Ordinary Men

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF CHRISTOPHER BROWNING

Christopher Browning was born in Durham, North Carolina in 1944 but grew up in Chicago. His father was a philosophy professor at Northwestern University and his mother was a nurse. Browning earned a B.A. in history from Oberlin College in 1967 and an M.A. in history from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1968. Browning taught history at Allegheny College in Pennsylvania and St. John's Military Academy before going on to earn his Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin in 1975. Since 1978, Browning has written or co-written 10 books on the Holocaust and the history of Hitler's Final Solution. Browning taught as a professor at Pacific Lutheran University for 25 years and has been a guest lecturer or professor at several prestigious institutions, including Princeton University and Cambridge University. Browning has been called as an expert witness in the trials of accused Nazis in Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Browning won his first of three National Jewish Book Awards in 1994 for his book *Ordinary Men*, and in 2006 he was elected a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. In 1999, Browning began working at the University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill, where he is currently the Frank Porter Graham Professor of History Emeritus.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The German invasion of Poland began on September 1, 1939. The German army rapidly swept through Poland, bombing airfields and attacking Polish naval forces. This invasion sparked outrage and, two days later, Great Britain and France declared war on Germany, thus beginning World War II. At this time, Adolf Hitler and the Nazis had control of the German government and soon developed a plan to exterminate all the Jews in Europe to make way for a German "master race." This is part of the reason that Reserve Police Battalion 101, the group at the center of Browning's book, were ordered to carry out mass executions of Jews. This genocide or ethnic cleansing was part of the "Final Solution" to permanently eradicate the European Jewry. Reserve Police Battalion 101 also helped oversee the forced deportation of Jews from several districts in Poland to Treblinka, one of the Nazis' extermination camps in which an estimated 700,000 to 900,000 Jews were gassed to death in addition to about 2,000 Romani people. The period of time *Ordinary Men* covers was one of the deadliest and most violent for the Jews living in countries that had been invaded by the Germans. Jewish ghettos, extermination, and work camps sprung up all over Continental Europe and many innocent Jewish men, women, and children were simply shot in the street. The tide of World War II changed in 1944 after the American and English invasion at Normandy (called D-Day). By 1945, Allied Forces (namely American, English, and Russian armies) were closing in on Germany. Hitler and several high-ranking Nazis committed suicide and Allied Forces captured Berlin, effectively ending the fighting in Europe. Allied Forces then helped liberate Jews and other prisoners from the camps.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

When Christopher Browning's *Ordinary Men* was first published, it garnered a lot of attention and some controversy. Another historian, Daniel Goldhagen, was particularly critical of Browning's work and, using many of the same historical documents as Browning, provided a different interpretation of events in his book *Hitler's Willing Executioners*. The orders and executions Browning describes in *Ordinary Men* were part of Hitler's infamous Final Solution. For more on the Final Solution and what it meant, try Browning's other nonfiction book *The Origins of the Final Solution*. In his extensively researched book *Life and Death in the Third Reich*, Peter Fritzsche examines the immense ideological grip Nazis had over ordinary Germans before and during World War II. Another book with clear parallels to *Ordinary Men* is Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, an account of Adolph Eichmann's war crimes trial. In that book, Arendt coins the phrase "the banality of evil" to describe how many Nazi war criminals weren't zealots or sociopaths, but rather ordinary men who were just trying to get along at work. For those interested in learning more about Jewish life in Europe during World War II, try *The Diary of Anne Frank*, which was written by Anne Frank while her Jewish family hid in a secret annex and then published by her father, Otto Frank, after the war. Although Anne Frank did not survive the war after being sent to one of the Nazi's notorious concentration camps, many others did. Corrie ten Boom's memoir *The Hiding Place* details the part her family played in trying to safe Jewish lives, her arrest by the Nazis, and her experience in a concentration camp until the end of the war. Similarly, Władysław Szpilman's *The Pianist* recounts how he survived life in the Warsaw Ghetto when he was forcibly relocated there after the German invasion of Poland.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*
- **When Written:** Late-1980s to early-1990s
- **When Published:** 1992

- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Historical Nonfiction
- **Setting:** 1942-1943 Poland
- **Climax:** Reserve Police Battalion 101 participates in the *Erntefest* ("Harvest Festival"), a mass execution of Jews in Poland
- **Point of View:** First Person, Third Person, Multiple Narrators

EXTRA CREDIT

Denying the Deniers. In 1996, Browning served as a leading expert witness in the infamous Irving v Penguin Books and Lipstadt case in which David Irving (a notorious Holocaust Denier and writer) sued Deborah Lipstadt for libel after the publication of her book *Denying the Holocaust*. Browning had to write a report about the evidence of the mass extermination of Jews during World War II and was cross-examined by Irving. Browning's testimony helped Lipstadt win the court case, as the judge sided with Lipstadt and railed against Irving's distortion of historical fact.

From Thesis to Book. Browning's Ph.D. thesis also helped him kickstart his writing career when it was formally published as a popular book titled *The Final Solution and the German Foreign Office: A Study of Referat D III of Abteilung Deutschland, 1940-43* in 1978. Since then, Browning has regularly published books and articles about the Holocaust and the Final Solution.

PLOT SUMMARY

Christopher R. Browning prefaces *Ordinary Men* with a disturbing statistic: in March 1942, around 80 percent of all the victims of the Holocaust were still alive while about 20 percent had already died, but a mere 11 months later these numbers would be reversed. This period, from 1942-1943, is among the most violent, bloody, and horrifying in World War II, due in no small part to the violence in major ghettos and extermination camps. Browning, however, developed an early interest in the question of whether small villages and towns were subject to the same violence as the large ghettos. In his quest for answers, Browning stumbled upon interrogation files for Reserve Police Battalion 101, a unit of the German Order Police. The level of detail in the indictments and interrogations was chilling, especially because it revealed just how ordinary the men who perpetrated extreme acts of violence evidently were. This inspired Browning to write *Ordinary Men* using the testimonies of more than 125 policemen from Reserve Police Battalion 101 (RPB 101).

On July 13, 1942 the men of RPB 101 arrive in Józefów, Poland and gather around their commander, Major Wilhelm Trapp. Trapp tells them that their orders for the day are to round up all the Jews in town, separate the men to be sent to work camps, and then execute the women and children. After explaining this, Trapp makes a very unusual offer: any older man who doesn't think they can go through with the executions may be excused.

Before going on with this story, Browning details the history of the Order Police in Germany. The group has roots in the interwar era as a paramilitary group meant to deal with groups of revolutionaries. However, according to the Treaty of Versailles, Germany could not have an army more than 100,000 strong so the group was forced to disband. With the ascendance of Adolf Hitler to the chancellorship and Heinrich Himmler to head of the police, Germany began rearming itself and forming new branches of the police. Himmler placed Kurt Daluege in charge of the Order Police (regional police). Order Police numbers boomed after the start of World War II and they began deploying to newly won territory in Russia, Poland, and elsewhere. The Order Police became particularly useful in Poland, where the leader of the General Government (German-occupied Central Poland), Odilo Globocnik, found himself lacking the necessary manpower to carry out the Nazis' Final Solution in his district.

In carrying out the Final Solution, leaders drew on the Order Police for help with major Jewish actions, including deportations to extermination camps and ghettos in the east. These deportations were often accompanied by violence as Jews tried to escape or even died of heat exhaustion in the trains. Reports from Order Police guards on these trains paint a bleak picture of starving Jews struggling to survive in extreme temperatures for several days before reaching their destinations, which were frequently extermination camps. This task, as well as resettlement actions, made up the bulk of RPB 101's duties when they first entered Poland.

Major Trapp is an Alte Kämpfer ("old Party fighter") and World War I veteran, but the Nazis don't consider him to be SS material when they give him command of RPB 101. The battalion is broken up into three companies and each company is divided into three platoons. The company commanders are Julius Wohlauf (First Company), Lieutenant Gnade (Second Company), and Wolfgang Hoffmann (Third Company) and Trapp keeps Lieutenant Hagen as his deputy. The battalion arrives in Biłgoraj, Poland in the early summer of 1942, during a lull in gas chamber killings at extermination camps like Sobibór and Treblinka. Eager to carry out the Nazi's Final Solution, Globocnik becomes impatient with the lack of killing and sends orders for RPB 101 to carry out a mass execution of Jews in Józefów.

When Trapp and his men gather in Józefów on July 13, Trapp is visibly upset by what he's asking his men to do. When he makes the offer for any man who doesn't want to participate in the shooting to step out, only one man, Otto-Julius Schimke, immediately steps forward. About 12 more follow his lead once

they see Trapp protect Schimke from Schimke's commander's wrath. The battalion quickly sets to work rounding up the Jews, bringing them to the **marketplace**, selecting Jewish men for the work camps, and preparing firing squads. When the first firing squads are ready, a group of Jews are led into the forest, matched up with their executioners, and killed. As the first firing squad exits the forest to collect another round of Jews, the second group comes in. This pattern continues for 17 hours that day until all 1,500 Jews are killed. Throughout the day, many men ask to be excused from the violence, which is always permitted. Still, the overwhelming majority—about 80 percent—choose to shoot for the whole day. When they all return to their barracks, the men are demoralized and don't want to talk about what happened.

Browning cites the pressure to conform to the group as a major reason that so many men from the battalion chose to shoot—individual men simply didn't want to others to think of them as cowards. Furthermore, many of them men likely accepted the Nazi notion that Jews were enemies of Germany. Many of the men who opted out of shooting after executing at least one person cited physical revulsion, but Browning believes that there may have been underlying ethical or political opposition that they simply couldn't articulate. A short time later, however, when Gnade leads his men in another mass execution alongside a unit of Hilfswillige (Hiwis), all of the men choose to shoot at least once. Browning argues that part of the reason for this is likely that Gnade did not explicitly offer to excuse men who didn't want to shoot (although many men chose to stop early on).

One of the battalion's primary duties is to help round up Jews from towns and ghettos for deportation to nearby extermination camps. A standing order for these roundups includes killing the sick and frail who struggle to walk. Thousands of Jews are rounded up at a time, sometimes with extreme violence (like at Międzyrzec) and sometimes with relative ease and order (like the second day of clearing the Parczew ghetto). The battalion does participate in more mass murders, including one in Serokomla and a retaliation killing of 78 Poles and 180 Jews after one of the battalion's men is killed on his way back to the barracks from an assignment.

While most men grow used to the violence, others do not and they continue evading being assigned to firing squads. Lieutenant Buchmann is one of the most vocal critics of the violence and he even takes active steps to be transferred back to Germany so that he doesn't have to be around violence anymore. Futhermore, Captain Hoffmann develops a mysterious illness that gives him stomach cramps that seem to coincide with violent actions. At the time, he attributes this to a bad dysentery vaccine he received in 1942, but later he says it was induced by the stress of the murders and violence that surrounded him. Hoffmann, too, is removed from his command and sent elsewhere.

In late fall of 1942, the battalion takes part in a new phase of the Final Solution that they call the judenjagd, or "Jew hunt." To make their security area truly *judenfrei*, the men comb the forests, buildings, and barns in the district to find any Jews who are hiding and have escaped deportation. Any Jews they find are summarily shot. This process goes on for months, well into Spring 1943, and there is no way to determine precisely how many Jews the men killed during this time.

The battalion's final murderous action comes in the fall of 1943 when they participate in the notorious Erntefest, or "harvest festival." With most of the ghettos cleared out and hundreds if not thousands of Jews killed in the *judenjagd*, only a few Jews remain in small ghettos and work camps in the battalion's district. In order to make the district truly *judenfrei*, Globocnik realizes that these Jews must be killed. The operation must happen all at once to minimize Jewish resistance. After an extended period of planning and preparing, on November 3, Reserve Police Battalion 101 and several other units converge on the Majdanek concentration camp, where around 18,000 Jews have been concentrated specifically for the *Erntefest*. The battalion helps guard the road into the inner camp where the Jews are shot to death in mass graves that they themselves dug. The next day, the same thing happens at the Paniatowa concentration camp. After this, the Lublin district is proclaimed *judenfrei*.

After this final massacre, most of the battalion breaks up as men transfer to different units or even form new ones. Some, like Hoppner and Peters, die in action during the war. Trapp, Buchmann, and Kammer are tried and convicted for the retaliation killing of Poles in 1942—Trapp is executed while Buchmann and Kammer are sentenced to a few years in prison. In the 1960s, charges are brought against 14 men in Reserve Police Battalion 101 for their participation in the mass murder of Jews and 210 former members are interrogated. Only a few go to prison, and some are excluded from the verdict due to their failing health. Browning asserts that, while this might seem inadequate, it is one of the only cases against Order Police that went to trial, let alone resulted in a verdict, which makes it a success.

Most of the men in Reserve Police Battalion 101 were middle-aged family men whose moral compasses were formed before rise of Nazi culture, and many of them hadn't chosen to join the battalion but were drafted into it, meaning that they didn't sign up to be a part of the war. Browning turns to the question of why so many of these seemingly ordinary men became mass murderers during the war, especially since they were given the freedom to choose not to kill. Ultimately, there is no single answer to this question. It was a combination of factors, including prevalent racism combined with ongoing war, the tendency to respect authority, the men's belief in German superiority due to widespread Nazi propaganda, and, as the men themselves admit, the desire to conform to the group.

This, however, has some dark implications. Many of these factors are present in most people's everyday lives, which leads to one important question: if the men in RPB 101 were transformed into killers under such common circumstances, are there many people who wouldn't?

CHARACTERS

Christopher R. Browning – Christopher R. Browning is the author, researcher, and narrator of *Ordinary Men*. Browning is a history professor whose area of specialization is World War II, particularly the war in Europe and Adolf Hitler's infamous Final Solution. As research for this book, Browning used a number of primary sources, including the interrogation files of around 125 men from Reserve Police Battalion 101, interrogations that were conducted over 20 years after the war. This gives Browning extraordinary insight into how the men felt and what they thought of their crimes. Along with the factual information he provides, Browning sprinkles in his own thoughts, opinions, and conclusions about Reserve Police Battalion 101's actions between July 1942 and November 1943. What most interests Browning is how so many people (about 80%) from a group of seemingly ordinary men devolved into ruthless killers after the battalion's first mass execution in Józefów, Poland on July 13, 1942 while others seemed to resist this transformation entirely. The results are unsettling—the men who chose to kill innocent Jews largely succumbed to forces that are present in most people's daily lives: nationalism, respect for authority, and especially peer pressure and the desire to conform to the group. Browning's ultimate realization is that, when the conditions are right, *anyone* can transform from an average citizen into a cold-blooded murderer.

Major Wilhelm Trapp – Major Wilhelm Trapp is the 53-year-old commander of Reserve Police Battalion 101. Many of the men affectionately call him Papa Trapp. Trapp is an Alte Kämpfer (which contributed to his assignment to command a battalion), and he is also a career policeman—as such he has been trained to protect innocent people from bad people. This makes it very difficult for him to give his men orders to commit mass executions of innocent men, women, and children. Before starting the battalion's first assigned massacre at Józefów, Trapp tearfully makes an offer that sets a precedent for all of the battalion's future orders: any man who doesn't feel like he can shoot unarmed civilians will be excused from being on the shooting squads. Otto-Julius Schimke is initially the only man who steps forward to take the offer, which makes his company leader, Captain Hoffman, really upset. However, Trapp stands up for Schimke and witnessing this helps 11 other men step forward to be excused from the firing squads. Throughout the massacre, men see Trapp pacing back and forth in the schoolroom, openly weeping about the executions, and complaining that he had to give these orders. Over the next few months, despite Trapp's attempt to create distance between himself and the brutal violence he orders his men to commit, it seems to get easier and easier for him to give these orders. Despite having given orders for his men to execute tens of thousands of innocent Jewish people, after the war Trapp is only tried for ordering the execution of 78 Poles in a small town as retribution for the murder one of the sergeants from First Company. Trapp is sentenced to death and executed in December 1948.

