Der Schicksalstag: November 9th, Germany’s Day of Fate

Schicksalstag: The Fateful Day

Friends of Padre Steve's World,

There are some days in history that are crammed full world changing events, and sometimes those events occur, for good or bad and sometimes good and bad in different countries. In the United States July 4th is not only Independence Day, but eighty-seven years later marked the surrender of Vicksburg and the retreat of Robert E. Lee’s army from Gettysburg. Likewise it was the day that the Louisiana Purchase was announced in 1803 and that in 1826 the Thomas Jefferson and John Adams died.

Since 1918 November 9th has been a day in German history that has impacted both Germany and the world in many ways. In a sense it is almost hard to believe that so much occurred on that day. It is known by many as Der Schicksalstag (the fateful day).
Robert Blum

In 1848 a member of the Frankfurt Parliament, Robert Blum was arrested and executed for traveling to Vienna to support the 1848 democracy uprising there. A liberal, humanist and democrat Blum advocated German unification without Prussian dominance, protested Prussian oppression of Poles, stood against anti-Semitism and for the rights of Catholics in heavily Protestant German kingdoms. Blum's dream remained unfulfilled for over a century after his death. Many of the men and women who took part in the failed revolution of 1848 would come to the United States where during the American Civil War they would fight for the emancipation of slaves and later the Civil rights of freed blacks. Among them was Carl Schurz.
Kaiser Wilhelm II Crosses the Dutch Border Following his Abdication

November 9th, 1918 was a gloomy day at the military headquarters of Kaiser Wilhelm II. General Wilhelm Groener, Quartermaster General of the Army looked his sovereign in the eye and told Kaiser Wilhelm that the war was lost, and that he no longer had the support of the Army. The Kaiser, reeling from battlefield defeats and the mutiny of his precious High Seas Fleet, was stunned. Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg, who had for all practical intents had headed a military dictatorship with General Erich Ludendorff since 1916, meekly nodded his concurrence with Groener. The Kaiser abdicated the throne and departed in his private train to the Netherlands the next day.

Phillip Scheidemann Proclaims the Republic


However, the promise of democracy was soured by events that the leaders of the Republic were blamed: a continued allied blockade, a humiliating peace treaty, the loss of territory, the occupation of the industrial areas of the Ruhr and Saar by France and Belgium, heavy war reparations, and the war guilt clause of the Treaty of Versailles. This was compounded by civil war between various right and left wing factions and major economic problems including massive hyper-inflation of 1920-21 and the Great Depression doomed the young Republic.
**Beer Hall Putsch**

Five years to the day following Scheidemann's proclamation a charismatic Austrian in Munich who had fought and been wounded fighting for Germany in the First World War gathered with his political sympathizes and para-military street thugs to attempt a putsch. The man was Adolf Hitler, the head of the small and radical National Socialist Deutches Arbeiter Partei, or National Socialist German Workers Party. Hitler hoped that his putsch would result in a popular uprising against the German government in Berlin. The putsch was a failure and ended in bloodshed at the Feldherrnhalle monument on Munich's Odeonsplatz.

Hitler fled the scene but arrested and put on trial. The case was tried in Munich rather than Berlin and convicted of treason. He was given a light sentence and jailed for nine months at the Landesberg prison where he wrote his book Mein Kampf. In prison he continued to recruit others to his cause. Less than ten years later Hitler was appointed Chancellor by President Hindenburg. Hitler quickly banned political opposition and began his persecution of Jews and others that he believed to be sub-human and upon Hindenburg's death in 1934 merged the office of Chancellor and President become the leader of Nazi Germany.

In November 1938 Hitler and his henchmen were looking for a reason to openly begin persecuting the Jews. They had been doing so since the seizure of power, but 1938 marked a turning point. Instead of unofficial pogroms launched by his undisciplined Stormtroopers, this was orchestrated by the top men in the Nazi regime.

One of the chief reasons for this was to seize the property and financial resources of German Jews. This coincided with the expulsion of Polish Jews from Germany. A reason for the action was furnished when a young Polish man, Herschel Grynszpan, whose parents were expelled from Germany on November 3rd went to the German embassy in Paris and shot and mortally wounded Ernst von Rath, a young diplomat, who reportedly had some anti-Nazi sentiments. When Von Rath died the the Nazis unleashed their fury.
Joseph Goebbels unleashed the storm troopers and others in civilian clothes on the night of November 9th. They were supposedly spontaneous demonstrations, but the Police and Fire Departments were ordered not to intervene except to save German property. Stormtroopers ransacked Jewish businesses, homes and synagogues causing hundreds of millions of Reichsmarks in damage, destroying over 200 synagogues and 7000 businesses. About 100 Jews were killed during the rampage, which went unchecked by police. Another 2000-3000 subsequently died either by suicide or in concentration camps in which 30,000 Jewish men were incarcerated.

To add to the insult to injury Jews were charged for the damage done to their property and insurance payments that should have gone to them were collected by the state. The night became known as Kristallnacht, the night of broken glass and marked a major turn in the open Nazi persecution of Jews in Germany, which would extend throughout Europe and end in the Final Solution and the systematic murder of nearly six million Jews. World War Two ended with the total defeat of Germany and the Nazi regime.

Following Germany's defeat in the Second World War, it was occupied by the Allied powers. Germany was split in two, the East under the domination of the Soviet Union which became the German Democratic Republic, and the West which supported by the United States and Britain became the Federal Republic of Germany.

The divided country became the focal point of what became the Cold War, the fortified border became infamous as the Iron Curtain. The Berlin was blockaded by the Soviets in 1948 and the subsequent airlift kept West Berlin Free. However in August 1961 as the Cold War escalated the leaders of East Germany erected a fence which became the Berlin Wall, a wall which was effectively a means to imprison the population. It seemed to be a fixture that would never come down.
But in the late 1980s the Cold War began to thaw. Mikhail Gorbachev took power in the economically strapped Soviet Union which was bogged down in a costly war in Afghanistan, and a struggle against a Polish democratic movement. Premier Gorbachev sought to relieve the situation with a policy of openness. It backfired, and throughout Eastern Europe, pro-democracy and pro-freedom groups began to protest the status quo.

The once feared Warsaw Pact began to disintegrate. As borders were opened hundreds of thousands of Eastern Europeans including thousands of East Germans went west through Hungary and Czechoslovakia. East Germans began to gather at the Berlin Wall and on November 9th 1989 the tottering East German government decided to open border crossing points with restrictions. On hearing the news hundreds of thousands of people gathered at the six crossings demanding to be let through, and finally, ignoring orders, Stasi Lieutenant Colonel Harald Jäger who commanded the Bornholmer Strasse crossing opened the gates. The Berlin Wall had fallen and 339 days later East Germany was dissolved. On October 3rd 1990, Germany was reunited.

The new Germany is the economic heart of the European Union and has become a champion of human rights and social progress. But that could be in danger with the splintering of the major political parties that guided Germany to its position and the rise of a new nationalistic, racist, and anti-Semitic movement built around the AfD, or Alternative for Germany Party. Some leaders and members of this
party express admiration for the Third Reich.

It has now been twenty-nine years since the Berlin Wall fell, eighty years since Kristallnacht, ninety-five years since the Beer Hall Putsch, and one hundred years since the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II.

These are all important events, and our challenge as citizens of the world is never to forget just how important and fateful each was, and why November 9th is indeed the “fateful day.” One wonders if a future November 9th will become another Schicksaltag that will again shake Germany to its foundations.

But then, maybe what is going on in the United States is much more threatening than anything going on in Germany.

Peace,

Padre Steve

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**Kaiser Wilhelm II Cross the Dutch Border Following his Abdication**

It was a gloomy day at the military headquarters of Kaiser Wilhelm II on November 9th 1918 when General Wilhelm Groener looked his sovereign in the eye and told Kaiser Wilhelm that the war was lost, and that he no longer had the support of the Army. The Kaiser, reeling from battlefield defeats and the mutiny of the High Seas Fleet was stunned, and Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg, who had for all practical intents directed the war effort meekly nodded his concurrence with Groener. The Kaiser abdicated the throne and departed in his private train to the Netherlands the next day.

**Phillip Scheidemann Proclaims the Republic**

In Berlin Majority Socialist parliament member Philip Scheidemann proclaimed the Republic, in part to prevent a Soviet takeover, which became known as the Weimar Republic. However, the promise of democracy was soured by a continued allied blockade, a humiliating peace treaty, loss of territory, and occupation of the industrial areas of the Ruhr and Saar by France and Belgium, heavy reparations, and war guilt; compounded by civil war between various right and left wing factions and major economic problems including massive hyper-inflation doomed the young republic.
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In November 1938 Hitler’s and his henchmen were looking for a reason to openly begin persecuting the Jews, something that they had already been doing since the seizure of power. One of the chief reasons for this was to seize the property and financial resources of German Jews, which coincided with the expulsion of Polish Jews from Germany. A reason was furnished when a young Polish man, Herschel Grynszpan, whose parents were expelled from Germany on November 3rd went to the German embassy in Paris and shot and mortally wounded Ernst von Rath, a young diplomat, who reportedly had some anti-Nazi sentiments.
The murder was what Josef Goebbels needed and on the night of November 9th Nazi storm troopers ransacked Jewish businesses, homes and synagogues causing hundreds of millions of Reichsmarks in damage, destroying over 200 synagogues and 7000 businesses. About 100 Jews were killed during the rampage, which went unchecked by police. Another 2000-3000 subsequently died either by suicide or in concentration camps. About 30,000 Jewish men were incarcerated. To add to the insult to injury Jews were charged for the damage done to their property and insurance payments that should have gone to them were collected by the state. The night became known as Kristallnacht, the night of broken glass and marked a major turn in the open Nazi persecution of Jews in Germany, which would extend throughout Europe and end in the Final Solution and the systematic murder of nearly six million Jews. World War Two ended with the total defeat of Germany and the Nazi regime.

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Peace,

Padre Steve+

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warsaw pact, west germany

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The Absence of Empathy Among Conservative Christians
“Evil, I think, is the absence of empathy.” Captain Gustave Gilbert at Nuremberg

Since coming back from Munich on Friday night I have been catching up on the news and I was nearly overwhelmed with the amount of vitriol, hatred and intolerance coming out of the Values Voters Summit. The summit is an annual gathering of right wing political hacks who specialize promoting fear in the hearts of conservative Christians by fostering a nearly pathological culture of victimhood and persecution, in which they are the victims because others are being granted the same rights and privileges that they have enjoyed since this country was founded. Prominent among all of the speakers was a lack of empathy for anyone who did not hold their views, and those views are reflected in the latest Pew Survey on Religion in America where only 55% of consistent conservatives believe empathy is a value to be taught to their children.

Being that I am a historian as well as a theologian know all too well. The consequences for the church when such leaders promote such intolerance under the veil of being the victims reminds me of what occurred in Weimar Germany less than a century ago. At that time, conservative German Christians, feeling their privileged status that they had enjoyed under the reign of the Kaiser and other local monarchs being threatened took refuge in various right-wing political parties and organizations, many of which entered alliances with Hitler's National Socialist German Workers Party.
The leaders of those groups preached how they were being persecuted by the now secular government which had many Socialists in it. Feeling threatened by the rights now afforded to others, including socialists and communists, but in particular those provided to Jews they used a similar strategy to smear anyone that did not hold their perverted views of church and state. They felt that they were the victims; the victims of a “stab in the back,” which caused Germany’s defeat and the collapse of the Empire.

