

# ORDINARY MEN

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RESERVE POLICE BATTALION 101  
AND THE FINAL SOLUTION IN POLAND

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at that, such as druggists and teachers. The average age of the men was thirty-nine; over half were between thirty-seven and forty-two, a group considered too old for the army but most heavily conscripted for reserve police duty after September 1939.<sup>26</sup>

Among the rank and file policemen, about 25 percent (43 from a sample of 174) were Party members in 1942. Six were *Alte Kämpfer* who had joined the Party before Hitler came to power; another six joined in 1933. Despite the domestic ban on new Party members from 1933 to 1937, another six men who worked aboard ships were admitted by the Party section for members living overseas. Sixteen joined in 1937, when the ban on new membership was lifted. The remaining nine joined in 1939 or later. The men of lower-middle-class background held Party membership in an only slightly higher proportion (30 percent) than those from the working class (25 percent).<sup>27</sup>

The men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 were from the lower orders of German society. They had experienced neither social nor geographic mobility. Very few were economically independent. Except for apprenticeship or vocational training, virtually none had any education after leaving *Volksschule* (terminal secondary school) at age fourteen or fifteen. By 1942, a surprisingly high percentage had become Party members. However, because the interrogating officials did not record such information, we do not know how many had been Communists, socialists, and/or labor union members before 1933. Presumably a not insignificant number must have been, given their social origins. By virtue of their age, of course, all went through their formative period in the pre-Nazi era. These were men who had known political standards and moral norms other than those of the Nazis. Most came from Hamburg, by reputation one of the least nazified cities in Germany, and the majority came from a social class that had been anti-Nazi in its political culture. These men would not seem to have been a very promising group from which to recruit mass murderers on behalf of the Nazi vision of a racial utopia free of Jews.

# 6

## *Arrival in Poland*

SOMETIME IN THE SUMMER OF 1941, AFTER THE ONSLAUGHT against Russian Jewry was under way, Himmler confided to the SS and Police Leader in Lublin, Odilo Globocnik, Hitler's intention to murder the Jews of Europe as well. Moreover, Himmler put Globocnik in charge of the single most important element of this "Final Solution to the Jewish Question in Europe"—the destruction of the Jews of the General Government, who constituted the bulk of Polish Jewry. A method different from the firing squad operations used against Russian Jewry was deemed essential for the murder of European Jews, however—one that was more efficient, less public, and less burdensome psychologically for the killers.

The organizational and technological answer to these needs

was the extermination camp. The victims would be deported to special camps where—by virtue of assembly-line procedures requiring very limited manpower, most of it prisoner labor—they would be gassed in relative secrecy. Preparations for gassing began at three locations in the fall of 1941: Auschwitz/Birkenau near Katowice in Silesia and Chełmno near Łódź in the Warthegau, both in the incorporated territories, and Bežec in Globocnik's Lublin district. Large-scale gassing began at Chełmno in early December 1941 and at Birkenau in mid-February 1942.<sup>1</sup> Gassing at Globocnik's camp at Bežec did not begin until mid-March 1942.

The task Globocnik faced was enormous, but he was given virtually no manpower to accomplish it. For expertise and assistance in building and operating the extermination center at Bežec, Globocnik was able to draw on personnel from the "euthanasia program" in Germany, but this was a handful of men that at its maximum never exceeded one hundred. This number by itself was insufficient to staff a single extermination camp, and two more were yet to be built by Globocnik at Sobibór and Treblinka. But the extermination camps were not Globocnik's biggest problem. Far more pressing was the manpower required to clear the ghettos—to round up the victims and force them onto the death trains. In the Lublin district alone there were nearly 300,000 Jews; in all of the General Government, about 2,000,000!

While Germany's military fate hung in the balance in the crucial year of 1942, where were the men for such a staggering logistical task? In fact, aside from the assignment itself, Himmler gave Globocnik virtually nothing, and he had to improvise. He had to create "private" armies out of his own resources and ingenuity to accomplish the task with which Himmler had entrusted him.