Lieutenant Hartwick Gnade – Lieutenant Hartwick Gnade is the commander of Reserve Police Battalion 101's Second Company. Gnade joined the Nazi party in 1937 and is 48 years old in 1942 when Major Trapp starts giving orders for the men to execute Jews. Gnade is one of the only people in the battalion widely described as a virulent anti-Semite who ardently believes in Adolf Hitler and Heinrich Himmler's Final Solution, which involved exterminating the entire European Jewry. Unlike Trapp, Gnade doesn't have a problem with giving orders to execute hundreds of people at once—or with taking part in this violence himself. Gnade leads the Second Company in the exceptionally bloody mass execution at Łomazy, where he demonstrates his capacity for sadism by forcing elderly Jews with full beards to crawl naked in the mud by their graves while Gnade and others beat them with clubs. Gnade also becomes a violent drunk over time, which seems to make him even more brutal. In 1943, Gnade is pulled out to create a special guard company, although he does return to the battalion to help with deportation and ghetto clearing. He is killed in action in 1945.

Captain Julius Wohlauf – Captain Julius Wohlauf is the commander of Reserve Police Battalion 101's First Company. Wohlauf is also a member of the SS and has a lot of contempt for Major Trapp, who Wohlauf believes is too tenderhearted to be an effective police commander in wartime. However, as Trapp's deputy and subordinate, Wohlauf must show Trapp respect and do things according to Trapp's orders. As a member of the elite SS, Wohlauf doesn't have the same horror of violence as Trapp does and he is initially unwilling to excuse men from being part of the shooting squads. Wohlauf's men are among the first to carry out executions in Józefów. During the battalion's time in Poland, Wohlauf makes a couple of trips back to Germany to marry his pregnant girlfriend, who returns to Poland with him to stay for a little while. Wohlauf makes the ill-advised decision to bring her to a ghetto clearing to show off how much power he has over the Jews, which raises some eyebrows amongst the men. After the war, Wohlauf continues his career as a policeman, but in the 1960s he's indicted for war crimes and sentenced to eight years.

Captain Wolfgang Hoffman – Captain Wolfgang Hoffman is the commander of Reserve Police Battalion 101's Third Company. Like Captain Wohlauf, Hoffman is a member of the SS and is younger than most of the other men in the battalion. Most of Hoffman's men don't actually take part in the shooting

squads, but instead set up cordons and work outside of the forest where the Jews are being executed. However, in October 1942 Hoffman is ordered to help clear the ghetto at Konskowola to help make Northern Lublin judenfrei. Over the course of that day, between 1,100 and 1,600 Jews are killed by men under Hoffman's command. The incident was apparently very traumatic for Hoffman—after the ghetto clearing, Hoffman begins experiencing mysterious stomach pains whenever he's given orders to have his men engage in any violence or executions. These pains confine him to his bed, where he gives orders and generally harasses his men. Later, Hoffman says they must have been psychosomatic pains rooted in his psychological distress and unwillingness to take part in any more violence. At the time, however, his men badmouth him and word about his mysterious condition reaches his commanders. While seeking medical help in Germany, Hoffman finds out that Trapp has relieved him of command of Third Company. After the war, Hoffman continues his career as a policeman until the 1960s when he's indicted and tried for war crimes. Hoffman's sentence is initially set for eight years, but later this is reduced to four years.

First Lieutenant Hagen – First Lieutenant Hagen is Major Trapp's adjutant. "Hagen" is actually an alias and very little is known about him other than that he was killed in 1943. Before the executions in Józefów begin, Hagen takes charge of the process of selecting Jews to be sent to work instead of being executed that day. During a judenjagd, Hagen and some others stumble on a camp of escaped Russians and Jews who are armed. Hagen is accidentally killed by one of his own men during the firefight.

Odilo Globocnik – As the SS and Police Leader for the Polish district of Lublin, Odilo Globocnik hands down the orders for numerous deportations, ghetto clearings, the judenjagd, and mass executions. Globocnik has a reputation for being especially brutal and cold, and his friendship with Heinrich Himmler only adds to his notoriety. In 1941, Globocnik becomes one of the first to learn that Himmler and Hitler's Final Solution involves exterminating every single Jew in Europe, not just in Germany. Furthermore, Himmler puts Globocnik in charge of making most of Poland judenfrei, particularly using gas chambers in some of Poland's notorious extermination camps. It's either Globocnik or someone in his office who gives Major Trapp orders to kill, deport, and round up Jews from 1942 to 1943, when the events in the book take place. It is a testament to Globocnik's tenacity and extreme ruthlessness that Himmler gives him so much responsibility for brutal violence, and Globocnik enthusiastically launches into the task, delivering orders for mass executions in some of Poland's extermination camps, Jewish ghettos, and ordinary towns. Globocnik is a prime example of what Christopher Browning calls a "desk murderer," or someone who gives orders for mass deportations to death camps and executions from the safety of a desk and does not have to witness the results of these orders firsthand.

Sergeant Heinrich Steinmetz – Christopher Browning uses "Sergeant Heinrich Steinmetz" as an alias for the commander of the Third Platoon of Reserve Police Battalion 101's Second Company. Virtually nothing about Steinmetz's personal life is known, either during or after World War II, but Browning does confirm that Steinmetz played a very important role in the violence and murders that Reserve Police Battalion 101 committed during their tenure in Poland. During the action at Józefów, Steinmetz repeats Major Trapp's offer that any man who doesn't think he can endure shooting innocent men and women can be excused from doing so. Even though nobody steps forward, Steinmetz's offer reveals his personal concern for his men's psychological wellbeing and respect for the precedent Major Trapp set. Not only does Steinmetz lead groups of shooting squads all day at Józefów, but after that day's massacre he leads Second Company's Third Platoon in several deportations, ghetto clearings, judenjagd, and other mass murders. His feelings and thoughts on all of this violence are never truly addressed, possibly because he simply followed orders and didn't really distinguish himself as either particularly sadistic (like Lieutenant Gnade) or particularly repulsed by the violence (like Lieutenant Buchmann). After the war, Steinmetz is one of the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 who is indicted for war crimes in the 1960s, but due to his failing health he isn't included in the guilty verdict. Still, Browning concludes that Steinmetz was morally guilty in choosing to take part in the mass executions and violence against innocent men, women, and children because he *chose* to do it even though the freedom to refuse was always there.

Lieutenant Kurt Drucker – Christopher Browning uses the alias Lieutenant Kurt Drucker for the commander of the Second Platoon of Police Reserve Battalion 101's Second Company. At 33 years old, Drucker is one of the youngest commanders in the battalion, although he didn't join the Nazi party until 1939, which is a bit later than most of the other men who were part of the party. This calls into question whether he joined the party out of ideological conviction or simply a desire to belong to the same party as the German chancellor, Adolf Hitler. Like Sergeant Steinmetz, Drucker leads shooting squads all day long during the massacre at Józefów, which means he is in extremely close proximity to the actual executions from the beginning. Furthermore, as part of the battalion's Second Company, Drucker plays an important role in leading men during deportations, ghetto clearings, the judenjagd, and other mass executions. Drucker's personal feelings about the violence aren't explicitly described, but there are at least two occasions when Drucker offhandedly orders the executions of Jews whom he and his men personally know, which possibly indicates that he has fewer qualms about violence and murder than other leaders, like Major Trapp and Lieutenant Buchmann.

After being interrogated and indicted for war crimes in the 1960s, Drucker is sentenced to eight years in prison, but this is later reduced to three and a half years after a lengthy appeals process. Drucker is one of the relatively few Nazis who were tried and found guilty for his role in the Holocaust, but his moral guilt is beyond doubt because Trapp gave him and the other men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 the option to excuse themselves from committing any violence and he chose to take part in it anyway.

Lieutenant Heinz Buchmann – Lieutenant Heinz Buchmann is an alias for the commander of the First Platoon of the First Company of Reserve Police Battalion 101. Before the war, Buchmann owned and ran a family lumber business and intended to return to it after the war. Buchmann distinguishes himself as one of the very few men in the battalion who is openly opposed to using violence against the Jews. In fact, he downright refuses to play any part in the battalion's first mass murder orders in Józefów, and so Hagen (Major Trapp's adjutant) arranges for Buchmann to simply help transport male Jews to the work camp. After the massacre, Buchmann takes his opposition a step further by asking Trapp to secure him a transfer back to Hamburg and he even writes letters to higher-ups saying he can't be a part of activities that are so remote from the regular duties of a policeman. Unlike so many other men, Buchmann doesn't allow others' criticism of his choice not to take part in the violence to deter him from continual opposition to it. The only exception is when super SS officers order him to form execution squads, but even in this situation Buchmann openly dismisses any man who doesn't want to be a part of it. Despite Buchmann's willingness to give violent orders when directly ordered by superior SS officers, he is among the most innocent of the individual characters Browning identifies in *Ordinary Men*. Ironically, he's also one of the few who is tried for war crimes, found guilty, and sentenced to eight years in prison. Buchmann's guilty verdict highlights the general belief that anyone who had anything to do with the crimes the Nazis perpetrated during World War II is complicit and deserving of punishment.

Heinrich Himmler – The notorious head of the SS and chief of the German police, Heinrich Himmler is one of Adolf Hitler's closest advisors and one of the masterminds of the infamous Final Solution. To this day Himmler has a reputation for having been exceptionally sadistic, cruel, and calculating in the way he meticulously planned and instigated violence and mass murder against European Jews during World War II. Himmler personally chose Odilo Globocnik to oversee several Polish extermination camps and to make the central zone of Poland (known as the General Government) judenfrei. Like Globocnik, Himmler falls into the category of what Christopher Browning terms a "desk murderer," meaning that Himmler was responsible for a lot of the paperwork and bureaucracy behind the violence that other people, including the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101, were ordered to do. This creates physical and psychological distance between Himmler and the violence that resulted from his orders (at least when he chose to remain physically distant), but his enthusiasm and zeal for his job reveal him to be extraordinarily callous about human life, a man who quite enjoyed having the power to wipe out thousands of people just by signing a piece of paper.

Kurt Daluege – Kurt Daluege is the head of a special branch of the German police called the Order Police, which includes city or municipal police, rural police, and community police. Daluege's main office is in Berlin, which places him at an immense physical distance from the Order Police battalions (including Reserve Police Battalion 101) working in Poland and Russia. Many people willingly joined the Order Police to avoid having to go to war, so it is somewhat ironic that Daluege would then allow these men to be used as shooting squads in both Russia and Poland. As head of a major branch of the German police, Daluege works closely with Heinrich Himmler in creating and distributing orders to shoot Jewish men, women, and children. Like Himmler, Daluege is a "desk murderer," meaning that he commits murders through creating and distributing these orders even though he himself doesn't participate in the actual shootings. As a desk murderer, Daluege's power over human lives is somewhat indirect—he supplies the orders for so many Jews in a certain area to be deported or killed, but it's the soldiers and policemen who make direct contact with the Jews themselves. Daluege, then, can mentally distance himself from the reality of the violence and this helps him cope with the psychological burden of having caused it.

Reinhard Heydrich – The commander of the special Security Police branch of the German police, Reinhard Heydrich has command of the infamous Gestapo and the Criminal Police (which dealt largely with nonpolitical crimes). Heydrich plays an active role in a number of Hitler and Himmler's schemes to eliminate Jews from Europe, starting with Germany, including by organizing the deportations of Jews from Germany to Eastern Europe starting in 1941. Heydrich is a vital and important part of Hitler's cabinet, which also means that he is as enthusiastic and dedicated to the Final Solution as Himmler himself. Heydrich, then, is a virulent anti-Semite, cruel and callous towards the suffering of the Jews, and he had a real enthusiasm for the idea that Germans were a "master race" that deserved to rule Europe if not the world. In fact, Heydrich was so integral to the implementation of the Final Solution during World War II that the murderous campaign against the Jews in Poland is named after him (Operation Reinhard) following his death in Czechoslovakia.

Adolf Hitler – Adolf Hitler is the chancellor of Germany during World War II. During the time that *Ordinary Men* describes, Hitler develops and begins to implement the Final Solution, a plan to eliminate the Jewish population of Europe using

systematic mass shootings and death camps. Although Himmler does much of the planning and paperwork for the Final Solution, Hitler was the primary instigator of the unmitigated violence against European Jews.

Bruno Probst – Christopher Browning uses "Bruno Probst" as an alias for a policeman in Reserve Police Battalion 101. The book makes heavy use of Probst's interrogation records to describe events and actions the battalion took part in. Although relatively little is shared about Probst's own involvement (or noninvolvement) in the violence, his perspective on these events is useful because he tends to be more honest than others. For instance, he doesn't just discuss how Poles would help the battalions track down Jews hiding in the forests during the judenjagd in order to be rewarded; he also relays that some Poles who tried to hide Jewish friends and neighbors would be executed, a fact that most of the other men did not address, since it made their own actions look worse. Probst's statements about violence used against non-Jews (namely the Poles) highlight how willing most of the men in the battalion were to use violence once they became habituated to it after Józefów.

Sergeant Hans Keller – Christopher Browning uses the alias "Hans Keller" for a sergeant of Reserve Police Battalion 101 whose interrogation files are useful in describing what the men thought and felt about their orders and their superiors. In his interrogation files, Keller seems somewhat blasé when describing the violence and suffering around him. He describes how badly the men wanted to earn a spot as a guard on the trains used to transport Jews from cities to ghettos or concentration camps because it meant they'd be able to travel, and how he and another policeman would complain about their commander, Captain Wohlauf, while they watched a mass execution. If Keller expresses any shame, regret, or anger over the orders he received to kill unarmed civilians, Browning doesn't describe it. This leads to the implication that Keller was part of the majority of policemen who grew to accept their orders and actions as simply part of the job.

Otto-Julius Schimke – The name Otto-Julius Schimke is an alias for the one man who immediately accepted Major Wilhelm Trapp's offer to be excused from Reserve Police Battalion 101's first ordered mass execution in Józefów. Schimke risks his reputation and social standing within the battalion by being the first man to opt out of being part of the shooting squads, which not only makes him very brave but also indicates his deep sense of right and wrong and unwillingness to compromise his values just to conform to the group. After the massacre at Józefów, Schimke is never made to participate in the executions of unarmed Jewish men, women, children, and the elderly, making his story the perfect example of how officers typically respected the individual choice not to participate in violence, thus leaving the freedom of choice open to all battalion members throughout their time in Poland.

First Sergeant Kammer – Browning uses "Kammer" as an alias for a First Sergeant in Reserve Police Battalion 101's First Company. Kammer is an important leader in the executions at Józefów—he has the rather unsavory task of leading the first group of Jews into the forest, matching them up with their executioners, then leading the groups to the mass graves, and giving the orders to shoot. However, he doesn't seem too bothered by the violence and seems to become even more prone to violence and intolerant of those who opt out over time. This is highlighted by his treatment of men who didn't want to participate in shootings later that year: he calls them "shitheads" and says they are "good for nothing." Still, Kammer respects the precedent set by Major Trapp and allows the men who don't want to shoot walk away from the task. This is a prime example of how the freedom of choice is always present for the men in the battalion, but with the caveat that those men who opt out of shooting will be accused of cowardice by their leaders and peers. After the war, Kammer is found guilty and sentenced to three years in prison.

Sergeant Ernst Hergert – Browning uses the name "Ernst Hergert" as an alias for a sergeant of Reserve Police Battalion 101's First Platoon of Second Company. Sergeant Hergert is notable for coming up with a process of rounding up Jews from the **marketplace**, bringing them right to the gravesites in the forest, shooting them, and then gradually moving closer to the path. This significantly sped up the execution process at Józefów. However, he, like Sergeant Keller, doesn't seem particularly enthusiastic about the violence—he doesn't develop a sadistic streak like Lieutenant Gnade or berate those who don't want to participate like First Sergeant Kammer. Hergert is unique in that he encourages his men to shoot at least once and then freely excuses the men who are clearly struggling or admit that they can't go on. This places him in sort of a middle position between enjoying the violence and being adamantly opposed to it. Despite this, Browning concludes that all those who chose to take part in the massacres and violence, even if they just gave orders, are guilty. This means that Hergert is morally culpable and his choices should not be excused just because he was following orders or because he showed some leniency towards those who didn't want to shoot.