War hero and pastor Martin Niemöller was representative of those that took the bait. After the war Niemöller who after Hitler came to power and he realized what was happening spoke out and was sent to the concentration camp noted:

“I find myself wondering about that too. I wonder about it as much as I regret it. Still, it is true that Hitler betrayed me. I had an audience with him, as a representative of the Protestant Church, shortly before he became Chancellor, in 1932. Hitler promised me on his word of honor, to protect the Church, and not to issue any anti-Church laws. He also agreed not to allow pogroms against the Jews, assuring me as follows: ‘There will be restrictions against the Jews, but there will be no ghettos, no pogroms, in Germany. I really believed given the widespread anti-Semitism in Germany, at that time—that Jews should avoid aspiring to Government positions or seats in the Reichstag. There were many Jews, especially among the Zionists, who took a similar stand. Hitler’s assurance satisfied me at the time. On the other hand, I hated the growing atheistic movement, which was fostered and promoted by the Social Democrats and the Communists. Their hostility toward the Church made me pin my hopes on Hitler for a while. I am paying for that mistake now; and not me alone, but thousands of other persons like me.’

Realizing the danger of how Christians were giving their support to such parties and the implicit demands of some for a theocracy Bonhoeffer in the Bethel Confession wrote:

“every attempt to establish a visible theocracy on earth by the church as a infraction in the order of secular authority. This makes the gospel into a law. The church cannot protect or sustain life on earth. This remains the office of secular authority.”

But this is the same nonsense being promoted by Mike Huckabee, Sarah Palin, Matt Staver, Tony Perkins, Laura Ingraham, Bryan Fischer, Ted Cruz and a host of others. Sadly, this vision of theocracy is very much in vogue in many churches and among conservative Christians in general no-matter what their denomination. Thomas Jefferson would be appalled by this. He wrote of the effects of clergy in political power:

“The clergy, by getting themselves established by law and ingrafted into the machine of government, have been a very formidable engine against the civil and religious rights of man.”
Much of the thought behind the movement is from Gary North who posits a version of Christianity much like that of Calvin’s Geneva, and the Massachusetts Bay Colony know as Christian Dominionism or Reconstructionism. All of these leaders proclaim their desire to protect religious liberty, but for them religious liberty is a one way street, it only applies to them and the state should ensure that it does not apply to others. North wrote:

“We must use the doctrine of religious liberty to gain independence for Christian schools until we train up a generation of people who know that there is no religious neutrality, no neutral law, no neutral education, and no neutral civil government. Then they will get busy in constructing a Bible-based social, political and religious order which finally denies the religious liberty of the enemies of God.”

North also wrote:

“The long-term goal of Christians in politics should be to gain exclusive control over the franchise. Those who refuse to submit publicly to the eternal sanctions of God by submitting to His Church’s public marks of the covenant–baptism and holy communion–must be denied citizenship, just as they were in ancient Israel.”

The scary thing for me is just how similar North’s words as well as those of others to the Nazi Aryan Laws against the Jews. Please know that I am not claiming these people are Nazis by any means. That being said, I think that their ignorance of history, the Constitution, American jurisprudence which is charged by fear-mongering and vitriolic hatred of those not like them opens the door to much evil. Note how similar North’s comments parallel the Aryan Paragraph:

“A citizen of the Reich is that subject only who is of German or kindred blood and who, through his conduct, shows that he is both desirous and fit to serve the German people and Reich faithfully.” and that “A Jew cannot be a citizen of the Reich. He has no right to vote in political affairs and he cannot occupy public office.”

While much of their vitriol is directed against Moslems, who because of acts committed by Islamic terrorist extremists are all targets of allegedly “Christian rage” like that of Timothy Rollins of The American Partisan who wrote:

“this can best be done by enacting the Great Muslim Purge from our military and other national security apparatuses. These people need to be removed from every security post, even to be completely removed from all levels of government employment, be it federal, state, county, city or other municipality. This applies especially to universities….”
Westminster Seminary graduate Doug Giles who writes for the Townhall.com website who wrote on one of his commentaries:

“Please note: If Christ wasn’t cool with irrigating irate Islamicists for facts, I must admit, I would still have to green light our boys getting data from enemy combatants 007 style. Stick a fire hose up their tailpipe and turn it on full blast. I don’t care. I’m not as holy as most of you super saints or as evolved as some of you progressive atheists purport to be. Security beats spirituality in this scenario, as far as I’m concerned.”

Or who can forget that lovable darling of the Christian Right Sarah Palin who told the NRA convention that “waterboarding is how we baptize terrorists.”

For me to read and listen to people who claim to be Christians show such little regard for other human beings is frightening. Personally, I am frightened because I know the history of Christians when they not only hold control of their churches but the government. The persecution, torture and murder of heretics and unbelievers, the place of privilege given to the elect and the second rate status of non-Christians in their countries; not to mention the wars of extermination blessed as “holy” by the Church, such as the 30 Years War, the Crusades not to mention the numerous other wars blessed by the church. St Bernard of Clairvaux who told those going off to fight the First Crusade:

“The knight of Christ, I say, may strike with confidence and succumb more confidently. When he strikes, he does service to Christ, and to himself when he succumbs. Nor does he bear the sword in vain. He is God’s minister in the punishment of evil doers and the praise of well doers. Surely, if he kills an evil doer, he is not a man-killer, but, if I may put it, an evil-killer. Clearly he is reckoned the avenger of Christ against evildoers, and the defender of Christians.”

But it is not just Moslems that feel the wrath of the Christian Holy Warriors, but Atheists, agnostics, the LGBT community, other non-Christian religions including the Jews, though most deny the latter due to their beliefs about the role of Israel in the end times. Christians can behave as badly as the those committed to the Islamic State or ISIL. Our history has nothing to commend us, for when we as Christians “hold the franchise” to quote Gary North, we are more than capable of committing some of the most heinous acts imaginable.
Thomas Jefferson wrote:

“Millions of innocent men, women, and children, since the introduction of Christianity, have been burnt, tortured, fined, and imprisoned; yet we have not advanced one inch toward uniformity. What has been the effect of coercion? To make one-half the world fools and the other half hypocrites. To support roguery and error all over the earth.”

Philosopher Eric Hoffer wrote something that we should very much keep in mid when we read or hear about the antics of those speaking at the Values Voters Summit and others like them:

“The impression somehow prevails that the true believer, particularly the religious individual, is a humble person. The truth is the surrendering and humbling of the self breed pride and arrogance. The true believer is apt to see himself as one of the chosen, the salt of the earth, the light of the world, a prince disguised in meekness, who is destined to inherit the earth and the kingdom of heaven too. He who is not of his faith is evil; he who will not listen will perish.”

Sadly, most if not all of the leaders of this movement of theocratic, liberty denying Christians are so immersed in themselves and narcissistic that they cannot comprehend this. Perpetually the victim they misapply scripture to justify their perceived victimhood. Such should not be the case, and Bonhoeffer reminds us of the mark of true Christian faith in a sermon where he said:

“Christianity stands or falls with its revolutionary protest against violence, arbitrariness and pride of power and with its plea for the weak. Christians are doing too little to make these points clear rather than too much. Christendom adjusts itself far too easily to the worship of power. Christians should give more offense, shock the world far more, than they are doing now. Christian should take a stronger stand in favor of the weak rather than considering first the possible right of the strong.”

Captain Gustave Gilbert who served as the Army Psychologist for the defendants ant the Nuremberg major War Crimes trials wrote of his experience with them in words that at least to me could apply to
“In my work with the defendants (at the Nuremberg Trials 1945-1949) I was searching for the nature of evil and I now think I have come close to defining it. A lack of empathy. It’s the one characteristic that connects all the defendants, a genuine incapacity to feel with their fellow men. Evil, I think, is the absence of empathy.”

Sadly we have come to the point where many people who profess to be Christians have no empathy, or for that matter any real love for those different than them. History shows this time and time again. Christians who have political power and the “right to the franchise” have behaved little differently than the terrorist thugs of ISIL and I can say with certitude based on the words and legislative efforts of the people who dominated the Values Voters Summit, that they too would behave no differently. As I walked on the Odeonsplätz and went to the Feldherrnhalle in Munich where Hitler’s Beer Hall Putsch came to an end I could not help but think of what might have happened had Christians during the Weimar Republic not gravitated and become politically captive to the right wing of German politics and for many the Nazi Party.

The right of religious liberty for all is far to important to be left to those that would claim it for themselves and deny it to others. As Jefferson wrote the Virginia Baptists in 1808:

“Because religious belief, or non-belief, is such an important part of every person’s life, freedom of religion affects every individual. Religious institutions that use government power in support of themselves and force their views on persons of other faiths, or of no faith, undermine all our civil rights. Moreover, state support of an established religion tends to make the clergy unresponsive to their own people, and leads to corruption within religion itself. Erecting the “wall of separation between church and state,” therefore, is absolutely essential in a free society.”

With that I wish you a good night,

Peace

Padre Steve+
Oktoberfest Pilgrimage Live Blog: A Visit to Beer Land

“Beer is proof that God loves us and wants us to be happy.” Benjamin Franklin

One of my favorite comic strips is Stephan Pastis’ *Pearls Before Swine*. A few months ago one of the main characters appropriately named Rat, since he is a rat, decides to open his own amusement park called Beer Land. The series of strips is amazingly brilliant, especially to true beer drinkers. I think the strip from that series that I most enjoyed was this one, because of the way Pastis linked a ride at the strip to the syrupy Disney ride It’s a Small World.

Today we did a bit of a road trip and took the U-Bahn from Munich to a small town on the outskirts of the city called Erding, for a visit and tour of the Erdinger Weisbier brewery, the largest brewer of wheat beers in the world. Before heading to Erding we had taken a short visit to the historic Marianplatz where we were able to see the famous Glockenspiel at the old city hall, or Rathaus.
Now Judy has incurred a couple of injuries to her knee, ankle, and a couple of years ago had to her Achilles’ tendon repaired. As such sometimes a lot of walking causes her a lot, I mean a lot of pain. We tried to go out some yesterday but after a few minutes at Marianplatz but she was in such pain so we went back to our hotel until later in the evening when we went to dinner with our friends.

This morning she was in less pain but she knew if she didn’t get some European style crutches that she would not do well and possible be confined to the hotel for most of our remaining time here. For those that don’t know, European or as they are referred to in the United States Canadian crutches are far superior to the type most of us know and loath so much. They provide the user much more mobility and less pain to the armpits and shoulders because you do not swing from them.

So while she hung out with our friends I googled where to find the crutches in Munich. The word for crutches is krucken and they are sold at stores that specialize in equipment for those recovering from injuries as well as those with various physical disabilities called a Saniatshaus. The closest of these was about two miles away, so with google maps to guide me I set off. I walk pretty fast so it didn’t take that long to get there and when I did after the normal greetings with the lady at the counter I asked for a pair of crutches, which she showed me and allowed me to even pick the color. They cost about 34 Euros, which isn’t too bad, and for that quality I would have payed more in the U.S, had I gotten them
at home. I made my way back by hailing a taxi to save time. Had a nice conversation about Munich, beer and the Oktoberfest with the driver and he delivered me back just city meters from where Judy and some of our friends had gathered. Since we were waiting on some of the rest of our group we had a beer at an outdoor cafe across from the Rathause where we saw the Glockenspiel do its thing when the clock stuck eleven.

Once all of us were gathered we boarded the U-Bahn to Erding a trip of about 45 minutes. Once in Erding we caught a city bus to the Erdinger brewery. We got our tickets for the tours and bought a couple of items in the gift shop and then went on the tour. The tour took about an hour and a half and was amazing.

I was impressed with how well a large brewery can make great beer using only the natural ingredients of hops, barley or wheat malt and water. There are no added sugars, food colorings known to be carcinogenic, Bisphenal A (BPA); cheap filler grains such as rice and corn as well as high fructose corn syrup, dextrose, and mono sodium glutamate, and even propylene glycol (a component of anti-freeze) are found in many mass produced American beers. This is because of the observance of the strict Bavarian or German beer purity law the Reinheitsgebot which stipulates what are acceptable ingredients in beer. Frankly the difference in taste is amazing as well as the effects, especially the morning after. But I digress….