For the coordination of the mass murder campaign against Polish Jewry—dubbed Operation Reinhard after Reinhard Heydrich was slain in Czechoslovakia in June 1942—Globocnik formed a special staff under his deputy and fellow Austrian

Hermann Höfle. The key people on this staff included Christian Wirth and his adjutant, Josef Oberhauser, in charge of the extermination centers; Helmuth Pohl, another Austrian, in charge of incoming transports; Georg Michalsen, Kurt Claasen, and yet another Austrian, Ernst Lerch, to oversee and often personally conduct operations in the field; and Georg Wippern, in charge of collecting, sorting, and utilizing the Jewish property collected at the extermination camps and in the vacated ghettos.

As the SS and Police Leader in the Lublin district, Globocnik was responsible for coordinating all regional operations that involved the joint action of mixed SS units. Thus the entire SS and police network in the Lublin district, though already stretched thin, was at his disposal. Most important, this meant the two branches of the Security Police (Gestapo and Kripo) on the one hand and various units of the Order Police on the other. In addition to its main headquarters in the city of Lublin, the Security Police had four branch offices in the district. Each contained a Gestapo section for "Jewish affairs."

The presence of the Order Police was felt in three ways. First, each of the major towns in the Lublin district had a Schutzpolizei agency. Included in its responsibilities was the supervision of the Polish municipal police. Second, scattered throughout the towns in the countryside were small detachments of Gendarmerie. Finally, three battalions of Order Police were stationed in the Lublin district. The Security Police branches along with the Schutzpolizei and Gendarmerie units provided small numbers of policemen who knew the local conditions. But the three Order Police battalions, totaling 1,500 men, represented the single largest police manpower pool Globocnik could draw on. Clearly they were indispensable, but still not sufficient to meet his needs.

Globocnik also utilized two other sources of manpower. The first was the Sonderdienst (Special Service), composed of small units of ethnic Germans who had been mobilized and trained after the German conquest and assigned to the head of the civil administration in each county of the district in the summer of

1940.<sup>2</sup> Second, and far more important, were the so-called Trawniki. Unable to satisfy his manpower needs out of local resources, Globocnik prevailed upon Himmler to recruit non-Polish auxiliaries from the Soviet border regions. The key person on Globocnik's Operation Reinhard staff for this task was Karl Streibel. He and his men visited the POW camps and recruited Ukrainian, Latvian, and Lithuanian "volunteers" (*Hilfswillige*, or Hiwis) who were screened on the basis of their anti-Communist (and hence almost invariably anti-Semitic) sentiments, offered an escape from probable starvation, and promised that they would not be used in combat against the Soviet army. These "volunteers" were taken to the SS camp at Trawniki for training. Under German SS officers and ethnic German noncommissioned officers, they were formed into units on the basis of nationality. Alongside the Order Police, they constituted the second major manpower pool from which Globocnik would form his private armies for the ghetto-clearing campaign.

The first murderous onslaught against Lublin Jewry began in mid-March 1942 and continued until mid-April. About 90 percent of the 40,000 inhabitants of the Lublin ghetto were killed either through deportation to the extermination camp at Bežec or execution on the spot, and 11,000 to 12,000 more Jews were sent to Bežec from the nearby towns Izbica, Piaski, Lubartów, Zamość, and Krasnik. During the same period some 36,000 Jews from the neighboring district of Galicia to the east of Lublin were also deported to Bežec.

From mid-April to late May the killing operations at Bežec were temporarily halted as the small wooden building with three gas chambers was torn down and a large stone building with six larger gas chambers was erected. When killing operations resumed at Bežec in late May, the camp primarily received Jews deported from the neighboring district of Kraków to the west, not from the Lublin district itself.