Sergeant Anton "Toni" Bentheim – Sergeant Toni Bentheim (an alias) is part of Lieutenant Gnade's Second Company of Reserve Police Battalion 101. He takes part in both the Józefów and Łomazy massacres. Like most battalion leaders, Bentheim has no qualms about allowing men who don't want to shoot to distance themselves from the violence, but the most striking part of Bentheim's interrogation file is his description of the unimaginable bloodshed that occurred at both massacres—men covered in brain matter and skull fragments because they'd shot their victims a little too high on the head and men standing in knee-high puddles of blood and mud. In other words, Bentheim provides an image of what these massacres looked like to illustrate just how horrific they were.

Bentheim's descriptions also help explain why so many men who initially believed they could spend the day on the firing squads ultimately changed their minds and asked to be excused.

Lieutenant Paul Brand – Lieutenant Paul Brand (an alias) is the leader of one of the platoons in Reserve Police Battalion 101's First Company. As such, Brand comes into close contact with the executions at Józefów, but virtually nothing is shared about his personal feelings about the orders to execute the Jews. Brand also helps oversee deportations of Jews from one area to another as Himmler begins focusing on making more areas judenfrei for Germans to move into. Like Captain Wohlauf, Brand allows his wife to visit him in Poland. While there, his wife encounters the callous attitudes of the men towards the Jews and Poles. She is openly critical of these things at the time, but Brand carefully instructs her not to share her criticism too openly. Brand's instructions to his wife not to express her displeasure at the men's attitudes implies that Brand himself would not have expressed similar sentiments. However, as Browning declares in the end, Brand always had the choice not to take part in the violence and could even criticize it without being formally punished. Still, he chose to be an active member of the battalion during violent events, which means that Brand is morally guilty for the murders and violence.

Lieutenant Oscar Peters – As the commander of the First Platoon of Third Company of Reserve Police Battalion 101, Lieutenant Oscar Peters (an alias) has to lead his men in violent actions in Poland between 1942 and 1943. In particular, Peters helps form shooting squads to execute Jews from Serokomla, placing him in close proximity to the violence. Peters' continued presence at these actions indicates that he either never minded the violence or became habituated to it over time. As one of the handful of men from the battalion who are killed in action, Peters is never tried for his role in the mass executions of Polish Jews between 1942 and 1943.

Sergeant Rudolf Grund – As Lieutenant Buchmann's deputy, Sergeant Rudolf Grund (an alias) plays an important role in helping Buchmann evade having to be present during violent actions against the Jews. Grund does this by asking Buchmann if he wants to join the men on an action. Normally, it would be assumed that a Lieutenant would follow his company to any action, so if Grund specifically asked, then Buchmann knew there would be violence and could decline to join them. Additional information about Grund's personal beliefs about the violence or whether he took a more active part in it is not revealed. However, Grund's concern for Buchmann's psychological wellbeing and willingness to help him avoid violence implies that Grund sympathizes with Buchmann and likely shares his aversion to the killings. Grund is one of the men from Reserve Police Battalion 101 who is tried for war crimes in the 1960s, but his case is separated from the rest due to his failing health.

First Sergeant Peter Ostmann – A member of Reserve Police Battalion 101's Second Company under Lieutenant Gnade, First Sergeant Peter Ostmann (an alias) reportedly brings deliveries of alcohol to the rest of the men before the mass murder of women and children who could not fit on the deportation trains. Ostmann urges the men to drink because they must shoot, although there's no reason to believe he would have forced any man to shoot if he didn't want to. However, he does pressure the men who are known as "nonshooters" to at least try to take part in the killings, and sometimes he succeeds. In this way, Ostmann really does turn at least some of his men into killers.

First Lieutenant Messmann – First Lieutenant Messmann (an alias) replaces Captain Hoffman as commander of Reserve Police Battalion 101's Third Company after Major Trapp removes Hoffmann from the position during his mysterious illness. Messmann is initially the leader of a Gendarmerie unit that helps Third Company with a ghetto clearing several months after the massacre at Józefów. Ironically, before this, Hoffmann complained of Messmann's Gendarmerie unit because they used excessive violence against the Poles in towns and villages in their district. This means that Messmann's violent tendencies were common knowledge before he was brought into the battalion as a commander of the Third Company, but it's not known whether he always had them or if he developed this disposition during World War II.

Lieutenant Walter Hoppner – Lieutenant Walter Hoppner (an alias) is an Alte Kämpfer and the commander of the Second Platoon in the Third Company (under Captain Hoffmann) of Reserve Police Battalion 101. Hoppner is one of the few men who was not a policeman before the war (he was a tea importer), which means he had little to no experience enforcing laws or using any amount of violence in his pre-war life. This makes it all the more surprising that Hoppner reportedly becomes extremely enthusiastic about the judenjagd and encourages his men to all shoot any Jews they find even if they don't want to. Furthermore, some of Hoppner's men report that over time he seemed to take real pleasure in shooting people himself. Hoppner is a prime example of Browning's conclusion that even the most ordinary men can become so habituated to violence that they develop a real zeal for it.

TERMS

Alte Kämpfer – An *Alte Kämpfer* is someone who became a member of the Nazi party before **Adolf Hitler** came into power as the German chancellor. The term literally translates from German into "old fighters," meaning they did not simply join the Nazis to be part of the winning team when Hitler became chancellor. **Major Wilhelm Trapp** was an *Alte Kämpfer*, which is part of why he was given command of the Reserve Police Battalion 101. Other *Alte Kämpfer* were given higher positions

in the infamous SS, but Trapp's characteristic tenderheartedness and lack of enthusiasm for using violence reportedly disqualified him from that kind of position.

Erntefest – *Erntefest* refers to the so-called "harvest festival," which was a 1943 massacre of about 43,000 Jews in the Majdanek, Poniatowa, and Trawniki concentration camps. The massacre was the largest German killing operation targeting Jewish people in the entire war, and Reserve Police Battalion 101 took an active part in it. This was the final action in a series of massacres perpetrated in order to make the Polish district of Lublin judenfrei.

Hilfswillige (Hiwis) – *Hilfswillige* are called Hiwis for short. They were Ukrainian, Latvian, and Lithuanian prisoners of war who volunteered to train to become fighters for the Germans. The Hiwis were screened to make sure they had anti-Communist sentiments, which almost invariably indicated anti-Semitic sentiments, as well. The Hiwis volunteered to escape starvation in the POW camps and were promised that they wouldn't have to fight the Soviets. In Poland, the Hiwis often did the dirty work of executing Jews instead of the Order Police, but they started working side by side during the executions, most notably during the massacre at Łomazy.

Judenfrei – Literally translated, *judenfrei* means "free of Jews." This was the term the Nazis used to designate areas where every single Jew had been killed or rounded up for deportation. Massacres like the Erntefest were designed to create *judenfrei* areas in Poland. Reserve Police Battalion 101 helped create *judenfrei* areas by overseeing mass deportations, ghetto liquidations, and mass murders.

Judenjagd – Literally translated, *judenjagd* means "Jewish hunting," or "the Jew hunt." A *judenjagd* involves searching homes, barns, abandoned buildings, and even the forest for any Jewish men, women, and children who escaped the roundups and executions. The *judenjagd* was a major part of truly making an area judenfrei. Reserve Police Battalion 101 took an active role in the *judenjagd* after being assigned to make the Lublin district *judenfrei*, ultimately killing about 1,000 Jews who were hiding in buildings and in the forest.

The Final Solution – The Final Solution was a plan that **Heinrich Himmler** and **Adolf Hitler** devised for the total destruction of the Jews during World War II. The plan's full title is "Final Solution to the Jewish Question," and it called for a highly organized systematic genocide that was initially implemented in Europe in the early 1940s. The Nazis believed that Germans were part of a master race and they had a vision of transforming the world into a racial utopia, free of Jews and other undesirables (such as Gypsies, people with mental illnesses, gay people, and other racial minorities). To that end, extermination camps were established all over Nazi-occupied territory in Europe, and many (like Treblinka and Sobibór, which **Browning** mentions frequently in *Ordinary Men*) were fitted with gas chambers that enabled the Nazis to kill large numbers of people very quickly and with much less bloodshed. Jews were rounded up from ghettos and either shot on the spot or sent to these extermination camps with the ultimate goal of making judenfrei areas for the German master race to settle in. One important thing to remember is that the Nazis did not begin World War II in order to launch the Final Solution and cause the Holocaust, but rather for geopolitical reasons (to regain lost territory after World War I). In actuality, the Final Solution came about because of their early success in the war. Feeling unstoppable, the Nazis believed that the war had given them the perfect opportunity to create a *judenfrei* Europe and that the war itself justified killing anyone they saw as an enemy.

Shutzstaffel (SS) – The *Schutzstaffel*, better known as the SS, was an elite paramilitary group created by **Adolf Hitler** and the Nazi Party in the 1920s. There were two primary branches to the SS: the *Allgemeine* SS (or General SS) and the Waffen-SS (or Armed SS). Only the Waffen-SS features prominently in *Ordinary Men* because this was the group that typically deployed to newly won territory or war zones. **Heinrich Himmler**, one of the most notoriously brutal members of Hitler's cabinet, was head of the SS and he created strict rules and regulations for who could join the elite force. Himmler did not just want able-bodied soldiers for his SS, but rather men who would wholeheartedly embrace Nazi ideology, including the idea that Germans are a master race who must eliminate the Jews from Europe in order to flourish. When the German army invaded Poland in 1939, the SS played a prominent role in the first systematic executions of Jews and Polish civilians (including teachers and activists) that the Nazis feared might try to organize and lead resistance groups against the Germans. As part of the Final Solution, Hitler and Himmler carefully chose reliable members of the SS with a reputation for exceptional brutality to run extermination camps and to plan and carry out the systematic murder of Jews in Europe during World War II.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

FREEDOM OF CHOICE

At the center of *Ordinary Men* is the argument that human beings are responsible for their choices, no matter the circumstance. Historian Christopher Browning comes to this conclusion after examining the testimonies of a group of German soldiers who perpetrated

some of the most barbaric violence in the Second World War: the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101. In telling their story, Browning shows how even the most ordinary of men can choose to become cold-blooded killers. These men were regular citizens—working-class, middle-aged family men, not Nazi zealots or hardened killers. Despite this, the majority of them chose to commit mass murder, even after their commanding officer, Major Trapp, gave them a choice not to participate (and then protected the men who chose to abstain). By examining the choices these men made to either kill others or abstain from violence, Browning determines that the frequent excuse that German soldiers participated in genocide because they were simply following orders is false; every man had a choice, and those who chose to kill are wholly responsible for their actions.

The moral center of *Ordinary Men* is the moment in which Major Trapp gives his men a choice about whether to participate in the mass murder of Jews at Józefów. This is the first time the battalion has been ordered to kill civilians, let alone in such numbers, and Trapp clearly finds the task abhorrent; when he relays the orders to his men, he is visibly distressed and he makes his discomfort with the situation known. At this point, Trapp and his men are not yet habituated to violence and they retain their moral intuition that such actions are wrong. Despite this, only a small number of men choose to take Trapp up on his offer and abstain from the violence; the rest go on to murder more than a thousand people in one day. By framing the book around this moment, Browning demonstrates that the notion that these men killed others only because they were following orders is false. From the very beginning, they had an explicit choice, and those who chose murder are morally accountable for what they did.

Beyond this explicit choice at Józefów, Browning shows that, in every other moment of violence, the men of RPB 101 could have chosen not to kill. At other massacres and roundups, men who objected morally or who simply couldn't stomach the violence found ways to step out. Some men tried the firing squads but left after finding the job sickening, while others pretended to be busy so that nobody would notice that they weren't participating. Lieutenant Buchmann, one of Trapp's men, refused from the beginning to shoot anyone, and he eventually requested a transfer back to Hamburg so that he wouldn't be around the battalion's atrocities. Buchmann even wrote letters to superior officers explicitly stating his refusal to take on duties so remote from the normal tasks of a policeman, regardless of the impact on his career. That this minority of men in the battalion found ways to avoid the killing shows that their choice was available to the others, as well; just as abstaining was a choice, every act of violence was a choice for every person who participated.

A sickening irony of Browning's research is that, while Trapp likely believed that giving his men a choice was compassionate, it actually caused most of them distress. Because Trapp gave them an explicit choice about participating in the massacre at Józefów, those who did the shooting took it quite hard. After the massacre, they were consumed by guilt and shame, unwilling to speak of what they'd done. In part, this was because it was (for most of them) their first time killing another person, but Browning argues that a big part of their distress was simply that—because of Trapp's offer—they couldn't deny that what they'd done was their own choice. By contrast, when Lieutenant Gnade led RPB 101's Second Company in another mass execution in Łomazy, he did not explicitly state that the men could back out. Some men backed out anyway, which showed that, even though the choice wasn't explicit, it was still available to them. Nonetheless, because Gnade's men could deny to themselves that they'd murdered by choice, they fared much better psychologically in the aftermath. As Browning writes, "those who shot did not have to live with the clear awareness that what they had done had been avoidable," as they were able to rationalize what they did as simply following orders.

Clearly, though, this lack of choice was an illusion; at any moment, each man could have chosen not to participate, and some did. Furthermore, all the men who abstained were protected from punishment—in fact, no defense attorney (representing accused war criminals) "has been able to document a single case in which refusal to obey an order to kill unarmed civilians resulted in [...] dire punishment." This demonstrates that the men were always free to choose not to shoot innocent people, which makes them morally responsible for their horrific choice.

PEER PRESSURE, CONFORMITY, AND ACCEPTANCE

In Christopher Browning's *Ordinary Men*, a battalion of middle-aged policemen are ordered to execute all the Jewish women and children living in the village of Józefów, Poland. The leader of the Reserve Police Battalion 101, Major Trapp, gives his men the chance to excuse themselves from participating, and quite a few men decide to abstain from the executions. Still, all told, about 80 percent of the men choose to follow orders from beginning to end, ultimately executing about 1,500 people. In trying to determine how a group of ordinary German men with no particular racist hatred nor ideological zeal became hardened mass murderers, Browning settles on one primary explanation: these men chose to kill essentially because of peer pressure. The choice to follow these orders, in other words, had less to do with respect for the orders themselves than with desire to fit in with the majority of the group.

In every "Jewish action" (massacre, round-up, etc.) assigned to RPB 101, commanding officers made comments implying that those who chose not to be violent would be harshly judged. At

Józefów, for example, Sergeant Heinrich Steinmetz informed the men under his command that he "didn't want to see any cowards," implying that all of his men should participate in the mass killing or risk his displeasure. After the massacre at Łomazy, Lieutenant Gnade stopped a policeman named Toni Bentheim, asked him how many people he killed, and then mocked him for being Catholic when he said he didn't kill any. This interaction speaks to the way in which the few men who didn't participate in the killing were singled out and treated with contempt even by their leaders. Since the men saw and feared this treatment, many chose to commit at least one execution, presumably so they would be seen doing it and could credibly claim to have participated if asked.