As I mentioned the tour was informative and enjoyable. At the end of the tour, which cost 12 Euros per person we were provided freshly baked Bavarian pretzels, two large Bavarian Weiswurst, which are a mildly spiced and finely textured pork sausage and three half liter glasses of whichever of the eight styles of Weisbier that Erdinger brews.

It truly was a visit to Beer Land and I am sorry to say that at each stage of the tour I kept thinking
about that comic, but no, I didn’t see the German kid beat up the French kid for his Hefeweizen.

So since this a religious pilgrimage, I will close with a quote from one of my favorite rebellious theologians, the eminent Doctor Martin Luther:

“Whoever drinks beer, he is quick to sleep; whoever sleeps long does not sin; whoever does not sin enters heaven! Thus let us drink beer!”

Have a great day.

Peace

Padre Steve+

Oktoberfest Live Blog: Munich Musings; History and Bier

I have spent a total of about four years of my life in Germany. I enjoy the country and the people and I love traveling here because for me it is relaxing. When I have a car I enjoy driving on the Autobahn, and I find the mass transportation more than effective and convenient but a great way to travel.
As a historian who for many years specialized in the study of the latter years of the Kaiser Reich, the German revolution and civil war, the Weimar Republic and the Nazi period visiting here always intellectually stimulating. Munich is a very interesting and sometimes contradictory city, rich in culture, music, art, literature and scientific-technological achievements. Likewise it has always been a more cosmopolitan center of a very conservative state, especially religiously conservative as Bavaria is the heart of Catholic Germany. Thus there has always been a tension in the city, between the local more religious conservatives and business leaders and the more secular and progressive inhabitants, and the immigrants from Eastern Europe, especially more traditional and conservative Orthodox Jews.

This tension continues today with the large numbers of foreigners that live and work in the city. Many are Turkish guest workers and their descendants that have been in Germany almost half a century. But many are new immigrants from the Middle East and Africa, some who have embraced German life in a secular state, but many who have not and stand out in the crowd. In particular I think of the number of Moslems who retain their traditional dress and ways, which in many ways is reminiscent of the Eastern European Orthodox Jews, who likewise stood out as they attempted to maintain their cultural and religious identity.

Munich is the capital city of Bavarian, or as it is known here, Bayern. It was ruled for centuries by the Wittelsbach dynasty, which included “Mad King Louis” who built the amazing Neuschwanstein and Linderhof castles. That dynasty, with the rest of the German royalty was overthrown at the end of the First World War. It was replaced for about three months by what was known as the Bavarian Soviet led by Kurt Eisner, an “independent socialist.” Eisner could not hold power and resigned in February 1919 and on the way to his resignation he was assassinated by a right wing extremist who held the views of the racist Thule Society. Eisner was replaced by a Majority Socialist leader who could not form a government and then by an Independent Socialist and Communist government. This government was both inept and brutal, it took hostages from the elite of the city as well as conservative reactionaries and had them executed. This brought a response from Berlin which sent a force of 30,000 Weimar Government employed Freikorps troops, including many Bavarians from rural areas, under the command of Ritter Von Epp to crush the Munich Soviet. After hard fighting against the Communist troops Epp’s men crushed the opposition and executed hundreds of the Communists and Independent Socialist fighter and leaders.

The city was still rife with revolutionary and reactionary elements and in 1919 a new political party was established. This party became the National Socialist Workers Party of Germany, or the NSDAP. Adolf Hitler joined the party and quickly became its head. He along with General Erich Ludendorff led a coup, or “putsch” against the government on the 8th and 9th of November 1923. The putsch originated at the NDSAP headquarters and Hitler led about 2000 armed members of the party to the Burgerbrau Keller beer hall where the Gustav Von Kahr, who had been appointed with dictatorial powers due to the unrest, was making a speech.
Hitler took Kahr and other members of the government hostage and declared a revolution and enjoined those present to “join in this grave eleventh hour for our German Fatherland.” While many present were turned by his speech, the revolt did not gain momentum and in desperation Hitler ordered a march to overthrow the government. At Odeonsplatz at the bridge over the Isar River near the Feldherrenhalle his group of nearly 2000 followers including future Nazi Leaders Hermann Goering and Rudolf Hess were confronted by about 100 Bavarian police, and defeated. Hitler was arrested and tried, spent nine months in prison during which he wrote Mein Kampf. The Burgerbraukeller and the Feldherrenhalle became Nazi shrines which after Hitler's takeover became places where Hitler would return yearly to mark his failed putsch.

All of these events took place in a small area of the Munich city center. Sadly most people who come to Munich are aware of the events that occurred here, and many fail to realize how easily a city know for so many cultural and scientific achievements can become the locus of evil for a man like Adolf Hitler.

While I love Munich my love is tempered by how many events which still affect us today occurred here just eight to ninety years ago. To use a German expression, that amount of in the sense of history is merely an “augenblick” or “blink of an eye”. It is hard to believe that so much has happen here, and just how few people understand just how easily such events can happen again.

When I look at my own country I see parallels between the more extreme elements of the Tea Party movement, White Supremacists and others with some of those that followed Hitler to the Burgerbraukeller. The hatred that they express towards liberals, racial minorities, immigrants and Moslems is so similar to the words of those precursors to the Nazi party rule in Germany that it is frightening. Comforting myths are substituted for history. Race, ideology and xenophobic nationalism, often clothed in the language of tradition “Christian” beliefs are used to demonize those who are different. Sadly too I see some of my fellow progressives inflamed with such a hatred of conservatives that they can not see the dangers inherent in such polarization. As a historian, I find the parallels disturbing.

But despite that we are here to have fun, and that I am. After all, I choose to believe in the power of acceptance, tolerance and inclusiveness. Those are found in the words that are imprinted on the modern German Army belt buckles and in the German National anthem “eingekeit, rech und freiheit” or “unity, Justice and freedom.” Those words are also implicit in our own Declaration of Independence.
which states that “all men are created equal. Thus for me, not believe that good can overcome evil is central to who I am.

And from Munich, I am your friend,

Peace

Padre Steve

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“Unparalleled Bestiality” Hitler’s Racial and Ideological War in Poland and Russia

As part of my academic work I teach military ethics as related to the Just War Theory. In the class on *jus post bellum* or justice after war I deal with the implication of participating in war crimes. It is a serious subject and in the class I attempt to make my students, all relatively senior officers as uncomfortable as possible. I use a number of examples from the major war crimes trials at Nuremberg as well as the Generals Trial. I had an exceptionally good class over the past several weeks and that caused me to go back and do some revisions to a number articles that I have written in the past. I have published a version of this before but I have made some additions and expect that like my work on Gettysburg that this work too will be an ongoing project.

I think part of why I write about this is that the witnesses of and those who confronted these crimes and tried the criminals are dying. Very few are left, and those still alive were very junior and very young. For years there has been a closet industry of Holocaust deniers and in many places neo-Nazi and other anti-Semitic groups are rising up. It is something that causes me great concern.

As I went through previous notes and research I felt a tenseness and revulsion for the actions of those that ordered, committed or condoned these crimes, men who were like me professional officers. I realize how easily it is that as Spencer Tracy playing an American justice at the Judges trial at Nuremberg in the movie *Judgment at Nuremberg* said: “under a national crisis, ordinary – even able and extraordinary – men can delude themselves into the commission of crimes so vast and heinous that they beggar the imagination.”

September 29th 2014 will be the 73rd anniversary of the Babi Yar massacre. It was committed by
members of the SS Einsatzgruppen C near Kiev shortly after the German Army captured that city. 33,771 Jews were exterminated by the members of Sonderkommando 4b of Einsatzgruppen C as well as Police battalions. About 10,000 others, mainly Communist Officials and Gypsies were rounded up and killed in the same operation. The victims were stripped of all of their belongings taken to a ravine and shot. It was the second largest killing action by Einsatzgruppen in the war. It was committed by men who either believed that the people that they were killing were sub-human, or did not have the courage to stand up and say no.

Babi Yar is just one example of how civilized people can get can commit great atrocities in the name of ideology and race, and it does not stand alone. The tragic fact is that it really doesn't take much to condition people to go commit such crimes; just teach people from childhood that people of certain races or religions are less than human. Then subjugate them to incessant propaganda and then turn them loose using the pretext that they are killing terrorists or insurgents.

The article deals with the ideological as well as military reasons that brought about Babi Yar and so many other atrocities committed by the Nazis during the campaigns in Poland and the Soviet Union.

Einsatzgruppen Massacre sites (www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org)

Introduction

The German war against the Soviet Union was the first truly race-based ideological war in history with the campaign against Poland its precursor. Adolf Hitler's racial theories and beliefs played a dominant role in Germany's conduct of the war in the East in both the military campaign and occupation. This has become clearer in recent years as historians have had the opportunity to examine Hitler's writings, those of senior Nazi officials and military officers and documents which had been unavailable until the end of the Cold War. Understanding the Nazi ideological basis and the underlying cultural prejudice against the Jews and eastern Europeans in general is foundational to understanding Hitler's conduct of the war and why the destruction of the Jews figured so highly in his calculations. One must also understand the military and police cultures and doctrines that enabled them to cooperate so closely in the conduct of the war.

The German war in the east would differ from any previous war. Its underlying basis was ideological. Economic and geopolitical considerations were given importance in relationship to the understanding
of the German “Master Race.” Race and Lebensraum was the goal of the State that “concentrates all of its strength on marking out a way of life for our people through the allocation of Lebensraum for the next one hundred years…the goal corresponds equally to the highest national and ethnic requirements.” [1]

Hitler believed that Germany was “entitled to more land…because it was the “mother of life” not just some “little nigger nation or another.”” [2] The Germans planned to “clear” the vast majority of the Slavic population and the “settlement of millions of hectares of eastern Lebensraum with German colonists” complimented by a short term exploitation of the land to “secure the food balance of the German Grossraum.” [3] Joachim Fest notes that Hitler called it a “crime” to wage war only for the acquisition of raw materials. Only the issue of living space permitted resort to arms. [4]

Following the Peace of Westphalia wars in Europe typically emphasized conquest of territory and natural resources either to expand empires or promote some kind of self-sufficiency. The Thirty Years War, which was ended by the Treaty of Westphalia had a heavy religious component which added to its brutality. However the root of much of this conflict was about increasing the power of emerging nation states led by men not necessarily loyal to their religious brethren. [5]

The American and Russian Civil wars had some ideological basis and helped usher in the brutality of total war. Both had major effect in these nations’ development and both were bitterly contested with the winners imposing to various degrees political changes on their vanquished brothers they were civil wars. [6]

Adam Tooze sees the Holocaust as the first step of the “last great land grab in the long and bloody history of European colonialism…” [7] This does have merit, Hitler's desire for Lebensraum or living space was a type of colonialism. However, Tooze's argument does not take away from the basic premise that Germany's war in the east was at its heart motivated by ideological factors.
German Anti-Semitism and Adolf Hitler

The root of this war was in the mind of Adolf Hitler himself. Hitler was born in Linz Austria during a time when various Pan-German and Anti-Semitic groups, publications and propaganda were widespread. As a young man Hitler moved to Vienna hoping to become an artist, something that he found little commercial success. While struggling to make a living in Vienna he was exposed to a culture far different from the provincial city of his youth, a city that had much culture but was also a meeting ground for the various peoples that populated the Austro-Hungarian Empire, including Slavs and many Jews. While many of the Germanic or Austrian Jews were outwardly little different from their Christian neighbors the Jews from Eastern Europe repulsed Hitler.

Hitler's lack of success, struggle with poverty and resentment of others led him to the writings of the Pan-Germanic and Anti-Semitic movements. His years in Vienna were foundational as he as he absorbed the ideas of these Pan-German, anti-Semitic groups through newspapers like the Deutsches Volksblatt. In Vienna Hitler began to connect the Jews with Marxism. Joachim Fest notes that in Vienna Hitler became obsessed by the fear of the Slavs and Jews, hated the House of Hapsburg, the Social Democratic Party, and “envisioned the end of Germanism.”