However, Sobibór, Globocnik's second extermination camp in the Lublin district, had begun operating in early May. For the next six weeks it received deportations from the Lublin counties

of Zamość, Puławy, Krasnostaw, and Chełm. By June 18, scarcely three months after the first deportations from the Lublin ghetto, about 100,000 Jews from the Lublin district had been killed, along with 65,000 from Kraków and Galicia, the vast majority by gassing at Bežec and Sobibór.<sup>3</sup>

The deportations to the death camps were only part of a vast relocation of central European Jewry. At the same time that Polish Jews were being deported from their homes to the extermination camps, trainloads of Jews from Germany, Austria, the Protectorate, and the puppet state of Slovakia were being dumped into the Lublin district. Some of these transports, such as the June 14 train from Vienna guarded by Lieutenant Fischmann, were also sent directly to Sobibór. Others, however, were unloaded in various ghettos, with the foreign Jews temporarily taking the places of those who had recently been killed.

This vast shuffling of Jews as well as the mass murder in Bežec and Sobibór stopped temporarily on June 19, when a shortage of rolling stock brought to a halt all Jewish transports in the General Government for a period of twenty days.<sup>4</sup> Two death trains per week from the Kraków district to Bežec resumed on July 9, and the steady flow of transports from Warsaw to the newly opened extermination center at Treblinka began on July 22. However, the main rail line to Sobibór was under repair, rendering that camp virtually inaccessible until the fall. In the Lublin district itself, therefore, deportations to the extermination camps did not resume in early July.

It was during this enforced lull in the Final Solution in the General Government that Reserve Police Battalion 101 arrived in the Lublin district. On June 20, 1942, the battalion received orders for a "special action" in Poland.<sup>5</sup> The nature of this "special action" was not specified in the written orders, but the men were led to believe that they would be performing guard duty. There is no indication whatsoever that even the officers suspected the true nature of the duties that awaited them.

The battalion entrained at the Sternschanze station,<sup>6</sup> the same point from which some of its men had deported Hamburg Jews

to the east the previous fall. It arrived in the Polish town of Zamość in the southern part of the Lublin district on June 25. Five days later the battalion headquarters was shifted to Biłgoraj, and various units of the battalion were quickly stationed in the nearby towns of Frampol, Tarnogród, Ulanów, Turobin, and Wysokie, as well as the more distant Zakrzów.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the temporary lull in the killing, SS and Police Leader Odilo Globocnik and his Operation Reinhard staff were not about to allow the newly arrived police battalion to remain entirely inactive in regard to the Lublin Jews. If the killing could not be resumed, the process of consolidating the victims in transit ghettos and camps could be. For most of the policemen of Reserve Police Battalion 101, the searing memory of the subsequent action in Józefów blotted out lesser events that had occurred during their four-week stay south of Lublin. However, a few did remember taking part in this consolidation process—collecting Jews in smaller settlements and moving them to larger ghettos and camps. In some cases only so-called work Jews were seized, put on trucks, and sent to camps around Lublin. In other cases, the entire Jewish population was rounded up and put on trucks or sent off on foot. Sometimes the Jews from the smaller surrounding villages were then collected and resettled in their place. None of these actions involved mass executions, though Jews who were too old, frail, or sick to be transported were shot in at least some instances. The men were uniformly uncertain about the towns from which they had deported Jews and the places to which the Jews had been relocated. No one recalled the names Izbica and Piaski, though these were the two major “transit” ghettos south of Lublin that were used for collecting Jews.<sup>8</sup>

Apparently, Globocnik lost patience with this consolidation process and decided to experiment with renewed killing. As deportation to the extermination camps was not possible at the time, mass execution through firing squad was the available alternative. Reserve Police Battalion 101 was the unit to be tested.

# 7

## *Initiation to Mass Murder: The Józefów Massacre*

IT WAS PROBABLY ON JULY 11 THAT GLOBOCNIK OR SOMEONE ON his staff contacted Major Trapp and informed him that Reserve Police Battalion 101 had the task of rounding up the 1,800 Jews in Józefów, a village about thirty kilometers slightly south and east of Biłgoraj. This time, however, most of the Jews were not to be relocated. Only the male Jews of working age were to be sent to one of Globocnik's camps in Lublin. The women, children, and elderly were simply to be shot on the spot.