In addition to fearing ostracism by their leaders, the men feared that choosing not to be violent would estrange them from their peers. As is characteristic of wartime, the men of RPB 101 experienced "a polarization between 'us' and 'them.'" Because of this, the men had a deep respect for the unity of their battalion and a sense of obligation towards their peers. Violence against those perceived as an "enemy" (including innocent Jewish civilians) strengthened the battalion's bond,. This is clearest in the way that, afterwards, the men would blow off steam together by playing cards or even making jokes about what they'd done. Those who didn't shoot, however, were called "weakling[s]," "cowards," and even "shithead[s]" by the shooters. This sent a message to all the men that they "risked isolation, rejection, and ostracism" if they didn't follow violent orders along with the majority of the men. As a result, for many of the men, it was simply "easier [...] to shoot" and align themselves with the majority. In other words, murdering innocent people was more palatable for some men in RPB 101 than being ostracized and disparaged by their own peers and leaders, which speaks to how intense and all-consuming the desire to fit in can be.

Throughout the book, Browning systematically demonstrates that these men weren't especially prone to gratuitous violence or ideological zeal about the Final Solution—this isn't why they chose to kill. Instead, "many policemen admitted [to] responding to the pressures of conformity." This means the men were more concerned with their social standing within their peer group than with their personal morality, fear of punishment, or even career advancement. Browning concludes that, with "virtually every social collective, the peer group exerts tremendous pressures on behavior and sets moral norms." Because a large majority of the group took part in the shootings, it became not only morally acceptable to participate in the violent actions, but also an important way to demonstrate belonging within the battalion.

NORMALIZATION OF VIOLENCE

Between July 1942 and the end of World War II, the majority of the men in Reserve Police Battalion 101 transformed from benign, well-meaning policemen to brutal killers, starting with the mass execution of Jews in the Polish town of Józefów. At Józefów, the men—and even some of their commanders—were horrified by the order to kill more than a thousand civilians. This battalion was mostly run-of-the-mill, middle-aged men with families—not young, bloodthirsty members of the SS—and nobody had been trained for such violence. Still, over time, the initial horror that the men experienced at Józefów gradually gave way to an acceptance of murder as normal, making these men callous and indifferent to human life. In detailing this rapid and extreme transformation from ordinary men to murderers, Browning suggests that anyone, no matter how mild-mannered or kind, can be become desensitized to extreme violence and murder.

Major Trapp, the commander of RPB 101, was initially horrified that his unit—a police unit that expected only to be enforcing laws—would have to carry out a mass execution at Józefów. However, he quickly became accustomed to giving such orders, showing one way in which German officers became desensitized to violence: by separating themselves from the action, allowing death to remain abstract. At Józefów, Trapp didn't kill anyone; he gave the orders and then "wept like a child" at a distance from the shooting area, experiencing tremendous distress from merely giving such horrific orders.

After this massacre, Trapp continued to put distance between himself and violence; before an order to round up and deport Jews to an extermination camp, for instance, Trapp "indicated 'indirectly' but without ambiguity" that the men must kill the elderly right away. By "indirectly" giving orders to kill, Trapp could deny, to some extent, the bloody reality of what he was demanding—a reality that he would never have to confront, since his men did the actual killing. Over the next few months, Trapp had to deliver even more horrific orders, but it became easier for him to do so as he felt more and more separate from the reality of death. In fact, during one retribution killing, Trapp ordered *more* deaths than his own commanding officer explicitly requested—in this moment, Browning writes, "the man who had wept through the massacre at Józefów [...] no longer had any inhibitions about shooting more than enough Jews to meet his quota," showing how desensitized to violence he became, merely through denial and distance. This distance from death also allowed other officers to order sweeping, horrific massacres and roundups without really confronting the reality on the ground. Browning calls some of these other men "desk murderers," because their orders (often issued from behind a desk) led to thousands of deaths, but they themselves didn't have to grapple with the gruesome physical reality that this entailed.

Unlike Trapp and the "desk murderers," the men of RPB 101 became habituated to violence and murder through direct engagement with death; they never had the luxury of distance. Initially, these men were unprepared for mass murder. Many of

them joined RPB 101 because they thought this meant they wouldn't have to deploy to war—they were not, in other words, men who sought violence or expected to have to massacre civilians. Furthermore, these were family-men for whom killing Jewish women and children was, at first, especially difficult, because it reminded them of their families at home. After the first massacre, the men were profoundly ashamed and disturbed—they drank to calm themselves and many refused to speak of the violence they had just perpetrated. However, "Having killed once already, the men did not experience such a traumatic shock the second time." In the following months, they took part in more mass murders, roundups, and violent deportations, to which they reacted differently than they had at first. Due to their continued exposure to violence, Browning writes, "many had become numbed, indifferent, and in some cases eager killers." In other words, continuous proximity to violence made murder somewhat normal; they were no longer ashamed afterwards, and could eat, joke around, and sleep like they'd had a regular day.

Browning suggests that the deterioration of the RPB 101's sense of humanity and their increasing desensitization to violence could happen to anyone in the right circumstance, not just soldiers and policemen. With this in mind, *Ordinary Men* can be seen as a cautionary tale. The conditions that helped transform the men into killers—proximity to violence, dehumanizing rhetoric, actions whose effects are unseen—exist everywhere in society. In his final line, Browning chillingly suggests that any average person can become a cold-blooded killer: "If the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 could become killers under such circumstances, what group of men cannot?"

NATIONALISM, WAR, AND ETHNIC CLEANSING

When Germany sparked the Second World War by invading neighboring countries, German Chancellor Adolf Hitler's aims were ostensibly just to regain lost territory and secure additional lands. Soon, though, Hitler and his SS head Heinrich Himmler recognized another possibility for these invasions: they could fuel a race war meant to eliminate European Jews. Hitler insisted that the Germans were a "master race" that was superior to every other race, and that Jewish people posed an insidious threat to German supremacy—a belief that led to the Final Solution, a plan to systematically slaughter Europe's Jews. To get the German people on board with such extreme barbarity, Hitler had to frame all Jewish people—including German Jews—as a foreign enemy seeking to hurt Germany in the war. *Ordinary Men* lays out the process by which political and military leaders can transform a conventional war into a race war by framing people of a certain race as foreign enemies who threaten national identity.

At the start of the war, as Germany began invading neighboring countries, German military and political leaders framed the war as a chance to destroy allegedly dangerous ideologies like Bolshevism (Russian communism implemented after the Bolshevik Revolution in the 1910s). They claimed that this was "for the benefit of Germany, Europe, yes, the entire world." The order of this list is telling: Germany is the beneficiary first and foremost, whereas Europe and the rest of the world seem tacked on as afterthoughts. Browning suggests that, in war, there's a natural "polarization between [...] one's comrades and the enemy"—in other words, an us-versus-them dynamic. In neatly categorizing people as either us or them, comrade or enemy, Germany managed to bolster its people's sense of unity and national identity while simultaneously villainizing and dehumanizing non-Germans, thereby providing justification for extreme violence against them.

After firmly establishing the idea that Germany had an enemy and needed to destroy it, German military leaders could then begin framing Europe's Jews as that enemy. Notably, they made it seem important to Germany's national identity to exterminate all the Jews from Germany and the rest of Europe. This tactic was largely successful: using RPB 101's mass execution of Jews in the Polish town of Józefów as an example, Browning highlights how the battalion's willingness to kill Polish Jews just for being Jewish is proof that the men in RPB 101 "at least accepted the assimilation of the Jews into the image of the enemy." This means that the men in the battalion began to believe that *all* Jews were enemies of the German people, and so it was somehow acceptable and necessary for the men to systematically execute them. This highlights how frightfully easy it is for political and military leaders to twist a conventional war into a race-based one.

In fact, throughout RPB 101's mass slaughter of Jews, one particular factor seemed to give them pause: meeting German Jews who had been forcibly resettled in Poland. Browning speculates that to meet Jewish people who were also Germans—just like the soldiers—must have been "unexpected and jarring" because it provided "a sharp contrast to their usual view of the Jews as part of a foreign enemy"; suddenly, the victims seemed quite similar to the soldiers themselves. While this similarity unsettled some of the men, the us-versus-them dynamic proved more powerful. By this point, most of the men had accepted the image of Jewish people as "racially inferior" enemies to the "racially superior Germans," and so the battalion continued mass executions. That the men in RPB 101 were willing to murder fellow Germans to allegedly promote German supremacy highlights how successful the Nazis were in "subsum[ing] the Jews into the 'image of the enemy.'" Indeed, Browning asserts that "Nothing helped the Nazis to wage a race war so much as the war itself," meaning that they successfully leveraged their conventional geopolitical war into a vicious race war targeting Europe's Jews.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

MARKETPLACES

Shortly before beginning mass executions or deportations, Reserve Police Battalion 101 would round Jewish people up and bring them to the marketplace. As such, marketplaces represent the dehumanization of the Jews into mere animals or even objects. In the marketplaces, there would often be a selection process where German military or police commanders would essentially shop for the Jews who looked like they would make good workers. These people would be taken away to work camps to help dig trenches or even work in factories to make weapons or ammunition for the German military. The remaining Jews would frequently be disposed of through executions or deportations to extermination camps like Treblinka, where large numbers of Jews could be killed in gas chambers all at once. Part of what made this kind of violence possible was the widespread belief that Jews were subhuman, and the choice to gather Jews in the marketplace and then "shop" for the fittest and simply throw out the rest illustrates the alarming extent to which the German police and military had dehumanized the Jews in their own minds.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Harper Perennial edition of *Ordinary Men* published in 2017.

Chapter 1 Quotes

The male Jews of working age were to be separated and taken to a work camp. The remaining Jews—the women, children, and elderly—were to be shot on the spot by the battalion. Having explained what awaited his men, Trapp then made an extraordinary offer: if any of the older men among them did not feel up to the task that lay before him, he could step out.

Related Characters: Major Wilhelm Trapp

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2

Explanation and Analysis

The opening pages of *Ordinary Men* describe the morning that Trapp and Reserve Police Battalion 101 enter Józefów.

Trapp's offer—in which he tells his men that they can choose not to participate in the first massacre they're ordered to carry out—is the defining moment of the book and its moral center. While many German soldiers accused of war crimes defended their participation in genocide by claiming that they were merely following orders, this moment shows that—from Reserve Police Battalion's very first order to massacre innocent civilians—the men had a choice about whether or not to participate. Here, a commanding officer (who clearly himself feels that these orders are immoral) is offering his men the chance to back out, which explicitly contradicts the notion that the men who participated were simply following orders. While the battalion *was* ordered to perform a massacre, it's important that before any of the shooting started, the battalion's commander made clear that participating was a choice. For Browning, this is key evidence that these men are morally culpable for all of the murders they will go on to commit.

Trapp singles out the older men in the battalion in his offer. The battalion itself is predominately middle-aged men, so the "older" men are in their 40s. Trapp himself is 53. Trapp singles them out because the older men are most likely the ones with families—wives and children of their own from whom they are hundreds of miles away—and he apparently believes that having to execute women and children would be exceptionally traumatic for these men. However, as the executions commence, men of all ages ask to be excused from the task and are allowed; therefore, just because the offer singles out older men doesn't mean it was exclusive to them. Presumably, any of Trapp's men who felt uncomfortable would have been excused had they spoken up.

Chapter 5 Quotes

The men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 were from the lower orders of German society. They had experienced neither social nor geographic mobility. Very few were economically independent. Except for apprenticeship or vocational training, virtually none had any education after leaving *Volksschule* (terminal secondary school) at age fourteen or fifteen. […] By virtue of their age, of course, all went through their formative period in the pre-Nazi era. These were men who had known political standards and moral norms other than those of the Nazis. Most came from Hamburg, by reputation one of the least nazified cities in Germany, and the majority came from a social class that had been anti-Nazi in its political culture. These men would not seem to have been a very promising group from which to recruit mass murderers on behalf of the Nazi vision of a racial utopia free of Jews.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 48

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Browning explains the background of the majority of the men in Reserve Police Battalion 101 in order to make the argument that they were not obviously predisposed to carrying out genocide. Most of these men came from areas that did not support the Nazi party (whose platform was, in part, a racist embrace of German superiority). This leads Browning to suppose that most of these men were probably not racist ideologues who were eager to carry out Hitler's genocidal vision for Europe—instead, their political and moral convictions might have predisposed them to *oppose* Nazi plans. This, alongside the evidence that most of the men were working-class tradesmen, hints at Browning's central thesis: that these men were wholly ordinary and not particularly predisposed to hatred or brutality, but they nonetheless carried out some of the most violent and abhorrent actions of the world's most barbaric genocide. This passage is meant to contradict a reader's possible assumption that German soldiers were all Nazi enthusiasts eager for violence. As Browning says, nothing about the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 indicates that they would become mass executioners.

This passage is also important because it emphasizes that these men developed their sense of morality *before* the Nazis rose to power in Germany. They were generally middle-aged, so their moral compasses were formed before the era of rampant Nazi propaganda about German superiority or Jewish menace. However, they did come of age in a time when German nationalism was extremely popular. In fact, this had played an important role in World War I, in which some of the battalion's men fought. While they might not have been as susceptible to the Nazis' anti-Semitic propaganda and rhetoric, they likely would have been willing to accept the Nazis' call to expand Germany's territory by invading neighboring countries, particularly German-speaking ones and land they'd lost after WWI under the Treaty of Versailles. This sentiment, however, would have been pretty common in Germany, which has a long history of both nationalism and a desire to expand territory—it doesn't really account for why someone would become a mass murderer.

Chapter 7 Quotes

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

Related Characters: Christopher R. Browning (speaker), Captain Wolfgang Hoffman, Otto-Julius Schimke, Major Wilhelm Trapp

Related Themes:

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

Browning returns to the moment when Major Trapp makes his "extraordinary offer" and details what happens immediately afterwards. It is important to remember that Browning is reconstructing these events using testimonies from the 1960s, about 20 years after the events they're recalling. In other words, this might not be exactly what happened that day, but enough of the men's testimonies corroborate it that Browning has deemed it most likely factual.

The average reader today will look at this offer and think that the right choice is obvious: just choose not to shoot. However, these men are in Nazi-occupied territory just a few hundred miles away from one of the bloodiest wars in history. Furthermore, they are policemen, so they take orders very seriously. Refusing orders is almost unthinkable, especially given the larger context of being involved in a dangerous war in enemy territory. All these things likely contribute to why so few men initially step forward.

Stepping forward to take Trapp's offer is also difficult because it means standing out from the crowd. As Browning goes on to argue, peer pressure and the desire to conform to the majority are both extremely powerful forces. More men step forward after Schimke does because it's easier to make that choice once someone else has already done it. Still, these men stand out as the definite minority. For many

men, the fear of standing out and separating themselves from their comrades is even greater than any moral qualms they might have about shooting innocent people. Still, this moment shows that the men now know that if they do want to be excused, they are free to do so—in fact, they see that Trapp will help protect them from their commanders the way he protected Schimke from Hoffmann. In this light, peer pressure aside, Browning suggests that the men have a moral responsibility to stand up for what they know is right.

When Trapp first made his offer early in the morning, the real nature of the action had just been announced and time to think and react had been very short. Only a dozen men had instinctively seized the moment to step out, turn in their rifles, and thus excuse themselves from the subsequent killing. For many the reality of what they were about to do, and particularly that they themselves might be chosen for the firing squad, had probably not sunk in. But when the men of First Company were summoned to the marketplace, instructed in giving a "neck shot," and sent to the woods to kill Jews, some of them tried to make up for the opportunity they had missed earlier.

Related Characters: Christopher R. Browning (speaker), Major Wilhelm Trapp

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 61-62

Explanation and Analysis

After Trapp makes his offer, only around a dozen men immediately take him up on it. However, after the rest of the men have had time to digest what they are about to do, more of them realize that they do not want to participate. Browning notes early on that none of the men were happy or excited when they heard why they had been called to Józefów, but only a few of the men were so repulsed by their orders that they stepped away immediately. What is important about this passage is that it shows that the men clearly understood that Trapp's offer did not expire the moment they set about their tasks. Throughout the process of preparing to start the executions, men continually came forward to ask if they could be excused, and all of them were. This adds moral culpability to those who did follow through with the massacre, since they—like their peers who were excused—presumably understood that they did not have to shoot.