Hitler's racial views were amplified after the war in turbulent Weimar Germany where he became a member of the NDSAP, rising rapidly within it, eventually taking over party leadership, reorganizing it so that it “became the instrument of Hitler's policies.” Following the unsuccessful Beer Hall Putsch of 1923 Hitler wrote Mein Kampf while imprisoned in the Landsberg prison in which he enunciated his views about the Jews, Slavs and Lebensraum. Hitler believed that Imperial Germany had been “hopelessly negligent” in regard to the Jews and that the Jews in conjunction with the Catholic Center Party and Socialists worked together for “maximum damage to Germany.”

Likewise he saw the Jews as heading the “main ideological scourges of the nineteenth and twentieth century's.” It was the ideology of Hitler's “obsessive anti-Semitism” that drove Nazi Germany's policy in regard to the Jews and against Jewish-Bolshevism. By the 1920s Hitler had “combined his hatred of the Jews and of the supposedly Jewish dominated Soviet state with existing calls to conquer additional Lebensraum, or living space, in the east.” Hitler wrote: “The fight against Jewish world Bolshevism requires a clear attitude toward Soviet Russia. You cannot drive out the Devil with Beelzebub.” Richard Evans notes that Mein Kampf clearly enunciated that “Hitler considered racial conflict...the essence of history, and the Jews to be the sworn enemy of the German race ....” And that the “Jews were now linked indissolubly in Hitler's mind with “Bolshevism” and “Marxism.”

When Hitler became the dictator of Germany “his ideology and strategy became the ends and means of German foreign policy.” His aims were clear, Hitler remarked to Czech Foreign Minister Chvalkovsky on 21 January 1939: “We are going to destroy the Jews.” It was clear that Hitler understood his own role in this effort noting to General Heinrici that “he was the first man since Charlemagne to hold unlimited power in his own hand. He did not hold this power in vain, he said, but would know how to use it in the struggle for Germany...”
Wilhelm Keitel: “war was a fight for survival….dispense with outdated and traditional ideas about chivalry and the generally accepted rules of warfare…” Bundesarchiv Bild

Race, Anti-Semitism and the German High Command

This study will focus on the German policy of ideological-racial war in Poland and Russia. The German war against the Soviet Union and to a certain extent Poland was waged with an unforgiving ferocity against Hitler’s enemy, the Jewish-Bolshevik state and the Slavic Untermenschen.

The campaigns in Poland and the Soviet Union were characterized by the rise of a “political-ideological strategy.” [22] Operation “Barbarossa showed the fusion of technocracy and ideology in the context of competitive military planning.” [23] Hitler’s “ideological and grandiose objectives, expressed in racial and semi-mystical terms, made the war absolute.” [24]

Field Marshal Keitel noted a speech in March 1941 where Hitler talked about the inevitability of conflict between “diametrically opposed ideologies” and that the “war was a fight for survival and that they dispense with their outdated and traditional ideas about chivalry and the generally accepted rules of warfare.” [25] General Halder, Chief of the OKH in his War Diary for that meeting noted “Annihilating verdict on Bolshevism…the leaders must demand of themselves the sacrifice of understanding their scruples.” [26]
Based on Lebensraum and race, the German approach to war would combine “racism and political ideology” for the purpose of the “conquest of new living space in the east and its ruthless Germanization.” [27] Hitler explained that the “struggle for the hegemony of the world will be decided in favor of Europe by the possession of the Russian space.” [28] Conquered territories would be “Reich protectorates…and that these areas were to be deprived of anything in the nature of a Slav intelligentsia.” [29]

This goal was manifest in the “Criminal Order” issued by OKW which stated that the war was “more than mere armed conflict; it is a collision between two different ideologies…The Bolshevist-Jewish intelligentsia must be eliminated….” [30] Other displaced inhabitants of the conquered eastern lands would be killed or allowed to starve. [31] Part of this was due to economic considerations in the Reich, which gave Germans priority in distribution of food, even that from the conquered lands. Starvation was a population control measure that supplemented other forms of annihilation. [32] As Fest notes in Russia Hitler was “seeking nothing but “final solutions.”” [33] Despite numerous post-war justifications by various Wehrmacht generals, the “Wehrmacht and army fell into line with Hitler because there was “a substantial measure of agreement of “ideological questions.”” [34]

Waffen SS Volksdeutsch Recruiting Poster

Hitler's racial ideology was central to his worldview and fundamental to understanding his actions in the war. [35] However twisted Hitler's ideological formulations were his ideas found acceptance beyond the Nazi faithful to the Army and Police, who would execute the campaigns in Poland and Russia in conjunction with the Einsatzgruppen and Nazi party organizations. In these organizations he found allies with pre-existing cultural, political and doctrinal understandings which allowed them to be willing participants in Hitler's grand scheme of eastern conquest.

Doctrinal and Ideological Foundations

While Hitler's racial ideology was more extreme than many in the German military and police, these organizations had cultural beliefs and prejudices as well as doctrinal and ideological foundations which helped them become willing accomplices to Hitler. These factors were often, consciously or unconsciously, excluded from early histories of World War II. The Allies relied on German officers to
write these histories at the beginning of the Cold War, developing the “dual myth of German military brillianc and moral correctness.” [36] British historian and military theorist B.H. Liddell-Hart makes the astounding statement that “one of the surprising features of the Second World War was that German Army in the field on the whole observed the rules of war than it did in 1914-1918—at any rate in fighting its western opponents….” [37]

While Liddell-Hart might be excused by lack of knowledge of some German army atrocities he could not have been ignorant. It was not just the SS who he blamed the atrocities but many of the men who he interviewed. In doing this Liddell-Hart and others presented a myth as truth. [38] The myths were helped by the trials of Manstein and Kesselring where “historical truth had to be sacrificed…to the demands of the Cold War.” [39] British military historian Kenneth Macksey confronted the myth that only the “Waffen SS committed barbaric and criminal acts” noting: “Not even the Knights of the Teutonic Order and their followers in the Middle Ages sank to the depths of the anti-Bolshevik Wehrmacht of 1941.” [40]

Germany had a long running history of anti-Semitism before Hitler. German anti-Semitism often exhibited a “paranoid fear of the power of the Jews,” [41] and included a “fashionable or acceptable anti-Semitism” [42] which became more pronounced as the conditions of the Jews became better and Jews who had fled to Eastern Europe returned to Germany. [43] Sometimes this was tied to religious attitudes, but more often focused on the belief that the Jews “controlled certain aspects of life” and presented in “pseudo-scientific garb” the “myth of a secret Jewish plot for world domination which was simultaneously part of the internationalism of Freemasonry.” [44]

Admiral Wilhelm Canaris provides an example as he “had grown up in the atmosphere of “moderate” anti-Semitism prevailing in the Ruhr middle class and in the Navy believed in the existence of a “Jewish problem”” and would “suggest during 1935-1936 that German Jews should be identified by a Star of David as special category citizens….” [45] Wehrmacht soldiers were “subject to daily doses of propaganda since the 1930s” and that with the “start of the Russian campaign propaganda concerning Jews became more and more aggressive.” [46] Some objected to Nazi actions against Jews. Von Manstein protested the “Aryan paragraph” in the Reichswehr on general principal.” [47] Yet some who planned and executed the most heinous crimes like Adolf Eichmann had “no fanatical anti-Semitism or indoctrination of any kind.” [48]
The military “looked to the regime to reshape society in every respect: political, ideological, economic and military...Propaganda would hammer home absolute nature of the struggle...” [49] Ideological training began in the Hitler Youth and Reichsarbeitsdienst and produced a soldier in which “Anti-Semitism, anti-communism, Lebensraum – these central tenants of Nazism were all inextricably linked with the Landser’s conception of duty, with his place and role in the vast machinery of war.” [50]

Following the dismissal of General Fritsch in 1938, General Brauchitsch promised Hitler that “he would make every effort to bring the Army closer to the State and the State’s ideology.” [51] Alfred Novotny, a Austrian soldier in the Gross Deutschland division noted how training depicted the Russians as Untermenschen and how they were “subjected to official rantings about how the supposedly insidious, endless influence of the Jews in practically every aspect of the enemy's endeavors...Jews were portrayed as rats, which were overrunning the world....” [52]

This ideological component added to the already “harsh military discipline” which had a long tradition in Germany conditioning soldiers to violence and brutalization of their enemy. Similar programs existed in the Order Police which would play a large part in the eastern campaign, the “image of “treasonous” leftists and Jews helped shape the personal and political beliefs of many policemen throughout the interwar period.” [53] Even ordinary police training before the war in German speaking Europe was brutalizing.” [54] These troops were recipients of an ideological formation which “aimed at shaping the worldview of the police leading to the internalization of belief along National Socialist
Waffen SS soldiers, especially those of the Totenkopf division were subjected to even more systematic political indoctrination on the enemies of National Socialism, the Jews, freemasonry, Bolshevism and the churches. [55]

Along with cultural anti-Semitism and the Nazification of German thought in the 1930s, there were aspects of military doctrine which helped prepare the way for the eastern campaign. The most important were the Army's anti-partisan and rear area security doctrine. The history of security anti-partisan operations dated back to the Prussian Army's Ettapen, which began in 1813 with the Landwehr's role in security against looters and others. [57] These units supported and supplied offensive operations from the rear to the combat zone with a secondary mission of countering partisans and preventing disruptions in the rear area. The Ettapen would be reformed and regulated in 1872 following the Franco-Prussian War. [58]

The German experience fighting guerrillas and partisans, the francs-tireurs in the Franco-Prussian War, “scarred the Army's institutional mentality.” [59] Von Moltke was “shattered,” writing his brother that “war was now taking on an ever more hate-inspired character.” [60] He was “appalled by improvised armies, irregular elements, and appeals to popular passion, which he described as a “return to barbarism.” [61] He wrote: “Their gruesome work had to be answered by bloody coercion. Because of this our conduct of the war finally achieved a harshness that we deplored, but which we could not avoid.” [62]

The brutal German response to the francs-tireurs found its legal justification in Franz Lieber's principles for classification of belligerents and non-belligerents, which determined that guerrillas were outlaws or bandits. [63] Lieber's principles were written for the Federal Army of the United States during the U.S. Civil War. Propagated as General Order 100 and signed by Abraham Lincoln the sections dealing with irregular forces and partisans dealt with this in section IV of that code:

Article 82 stated: “Men, or squads of men, who commit hostilities, whether by fighting, or inroads for destruction or plunder, or by raids of any kind, without commission, without being part and portion of the organized hostile army, and without sharing continuously in the war, but who do so with intermittent returns to their homes and avocations, or with the occasional assumption of the semblance of peaceful pursuits, divesting themselves of the character or appearance of soldiers – such men, or squads of men, are not public enemies, and, therefore, if captured, are not entitled to the privileges of prisoners of war, but shall be treated summarily as highway robbers or pirates.”

Article 84 stated: “Armed prowlers, by whatever names they may be called, or persons of the enemy's territory, who steal within the lines of the hostile army for the purpose of robbing, killing, or of destroying bridges, roads or canals, or of robbing or destroying the mail, or of cutting the telegraph wires, are not entitled to the privileges of the prisoner of war.”

