent the victims in the minds of the perpetrators.

A clerk in the 10th Company related the following encounter. On the morning of the execution, he looked on as a 20-year-old Jewish girl stepped outside to empty the trash. A Russian civilian appeared and gruffly spoke to the girl. He concluded, ‘the girl was very frightened and returned to Krupka. I thought to myself that this girl would now certainly be shot.’ Yet the clerk apparently did nothing to prevent this. A private on battalion staff remembered watching two 20-year-old girls who cleaned for them leaving the village to be shot. He, too, did nothing.

The battalion ordnance officer, Lieutenant Werner K., testified that Major Waldow lived in the house of a Jewish pharmacist. Waldow’s orderly testified that the major had tried to convince the pharmacist to escape because he would be shot the next day. The man apparently,
how ever, refused and was most likely killed along with the rest.\textsuperscript{128} This incident adds more to our understanding of Waldow himself. He appears to have been a man with reservations about killing Jews, willing to warn those with whom he had personal contact, but, as an officer, prepared to fully cooperate with the killing when it was asked of him.

Familiarity did not always breed empathy, however. As mentioned earlier, one soldier pointed his rifle at a Jewish girl apparently in an attempt to frighten her. According to the witness, the girl told this soldier, ‘Go ahead and shoot! Whether today or tomorrow, doesn’t matter to me.’\textsuperscript{129} The witness concluded from this that she knew of the impending execution.

Perhaps the most intriguing and most puzzling of the interactions these men had with their victims concerns a Jewish opera singer from Minsk. This woman was shot along with the others. She appears to have been well known amongst the 3rd Battalion soldiers. When speaking with an eyewitness of the executions, Erwin K. asked whether all the Jews had been shot, even the pretty women. The other soldier replied, ‘Yes, all shot. Also, the singer from Minsk.’\textsuperscript{130} Another soldier, asking about the fate of the cleaning women, was told that a girl from the theatre, who was ‘pretty as a picture’ was also shot.\textsuperscript{131} It is even more unexpected that two SS members of the \textit{Teilkommando} also remembered that this opera singer had been among those murdered.\textsuperscript{132}

What is the significance of this woman in the memory of the perpetrators? Who was she? Why was she so well known (and well remembered)? Unfortunately, this opera singer from Minsk raises more questions than answers. It is likely that she fled the larger city, perhaps because she had relatives in Krupki. It is possible that she even performed for the soldiers in Krupki. It is doubtful that the Germans only became aware of her on the day of the shooting. Moreover, how did the SS find out about her? Did the soldiers tell them? If so, under what circumstances? It could be that women in general figure so highly in soldiers’ memories because they highlighted most clearly the extreme nature of this action. In any case, the opera singer from Minsk reminds us both of the individual lives and stories that came to an end in Krupki and that to these men, their victims were not necessarily faceless or nameless, but they were killed all the same.

\textbf{Reclaiming a Neglected Past}

Trying to conceal the vestiges of their crimes, German thugs
burned the bodies of killed Jews before retreating. Burnings were carried out with the involvement of arrested Soviet citizens who were brought from prison in Borisov. They were also burnt afterwards. I can’t give you the exact number of bodies burnt, but the number of Jews was about 2,000.

(Vladimir Antonovich Baranchik, Belarusian inhabitant of Krupki, 28 December 1945)\textsuperscript{133}

I am hearing today for the first time that, in the autumn of 1941, the Jewish population of Krupki was rounded up and escorted, with the assistance of the 3rd Battalion, to an execution site where they were then shot.

(Colonel Siegfried von Rekowski, commander of the 354th Infantry Regiment, 30 March 1967)\textsuperscript{134}

In the autumn of 1943, an SS-Lieutenant Müller in Minsk began preparing cards listing locations of mass killings in occupied Belarus.\textsuperscript{135} These lists were then handed over to \textit{Sonderkommando} 1005, a unit whose task was eradicating the evidence of Nazi crimes before the Red Army re-captured the territory. In Krupki, as elsewhere, prisoners were

\begin{figure}
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\caption{THE KRUPKI KILLING SITE TODAY, MARKED BY THE GROVE OF TREES IN THE FOREGROUND}
\textit{Source}: Photo by Author, 8 July 2009.
\end{figure}
forced to dig up corpses and burn them. Margarita Kosenkova remembered that the ‘smell was terrible and the villagers saw [the burning operation] from the roofs of their houses’. The Red Army entered the town on 28 June 1944.