The "neck shot" that the men are taught to use is an important factor in many men's decisions to step out. The battalion doctor teaches the men where to shoot so that they can quickly and efficiently kill their victims without creating a huge mess. However, when they learn this, the doctor very likely also tells them that it's important to aim for this specific spot because if they go too low, their victim won't die and they'll have to shoot again, whereas if they shoot too high, it can make the back of the victim's head explode (unfortunately, many men learn this the hard way during the executions). For many men, this is the moment in which they really start to understand what they are being asked to do. Just as the reality of what killing another person entails sinks in, so, too, does the realization that they have the freedom to choose not to. More people come forward to ask to be excused during this period than when Trapp first made the offer, implying that not everyone had such a strong natural aversion to the thought of violence when it was more abstract.

Sergeant Steinmetz of Third Platoon once again gave his men the opportunity to report if they did not feel up to it. No one took up his offer.

Related Characters: Christopher R. Browning (speaker), Sergeant Heinrich Steinmetz

Related Themes:

Page Number: 63

Explanation and Analysis

After the executions begin and before Steinmetz forms his men into firing squads, he repeats the same offer as Trapp: any man who does not feel like he can participate can come forward and be excused from the task. Interestingly, even though they have all witnessed some form of violence and have had plenty of time to think about it, nobody takes Steinmetz's offer. One reason for this is that the men are already becoming habituated to violence. The murder of the Jews in the village did not begin in the forest; it already started in the town itself when the men helped round them up to bring them to the marketplace. One of their initial orders was to simply shoot anyone who was too old, too sick or frail to walk—including infants. As the men moved through the town, many of them found themselves having to shoot people before the formal executions began. Even if not every man was a shooter during the roundups, they did

all see or hear it happening. For many, just seeing the violence was enough to give them the confidence to believe they could help carry out the executions.

Another big reason that nobody takes Steinmetz up on his offer is the same one that prevented many men from speaking up during Trapp's offer: the desire to conform. Now that the killings are actually happening, it is almost harder to walk away than before because they know what they will be leaving their comrades behind to do. They themselves see walking out as something of a betrayal, so undoubtedly their peers will, too. Nobody wants to deliberately set themselves apart from the group, so they decide to at least try to carry out the executions (although even more men will drop out after shooting at least once).

> When the men arrived at the barracks in Biłgoraj, they were depressed, angered, embittered, and shaken. They ate little but drank heavily. Generous quantities of alcohol were provided, and many of the policemen got quite drunk. Major Trapp made the rounds, trying to console and reassure them, and again placing the responsibility on higher authorities. But neither the drink nor Trapp's consolation could wash away the sense of shame and horror that pervaded the barracks.

Related Characters: Christopher R. Browning (speaker), Major Wilhelm Trapp

Related Themes:

Page Number: 69

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Browning details how the men felt in the first hours after they finished carrying out a 17-hour long mass execution in Józefów. On this night, the men all seem to unite in their anger, frustration, and depression, even though not all of them participated in the executions. While the shooting was going on, the men must have been in shock. Between having to round up the Jews, bring them to the forest, and then execute them, the men had little time to really think about what they were doing and how they felt about it. Back in their barracks, the men are forced to confront the horrors of the day, whether they contributed to it or not. One thing the commanders of these battalions took very seriously was the mental health and wellbeing of their men, which is why they provided alcohol to all of them. Their belief was that, if they could help the men cope with the deep pain they were feeling in that moment, then they would recover sooner and be able to do it all again later (indeed, the men don't have a long respite before they're put to work with more ghetto clearings and Gnade's unit even goes to help with another mass execution).

The men's reactions and feelings after the Józefów massacre will be sharply contrasted with how they act after later violent actions. In this moment, when the experience is still new and they're still learning to identify their own feelings about it, it's incredibly difficult for the men to cope with their feelings. This extends to Trapp, who feels like he's responsible for making sure his men are alright and trying to console them, but who is also anxious to lay the blame elsewhere, on the "higher authorities." By doing this, Trapp is also trying to alleviate his own sense of guilt. He doesn't want to have been responsible for causing both the deaths of over 1,500 people or the shame and pain his men feel.

Chapter 8 Quotes

> As important as the lack of time for reflection was the pressure for conformity—the basic identification of men in uniform with their comrades and the strong urge not to separate themselves from the group by stepping out. The battalion had only recently been brought up to full strength, and many of the men did not yet know each other well; the bonds of military comradeship were not yet fully developed. Nonetheless, the act of stepping out that morning in Józefów meant leaving one's comrades and admitting that one was "too weak" or "cowardly." Who would have "dared," one policeman declared emphatically, to "lose face" before the assembled troops. "If the question is posed to me why I shot with the others in the first place," said another who subsequently asked to be excused after several rounds of killing, "I must answer that no one wants to be thought a coward." It was one thing to refuse at the beginning, he added, and quite another to try to shoot but not be able to continue. Another policeman—more aware of what truly required courage—said quite simply, "I was cowardly."

Related Themes:

Page Number: 71-72

Explanation and Analysis

After describing the massacre at Józefów, Browning dives into the reason that so many men chose to shoot even though they had the freedom to refuse. As Browning will reiterate time and again, in a group setting it is incredibly difficult to make a choice that will separate one from the majority. For Reserve Police Battalion 101, it is even more difficult because they are brothers in uniform. They have

been trained to depend on one another and they are all sharing these experiences together. Furthermore, the group is still fairly new, so the men are even more eager to fit in and find their place within the battalion.

The men have mixed opinions about what constitutes courage. One man in this passage implies that choosing not to shoot would have been cowardly. This man thinks that participating in the shooting was an act of bravery—he had to get over his moral qualms and the horror of watching another human being die to carry out his orders. Choosing not to go through with it, for him, would be cowardice, particularly because it would leave others to do this difficult work. On other hand, another man actually says that choosing to go through with the shooting was the real act of cowardice. By this man's logic, choosing to step away was an act of bravery, a choice to place morality over camaraderie and risk being ostracized by the group. Clearly, Browning agrees with this man.

❝ What is clear is that the men's concern for their standing in the eyes of their comrades was not matched by any sense of human ties with their victims. The Jews stood outside their circle of human obligation and responsibility. Such a polarization between "us" and "them," between one's comrades and the enemy, is of course standard in war.

Related Characters: Christopher R. Browning (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 73

Explanation and Analysis

Browning turns his attention to the feelings the men must have had about the Jews they executed in Józefów. One reason that so many men were able to go through with the executions is that they saw the Jews as "others," meaning they didn't feel like they had anything in common with their victims. By dehumanizing the Jews this way, the German men were able to alleviate some of their guilt over killing so many people. Using propaganda, the Nazis inundated the Germans with the message that they were racially superior to the Jews, and even that Europe as a whole would be better off if there were no more Jewish people there. Still, as Browning will point out later, not even this propaganda explicitly instructed anyone to go personally kill unarmed Jewish women and children like the battalion did at Józefów.

This us-versus-them feeling becomes even more polarizing for the men in the battalion because they are participating in a war. As with all wars, the men are constantly aware that they have an enemy. In fact, when Trapp first told the men about their orders at Józefów, he exhorted them to remember that their enemies were killing innocent Germans back home. This plea made alongside the order to kill innocent Jewish women and children effectively sends the message that they are getting back at the enemy by killing the Jews. To what extent the men truly believed this at the time is hard to determine, but it almost certainly played a role in their ability to dehumanize their victims both before and after killing them.

❝ It would seem that even if the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 had not consciously adopted the anti-Semitic doctrines of the regime, they had at least accepted the assimilation of the Jews into the image of the enemy. Major Trapp appealed to this generalized notion of the Jews as part of the enemy in his early-morning speech. The men should remember, when shooting Jewish women and children, that the enemy was killing German women and children by bombing Germany.

Related Characters: Christopher R. Browning (speaker), Major Wilhelm Trapp

Related Themes:

Page Number: 73

Explanation and Analysis

One of the major questions Browning must tackle in *Ordinary Men* is whether the men in Reserve Police Battalion 101 are genuinely anti-Semitic. Browning is aware that most people take for granted that the vast majority of Germans during World War II were violently anti-Semitic, but this is not necessarily true. There might be more reason to believe that the men in this battalion were anti-Semites if more of them belonged to the SS or if this was a unit full of Gestapos. However, these are middle-aged police officers, and, as Browning has already pointed out, they formed their moral values long before Hitler and the Nazis rose to power. Here, Browning indicates that they might not have "consciously adopted the anti-Semitic doctrines of the regime," meaning they weren't aware of the existence or extent of their anti-Semitism. But this also implies that they might have subconsciously adopted those sentiments. If this is the case, then it becomes somewhat ironic that, in a number of testimonies, the men accuse other men whom

they don't like of being anti-Semites. They would have a hard time reconciling their own unconscious anti-Semitic sentiments with their more conscious belief that anti-Semites are unlikable.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ If Gnade's drinking was commonplace, the streak of sadism he began to display at Łomazy was not. The previous fall Gnade had put his men on the night train from Minsk to avoid becoming involved in the execution of the Jews he had brought there from Hamburg. At Józefów he had not distinguished himself from his fellow officers with any especially sadistic behavior. All this changed in the forest outside Łomazy as Gnade sought to entertain himself while waiting for the Jews to finish digging the grave.

Related Characters: Christopher R. Browning (speaker), Lieutenant Hartwick Gnade

Related Themes:

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

Lieutenant Gnade leads the men in his company in another mass murder in Łomazy about a month after the mass execution at Józefów. Gnade rather quickly becomes the most sadistic man in the battalion, which is surprising given that he didn't want himself or his men to be near the violence in Minsk. On that occasion, Gnade got out before the executions took place, thus saving himself and his men from participation. At Józefów, even though Trapp gave the men the opportunity to step down, the decision was a little more difficult for Gnade to make. He had to ask himself what kind of message he'd be sending to his men if he backed out but still asked them to take part in it. This could explain why Gnade didn't run out like he did in Minsk, but also why he didn't "distinguish himself from his fellow officers with any especially sadistic behavior."

In Łomazy, Gnade does "distinguish himself" for his extremely sadistic behavior. While they wait for the Jews to dig their own mass grave, Gnade makes some of the men strip down and crawl in the dirt. Then, Gnade and some of his men beat them with clubs for the fun of it. There is a huge difference between the Gnade who ran away from an execution at Minsk and the Gnade who decides to use Jews who are about to die to "entertain himself" while he waits to either watch them die or kill them himself. Gnade has no only become used to violence, but now he revels in it, and degrading his victims is entertaining.

Another difference between the massacres at Józefów and Łomazy is that at Łomazy, the Jews dig their own graves (in Józefów they just left the bodies lying out in the forest). This does serve a practical purpose: if the Jews dig the grave then the men don't have to, so it saves labor. However, it serves the additional purpose of psychologically torturing their victims. They know that they're digging their own graves and so they know their death is imminent, but they also know that if they don't dig them, then they'll die sooner. It's a sadistic way of prolonging their victims' suffering.

❝ Habituation played a role as well. Having killed once already, the men did not experience such a traumatic shock the second time. Like much else, killing was something one could get used to.

Related Characters: Christopher R. Browning (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 85

Explanation and Analysis

Another thing that makes the massacre at Łomazy notable is that every man who was asked to shoot did shoot at least once. At Józefów, some men who were put on firing squads either couldn't go through with actually executing their victims once they were matched up with them or they asked to be excused before the any of the killings began. However, simply being part of the Józefów massacre apparently made it easier for the men to be part of the Łomazy massacre just a little over a month later. The extreme demoralization, shame, and despair they experienced after the Józefów massacre did not seem to deter them from taking part in this one. They approach this second massacre as seasoned killers, so they have less hesitation and fear; they already know they can carry out executions because they've done it before.

The implication here is that anyone can get used to killing, but, as Browning has already indicated with Gnade, killing is also something that one can *enjoy* doing. This is disturbing because, as the title of the book suggests, the story is all about ordinary men—not bloodthirsty Nazis bent on exterminating every Jew in Europe. With this observation, Browning is challenging the general belief that only naturally violent people can get used to or enjoy violence. Instead, he implies that *anyone* can get used to it.

One other factor sharply distinguished Łomazy from Józefów and may well have been yet another kind of psychological "relief" for the men—namely, this time they did not bear the "burden of choice" that Trapp had offered them so starkly on the occasion of the first massacre. No chance to step out was given to those who did not feel up to shooting; no one systematically excused those who were visibly too shaken to continue. Everyone assigned to the firing squads took his turn as ordered. Therefore, those who shot did not have to live with the clear awareness that what they had done had been avoidable.

This is not to say that the men had no choice, only that it was not offered to them so openly and explicitly as at Józefów. They had to exert themselves to evade killing.

Related Characters: Christopher R. Browning (speaker), Lieutenant Hartwick Gnade, Major Wilhelm Trapp

Related Themes:

Page Number: 86

Explanation and Analysis

In exploring the differences between the massacre at Józefów and the massacre at Łomazy just a month later, he takes special note of the fact that no freedom of choice was explicitly offered in the second massacre. When Trapp offered to excuse men from carrying out executions in Józefów, he also put the men in a position where they would have to take total responsibility for their own actions. Murder became a choice they had to consciously make, and most of the men chose to make it. However, afterwards, all of them were torn apart with grief, they couldn't talk about what had happened, and they drowned their feelings in extra rations of alcohol in their barracks. Gnade doesn't make the same offer, and so the men do not feel the same level of responsibility for the violence they inflict on the Jews in Łomazy.

By not explicitly offering his men the freedom of choice, Gnade also gives them someone else to blame for their actions: himself. In this situation, the men will now be free to say that they had to execute unarmed civilians at Łomazy because their commander ordered them to and they did not have a choice. However, as Browning explains, the freedom of choice was still tacitly in place, meaning that they always could have refused, even if they weren't explicitly given the choice. They would have to "exert themselves to evade killing," but they would not have been punished for it. As they saw in Józefów and as some policemen report experiencing later, Trapp was willing to protect any man who chose not to take part in violence from irritated commanders.

This moment shows how hollow the "just following orders" excuse is—it's actually *easier* on the men to be ordered to commit murder, since then, psychologically, they don't have to blame themselves. In this way, all the German soldiers who, when accused of war crimes, said they were just following orders can be seen as people who did not wish to take moral responsibility for choices they probably would have made regardless.

Most of the policemen, however, seem to have made no effort to avoid shooting. At Łomazy following orders reinforced the natural tendency to conform to the behavior of one's comrades. This was much easier to bear than the situation at Józefów, where the policemen were allowed to make personal decisions concerning their participation but the "cost" of not shooting was to separate themselves from their comrades and to expose themselves as "weak."

Related Characters: Christopher R. Browning (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 87

Explanation and Analysis

Browning continues to elaborate on his belief that, because the men in Gnade's company at Łomazy were never explicitly offered the opportunity to be excused from the firing squads, it was easier for them to carry out brutal executions of innocent Jewish people. Browning concludes that, although the freedom to choose was never explicitly stated, avoiding being on a firing squad was a real possibility for any man who didn't mind exerting himself. Unfortunately, it seems that very few of them chose to do so. Without the "burden of choice," the men found it much easier to succumb to the power of peer pressure and the desire to "conform to the behavior of one's comrades." Even at Józefów, the majority of the men sent to the firing squads chose to shoot and kept shooting all day long, so if the freedom of choice had been clearly offered at Łomazy, odds are that the number of men willing to shoot and keep shooting would still have been greater than those who opted out. Still, most men would have hesitated because they'd have known that by choosing to shoot, they were accepting moral responsibility. Without the offer, there was less hesitation.

The men don't only want to fit in with the majority—they want the majority to think well of them. This is why choosing

to step out (a radical act of nonconformity that would create a barrier between them and the shooters) is described as a "cost," which here indicates some sacrifice of reputation.