Article 85 stated: “War-rebels are persons within an occupied territory who rise in arms against the occupying or conquering army, or against the authorities established by the same. If captured, they may suffer death, whether they rise singly, in small or large bands, and whether called upon to do so by their own, but expelled, government or not. They are not prisoners of war; nor are they if discovered and secured before their conspiracy has matured to an actual rising or armed violence.” [64]

The German Army adapted that code and incorporated it in its doctrine for dealing with partisans. In response to their experience in France during the Franco-Prussian War the Germans systematically reorganized the Ettapen to include railroad and security troops, special military courts, military police,
intelligence and non-military police, including the Landespolizei and the Grenzschutzpolizei. [65]

Pre-Nazi Exterminator: General Lothar Von Trotha led the Genocide against the Herero in Namibia

The doctrinal response to partisans, or as they would become known in German writings as “bandits,” was that bandits should be encircled and destroyed. This was employed in the Southwest Africa German colonies. The Germans, influenced by the experience in France, “displayed a ferocity surpassing even that of the racially brutalized campaigns of its imperialist peers.” [66] The campaign against the Herero tribes which resisted the occupation of Namibia from 1904-1912 utilized encirclement operations, racial cleansing and what would become known as Bandenkämpfung operations. [67]

This was further developed in the First World War, especially in the east where General Fritz Gempp described the security problem as a “ruthless struggle” in which German pacification policy “was in reality the application of terror to galvanize the population into accepting German rule.” [68] Anti-partisan doctrine was codified in the Truppenführung of 1933 which stated that “area defense against partisan warfare is the mission of all units” and that the preferred method of combating partisan bands was that they be surrounded and destroyed. [69] General Erhard Rauss later described active and passive measures used to deal with partisans, focusing on the tactic of encirclement to destroy the enemy. [70]

Anti-partisan doctrine focused on the destruction of the partisans, was coupled a total war philosophy and provided fit well with Hitler's radical ideology. The “propensity for brutality in anti-guerrilla warfare was complimented by officers' growing preoccupation, both during and after World War I, with the mastery and application of violence.” [71] Michael Geyer notes: “ideological mobilization for the creation of a new national and international order increasingly defined the parameters of technocratic planning.” [72] The acceptance of long used brutal tactics to destroy the enemy combined with Hitler's radical racial animus against the Jews could only be expected to create a maelstrom in which all international legal and moral standards would be breached.

Beginnings in Poland

The Polish campaign was a precursor to the Russian campaign and was not totally race driven. It contained elements of Germany's perception of the injustice of Versailles which gave Poland the Danzig corridor and Germany's desire to reconnect East Prussia to the Reich, as well as the perceived necessity to remove a potential enemy from its rear as it faced France, yet it was a campaign steeped in Nazi racial ideology. Poland resisted German efforts to ally itself with Germany in 1939, thus Hitler determined it “would be crushed first.” [73]
Meeting with military leaders on 23 May 1939 Hitler “made it plain that the real issue was not Danzig, but securing of Germany’s Lebensraum….” [74] On 22 August he enjoined the generals to “Close your hearts to pity! Act brutally! Eighty million people must obtain what is their right.” [75] Even so, most military leaders failed to appreciate what Hitler was calling on them to do; Manstein would note that “what Hitler had to say about an eventual war with Poland, could not, in my opinion, be interpreted as a policy of annihilation.” [76]

Others such as Canaris was “utterly horrified” as he read his notes to his closest colleagues “His voice trembled as he read, Canaris was acutely aware that he had witnessed something monstrous.” [77] General Johannes Blaskowitz, commander of 8th Army who would be the military commander in Poland did not leave any notes about the meeting, but his biographer notes that he “may have naively attached a military meaning to these terms since he was busy with military matters and soon to begin operations.” [78] This was the interpretation of Manstein as well. [79] Keitel noted that the speech was “delivered in the finest sense of psychological timing and application,” molding “his words and phrases to suit his audience.” [80]

In light of the mixed interpretations by military leaders, it is possible that many misinterpreted Hitler's intent and did not fully appreciated his ideology as they went into Poland, carefully excluding themselves in the narrow confines of their military world. While such an explanation is plausible for some, it is also true that many others in light of subsequent actions were in full agreement with Hitler. One author notes that “no man who participated in the Führer Conferences….and there were present the highest ranking officers of the three services, could thereafter plead ignorance of the fact that Hitler had laid bare his every depth of infamy before them, and they had raised no voice in protest either then or later.” [81] In July, General Wagner, the Quartermaster General issued orders that “authorized German soldiers to take and execute hostages in the event of attacks by snipers or irregulars.” [82]

Regardless of the meaning ascribed to Hitler's speech by his generals, Hitler had already laid plans to destroy the Jews in Poland and decimate the Polish intelligentsia and leadership. Hitler gave Himmler the task of forming “Einsatzgruppen to follow the German troops as they advanced into Poland and liquidate Poland’s upper class wherever it was to be found.” [83] While senior party leaders remained at Hitler's side following the conference, Himmler worked to coordinate his troops, including the reinforced Totenkopf battalions and Einsatzgruppen with the Army. [84]
Himmler began planning in early May and the Army decided to “use SS and police units to augment their own forces for security tasks.” Himmler established “five Einsatzgruppen to accompany each of the numbered German armies at the start of the campaign.” Placed under the aegis of Reinhard Heydrich the groups were broken down into smaller units of 100-150 men and allotted to army corps. All senior posts were occupied by officers of the Sicherheitsdienst.

Two additional Einsatzgruppen were formed shortly after the invasion. Additionally 3 regiments of the SS Totenkopfverbände, under the direction of SS General Theodore Eicke were deployed in the rear areas of the advancing armies. These regiments were formed from the Concentration Camp guard units and eventually became the nucleus of the 3rd SS Panzer Division Totenkopf. The purpose of these units was shielded from the Army in the planning stages, although Heydrich worked with the Army to develop lists of up to 30,000 Poles to be arrested including intellectuals, political leaders and clergy.

To eliminate the Polish elites without disturbing the Army, Himmler and Heydrich gave the Army “only the bare minimum of information.” The deception was initially successful. Blaskowitz’s 8th Army defined the mission of the Einsatzgruppen in the traditional doctrinal terms of the Ettapen, noting their mission as “the suppression of all anti-Reich and anti-German elements in the rear of the fighting troops, in particular, counter espionage arrests of politically unreliable persons, confiscation of weapons, safeguarding of important counter-espionage materials etc...” General Wagner issued orders in July 1939 that “authorized German soldiers to take and execute hostages in the event of attacks by snipers or irregulars.” Despite the deception, there was no way to disguise the murder of Polish intelligentsia and Jews, and had the Army had the political acumen and moral courage it could have considerably restricted or even halted the terror campaign.
Heinrich Himmler: Implementer of Hitler's Ideas Authorizes formation of Einsatzgruppen

The ensuing campaign in Poland demonstrated Hitler’s true intent. Heydrich talked about “murdering the Polish ruling class” of the aristocracy, Catholic clergy, communists and Jews on 7 September barely a week after the beginning of the invasion. As the German armies advanced into Poland slicing through the badly deployed and inadequately equipped Polish Army the Einsatzgruppen and Totenkopf Verbande followed in their wake, conducting mass arrests and executions of those Poles deemed to be a threat.

Many army leaders were worried about Polish soldiers left behind in rear areas as the armies advanced. In some cases that concern became a paranoid mindset and some generals believed that a “brutal guerilla campaign has broken out everywhere and we are ruthlessly stamping it out.”

Yet some of the actions by Einsatzgruppen and Totenkopf Verbande against the Polish elites and the Jews drew Army reactions. The unit commanded by SS General Woyrsch “behaved with such unparalleled bestiality that it was thrown out of the operational area” by General List of 14th Army.” Another unit, the Totenkopfverbande Brandenburg came to Army attention when its commander remarked that the “SSVT would not obey Army orders.” The conclusion drawn by the Army General was that “the SSVT commander was following orders from some non-military authority to terrorize the local Jews.”

These atrocities as well as those of other Waffen-SS units were hard to hide and brought reactions out of army commanders who sought to punish the offenders. Blaskowitz and others attempted to put a halt to SS actions against Poles and Jews, but most officers turned a blind eye to the atrocities or outright condoned them. It is believed that General Walter Model and others “not only knew what was occurring in Poland but actually took part in what Colonel General Franz Halder himself described in October as “this devilish plan.””

It appears that many who objected were not motivated so much by humanitarian, moral or legal considerations, but rather by the effect on good order and discipline. Likewise it is clear that many officers, even if they did not participate in the actions probably approved of them. Many biographies and histories of this period written by authors influenced by surviving German officers
make no or little mention of the Army’s part in these actions. Himmler and Heydrich were sensitive to the perception of the Army and resented the fact that the Army believed them to be responsible for actions that they were carrying out under the direction and order of Hitler and that their troops were “undisciplined gangs of murderers.” [102]

After the establishment of the Government General led by Hans Frank there was conflict between the Army under Blaskowitz the military commander, the SS, Police and the Nazi administration. Blaskowitz made an “elaborate report on the atrocities of the SS,” [103] expressing concern about his “extreme alarm about illegal executions, his worries about maintaining troop discipline under those circumstances, the failure of discussions with the SD and Gestapo and their assertions that they were only following SS Orders.” [104]

While it is unclear if the memorandum made it to Hitler, it is clear that Hitler did know about the protest and Blaskowitz fell into disfavor and was reassigned after a period of continued conflict with the Nazi administration. Hitler’s reaction to Army objections according to his adjutant was that the Army’s leaders used “Salvation Army” methods, and called their ideas “childish.” [105] others that objected were also relieved of their commands or reassigned. General Georg von Külcher was relieved of command for protesting SS and police atrocities. [106]

SS Officers convicted by Army courts-martial were given amnesty by Hitler on “4 October 1939 who two weeks later removed SS units from the jurisdiction of military courts.” [107] While the army remained, it was no longer in charge and would actively assist the SS and Police in combat and further atrocities against civilians. One German officer, later a conspirator in the July 20th plot, remarked in November 1939 about the killings that he “was ashamed to be German! The minority are dragging our good through the mud by murdering, looting and torching houses will bring disaster on the whole German people if we do not stop it soon…” [108]

Ordungspolizei in Action: Street Cops Become Executioners

The Army was relieved of responsibility for policing Poland which fell on the Ordungspolizei battalions and Gendarmerie. These units were composed of mobilized city police and rural constabulary police and would wreak their own devastation on Poland in the coming months and years. [109] Poland would also be the first Nazi driven shift in population to exploit the newly won Lebensraum as Poles were driven into the newly formed Government General and ethnic Germans moved into previously Polish occupied territories. By 1941 over 1,200,000 Poles and 300,000 Jews had been expelled and
497,000 ethnic Germans brought into provinces lost in 1919. [110] Prior to the war about 3.3 million Jews lived in Poland. After the war 50-70,000 were found to have survived in Poland, the Polish Army and camps in Germany. A further 180,000 were repatriated from the Soviet Union. [111]

**Russia**

The Nazi war against Russia was the ultimate test of Hitler's ideological at war. Planning for the war with the Soviet Union began after the Fall of France and during the beginning stages of the Battle of Britain. On 21 July 1940 Hitler made “his intentions plain” to the Army leadership and “von Brauchitsch set his planners to work.” [112] Detailed preparations for the offensive began in the winter of 1940-41 following the Luftwaffe's failure against Britain and postponement of Operation Sea Lion. Hitler intended to “crush Soviet Russia in a quick campaign which was to begin no later than March 15, 1941, and before the end of the war with England.” [113] Field Marshal Keitel noted the final decision came in “early December 1940” and from then he had “no doubt whatsoever that only some unforeseen circumstance could possibly alter his decision to attack.” [114]

The military plan initially focused on the destruction of “the Red Army rather than on any specific terrain or political objective,” [115] although the political and geographic objectives would arise in later planning and in the campaign. Hitler stated: “What matters is that Bolshevism must be exterminated. In case of necessity, we shall renew our advance whenever a new center of resistance is formed. Moscow as the center of doctrine must disappear from the earth’s center....” [116]

Besides preparations aimed at the destruction of the Red Army and overthrow of the Soviet State, the “war against the Soviet Union was more openly ideological from the start.” [117] Hitler set the stage on March 3rd 1941: “the forthcoming campaign is more than a mere armed conflict; it is a collision between two different ideologies...this war will not be ended merely by the defeat of the enemy armed forces” and that “the Jewish-Bolshevist intelligentsia must be eliminated....” [118]