The Krupki killing site is little changed today, a large meadow on the edge of an evergreen forest sloping gently down to a marsh alongside the Starozhevitsa River. It lies off a gravel road running north of the town and across the highway, probably the same road that the Jews were forced down in 1941. Still visible are the remnants of the peat pits and excavations. In 1969, a memorial was constructed at the site, funded by relatives of the murdered. However, because the Soviet authorities would not allow any mention of Jews, the inscription reads only ‘Buried here are 1,975 peaceful Soviet citizens, brutally murdered by the German Fascist occupants, 18 September 1941.’ A few trees have been planted around the monument. It is a humble memorial, but the grass is kept trimmed, as is the meadow where the Jews were assembled. The Belarusians throughout the region seem to quietly remember their Jewish neighbours by maintaining execution sites and even Jewish cemeteries.

The investigation of the Krupki killing greatly enriches our understanding of Nazi genocide. First and foremost, it gives us a window into another Holocaust. The sterile numbers in the Einsatzgruppen Reports return to real places and re-form into real lives destroyed. It also corrects a prevalent depiction of these killings as routine and without incident. On the contrary, we see that horrible scenes of misery, brutality, and sadism occurred on an intimately personal level. The victims did not go quietly to the pits, resigned to their fates; they cried, they screamed, they pleaded. And the German Army was there – guarding, escorting, and also shooting.

Here, in Krupki, one sees the end product of the initial high-level staff coordination and promises of support and cooperation between the Einsatzgruppen and the Wehrmacht. This was not just an agreement on paper, but one that on the ground resulted in German soldiers loading sick people onto trucks to be killed, guarding them in their last moments, and, in some cases, killing innocent men, women, and children themselves. Wehrmacht collusion in the Holocaust has often been described as haphazard rather than systematic and secondary rather than of great importance. Yet Krupki shows how incredibly important this participation actually was and how coordinated it was, even in the early ad hoc stages. Regardless of how the soldiers viewed
their part, the Army was essential in the murder of this community and provided the manpower, the force, and the intimidation that allowed a small group of SS shooters to kill 1,000 people. Moreover, as this and other cases show, the soldiers of the German Army did not remain aloof but instead pulled triggers themselves.

In addition, this case reveals the murky connection between the anti-partisan war and the Nazi genocidal project in the East. No longer are these compartmented events; more and more, these two ‘wars’ seem intimately connected, with Jews serving as default targets and the anti-partisan war as a ready cover for these killings, at least in areas where little partisan activity existed. More research is required to better help us understand this connection and how it contributed to Wehrmacht participation in the Holocaust.

Major Waldow, Captain S., the adjutant, and Captain Meyer-Schöller (the regimental adjutant) were the only German Army soldiers charged in the Krupki case beginning in 1964. However, Waldow escaped prosecution due to a ‘cardiac arrhythmia’ which left him ‘incapable of testifying or being tried’.139 All charges against S. were dropped because it could not be proven that he acted out of racist motives and the 15-year statute of limitations on being an accessory to murder had run out. Meyer-Schöller’s prosecution was abandoned because it could not be proven that he had actually passed on the order to assist the Einsatzgruppen. All other members of the 3rd Battalion who had clearly been complicit could not be charged due to German legal technicalities. Werner Schönemann was convicted in 1964 on 12 counts of aiding and abetting the murder of 2,170 men, women, children (though the actual number of murders over which he presided was much, much higher). He was sentenced to six years in prison.140 If the opportunity for justice has passed, perhaps time for remembrance, exploration, and understanding of these neglected but vitally important crimes remains.

NOTES
4. Ibid.


Building upon these important works, this project seeks to focus on the Wehrmacht, a more representative organisation of the military units engaged on the Eastern Front. (Previous studies have focused almost exclusively on Police Battalions or Einsatzgruppen units.) In addition, this seeks to reconstruct the actions of these units, and their unit climates in detail and at a scale not perhaps possible in previous works.


23. True to Type: A Selection from Letters and Diaries of German Soldiers and Civilians Collected
on the Soviet-German Front (London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd., 1945), p.29. The problematic nature of this source warrants a brief note. The diary alluded to belonged to a Private Heidenreich. The entries cited only appear in this book which apparently originated in the Soviet Union and was a collection aimed at portraying the crimes of the German Army. It is not impossible that the entries were edited to that aim by Soviet authorities as the original diary has apparently never surfaced. German authorities interviewed Heidenreich’s sister and widow, neither of whom knew of him keeping a diary. However, Heidenreich was a soldier in 12th Company (as stated in the book and confirmed by soldiers from the unit). He was captured in 1943, according to a member of the unit. Moreover, he writes that his battalion guarded a POW camp in Minsk in July 1941, which is correct. Many of the details he mentions (for example, the weather on the day of the mass execution, a partisan action in which a soldier is shot in the leg and the Christmas celebration that was cancelled when the unit was forced to move to the front) are corroborated by other soldiers’ testimony. While some dates appear to be inaccurate, in the final analysis it appears that, regardless of the circumstances under which this text was written, whether an actual diary or something Heidenreich himself wrote (willingly or perhaps unwillingly in Soviet custody), the portions of the published entries that can be checked against other sources have proven to be accurate.