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ This figure needs to be put into some wider perspective in order to show the ferocity of the Międzyrzec deportation even by the Nazi standards of 1942. About 300,000 Jews were deported from Warsaw between July 22 and September 21, 1942. The total number of Jews killed by gunfire over this two-month period was recorded as 6,687. In Warsaw, therefore, the ration between those killed on the spot and those deported was approximately 2 percent. The same ration for Międzyrzec was nearly 9 percent. The Jews of Międzyrzec did not march "like sheep to the slaughter." They were driven with an almost unimaginable ferocity and brutality that left a singular imprint even on the memories of the increasingly numbed and callous participants from Reserve Police Battalion 101.

Related Characters: Christopher R. Browning (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 95

Explanation and Analysis

After the massacre at Łomazy there is a brief respite from systematic mass executions, but during this time, the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 play a major role in the process of deporting Jews from the ghettos to extermination camps like Treblinka. Deportations are not easy, orderly events; they still involve a lot of violence, confusion, and death. There is a standing order to shoot anyone who is elderly or can't walk, so throughout deportations like the one at Międzyrzec, everyone can hear gunshots and they know that means death. These deportations are also important in gauging how violent the men in the battalion are becoming. The men might need to be stern at deportations, but violence is not explicitly necessary. Still, at Międzyrzec they drive their victims forward with "unimaginable ferocity and brutality." This shows that the men in the battalion are very comfortable using far more force than is necessary at this point. Presumably, this is because they are beginning to enjoy it and, like Gnade, use unnecessary violence against their victims for the sake of entertaining themselves.

The extermination camps were created with the intention of relieving the psychological burden that executing the Jews by hand would have had on average German soldiers and policemen. The gas chambers at these camps could be used to kill a large number of people all at once in a relatively short amount of time, and it removed the need for executioners to get personal with their victims. However, just because the men in the battalion were no longer doing the actual killing (or at least not most of them) doesn't mean they were not complicit in the deaths—after all, they rounded victims up and sent them to the death camps while explicitly knowing what fate awaited them. Instead of refusing to take part or pretending to be busy to avoid participating, most men simply did their job, and many of them did it with excessive violence.

Chapter 11 Quotes

❝ Major Trapp immediately reported to Lublin that 3 "bandits," 78 Polish "accomplices," and 180 Jews had been executed in retaliation for the ambush of Jobst in Talcyn. Apparently the man who had wept through the massacre at Józefów and still shied from the indiscriminate slaughter of Poles no longer had any inhibitions about shooting more than enough Jews to meet his quota.

Related Characters: Christopher R. Browning (speaker), Major Wilhelm Trapp

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 102

Explanation and Analysis

After one of Trapp's men is ambushed and killed by Poles on his way back to the barracks from a special mission, the higher authorities order Trapp to kill 200 Poles from the village as punishment. Trapp judiciously tries to keep the peace with the Poles by first selecting only the poorest and most insignificant citizens of the town. However, this isn't enough; he only has 78 men killed when his quota is 200. Trapp decides to make up for this by killing 180 Jews from a nearby ghetto, bringing the body count to 261 (the "3 'bandits'" are presumably the men actually responsible for Trapp's man's murder). It is astonishing to see how easy it is for Trapp to order the deaths of 61 more people than he was ordered to kill, especially after his strong emotional reaction to ordering the executions of Jews in Józefów just a few months earlier.

Notably missing from this reconstruction of the massacre at Talcyn and the Jews at Kock (the ghetto they raided to get enough people to meet the quota) is any hint that Trapp struggled with this decision—nobody describes him crying, they don't paint a picture of a man tortured by the deaths he'll be responsible for causing once he gives the order. Part

of the reason for this might be that the men aren't being ordered to kill women and children while their husbands and fathers weep in the road on the way to the work camp. Instead, Trapp himself gets to pick and choose who lives and who dies, and he carefully selects those whom he assumes society will miss the least. But, more likely than not, the reason for this transformation is that Trapp is growing so accustomed to delivering orders like this that they no longer affect him. It seems that, rather than focusing on his victims' humanity and recognizing their innocence, Trapp is focusing on the number of people he has to kill. He has separated the human element from the numbers on the paper, creating a psychological distance between his orders and their human cost that enables him to cope with the pain he's causing.

Chapter 14 Quotes

❝ But the "Jew hunt" was different. Once again they saw their victims face to face, and the killing was personal. More important, each individual policeman once again had a considerable degree of choice. How each exercised that choice revealed the extent to which the battalion had divided into the "tough" and the "weak." In the months since Józefów many had become numbed, indifferent, and in some cases eager killers; others limited their participation in the killing process, refraining when they could do so without great cost or inconvenience. Only a minority of nonconformists managed to preserve a beleaguered sphere of moral autonomy that emboldened them to employ patterns of behavior and stratagems of evasion that kept them from becoming killers at all.

Related Characters: Christopher R. Browning (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 127

Explanation and Analysis

The battalion's involvement in one of the last stages of the Final Solution—the *judenjagd*, or "Jew hunt"—reveals some clear divisions within the group. The "Jew hunt" involves combing the forests, nearby farms, buildings in town, and anywhere else they think Jews who escaped deportation might be hiding. In these actions, the men have a "considerable degree of choice"—they're rarely going out as a whole battalion, so there are frequently no commanders overseeing the process. Sometimes it's just a few guys going out with guns to check an area where local Poles claim Jews are hiding. In many of these situations, there is less pressure to shoot, especially when the smaller groups include like-minded people who are less than enthusiastic about violence and willing to let some potential victims get away.

The *judenjagd* starts just a few months after Józefów, in the fall of 1942. The people who fall into the two extremes—the "eager killers" and those who "preserve a beleaguered sphere of moral autonomy" and thus don't shoot—include men who have strong personalities. They have definite opinions and beliefs, and they stick by them no matter the cost. The "eager killers" definitively *like* killing and would include the sadists like Lieutenant Gnade. The latter group, who maintains their "moral autonomy" (this means they don't push their morals to the side to conform to the group's violence), would include consistent nonshooters, like Otto-Julius Schimke. The middle group, those who shoot when they're asked to but also avoid doing it when they can "without great cost or inconvenience" to themselves, is the most troubling group. They seem to have no strong feelings in either direction, or at least their feelings are not strong enough for them to take a stand as either an "eager killer" or a non-shooter. In a way, these men are ideal for carrying out the Nazis' plans because they likely won't put up a fuss. These men give in to peer pressure seemingly without a second thought because, to them, it's easier than exerting themselves to choose something different from the crowd.

❝ Growing callousness can also be seen in the post-shooting behavior of the policemen. After Józefów and the early shootings, the men had returned to their quarters shaken and embittered, without appetite or desire to talk about what they had just done. With the relentless killing, such sensitivities were dulled. One policeman recalled, "At the lunch table some of the comrades made jokes about the experiences they'd had during an action. From their stories I could gather that they had just finished a shooting action. I remember as especially crass that one of the men said now we eat 'the brains of slaughtered Jews.'" Only the witness found this "joke" less than hilarious.

Related Characters: Christopher R. Browning (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 128

Explanation and Analysis

The behavior of the men after carrying out patrols as part of the "Jew hunt" is telling; they're clearly growing more "callous[]" and they no longer struggle with immediate depression or shame after killing innocent men, women, and

children. More telling, however, is that killing has evidently become a bonding experience for the men. It's something they go out and do together and then joke about it over lunch or a few drinks. This sets them apart from the nonshooters, who can't share in the jokes and who are likely not very welcome at their lunch table anyway. Furthermore, at this point it's clear that the men are *choosing* to continue taking part in violent actions. Committing violence is an important part of being a member of their group, and unfortunately, nonshooters are the minority. Notably, there are no similar stories of the nonshooters joyfully making jokes about whatever they did with their day, indicating perhaps that they still struggle with the part they are playing in mass murder, even though they're not the ones doing the shooting. An example of this would be Buchmann, who does his best to avoid even having to be in the same place as violence. Becoming habituated to the violence and thus using actions as a bonding experience that excludes the nonshooters makes choosing not to shoot even more difficult for the group of men who let the group shape their choices.

Though the "Jew hunt" has received little attention, it was an important and statistically significant phase of the Final Solution. A not inconsiderable percentage of Jewish victims in the General Government lost their lives in this way. Statistics aside, the "Jew hunt" is a psychologically important key to the mentality of the perpetrators. Many of the German occupiers in Poland may have witnessed or participated in ghetto roundups on several occasions—in a lifetime, a few brief moments that could be easily repressed. But the "Jew hunt" was not a brief episode. It was a tenacious, remorseless, ongoing campaign in which the "hunters" tracked down and killed their "prey" in direct and personal confrontation. It was not a passing phase but an existential condition of constant readiness and intention to kill every last Jew who could be found.

Related Characters: Christopher R. Browning (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 132

Explanation and Analysis

Browning tries to explain the monumental importance of the *judenjagd*, or "Jew hunt," both to history and to the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101. The Final Solution was a Nazi plan to eliminate all of the Jews from Europe, presumably to bring peace, since Hitler argued that the German master race and inferior Jewish race could never live peacefully alongside each other. The *judenjagd* is one of the final stages of the Final Solution in the Lublin district in Poland, where the battalion is stationed. Historically, then, the *judenjagd* is significant because it indicates that the Germans have successfully cleared all towns and cities of their Jewish populations and placed those Jews either in ghettos or camps. At this stage, the only remaining step is to find and kill the Jews who are hiding—then they can proclaim an area *judenfrei* ("Jew free").

The "Jew hunt" is important to the psychological development of the men in the battalion. Before this, most of their actions only took a few hours and then they could go back to the barracks and drown any shame or depression they felt in alcohol and jokes with their friends. The "Jew hunt" is not one isolated event, though. As Browning explains, it is "a tenacious, remorseless, ongoing campaign." It's dragged out for months and the men must keep themselves in "constant readiness" to kill. This prevents them from getting any relief from the feeling that they are about to kill another person. For many men, as Browning explained earlier, this isn't a problem because they have become so habituated to violence that they're now "eager killers." At the same time, it must have weighed on everyone's mind that they were now in a position to completely wipe out an entire race of people in a region. By doing this, they're removing important elements of that area's economy, culture, population, and history. This knowledge, as well as the psychological burden of having to constantly prepare themselves to kill, polarizes the group even further into those who are ready and eager to kill, those who will avoid killing if they can but will readily shoot if directly asked to, and those who adamantly refuse to participate in any violence against the Jews.

Chapter 18 Quotes

Thus, wartime brutalization through prior combat was not an immediate experience directly influencing the policemen's behavior at Józefów. Once the killing began, however, the men became increasingly brutalized. As in combat, the horrors of the initial encounter eventually became routine, and the killing became progressively easier. In this sense, brutalization was not the cause but the effect of these men's behavior.

Related Characters: Christopher R. Browning (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 161

Explanation and Analysis

In the final chapter of *Ordinary Men*, Browning tries to explain why so many men in the battalion became so violent in such a short amount of time (the events Browning reconstructs took place in fewer than 18 months). The men were working in a war zone, so one of the most obvious reasons might be what Browning terms "wartime brutalization." Wartime brutalization occurs when men are exposed to mutual violence between opposing groups such as one would find in any normal battle. Clearly, however, this can't be the case for the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101. They didn't fight any battles in Poland before Józefów, and the closest they come to a serious battle in Browning's narrative is when they find a group of armed Jews and escaped Russian prisoners of war and briefly exchange gunfire. This, however, happened in 1943, nearly a year after mass executions like at Łomazy and Józefów. By the time the men engaged in this exchange of fire, they had already become brutalized.

Browning notes that, for these men, "brutalization was not the cause but the effect" of their behavior. The moment that the men started becoming brutalized was the massacre at Józefów when Trapp made his offer and so many men decided not to step out. In that moment, they chose to be willing to kill innocent people, predominately women and children. After that, it became easier and easier to make the same choice, leading to tons of violence that made them brutalized.

> War, a struggle between "our people" and "the enemy," creates a polarized world in which "the enemy" is easily objectified and removed from the community of human obligation.

Related Characters: Christopher R. Browning (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 162

Explanation and Analysis

Browning attempts to explain how and why the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 were able to dehumanize their victims enough to not only be willing to personally execute them, but also to enjoy it. As Browning asserted earlier, the Germans did not invade Russia, Poland, and other countries with the intention of obliterating the Jewish population; instead, they wanted to take over more land to expand Germany's borders, especially after losing several key regions after World War I. The "enemy" was ostensibly Bolshevism (the form of communism implemented in Russia after the Bolshevik Revolution in the 1910s) and many Germans genuinely believed it posed a threat to the rest of Europe and especially Germany. However, soon the Germans began subtly incorporating Jews into their image of the enemy—they ordered all plunderers to be shot but only raided Jewish areas, or they would decry Bolshevism as they ordered the mass execution of the Jews in a certain area. These things established Jews as not just an enemy, but a *foreign* enemy. It is, after all, easier to convince people that they have a foreign enemy than a domestic one.

Having subtly merged the image of the enemy with the image of Jews, it did not take long for the Nazis to start overtly dehumanizing Jews in their propaganda. Surrounded by posters, pamphlets, advertisements, and books all about how inhuman Jews are, many Germans unknowingly began to "objectif[y]" the Jews, which in turn made it easier for soldiers and policemen (like those in RPB 101) to execute so many of them. To remove Jews "from the community of human obligation" means to identify them as definitively inferior to human beings, which would then mean that their murderers don't need to feel obligated to help or save them the way they would naturally want to help another human being. It was important to the Nazis to not only transform Jews into the enemy, but to objectify and dehumanize them in the minds of the Germans so nobody would question or challenge the morality of rounding them up and killing them.

> Orders were orders, and no one in such a political climate could be expected to disobey them, they insisted. Disobedience surely meant the concentration camp if not immediate execution, possibly for their families as well. The perpetrators had found themselves in a situation of impossible "duress" and therefore could not be help responsible for their actions. Such, at least, is what defendants said in trial after trial in postwar Germany.

There is a general problem with this explanation, however. Quite simply, in the past forty-five years no defense attorney or defendant in any of the hundreds of postwar trials has been able to document a single case in which refusal to obey an order to kill unarmed civilians resulted in the allegedly inevitable dire punishment.

Related Characters: Christopher R. Browning (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 170

Explanation and Analysis

One of the most frequent excuses for why men like those in Reserve Police Battalion 101 chose to commit murder is that they were just following orders. Given the Nazis' known propensity for violence, it is easy to accept this answer. Men reported being afraid of getting themselves and their families punished or killed if they disobeyed orders. The implication is that, given these consequences, the perpetrators can't be held accountable for their actions. The problem with this argument, as Browning points out, is that there has not been "a single case in which refusal to obey an order to kill unarmed civilians resulted in the allegedly inevitable dire punishment." This calls into question *why* or *if* the men ever did truly fear it. While Browning doesn't comment on other groups, it's clear that the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 could not possibly use this excuse. They were offered the freedom to choose whether to be involved in the execution at Józefów and that option, though unspoken, remained available throughout the next year and a half. Men took advantage of it frequently. Furthermore, Trapp personally protected the men who didn't want to shoot, and as the battalion commander, every other man would have had to go through him to decide on whether to severely punish someone who didn't shoot. What it all boils down to is that these men—and, in fact, every man—had a choice, and the violence they chose to commit cannot justifiably be explained away by their alleged fear of punishment.

> The battalion had orders to kill Jews, but each individual did not. Yet 80 to 90 percent of the men proceeded to kill, though almost all of them—at least initially—were horrified and disgusted by what they were doing. To break ranks and step out, to adopt overtly nonconformist behavior, was simply beyond most of the men. It was easier for them to shoot.