Hitler noted that “this is a task so difficult that it cannot be entrusted to the Army.” [119] Reichskommissars would be appointed in the conquered areas, but since normal civilian powers would be insufficient to eliminate the Bolshevists, that it “might be necessary “to establish organs of the Reichsführer SS alongside the army’s Secret Field Police, even in the operational areas....” [120] The primary task was to liquidate “all Bolshevik leaders or commissars” if possible while still in the operations zones,” [121] yet the orders did not contain “a syllable that in practice every Jew would be handed over to the extermination machine.” [122]

This was followed on 13 March by an agreement between the Army represented by General Wagner and the SS, which stated in part that “the Reichsführer SS has been given by the Führer special tasks within the operations zone of the Army...to settle the conflict between two opposing political systems.” [123] Likewise the agreement dictated that Himmler would “act independently and on his own responsibility” while ensuring that “military operations are not affected by measures necessary to carry out his task.” [124]

A further instruction of 26 March issued by Wagner gave the Army’s agreement to the use of the Einsatzgruppen in the operations zone, specifying coordination between them and army authorities in the operational zone and communications zones to the rear. Cooperation was based on the “principals for co-operation between the State Secret Police and the Field Security organization of the Wehrmacht agreed with the Security branch of the War Ministry on 1 January 1937.” [125]

The most significant act for the Army in this was the Commissar Order. This order is sometimes known
as the “Criminal Order” which was used war as evidence at Nurnberg as against Keitel, Jodl and High Command of the Wehrmacht during the later Generals Trial. The order specified the killing of Soviet Political Commissars attached to the Red Army and as “they were not prisoners of war” and another order specified that “in the event that a German soldier committed against civilians or prisoners, disciplinary action was optional.” [126] The order noted regarding political commissars that “in this struggle consideration and respect for international law with regard to these elements is wrong.” [127] The “Guidelines for the Conduct of Troops in Russia” issued on May 19, 1941 called for “ruthless and vigorous measures against Bolshevik inciters, saboteurs [and] Jews.” [128]

Shortly before the order was issued, Hitler previewed it to the generals saying that the war in Russia “cannot be conducted in a knightly fashion” and that it would have to be waged with “unprecedented, unmerciful and unrelenting harshness…” [129] and that they would have to “dispense with all of their outdated and traditional ideas about chivalry and the generally accepted rules of warfare: the Bolsheviks had long since dispensed with them.” [130] He explained that his orders were beyond their comprehension stating “I cannot and will not change my orders and I insist that that they be carried out with unquestioning and unconditional obedience.” [131]

General Franz Halder, Chief of the OKH, or the Army High Command took notes on Hitler’s speech. They are chilling to read as none present could have understood them in any other way than Hitler meant:

“Clash of two ideologies. Crushing denunciation of Bolshevism, identified with asocial criminality….We must forget the comradeship between soldiers. A Communist is no comrade before nor after the battle. This is a war of extermination….We do not wage war to preserve the enemy….War against Russia: Extermination of the Bolshevik Commissars and of the Communist intelligentsia….this is no job for military courts. The individual troop commanders must know the issues at stake. They must be leaders in the fight….This war will be very different from war in the West. In the East harshness today means leniency in the future. Commanders must make the sacrifice of overcoming their personal scruples.” [132]

Hitler’s speech was protested by some according to Von Brauchitsch. [133] Von Brauchitsch refused to protest to Hitler but issued an order on his own authority “threating dire penalties for excesses against civilians and prisoners of war” which he maintained at Nurneberg “was sufficient to nullify the Comissar Order.” [134] Yet Von Brauchitsch later would tell commanders to “proceed with the necessary hardness.” [135] Warlimont noted that Von Bock, who would “later emerge as an opponent of the Comissar Order…makes no special comment on the meeting or the restricted conference that followed.” [136]

At Nuremberg Keitel said that he “stubbornly contested” the clause “relating to the authority of the SS-Reichsführer… in the rearward operational areas.” [137] Keitel blamed the Army High Command OKH under Halder, but the order came out with his signature on behalf of Hitler, which was key evidence against him at Nurnberg. He stated that “there was never any possibility of justifying them in retrospect by circumstances obtaining in the Russian campaign.” [138]

Some commanders refused to publish the orders and “insisted that the Wehrmacht never implemented such policies…” blaming them instead on the SS. One writer states “such protests were undoubtedly sincere, but in practice German soldiers were far from innocent. The senior professional officers were often out of touch with their subordinates.” [139] The orders were a “license to kill, although not a great departure from German military traditions….“ [140] The effect was terrifying, for in a sense the Einsatzgruppen, “could commit ever crime known to God and man, so long as they were a mile or two
Einsatzgruppe troops finishing off Jewish Women

For the campaign in the Soviet Union the SS formed four Einsatzgruppen composed of SD, Waffen-SS and Police troops designated A-D. Einsatzgruppe A was assigned to Army Group North, Einsatzgruppe B to Army Group Center, Einsatzgruppe C to Army Group South and Einsatzgruppe D to the 11th Army. The Einsatzgruppe were not standardized in manpower or equipment. In size they were battalion equivalents the largest Einsatzgruppe being A in the North with 990 assigned personnel while Einsatzgruppe D had only 550 troops assigned. These units had SS, SD or Police commanders. Additionally nine Ordnungspolizei battalions were initially assigned to the invasion forces to supplement the Einsatzgruppen.

The police contingent would grow over time so that by 1943, these units would be grouped under regiments and number about 180,000 men assisted by 301,000 auxiliaries. These units would act in concert with nine Army Security Divisions which handled rear area security. Himmler initially did not reveal their intent and planned use to Einsatzgruppen commanders, only speaking of a “heavy task…to “secure and pacify” the Russian area using Sicherheitspolizei and SD methods.” Understanding the effect of these operations, Himmler would state that “in many cases it is considerably easier to lead a company in battle than to command a company responsible to…carry out executions, to deport people…to be always consistent, always uncompromising—that is in many cases far, far harder.”

The actions of these units are well documented; the Einsatzgruppen, Police, Army and locally recruited Schutzmannschaft battalions ruthlessly exterminated Jews and others in the operational area. No sooner had an Einsatzgruppe unit entered a city, a “deadly stranglehold” would grip the “Jewish inhabitants claiming thousands and thousands of victims day by day and hour by hour.” Non-Jewish Russians were encouraged to conduct programs which Heydrich noted “had to be encouraged.” Einsatzgruppen D report number 153 noted: “During period covered by this report 3,176 Jews, 85 Partisans, 12 looters, 122 Communist functionaries shot. Total 79,276.” By the spring of 1942 Einsatzgruppe A had claimed “more than 270,000 victims, the overwhelming majority of whom were Jewish.” The total killed for all groups then was 518,388 people, mostly Jews. Germany's Romanian ally acted against Jews in Odessa as well; “on 23 October 1941 19,000 Jews
were shot near the harbor… probably 200,000 Jews perished either at Romanian hands or after being
turned over by the Romanians to the Germans.” [157]

Many Anti-Jewish Massacres were Labeled “Anti-Partisan” Operations

Operations against Jews were often called anti-partisan operations. Himmler referred to
Einsatzgruppen as “anti-Partisan formations [158] while Wehrmacht Security divisions “murdered
countless Soviet civilians and burned Russian settlements to the ground under the pretext of subduing
partisan resistance.” [159] The attitude by 1941-1942 was that “all Jews are partisans and all
partisans are Jews.” From 1943, all armed resistance was “banditry” and all Jews irrespective of
circumstances were treated as “bandits.”” [160]

General Von Reichenau issued an order in which he stated:

“The soldier in the Eastern territories is not merely a fighter according to the art of war but also a bearer
of a ruthless national ideology and the avenger of the bestialities which had been inflicted upon German
and racially related nations. Therefore the soldier must have full understanding for the necessity of a severe
Likewise the distinguished Panzer commander General Herman Hoth issued his own order of 17 November 1941 urging his troops to exact revenge on the Jews and Communists:

“Every trace of active or passive resistance or of any kind of machinations by the Bolshevik-Jewish agitators are [sic] to be immediately and pitilessly rooted out. The necessity of severe measures against elements foreign to people and kind must be understood precisely by the soldiers. These circles are the spiritual pillars of Bolshevism, the tablebearers [priests] of its murder organization, the helpers of the partisans. It consists of the same Jewish class of people which have done so much to harm our Fatherland and by its hostile activity…and anti-culture, which promotes anti-German currents in the whole world and which wants to be the bearer of revenge. Their annihilation is a law of self-preservation. Any soldier criticizing these measures has no memory of the former traitorous activity lasting for years carried on among our own people by Jewish-Marxist elements.” [162]

The commander of the 221st Security Division endeavored to persuade his “subordinate units that the Jews were carriers of Bolshevik contamination and, therefore, the ultimate source of any sabotage or difficulty the division faced.” [163] The extermination of the Jews and partisan war were closely intertwined with the Reich’s economic policies designed to exploit the natural resources of the Russia. This included the “hunger plan” which German authorities seemed to imagine that “millionfold starvation could be induced by requisitioning off all available grain and “shutting off” the cities.” [164]

The Wehrmacht’s complicity in these measures is demonstrated in the order drafted by Warlimont and signed by Keitel on 13 May 1941. That order, the “Decree on Exercising Military Jurisdiction in the Area of Barbarossa and Special Measures by the Troops” made it clear that international conventions regarding the treatment of civilians would not be observed in the Soviet Union. The order, relying on the historic precedent of German military law in regard to partisan activity stated:
I. “Treatment of crimes committed by enemy civilians “1. Until further order the military courts and the courts martial will not be competent for crimes committed by enemy civilians. “2. Francs-tireurs will be liquidated ruthlessly by the troops in combat or while fleeing. “3. Also all other attacks by enemy civilians against the armed forces, its members, and auxiliaries will be suppressed on the spot by the troops with the most rigorous methods until the assailants are finished (niederkaempfen) “4. Where such measures were not taken or at least were not possible, persons suspected of the act will be brought before an officer at once. This officer will decide whether they are to be shot. Against localities from which troops have been attacked in or treacherous manner, collective coercive measures be applied immediately upon the order of an officer of the rank of at least battalion etc., commander, if the circumstances do not permit a quick identification of individual perpetrators.

II. “Treatment of crimes committed against inhabitants by members of the Wehrmacht and its auxiliaries “1. With regard to offenses committed against enemy civilians by members of the Wehrmacht or by its auxiliaries prosecution is not obligatory, even where the deed is at the same time a military crime or misdemeanor….” [165]

Hitler was quite clear in his intent when he told General Halder that in 1941 that he “intended to level Moscow and Leningrad, to make them uninhabitable, so there would be no need to feed their populations during the winter.” [166] Economic officials held life and death power over villages. Those that met agricultural quotas were “likely to be spared annihilation and evacuation…the culmination of this process, during 1943, would be the widespread creation of “dead zones.”” [167] All told during the campaign against the Soviet Union the Germans killed nearly 1.5 million Russian Jews. [168]

By 1942, over two million Soviet POW’s had been killed. 600,000 shot outright, 140,000 by the Einsatzkommandos. [169] Eventually about 3.3 million Soviet POWs died in German captivity through starvation, disease and exposure, [170] are included in a total of over 10 million Red Army Combat deaths. [171] Bracher notes: “The reality and irreality of the National Socialism were given their most terrible expression in the extermination of the Jews.” [172]

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The Killer Becomes a Victim: Arthur Nebe’s experience commanding an Einsatzgruppe so traumatized him that he would be reassigned and then become active in the attempt to kill Hitler and lose his life

Himmler and others continued to use euphemistic language to describe their efforts talking in terms of
“Jewish resettlement.” Terms such as special actions, special treatment, execution activity, cleansing and resettlement were used in place of the word murder. At the same time these operations led to problems in the ranks, one SS trooper observed: “deterioration in morale among his own men who had to be issued increasing rations of vodka to carry out their killing orders.”