Trapp recalled the units that were stationed in nearby towns. The battalion reassembled in Biłgoraj on July 12, with two exceptions: the Third Platoon of Third Company, including Captain Hoffmann, stationed in Zakrzów, as well as a few men of First Company already stationed in Józefów. Trapp met with

First and Second Company commanders, Captain Wohlauf and Lieutenant Gnade, and informed them of the next day's task.<sup>1</sup> Trapp's adjutant, First Lieutenant Hagen, must have informed other officers of the battalion, for Lieutenant Heinz Buchmann learned from him the precise details of the pending action that evening.

Buchmann, then thirty-eight years old, was the head of a family lumber business in Hamburg. He had joined the Nazi Party in May 1937. Drafted into the Order Police in 1939, he had served as a driver in Poland. In the summer of 1940 he applied for a discharge. Instead he was sent to officer training and commissioned as a reserve lieutenant in November 1941. He was given command of the First Platoon of First Company in 1942.

Upon learning of the imminent massacre, Buchmann made clear to Hagen that as a Hamburg businessman and reserve lieutenant, he "would in no case participate in such an action, in which defenseless women and children are shot." He asked for another assignment. Hagen arranged for Buchmann to be in charge of the escort for the male "work Jews" who were to be selected out and taken to Lublin.<sup>2</sup> His company captain, Wohlauf, was informed of Buchmann's assignment but not the reason for it.<sup>3</sup>

The men were not officially informed, other than that they would be awakened early in the morning for a major action involving the entire battalion. But some had at least a hint of what was to come. Captain Wohlauf told a group of his men that an "extremely interesting task" awaited them the next day.<sup>4</sup> Another man, who complained that he was being left behind to guard the barracks, was told by his company adjutant, "Be happy that you don't have to come. You'll see what happens."<sup>5</sup> Sergeant Heinrich Steinmetz\* warned his men of Third Platoon, Second Company, that "he didn't want to see any cowards."<sup>6</sup> Additional ammunition was given out.<sup>7</sup> One policeman reported that his unit was given whips, which led to rumors of a *Judenaktion*.<sup>8</sup> No one else, however, remembered whips.

Departing from Biłgoraj around 2:00 a.m., the truck convoy

arrived in Józefów just as the sky was beginning to lighten. Trapp assembled the men in a half-circle and addressed them. After explaining the battalion's murderous assignment, he made his extraordinary offer: any of the older men who did not feel up to the task that lay before them could step out. Trapp paused, and after some moments one man from Third Company, Otto-Julius Schimke,\* stepped forward. Captain Hoffmann, who had arrived in Józefów directly from Zakrzów with the Third Platoon of Third Company and had not been part of the officers' meetings in Biłgoraj the day before, was furious that one of his men had been the first to break ranks. Hoffmann began to berate Schimke, but Trapp cut him off. After he had taken Schimke under his protection, some ten or twelve other men stepped forward as well. They turned in their rifles and were told to await a further assignment from the major.<sup>9</sup>

Trapp then summoned the company commanders and gave them their respective assignments. The orders were relayed by the first sergeant, Kammer,\* to First Company, and by Gnade and Hoffmann to Second and Third Companies. Two platoons of Third Company were to surround the village.<sup>10</sup> The men were explicitly ordered to shoot anyone trying to escape. The remaining men were to round up the Jews and take them to the marketplace. Those too sick or frail to walk to the marketplace, as well as infants and anyone offering resistance or attempting to hide, were to be shot on the spot. Thereafter, a few men of First Company were to escort the "work Jews" who had been selected at the marketplace, while the rest of First Company was to proceed to the forest to form the firing squads. The Jews were to be loaded onto the battalion trucks by Second Company and Third Platoon of Third Company and shuttled from the marketplace to the forest.<sup>11</sup>

After making the assignments, Trapp spent most of the day in town, either in a schoolroom converted into his headquarters, at the homes of the Polish mayor and the local priest, at the marketplace, or on the road to the forest.<sup>12</sup> But he did not go to the forest itself or witness the executions; his absence there was