29. Irene Sagel-Grande, H.H. Fuchs and C.F. Rüter, Justiz und NS-Verbrechen. Sammlung deutscher Strafterfeile wegen nationalsozialistischer Tötungsverbrechen 1945–1966, Vol.XX (Amsterdam: University Press Amsterdam, 1979), pp.165–6. Schönemann returned to Berlin in October 1941 and resumed his law studies. He then served with Einsatzkommando 13 in Slovakia and was involved in killings of civilians there in connection with Slovakian partisan movements. After the war, he was briefly punished by the Austrians before fleeing the continent. He lived in Lebanon, Egypt, Greece, Spain, and Switzerland before being arrested by the Germans in 1961.
34. Sagel-Grande et al., Justiz und NS-Verbrechen, p.166.
35. Alternately, both Lt. S and Waldow claimed that they were only asked to support a ‘resettling’ of the Jews. However, this is clearly a post-war attempt at avoiding responsibility (and is itself contradicted by S.’s later remembrance of his conversation with Schönemann).
38. Much post-war testimony revolves around whether or not Meyer-Schöller was actually the Regimental Adjutant at the time. He claimed to have already been the commander of the 11th Company and that another officer had taken over. The documents and testimony are not conclusive, but given Waldow and Lt. S.’s conviction that it was Meyer-Schöller it is likely that he was the adjutant. In any case, contrary to von Rekowski’s statements, the most important conclusion here is that the 3rd Battalion’s support of the Einsatzgruppen in this massacre was both known and condoned by its higher headquarters.
40. ‘S., Werner Statement, 11 March 1964’, p.221. SS, SD, and Einsatzgruppen are meant here. Himmler’s pre-invasion agreement with the Wehrmacht specified logistic support but in practice this seems to have been understood as manpower in addition to materiel.
41. One company commander claimed not to have been notified at this meeting or to have been told that the goal of the action was the shooting of the Jews. However, this is a common attempt at self-exculpation.
55. ‘Kosenkova, Margarita Interview, 8 July 2009’. Interpreter: Vadim Ovsyanik.
60. Some testimonies indicate victims were forced to enter the pit while others state that the victims were shot outside of the pit. Schönemann testified that they entered the pit so this is probably the most reliable explanation.
65. ‘Kosenkova, Margarita Interview, 8 July 2009’. Interpreter: Vadim Ovsyanik.
67. ‘C., Herbert Statement, 17 December 1963’ (BA-ZS: B162/3875), p.153. Some testimonies obscure the participation of Schrade’s platoon by claiming that the ‘volunteers’ were actually for an anti-partisan operation and that Schrade’s platoon was on such a mission the day of the execution. It is true that Schrade took only volunteers on his anti-partisan patrols, but his platoon was in Krupka the day of the shooting, as confirmed by several men.
77. Ibid.
78. ‘Kosenkova, Margarita Interview, 8 July 2009’. Interpreter: Vadim Ovsyanik.
79. ‘Ereignismeldung UdSSR Nr. 124, 25 October 1941’ (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM): 1999.A.0196(Reel2)), 2-723043. The nearby town of Kholoponichi was also the site of a large mass shooting that was, again, supported by soldiers from the 3rd battalion.
84. ‘rHGM Korpsbefehl Nr. 18, 24 June 1941’ (BA-MA: RH 26-221-12b), Anl. 193.
102. The 10th Company commander also reported calling Major Waldow and requesting to be released from the order to support the execution. It is possible that this occurred. However, as a commander, First Lieutenant B. was much more vulnerable to a charge himself and, therefore, more likely to invent some form of reluctance or resistance. In addition, Waldow does not corroborate this phone call. Finally, Lieutenant B.’s presence at the execution site does not support his discomfort with the mission. 'B., Paul Statement, 17 September 1968'(LA-NRW: Münster: Q124/3548), p. 37.


104. 'S., Erich Statement, 3 November 1966’, p.106.

105. 'H., Bruno Statement, 1 November 1967’, p.34.


110. ‘M., Bruno Statement, 8 September 1961’ (BA-ZS: B162/3876), p.49.


116. Schrade did not survive the war so no testimony from him exists.


118. ‘L., Richard Statement, 9 December 1963’ (BA-ZS: B162/3875), p.131. It is worthwhile noting that even under the already harsh guidelines for the treatment of civilians, reprisals could only be ordered by battalion commanders.


120. Ibid., p.125.


122. ‘Krupki’, entry by Leonid Smilovitsky for the *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos*.

124. Very few Jews survived the 18 September Action. Thus, practically the entirety of what we know of their experiences comes from German soldier post-war testimony.


137. Yad Vashem, ‘The Untold Stories’.