Even commanders of the Einsatzgruppe were affected. Arthur Nebe would say “I have looked after so many criminals and now I have become one myself.” Nebe became an active participant in the July 20th plot against Hitler and a fellow conspirator would describe him as a “shadow of his former self, nerves on edge and depressed.” Erich Bach-Zelewski, who led the SS anti-partisan operations, would suffer a nervous breakdown which included “hallucinations connected to the shootings of Jews” which hospitalized him in 1942. Himmler would state in his Posen speech given in October 1943 that “to have gone through” the elimination of the Jews had “and remained decent, that has made us tough. This is an unwritten, never to be written, glorious page in our history.”

**Conclusion**

The German war against Poland and the Soviet Union was heavily dependent on the racist ideology of Adolf Hitler. He was the true spirit behind the atrocities committed by his nation as one noted in Russia: “Here too the Führer is the moving spirit of a radical solution in both word and deed.” He saw the partisan war as “the chance to stamp out everything that stands against us.” Belief in Germany’s right to Lebensraum the superiority of the German Volk and necessity to settle the Jewish problem provided a fertile ground for Hitler’s plans. German military doctrines, especially those of anti-partisan and total warfare abetted Hitler’s goals.

It is quite clear that many in the Wehrmacht were in agreement with Hitler’s ideology of racial-war. Prepared by cultural prejudice and long traditions of thought, the “Prussian and in later German military must be regarded as a significant part of the ideological background of the Second World War.” General Walther Von Reichenau’s orders to his troops are revealing: “The most important goal of the campaign against Jewish-Bolshevism is the complete destruction of its grip on power and the elimination of the Asian influence from our European cultural sphere.” Field Marshal Gerd Von Rundstedt appeared to agree with Reichenau to “use the partisan threat as excuse for persecuting Jews, so long as the dirty work was largely left to SS Einsatzgruppen.”

The Army command…on the whole acquiesced in the extermination of the Jews, or at least closed its eyes to what was happening.” Even if the Generals had been more forceful in their opposition, they would have been opposed by the highly nazified youth that made up the bulk of their Army, especially junior officers and then there was the matter of their oath to Hitler and what they saw as personal honor. General Alfred Jodl told American Army psychologist Gustave Gilbert at Nuremberg that “In war the moral pressure of obedience and the stigma of high treason are pretty hard to get around.”

Jodl’s superior Keitel stated his helplessness before Hitler saying to Gilbert “What could I do? There were only 3 possibilities: 9a) refusal to follow orders, which naturally meant death; (b) resign my post, or (c) commit suicide. I was on the point of resigning my post 3 times, but Hitler made it clear that he considered my resignation in time of war the same as desertion. What could I do?” This was obviously an after the fact excuse by Keitel who had been present in Hitler’s headquarters since the beginning and had witnessed the explosive General Heinz Guderian explode in rage against Hitler in 1945.
SS leaders fanatically executed Hitler’s policies aided by the civil administration. Genocide was to bring the Reich “long term economic gains and trading advantages” and was seen as a way of “financing the war debt without burdening the German taxpayer.” [188] Many in the Army as it has been shown were not only knowledgeable about the crimes committed but urged their soldiers to participate in these crimes.

Otto Ohlendorf, commander of Einsatzgruppe D testified at the Einsatzgruppe Trial that “Einsatzgruppen reported all of their tasks to the army commanders, and that together, they and the army agreed on the time, place, and possible support of the troops for any particular “liquidation action[s].” [189]

Some individuals did attempt to resist the most brutal aspects of the Nazi campaign against the Jews. Wilhelm Kube, Reichskommissar for White Russia and a virulent anti-Semite was shocked at the murders of the Jews calling them “unworthy of the German cause and damaging to the German reputation” and would later attempt to spare Jews by employing them in war industries, would be “defeated by Himmler’s zealots.” [190] Army officers who objected like Blaskowitz and Külcher were relieved, or like Von Leeb, told by Hitler to “in so many words told to mind his own business.” Leeb stated: “the only thing to do is to hold oneself at a distance.” [191] Field Marshall Erwin Rommel knew of crimes being committed against the Jews and others through Blaskowitz but blamed the crimes “on Hitler’s subordinates, not Hitler himself.” [192]

Partial Justice: The Einsatzgruppen Trial

Hitler’s ideology permeated German military campaigns and administration of the areas conquered by his armies. No branch of the German military, police or civil administration in occupied Poland or Russia was exempt guiltless in the crimes committed by the Nazi regime. It is a chilling warning of the consequences awaiting any nation that allows it to become caught up in hate-filled political, racial or even religious ideologies which dehumanizes opponents and of the tragedy that awaits them and the world. In Germany the internal and external checks that govern the moral behavior of the nation and individuals failed. Caught up in the Nazi system, the Germans, especially the police and military abandoned the norms of international law, morality and decency, banally committing crimes which still reverberate today and which are seen in the ethnic cleansing actions in the former Yugoslavia, Syria and other nations.
It is something that we should not forget.

Peace

Padre Steve+


Di Nardo, Richard L. *Germany and the Axis Powers: From Coalition to Collapse.* University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, KS. 2005


Gilbert, Gustave *Nuremberg Diary* DaCapo Press 1995 copyright G.M. Gilbert 1947


Hebert, Valerie Genevieve. *Hitler’s Generals on Trial: The Last War Crimes Tribunal at Nuremberg* University of Kansas Press, Lawrence Kansas 2010


Newton, Steven H. *Hitler's Commander: Field Marshal Walter Model*—Hitler’s Favorite General DaCapo Press a division of Perseus Books Group, Cambridge MA 2005


Weinberg, Gerhard L. *Germany Hitler and World War II*. Cambridge University Press, New York, NY 1995


[5] Note the actions of Cardinal Richelieu in France who worked to expand French power at the expense of other Catholic nations and the Vatican itself.

[6] In the United States the Reconstruction policies produced great resentment in the south with decidedly negative results for the newly freed slaves which lasted another 100 years, while in the Soviet Union great numbers of “opponents of Socialism” were killed, imprisoned or driven out of the county


[8] Ibid. Davidowicz, *The War Against the Jews* pp.8-9


[10] Ibid. Fest *Hitler* p.47


[12] Weinberg, Gerhard L. *Germany Hitler and World War II.* Cambridge University Press, New York,
Friedlander, Saul  

Friedlander called this anti-Semitism “Redemptive anti-Semitism” in which “Hitler perceived his mission as a kind of crusade to redeem the world by eliminating the Jews.

Megargee, Geoffrey P.  

Hitler, Adolf  

Evans, Richard J.  

Speer, Albert.  

Geyer, Michael.  

Speer, Albert.  

Goerlitz, Walter.  

Trevor-Roper, H.R.  
Frankfurter Hefte, Frankfur am Main, 1953 p.390

Novato CA, 1964 p. 150


[33] Ibid. Fest. Hitler p.649

Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 2006. Originally published as Die Wehrmacht: Feindbilder,
Vernichtungskrieg, Legenden. S. Fischer Verlag, GmbH, Frankfurt am Main, 2002 p.93

[35] This understanding is different than many historians who as Friedlander notes advocate
something like this: “The persecution and extermination of the Jews of Europe was but a secondary
consequence of major German policies pursued toward entirely different goals.” See Friedlander p.xvi

[36] Ibid. Megargee. War of Annihilation p.xii

1948 by B.H. Liddell-Hart p.22

[38] It has to be noted that Liddell-Hart published this work in 1948 and was limited in the materials
available, his primary sources being German officers who he viewed with sympathy because he saw
them as exponents of his theory of the indirect approach. The time was also around the beginning of
the Cold War and the Berlin Blockade when many American and British leaders were trying to end the
war crimes trials and bring the West Germans into the new anti-Communist alliance.

[39] Ibid. Wette. The Wehrmacht p.224


[42] Ibid. Stern. Gold and Iron p.494

[43] Ibid. Bracher. The German Dictatorship p.34

[44] Ibid. Bracher The German Dictatorship pp.34-35

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Ibid Witte *The Wehrmacht*, p.73

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Ibid. Megargee. *War of Annihilation* p.6

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Westermann, Edward B. *Hitler’s Police Battalions: Enforcing Racial War in the East*. University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, KS. 2005 p.64 Westermann also notes the preponderance of SA men who entered the Order Police in the 1930s, a factor which helped further the politicization of that organization.

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Ibid. Rhodes *Masters of Death* p.23

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Ibid. Westermann *Hitler’s Police Battalions* p.103

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Ibid. Shepherd. *War in the Wild East* p.42

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Ibid. Goerlitz. *History of the German General Staff* p.93

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Hughes, Daniel J. editor. *Moltke on the Art of War: Selected Writings*, translated by Harry Bell and
Ibid. Blood *Hitler's Bandit Hunters* p.6 Lieber was a Prussian emigrant to the US who taught law at Columbia University.


Ibid. Blood *Hitler's Bandit Hunters* pp.12-13

Ibid. Shepherd *Wild War in the East* p.42

Ibid. Blood. *Hitler's Bandit Hunters* pp.16-19

Ibid. Blood. *Hitler's Bandit Hunters* p.22


Ibid. Shepherd. *War in the Wild East* p.45

Ibid. Geyer. *German Strategy* p.584

Ibid. Weinberg. *Visions of Victory* p.8

Ibid. Goerlitz, *History of the German General Staff* p.346


Ibid. Hohne. *Canaris* p.347


Ibid. Manstein. *Lost Victories* p.29

Ibid. Goerlitz. *The Memoirs of Field Marshal Keitel* p.87


[83] Ibid. Höhne *The Order of the Death’s Head* p.297


[86] Ibid. Westermann. *Hitler’s Police Battalions* p.127

[87] Ibid. Höhne *The Order of the Death’s Head* p.297

[88] Ibid. Westermann. *Hitler’s Police Battalions* p.127

[89] Ibid. Sydnor *Soldiers of Destruction* p.37

[90] Ibid. Giziowski *Blaskowitz* p.120

[91] Ibid. Witte. *The Wehrmacht* p.100

[92] Ibid. Höhne *The Order of the Death’s Head* pp. 297-298

[93] Ibid. Giziowski *Blaskowitz* p.120

[94] Ibid. Höhne *The Order of the Death’s Head* p.298

[95] Ibid. Witte. *The Wehrmacht* p.100


[97] Ibid. Giziowski. *The Enigma of General Blaskowitz* pp.165-166

[98] Ibid. Sydnor, *Soldiers of Destruction* pp. 42-43 Note SSVT is the common abbreviation for Verfügungstruppe which was the early designation of the SS Totenkopf Verbande and some other Waffen SS Units.

[99] Ibid. Goerlitz. *History of the German General Staff* p.359

[100] Ibid. Newton. *Hitler’s Commander* p.78

[101] Ibid. Witte *The Wehrmacht* p.102

[102] Ibid. Höhne *The Order of the Death’s Head* p.298

[103] Ibid. Goerlitz. *History of the German General Staff* p.359


[106] Ibid. Witte *The Wehrmacht* p.102

For a good account of one of the Police Battalions see *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* by Christopher Browning Harper Perennial Publishers, San Francisco CA 1992


Ibid. Davidowicz *The War Against the Jews* pp.395-397

Ibid. Megargee *War of Annihilation* p.24

Ibid. Wheeler-Bennett *The Nemesis of Power* p.511


Megargee. *War of Annihilation* p.10 The campaign against the Soviet Union was to be much more openly ideological as compared to the campaign in Poland.

Ibid. Warlimont. *Inside Hitler’s Headquarters* p.150

Ibid. Warlimont. *Inside Hitler’s Headquarters* p.151

Ibid. Reitlinger, *The SS* p.175

Höhne *The Order of the Death’s Head* p. 354

Höhne *The Order of the Death’s Head* p. 354 Again another deception.