Related Characters: Christopher R. Browning (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 184

Explanation and Analysis

Browning details the role that the desire for conformity played in why so many people in Reserve Police Battalion 101 chose to participate in mass executions and other violent actions. He makes an important distinction right away: "The battalion had orders to kill Jews, but each individual did not." Orders did not come down with a list of individual men who must kill Jews. This is what made it possible for individuals to choose whether to participate or not, and those who chose not to did so without fear of reprisal because their battalion commander explicitly gave them the option to walk out. Given the high degree of freedom for individual choice, then, it is disturbing to Browning that "80 to 90 percent of the men proceeded to kill" even though they were initially disgusted by what they were being asked to do. In fact, they remained angry over having been put in that position by Trapp's commanders even after the massacre was finished.

It seems to defy human understanding that choosing *not* to kill innocent and unarmed Jews would be considered "nonconformist behavior," but in this case it was. Modern Western attitudes about individuality versus conformity are different than they were in the 1940s when the battalion faced this huge decision. At the time, conformity was a basic expectation even outside of the military or police force. Within the military and police force, however, the demands for conformity were intensified. Combined with a war and the us-versus-them attitude that naturally springs out of all wars, nonconformity was almost unthinkable. In this way, the title takes on a new light. These men were ordinary because they were tradesmen and family men, not zealous Nazis nor habituated killers—but perhaps their most ordinary characteristic was their inability to resist conforming to the group. Only a small percentage of the group had the courage and personal confidence to refuse to kill; the rest were sadly ordinary in their conformity and cowardice.

> What, then, is one to conclude? Most of all, one comes away from the story of Reserve Police Battalion 101 with great unease. This story of ordinary men is not the story of all men. The reserve policemen faced choices, and most of them committed terrible deeds. But those who killed cannot be absolved by the notion that anyone in the same situation would have done as they did. For even among them, some refused to kill and others stopped killing. Human responsibility is ultimately an individual matter.

Related Characters: Christopher R. Browning (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 188

Explanation and Analysis

It is difficult for Browning to identify what this story is meant to teach the people who hear it. How does one make sense of *why* these men obeyed barbaric orders? More importantly, how does one make sense of why those orders were given? This is why Browning says there is a sense of "great unease" surrounding the story. It forces the reader, as it forced Browning, to question what they would do in the same situation. It would almost be easier to explain if "This story of ordinary men" *had* been "the story of all men," because then there might be something more believable about their explanation that they felt like they had no choice. As it is, it's a story of a group of men who *did* have a choice, and "most of them committed terrible deeds" even though they could have chosen not to. Because of this, there can be no forgiveness for the men who chose to slaughter so many thousands of innocent people.

One conclusion Browning can easily come to is that "Human responsibility is ultimately an individual matter." As he has also explained earlier, many of the men in the battalion simply gave in to peer pressure and the desire to solidify their place in the group through conformity. They felt that their actions would be justified if they were acting as a group, but Browning disagrees—the men's individual choices are simply more meaningful (and therefore, for most of the group, more damning) than group actions.

❝ At the same time, however, the collective behavior of Reserve Police Battalion 101 has deeply disturbing implications. There are many societies afflicted by traditions of racism and caught in the siege mentality of war or threat of war. Everywhere society conditions people to respect and defer to authority, and indeed could scarcely function otherwise. Everywhere people seek career advancement. In every modern society, the complexity of life and the resulting bureaucratization and specialization attenuate the sense of personal responsibility of those implementing official policy. Within virtually every social collective, the peer group exerts tremendous pressures on behavior and sets moral norms. If the men of Reserve Battalion 101 could become killers under such circumstances, what group of men cannot?

Related Characters: Christopher R. Browning (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 189

Explanation and Analysis

Ultimately, Browning is not able to pinpoint just one or two reasons or circumstances that can explain why so many of the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 became hardened killers in less than two years. Instead, to his horror, the conditions that facilitated this transformation are seemingly as ordinary as the men themselves, and they exist in society even when it's not at war. Society "could scarcely function" if people weren't socialized and conditioned to "respect and defer to authority," but when the authorities have murderous intentions then deferring to authority can become morally wrong and lead one to commit atrocious acts that they likely wouldn't dream of doing otherwise. Some of the men in the battalion were career policemen even before the war, and so they saw agreeing to follow their orders as the right thing to do.

Furthermore, peer pressure exists everywhere, at every level of society and even at every age. Most people, especially young people, find it overwhelmingly difficult to go against the group and so they will do things they'd never do otherwise to gain acceptance and solidify their social position. These things all guide human behavior in everyday life and are intensified when people are broken up into groups and given a task to do, which is what happened when RPB 101 was sent to Poland together.

One of the most insidious circumstances Browning identifies is how "bureaucratization and specialization" can reduce an individual's sense of responsibility when it comes to creating and implementing policy. This can be most clearly seen in Trapp, who never had to kill anyone himself but did have to implement murderous orders. Over time, his own sense of personal responsibility diminished until, finally, he no longer experienced sadness and regret over delivering orders for mass executions or deportations. Equally guilty in the deaths of so many Jews during World War II were the men who created policies and then handed them down knowing that thousands of people would die as a direct result of their actions. However, because they weren't witnessing it themselves (although some of the more sadistic authorities like Himmler did go witness the violence and were rather delighted with it), they seemingly felt little regret or sadness over it.

In the final line, Browning asks, "If the men of Reserve Battalion 101 could become killers under such circumstances, what group of men cannot?" Given the prevalence of the circumstances that helped transform them into killers in modern daily life, the answer, unfortunately, is that most people within a group could become killers and only a sharp minority will abstain.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PREFACE

Historian Christopher Browning explains that more than half of all the victims of the Holocaust were killed between mid-March 1942 and mid-February 1943. A large proportion of that killing took place in Poland where Nazis rounded up the Jewish populations of major cities and murdered them. During this period, however, the majority of Polish Jews did not live in major cities, but in smaller towns and villages throughout the country. Browning wonders about how the Germans dealt with this more dispersed population of Polish Jews, who were logistically harder to round up because they weren't concentrated in one place.

While the events in this book take place during a conventional war (WWII), it is important to note that the violence and deaths that occurred during the Holocaust are not a part of that war—they were a systematic genocide associated with the separate race war that Hitler launched against European Jews years after his initial invasion of Poland. Browning's focus on how the Germans dealt with the Jews living in small villages and rural areas indicates that he is specifically interested in the process of carrying out the Final Solution, when the Nazis moved past simply concentrating Jews in ghettos to be sent to work camps and instead began to systematically murder them in mass shootings and extermination camps to create a totally judenfrei *("Jew-free") Poland.*

While searching for answers in the court records of Nazi war crimes trials, Browning stumbles on the indictment of Reserve Police Battalion 101. Browning has been studying the Holocaust for almost two decades, but he finds this indictment "singularly powerful and disturbing" in that the testimonies on which the indictment is based deal honestly with the fact that perpetrators *chose* to kill others and reveal the "human face" of the "killers" who destroyed so many Polish Jews. Of the nearly 500 members of this battalion, nearly half have interrogations on record, which allows Browning to reconstruct and analyze how joining the battalion transformed everyday people into "professional killers."

Browning introduces the primary focus of Ordinary Men*: the experiences of the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101. He focuses on this battalion because it helps fill a gap in the historical record (how the Nazis dealt with Polish Jews who did not live in major cities) and because he finds the documentation of the battalion's crimes to be extraordinarily powerful and disturbing, particularly because the files reveal the humanity of people who committed barbarous crimes. One can therefore assume that Browning's project is, in part, to communicate to readers the historical and moral reality that regular human beings—not monsters—chose to commit these crimes, which makes their brutality especially disturbing.*

Despite the depth of this source material, it's difficult for Browning to write with certainty about the history of this battalion. For one, there are few outside sources to confirm the testimonies of the unit's members. Witnesses to the activities of "itinerant killing units" like this battalion typically didn't have much contact with the men of the battalion (unlike survivors of ghettos and camps, who often knew the perpetrators well). Because of this, Browning relies heavily on the battalion members' own testimonies, which are often confusing and contradictory. After all, the testimonies were given in the 1960s, more than 20 years after the events in questions, so these men have faulty or repressed memories and some of them lie.

While Browning will devote his whole book to reconstructing the battalion's experiences, he acknowledges that this is a complicated task. He has done his best to weigh the evidence, but some of what he will present in this book is based on imperfect sources. This is a common problem in writing about the Holocaust, particularly since the Nazis destroyed many of their records and tried to hide the evidence of their crimes. It is morally complicated to take the perpetrators' accounts of their activities as fact (as Browning generally does), especially since their testimony was given in a court of law as they faced criminal indictment, which incentivized them to minimize their actions. Perhaps Browning previously noted how candid these testimonies seem in order to justify using them as a foundational source of this book.

Browning understands that writing a history of the day-to-day lives of men in a Nazi killing battalion might divert attention from the scale of Nazi crimes and the horrors that their victims faced. Nonetheless, he finds it worthwhile to write this book because it helps to illuminate how the Nazi regime's policies of mass murder became a normal part of everyday life for rank-and-file Nazi perpetrators. Browning is also aware that narrating the everyday lives of these men might engender sympathy for them, because to write this kind of history requires Browning not to demonize Nazi murderers and instead acknowledge that they were human. He rejects, however, the notions that explaining behavior is equivalent to excusing it and that understanding someone means forgiving them; in fact, without explaining or understanding, one can only caricature Nazis, which does not allow for a real moral reckoning with their crimes.

Browning's insistence that mass murder became normal life for many Nazi perpetrators, who were themselves everyday people following orders at work, echoes Hannah Arendt's famous book Eichmann in Jerusalem, *which chronicled Nazi leader Adolf Eichmann's war crimes trial. Arendt's major observation—which was incredibly controversial at the time—was about the "banality of evil," or her perception that Eichmann was not a sociopath or a devoted ideologue, but in fact a mediocre man who didn't really think about what he was doing beyond his commonplace desire to get promoted at work. Browning is clearly in agreement with Arendt's analysis, as he is interested in how banal motives can lead ordinary people to commit monstrous acts. He acknowledges, however, that emphasizing the humanity of mass murderers could have an effect opposite of what he intends: engendering sympathy and minimizing the evil of their crimes. In justifying his approach, Browning makes an important differentiation between sympathy that leads to forgiveness and sympathy that leads to understanding. He is not seeking to forgive these men, but rather to understand their actions and motivations, which is important because it helps readers to understand what made the Holocaust possible (knowledge that might help prevent similar atrocities in the future).*

CHAPTER 1: ONE MORNING IN JÓZEFÓW

Early on the morning of July 13, 1942, the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101—most of whom are middle-aged family men from Hamburg's lower-middle- and working-classes—wake up in Biłgoraj, Poland and prepare to go to a town called Józefów. They aren't sure what they will have to do there, but it is home to around 1,800 Jews. The town is eerily quiet as the men pull in and gather around their 53-year-old commander, Major Wilhelm Trapp, whom some affectionately call Papa Trapp. With tears in his eyes, Trapp explains that the battalion will have to do a "frightfully unpleasant task," and that even though he doesn't like this assignment, it came from the highest authorities and must therefore be done. To motivate his men, Trapp reminds them that, back in Germany, there are bombs killing women and children.

The men are initially unsure why they're being called to the town and what they could possibly have to do there, which shows that the kind of killing that is about to happen is new in the course of the war. Furthermore, Trapp's emotions betray how unusual an order like this is and how disturbing he finds it. His tears and his personal commentary on how distasteful he finds the task at hand show that–at least initially—Trapp has a moral intuition that to carry out this order would be wrong. In light of this, it's interesting to see how he justifies it to himself and his men: he says that they must follow orders (thereby appealing to their sense of hierarchy and patriotism) and then he rouses them by mentioning bombs falling in their home country (albeit without mentioning that those doing the bombing were neither Polish nor Jewish—the bombs have nothing to do with the battalion's soon-to-be victims). Already, Browning is painting a picture of ordinary people shoving aside their strong moral objection to harming others by distorting the truth and casting the blame on others (they are just following the orders of their commanders, after all).

Trapp says that the town's Jews are working with resistance groups to undermine the German war effort. Because of this, the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 are to round up all the Jews in town, separate the healthy working-age men so they can be taken to work camps, and all the remaining Jews (women, children, the sick, and the elderly) are to be executed. After explaining these orders, Trapp does something extraordinary: he tells the battalion that if any of the older men don't think they can take part in this assignment, then they can opt out.

In the preface, Browning notes that part of what makes the testimony of this battalion so illuminating is that it shows the extent to which ordinary people chose *to commit egregious acts of violence. Here, readers see the first instance of such a choice: the older men in the battalion can opt out of the order to murder the town's Jews if it disturbs them too much. By showing this offer, Browning makes clear that the moral responsibility for the murder and imprisonment of the town's Jews falls entirely on the men of the battalion who chose to participate. Furthermore, this moment is ironic because of Trapp's invocation (just moments before) of German women and children being bombed back home. The suggestion here is that killing German women and children is morally beyond the pale, whereas killing Jewish women and children is simply their job, which (even if they might individually find it unpleasant) still needs to be done. This shows that—even while the men maintain some moral sense that this is wrong—they fundamentally do not see German and Polish/Jewish lives as equal.*

CHAPTER 2: THE ORDER POLICE

To explain how a group of middle-aged police officers end up receiving orders to shoot over 1,000 Jews, Browning must first provide some background on the Order Police and its role in the Nazis' plans to kill all European Jews. The Order Police has its roots in the period following the First World War, a time when—because of a provision in the Treaty of Versailles (which ended WWI)—Germany could not have a standing army larger than 100,000 men. After the establishment of the Nazi regime in 1933, a police unit of 56,000 men receives military training in a covert attempt to re-arm Germany, and in 1935, when Hitler begins building the German army in open defiance of the Treaty of Versailles, that police unit becomes part of the regular army. It is in this unit that many future German officers begin their military careers.

The Treaty of Versailles effectively ended World War I, but it included some heavy penalties for Germany in retaliation for their actions during the war. Among these was the clause that Germany couldn't create another large army. The anger over this clause in particular contributed to Germany's willingness to launch into another war—they hoped that if they could successfully assert themselves through war, then they could regain some of the land and other things they lost after WWI.

When Heinrich Himmler becomes chief of the German police in 1936, he establishes two new police branches: the Security Police (led by Reinhard Heydrich, which includes the Criminal Police for nonpolitical crimes and the Gestapo for political crimes) and the Order Police (led by Kurt Daluege, which includes city and municipal police, rural police, and police for small towns). When World War II begins in September 1939, the Order Police includes 131,000 men, many of whom enlisted in the Order Police with the understanding that this would make them ineligible for military conscription. However, many of their units are absorbed into the army anyway as the war gets underway.

Part of the appeal of joining the Order Police was the belief that those who joined would avoid being conscripted into the military, so it is ironic that so many of those same young men were then essentially handed over to the military when the war began. This also illustrates that the Order Police was seen as something of a refuge for people who didn't want to find themselves perpetrating any kind of violence in a war—cold-blooded killers didn't sign up for the Order Police, men who wanted to avoid violence and bloodshed did.

Although the Order Police wasn't initially created for military use, Germany's early success in World War II meant that the Order Police became an increasingly important source of manpower; many members of the Order Police are grouped into battalions and deployed to Poland, Czechoslovakia, Norway, and the Netherlands. In central Poland—an area called the General Government—the Order Police form regiments and supervise the Polish police. This is where Reserve Police Battalion 101 is stationed in 1942-1943.

The General Government area in Poland is extremely important because it is home to a large Jewish population and several of Poland's major cities, and also because hundreds of thousands of Poles and Jews are resettled there after being driven from their homes in Western Poland. The General Government is also where Himmler and Hitler begin carrying out their infamous Final Solution at extermination camps like Auschwitz and Treblinka. Being stationed in the General Government in 1942 (the beginning of the deadliest period of the Holocaust, as Browning points out in the opening pages) means that the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 will be witness to—and, indeed, take part in—some of the worst crimes against the Jews in the entire Holocaust.