Ibid. Warlimont. *Inside Hitler’s Headquarters* p.153

Ibid. Warlimont. *Inside Hitler’s Headquarters* p.153

Ibid. Warlimont. *Inside Hitler’s Headquarters* pp. 158-159

Glantz and House. *When Titans Clashed* p.56

Davidowicz. *The War Against the Jews* p.123


Ibid. Wheeler-Bennett. *Nemesis of Power* p.513

Hebert, Valerie Genevieve, *Hitler’s Generals on Trial: The Last War Crimes Tribunal at Nuremberg* University of Kansas Press, Lawrence Kansas 2010 pp.77-78

Ibid. Wheeler-Bennett *Nemesis of Power* p.513 and footnote. He cites the three Army Group commanders, Leeb, Rundstedt and Bock. However Von Rundstedt’s biographer notes that “no evidence exists as to what Von Rundstedt’s to this was at the time.” Messenger, Charles, *The Last Prussian: A Biography of Field Marshal Gerd Von Rundstedt 1875-1953* Brassey’s (UK) London England 1991. p.134

Ibid. Reitlinger, *The SS* p.177

Ibid. Megargee. *War of Annihilation* p.33

Ibid. Warlimont. *Inside Hitler’s Headquarters* p.162


Ibid. Glantz and House. *When Titans Clashed* p.56

Ibid. Blood. *Hitler’s Bandit Hunters* p.52

Ibid. Reitlinger *The SS* p.177

Ibid. Shepherd. *War in the Wild East* p.54

Ibid. Reitlinger *The SS* p.177

Ibid. Rhodes *Masters of Death* pp.12-13

Ibid. Westermann. *Hitler’s Police Battalions* p.167

Ibid. Westermann. *Hitler’s Police Battalions* p.164

Ibid. Blood *Hitler’s Bandit Hunters* p.141

Ibid. Shepherd *Wild War in the East* p.48. Shepherd notes the deficiencies of these units in terms of organization, manpower and equipment which he calls “far short of the yardstick of military excellence with which the Wehrmacht is so widely associated

Ibid. Höhne *The Order of the Death’s Head* p.356 Only one of the Einsatzgruppen commanding officers was a volunteer, Arthur Nebe who was involved in the conspiracy to kill Hitler. It is believed by many that Nebe volunteered to earn the clasp to the Iron Cross to curry favor with Heydrich and that initially “Nebe certainly did not know that “employment in the east” was synonymous with the greatest mass murder in history.

Ibid. Bracher. *The German Dictatorship* p.422

Ibid. Blood *Hitler’s Bandit Hunters* p.55

Ibid. Höhne *The Order of the Death’s Head* p.360

Ibid. Friedlander *The Years of Extermination* p.207
The Hungarian would also engage in ant-Jewish operations. Only the Italian army would not conduct operations against the Jews.

This included 228,000 from the Baltic republics (90%) 245,000 from White Russia (65%) 900,000 from the Ukraine (60%) and 107,000 from Russia proper (11%).
Kristallnacht 75 Years Later

“One of the men grabbed my father by the shoulder and spit in his face. They tore his World War I medals from his shirt and stomped them into the ground. They started beating my father. Furniture started flying through the windows. My mother was screaming: ‘Let’s get out of here. They are killing us.’ We slipped out a back street, hoping the men would be finished soon and we could go back home.” Alex Liebenstein Kristallnacht survivor. (Jewish Weekly.com 12 November 2004)
It is still hard for me to believe that a civilized people can be incited into mob violence against a minority, even one that is already being persecuted. Unfortunately has happened all too often. The atrocities committed by the Nazi regime 75 years ago on the 9th and 10th of November 1938 reverberate to today as we see a resurgence of anti-Semitism around the world.

The catalyst for the event was the assassination of a German diplomat in Paris by the teenage son of a Polish Jewish immigrant who had recently been expelled from his home. However the death of the diplomat was a mere pretext for actions that the more radical National Socialists desired and had been building up to the previous five years.
Josef Goebbels

Preparations for the action were already underway when death of the diplomat Ernst was delivered at a meeting commemorating the Beer Hall Putsch. Ironically Von Rath was an anti-Nazi under suspicion and being watched by the Gestapo.

After the message was delivered, Goebbels who was in disgrace with Hitler after the discovery of an affair between him and an actress took the opportunity to regain favor with Hitler. He stirred up the assembled Nazis and reported that there were reports of anti-Jewish demonstrations and the burning of synagogues and that Hitler ‘has decided that such demonstrations are not to be prepared or organized by the party, but so far as they originate spontaneously, they are not to be discouraged either.’ Taking his exhortation as an order many Gauleiters ran to phones to begin the action in their districts.

But the fact was the pogrom was already planned. SS Gruppenfuhrer Reinhard Heydrich sent the following order out the day before.
TO ALL REGIONAL AND SUB-REGIONAL GESTAPO OFFICES 1:20AM, November 8, 1938

SUBJECT: MEASURES AGAINST THE JEWS THIS NIGHT
That only such measures were to be taken that would not endanger German lives or property
Businesses and residences of Jews may be damaged but not looted. Particular care is to be paid in
business sections and surrounding streets. Non-Jewish businesses are to be protected from damage
under all circumstances. Police are to seize all archives from synagogues and offices of community
organizations, this refers to material of historical significance. Archives are to be handed over to
the SS. As soon as possible, officials are to arrest as many Jews especially wealthy ones – in all
districts as can be accommodated in existing cells. For the time being, only healthy male Jews of not
too advanced age are to be arrested.
Reinhard Heydrich, SS Gruppenführer
Heydrich’s Order

By two to three in the morning mobs were roaming the streets of German and Austrian cities. British Journalist Hugh Carlton Greene of the Daily Telegraph wrote:

“Mob law ruled in Berlin throughout the afternoon and evening and hordes of hooligans indulged in an orgy of destruction. I have seen several anti-Jewish outbreaks in Germany during the last five years, but never anything as nauseating as this. Racial hatred and hysteria seemed to have taken complete hold of otherwise decent people. I saw fashionably dressed women clapping their hands and screaming with glee, while respectable middle-class mothers held up their babies to see the “fun”.”
The banned Social Democratic Party reported:

“When the Jewish Synagogue was burning...a large number of women could be heard saying, That’s the right way to do it—it’s a pity there aren’t any more Jews inside, that would be the best way to smoke out the whole lousy lot of them. No one dared to take a stand against these sentiments....”

Though horrified by the reports coming out of Germany the world did nothing to help the Jews. No country stepped up to allow increased immigration including the United States where anti-semitism was at its historic peak. Public condemnations of the Nazis by world leaders were at best muted. Likewise the passivity of many Germans to Kristallnacht encouraged the most radical parts of the party to enact even more restrictive and punishing laws and regulations on the Jews.

Goebbels was ecstatic and wrote in his diary: 10 November 1938 I reported to the Fuehrer and he decides: the demonstrations should be allowed to continue. The police should retreat. Let the Jews get a taste of popular anger. He is right. I immediately instructed the party and police accordingly.
Then I gave a short speech along these lines to the Party leadership. Loud applause. Everybody goes to the telephones. Now the people is going to act.... I wish to return to my hotel, and see a glow as red as blood. The synagogue is burning.... We only put out the fires when they endanger adjacent buildings. If not, they should be burned to the ground.... Reports come from all over the Reich. 50 synagogues, then 70 are on fire. The Fuhrer ordered 20-30 thousand Jews to be arrested.... Public anger is running wild.... They have to be given the possibility to vent their rage.... Driving to the hotel, windows are being smashed. Bravo, bravo. The synagogues burn like big old huts. There is no danger to German property. For the time being there is nothing more to be done.... (Der Spiegel 1992)

Heydrich’s preliminary report stated:

“The extent of the destruction of Jewish shops and houses cannot yet be verified by figures ... 815 shops destroyed, 171 dwelling houses set on fire or destroyed only indicate a fraction of the actual damage so far as arson is concerned ... 119 synagogues were set on fire, and another 76 completely destroyed ... 20,000 Jews were arrested. 36 deaths were reported and those seriously injured were also numbered at 36. Those killed and injured are Jews.”

The Nazis even found a way to make money off of their persecution of the Jews. Hermann Goering convened a meeting of leaders on the 12th and discussed the economic implications of the action. The minutes of the meeting recorded his thoughts.
“Since the problem is mainly an economic one, it is from the economic angle it shall have to be tackled. Because, gentlemen, I have had enough of these demonstrations! They don't harm the Jew but me, who is the final authority for coordinating the German economy. 'If today a Jewish shop is destroyed, if goods are thrown into the street, the insurance companies will pay for the damages; and, furthermore, consumer goods belonging to the people are destroyed. If in the future, demonstrations which are necessary occur, then, I pray, that they be directed so as not to hurt us.’

Accordingly those at the meeting decided that the Jews were to blame for the action and determined that the Jews be fined 1 Billion Reichsmarks for the slaying of Von Rath and 6 million for the damage to property. The money was taken from the insurance payments that Jewish business and property owners would have received. The banality of Goering was typical of many Nazi leaders. He stated “We must agree on a clear action that shall be profitable to the Reich. ... Anyway, the Jew must be evicted pretty fast from the German economy.”
Goebbels made the announcement of the official party line that the riots and destruction were “a spontaneous wave of righteous indignation throughout Germany as a result of the cowardly Jewish murder of Third Secretary vom Rath.” Goebbels lied to foreign reporters saying “Not a Jew has had a hair disturbed.”

But the truth was different. 91 Jews died as a direct result of the action while it is estimated several hundred more committed suicide during or just after Kristallnacht. Another two to three thousand of those arrested and sent to concentration camps died in those camps before the majority were released on the promise that they would leave Germany.

The events of Kristallnacht and the decisions afterwards marked a distinct watershed in the annals of the Holocaust. They had already been stripped of citizenship and most rights but from this point they became the target of any petty bureaucrat or party official. Kristallnacht foreshadowed the future for the Jews of Germany and Nazi occupied Europe.

In the next year over 100,000 Jews would immigrate from Germany mainly to other European countries where many would again face the horrors of Nazi persecution as the Nazis implemented the
Final Solution.

In hope of peace,

Padre Steve+

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Ze Wohl!
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- The Last Word Lawrence O'Donnell
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- The Political Carnival
- The Stephanie Miller Show
- Think Progress

PTSD

- Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America
- National Center on PTSD
- National Intrepid Center of Excellence
Hitler's Beer Hall Putsch. This is the currently selected item. Hitler and the Nazis come to power. Hitler sees this as the opportunity to take control. This is where he launches his Beer Hall Putsch, and I know I'm mispronouncing it, but Putsch literally means coup d'état, to try to overthrow the government. So, Hitler and his Nazi's the go to that Beer Hall meeting of the government officials, they surround it with their paramilitary group, their storm troopers, Hitler enters into the hall, gets on stage, shoots into the air twice and says, look this is the revolution, it is beginning. He forces the three leaders of Bavaria at gunpoint to pledge allegiance to the Nazi party. But in the course of a chaotic beer hall confrontation during the night of Nov. 8, the Bavarian Government changed its mind and withdrew from the march on Berlin. Advertisement. The Munich putsch was over. It had been rashly conceived, ill prepared and bungled in execution. Soon it seemed little different from the welter of contemporary disturbances; some saw it as the end of the road for Hitler. It turned out the very opposite—namely the starting point of his 10 year climb to power. As such it obviously merits careful attention, and this is what Harold J. Gordon Jr., professor of history at the University of Massachusetts, has given it in “Hitler and the Beer Hall Putsch.” Professor Gordon is particularly interested in the class composition of the early Nazi party. This attempted coup d'état came to be known as the Beer Hall Putsch. They began at the Bürgerbräu Keller in the
Bavarian city of Munich, aiming to seize control of the state government, march on Berlin, and overthrow the German federal government. In its place, they sought to establish a new government to oversee the creation of a unified Greater German Reich where citizenship would be based on race. Although the putsch failed—and Bavarian authorities were able to prosecute nine participants, including Hitler—the leaders ultimately redefined it as a heroic effort to save the nation and in