The normal chain of command for the Order Police runs up to its head, Kurt Daluege, in Berlin. However, another chain of command—for any operations involving the Order Police working with the SS—runs up to Himmler. Himmler selects a "crony" of his—Odilo Globocnik, known for corruption and brutality—to oversee the Lublin district of the General Government, which is Reserve Police Battalion 101's district. This means that Order Police units in this area can receive orders from Daluege, from Himmler, or from Globocnik. This last chain of command will be central to implementing the Final Solution, the plan to exterminate all of Europe's Jews.

The first indication that Reserve Battalion 101 will have to commit barbarous violence is that Himmler selects a notoriously brutal man to head up the district office of the General Government in the area where Reserve Battalion 101 is stationed. Globocnik will be more than willing to deliver orders for mass executions, violent round ups, and brutal deportation processes, which makes it easier for Himmler to get him to help with extermination the Polish Jews as part of the Final Solution.

CHAPTER 3: THE ORDER POLICE AND THE FINAL SOLUTION: RUSSIA 1941

In Russia in 1941, the Order Police actively participates in the Final Solution for the first time. During preparations for Hitler's planned invasion of Russia, special units of the SS called the Einsatzgruppen are formed, mostly from members of the Security Police and its corresponding intelligence group—but three companies of an Order Police battalion are distributed through the Einsatzgruppen, as well. After the Russian invasion's initial success, Hitler announces that Germany will never withdraw from the area, and he says that the best way to "pacify" the newly won territory is to shoot anyone who so much as gives the military a dirty look. In response to Hitler's statement, Himmler adds thousands more SS and Order Police to the Einsatzgruppen and personally urges them to exterminate Russian Jews.

One of Hitler's primary motivators in invading Russia was to take over land that could be annexed into Germany to create more room for the German "master race" to spread out. In order to create this new area, Hitler also wanted to clear out all the undesirables that might prevent the area from becoming ethnically pure—namely, the Jews and Communists. Hitler's comment that it'd be better to shoot anyone who doesn't like what Germany is doing there is disturbing because he doesn't even seem to consider simply shipping these people elsewhere or isolating them to a smaller area. This shows Hitler's willingness to murder civilians on an extremely large scale very early on in the war.

The actual slaughter of Russian Jews, however, has already begun. Months earlier, in the city of Białystok, a German officer named Major Weis reveals to his men that he has orders that must be passed on verbally: first, that any Communist functionaries are to be denied prisoner of war status and executed; second, that military courts will no longer prosecute German violence against Russian civilians, including violence against entire villages. Weis clarifies that the war is against Jews and Bolsheviks, and, as he understands it, Hitler wants them to destroy the Jews. On June 27, Weis leads his men into the town and what begins as a violent pogrom targeting Jews quickly escalates into the systematic murder of between 2,000 and 2,200 Jewish people.

It is notable that Weis says he must pass on these orders verbally rather than printing orders on paper and mailing them out. This shows an early desire not to leave any hard evidence of orders to use unjustifiable violence against innocent civilians, which also implies a knowledge that what Weis is ordering is both legally and morally wrong. Nazi leaders knew from the beginning that these kinds of actions would incite the rest of the world's fury, and creating a paper trail would make it easier for the rest of the world to figure out exactly what was happening and take action to stop it. This event also reveals how military leaders began portraying all Jews as enemies of Germany early in the war, which would later help shooters justify killing even unarmed Jewish people.

The second massacre in Białystok occurs in July and seems to have been instigated by the top members of the SS: Heinrich Himmler, Kurt Daluege, and Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski. The action is carried out by Police Battalions 316 and 322, and the reports from Battalion 322 miraculously make their way out of the Soviet archives. The men of Police Battalion 322 were urged to be ruthless and to treat the Slavic people as inferiors. Two days after entering Białystok, the men are ordered to search for Bolsheviks and Communists, but apparently they only search the Jewish quarter and the 22 people who are killed are almost exclusively Jewish. That same day, Himmler and Daluege visit and Daluege praises the men for helping "defeat [...] the world enemy." He identifies this enemy as Bolshevism.

Bolshevism is the form of communism established in Russia during the 1910s when the Bolsheviks revolted against the Czar. It was easy for most Germans to accept the Bolsheviks as an enemy, which in turn made it easier to justify killing anyone believed to be a Bolshevik or a Bolshevik supporter. The Nazi commanders cunningly associated Jews with Bolshevism, and they thereby made Jews the enemy, then targeted Jews during actions that were ostensibly supposed to be against Bolsheviks. I

Two days after Daluege's speech, a confidential document reveals new orders to execute all Jews between 17 and 45 who have been convicted of plundering. The order acknowledges that the men who carry out these executions might feel down afterwards, and so commanders should distract them by throwing social events. On July 12, all Jewish men fitting into that age group (about 3,000 men) are rounded up, brought to a nearby stadium, and executed over the next two days. Over the next few months, the war diary for Police Battalion 322 shows that they sweep through Eastern Europe, systematically killing dozens if not hundreds of Jews at a time. Soon, Jewish women are included in the mass murders, first in a massacre at the ghetto in Minsk on September 1. In October, 2,208 Jewish men and women from the Mogilev ghetto are executed.

It is ironic that the Nazi commanders passing down these orders show so much concern for the psychological wellbeing of the men doing the shooting, but not the thousands of people that the men are going to systematically execute. It indicates that the commanders are not quite the unfeeling psychopaths people believe them to be—they do have a great deal of humanity, but it is selective and their empathy focuses almost exclusively on Germans. (It's also possible that this order is more strategic than empathetic—perhaps they simply want morale to be good enough to continue on with the war effort.) Little is known about how the men who actually did the shooting felt about their orders, but the sheer number of victims killed over an extended period shows that they, like the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101, grew used to the violence.


War diaries from commanders of Police Battalions in other regions of Russia tell a similar story of mass murder and violence. Friedrich Jeckeln, who commanded five battalions, kept a war diary highlighting 17 different mass murder events between August 19 and October 5—between 25 and 15,000 Jews are killed in each recorded event. A postwar judicial interrogation reveals even more mass murders committed that fall, climaxing in the Babi Yar massacre on September 29 and 30; 33,000 Jews were murdered in a ravine over those two days alone. The final shooting this investigation uncovers occurred in January 1942 in Kharkov.

It's important to note that these mass murders did not happen all at once, but over several months. This means that the violence is not something these men perpetrated just once and could then put out of their minds, but an ongoing ordeal that dominated their lives for a sustained period. Also notable is that there doesn't seem to be any record of the men being unwilling to commit the murders (or if there is Browning didn't include it), but presumably they at least got used to it over time.


The documentation of these events in Southern Russia provides an overview—though one lacking detail—of the role the Order Police played in mass executions of Jews. Documents from Northern Russia, however, provide a more detailed description of a mass execution carried out by members of two companies from Police Battalion 11 along with two companies of Lithuanian auxiliary police. They received orders for two mass murders, one of the Jews living in the village of Smolevichi and the next in a town called Slutsk, near Minsk. The justification for these murders was to deter civilians from helping resistance groups. The events in Slutsk are detailed in a report from the head of the German civil administration—a man named Carl—to his boss.

Once again, the commanders of these units associate their Jewish victims with enemies of Germany, this time by saying that killing Jews will deter the resistance fighters and anyone who might help them undermine the Germans. This implies that killing Jews not only eliminates an enemy of Germany, but deters others from becoming enemies as well.

On October 27, according to Carl's report, a lieutenant from Police Battalion 11 announces that the battalion has been ordered to eliminate all Jews in the city over the next two days. After meeting with the battalion commander, Carl believes that he has brokered a deal to spare the Jewish artisans and their families because they are vital to the area's economy. Nonetheless, the battalion commander defies him; Jews are pulled out of factories and workshops all over town.

Carl makes an interesting choice in how he tries to convince the Police Battalion to spare some of the Jews. He highlights how Jews are useful—they benefit the economy and provide an important service to the non-Jews living there—but doesn't try to argue against mass murder on the basis of basic humanity. This could reflect Carl's own belief that Jews are useful tools but not quite human, or it could mean he knew the policemen lacked humanity and wouldn't be moved by any consideration of the victims' feelings or pain. The latter possibility seems to be proven true by how brutally the policemen slaughtered and injured the Jews in the town.

This is, according to Carl's report, an event characterized by intense brutality. Bodies pile up in the streets, shootings can be heard all over the city, and even non-Jewish people are beaten. As for the mass killing, many people die, but some of the Jews who were shot in the forest climb out of the mass grave and crawl back to the town. Economically, the event is devastating. Many families are destroyed. Carl hopes the police battalion will never return.

The men who carry out this violent action in Slutsk seem to do so in an absolute frenzy—they indiscriminately beat whoever they can get their hands on, they show no concern for moving bodies out of the town, and they clearly put minimal effort into making sure they kill their victims because so many of them come crawling back into town that night after suffering in pain for hours. The cruelty is unimaginable, and it says a lot about how brutal the policemen in this battalion have become during their time in Russia.

Although there isn't extensive documentation of police battalions participating in the mass murder of Russian Jews, there is enough evidence to disprove certain claims from Order Police leadership. One disproven claim is that Daluege and Himmler provided the Order Police for guard duty, but never as executioners. The documentation clearly points to the Order Police as direct participants in numerous mass executions throughout the summer and fall of 1941. Moreover, Daluege's presence at Białystok and Minsk immediately before Order Police carried out mass murders in both cities indicates that he was instigating Order Police involvement in the murders.

Earlier, Browning points out that there was a conscious effort to avoid creating a paper trail by delivering orders orally instead of in print. After the war, the leaders of the Order Police clearly hoped that there'd be either no paper trail or too little of one for prosecutors to use to hold them accountable for their actions during the war. In some cases, there really wasn't documentation of Nazi war crimes, but in this case, luckily, there is.

After this period, relatively little is known about Order Police involvement in mass killings, probably because Order Police became less involved. One reason for this is that Order Police duties shifted towards other forms of warfare, while the military began to recruit collaborators from occupied regions to carry out mass killings. Shifting the killing to these collaborators (who formed Order Police auxiliary units) freed the core Order Police battalions from the "psychological burden" of murder—an issue that, at that time, had begun to extend beyond rank-and-file soldiers. A top SS officer who led troops during one of the massacres at Białystok, for instance, developed an "incapacitating illness" having to do with the shootings he led.

Once again German military leadership displays far more concern for their German soldiers and policemen than for anyone else. They select non-Germans to carry out mass killings so their German units won't be burdened with as many psychological scars. However, for many men, including the SS officer referenced here, it is too late to avoid psychological scarring. Despite the Nazis' attempts to convince the Germans that the Jews are subhuman creatures who threaten German security, the reality that many of the men face is that they are killing unarmed civilians, many of whom are women and children who remind them of their own wives and children back home (in fact, many men who opt out of participating in the firing squads in Reserve Police Battalion 101 say they can't go through with killing women and children because they are fathers and find it impossible to hurt children).

CHAPTER 4: THE ORDER POLICE AND THE FINAL SOLUTION: DEPORTATION

As Order Police involvement in the mass murders of Jews in Russia begins to wind down, Hitler and Heydrich give Daluege a new assignment: the Order Police must guard deportation trains from Germany into Eastern Europe. Heydrich and Daluege agree that the Security Police will round up Jews for deportation and the Order Police will guard the trains. Between 1941 and 1945, over 710 deportation trains take Jews from countries like Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia to Eastern European ghettos and concentration camps, many of which are in Poland. The Order Police provides guards for virtually all of these deportation trains.

For a long time, Eastern Europe was considered a sort of backward place—less developed, less educated, more primitive. Because of this, Nazis decided to send Jews to Eastern European countries. Furthermore, deporting Jews to different countries reinforced the image of Jews as foreign enemies living on land that rightfully belonged to Germany. Notably, the Order Police were given the less violent of the two jobs in the deportation process—they did not have to round up Jews, shoot those who couldn't walk, and force the rest to leave their homes behind, since the Security Police did that. All the Order Policemen had to do was keep an eye on the train (although this does include shooting any Jews who try to escape the train cars). This is one example of how the military makes use of the Order Police in nonviolent actions.

The reports written by Order Policemen who helped guard these deportations provide valuable insight into what the experience was like for both the guards and the Jews they deported. One such report, from a deportation of 1,000 Jews to the Sobibór extermination camp in June 1942, dwells on the lack of adequate rations (most of which went bad due to the heat), but it completely ignores the experience of the Jews (mostly women and children) trapped in overpacked train cars. However, the note about food going bad due to the heat is important because it also means the Jews—who were typically packed into inadequately ventilated train cars by the hundreds—likely suffered from heat exhaustion and dehydration, and were undoubtedly starving on the 61-hour trip.

This deportation doesn't seem violent and outwardly it is not, but Sobibór was a notorious death camp in Poland. While the Order Police aren't torturing or beating the Jews, they are still bringing them to their deaths. This makes the Order Policemen who guarded the trains complicit in the deaths of all the Jews on that train. The guard's lack of concern for the Jews shows that he doesn't see them as human beings, but merely as cargo that he is responsible for transporting.

Another report, this one written by an Order Policeman who guarded a transport of nearly over 8,000 Jews from Kołomyja to Galicia, illustrates an even more difficult journey in 1942. Desperate to escape the fate they knew awaited them at the extermination camp, many Jews tried to escape and the guards shot at them. Around 300 more Jews who appeared too weak to survive the trip were executed, and many of them were already suffering after enduring a forced 50-kilometer march to the train station. Jewish prisoners also experienced some "tremendously adverse effects" resulting from extreme heat, overpacked cars, and lack of food. Over the course of three days, about 2,000 Jews died in the cars before they arrived at Bełzec and the Order Police handed them over to the camp's officers.

The policeman chooses the phrase "tremendously adverse effects" to describe the large number of deaths that occurred due to starvation and thirst in extremely hot, overpacked train cars. His evident concern over losing so much of his cargo is somewhat ironic because he is bringing the Jews to Bełzec, a notorious extermination camp where they are scheduled to be killed in gas chambers anyway. This might be at least partially due to an "out of sight, out of mind" mentality. The man is concerned with the immediate necessity of counting bodies for his report and disposing of them, but he does not seem to have internalized the fact that he is bringing the Jews to their deaths because he will not witness them dying in the gas chambers. The somewhat detached way the guard speaks of the inhumane conditions the Jews live in on the train indicates that he may have become so used to this kind of suffering that it simply does not horrify him anymore.

These kinds of reports do not provide as much information about the inner workings of the Order Policemen's minds as Browning would like. The perpetrators he is most interested in are not "desk murderers" who can distance themselves and bury their feelings in bureaucratic paperwork, but those who directly victimize other people (for example, those who participate in firing squads). Browning wants to understand the psychological transformation they undergo over weeks and months of near constant participation in or proximity to extreme violence. To find these answers, Browning must return to the story of Reserve Police Battalion 101.

Browning is more interested in the experiences of the people with direct involvement in the violence (such as shooters, guards, ghetto clearing units, and so on) because they had to leap far more mental hurdles to cope with their actions than a "desk murderer" who simply signs a piece of paper or writes up a report. The general belief behind this is that doing the actual shooting has a different psychological effect than writing up and delivering orders from a distance. Reserve Police Battalion 101 provides an ideal case study because, as Browning has explained, there are numerous firsthand accounts of their actions given by the perpetrators themselves.

CHAPTER 5: RESERVE POLICE BATTALION 101

Reserve Police Battalion 101 is among the first units to be sent to Poland after the German invasion in 1939. At this stage, they're primarily supposed to help round up Polish soldiers and equipment, but later that year the battalion is reshaped, with career policemen transferred to other units and new members taking their place. Several months later, the battalion begins to carry out resettlement actions as part of Himmler and Hitler's plan to repopulate large areas of Poland with "pure" Germans. The battalion contributes to this by moving Jews, Poles, and Gypsies out of their towns and into central Poland, thus allowing Germans to take over the empty cities. Hitler and Himmler never truly achieve this goal, but hundreds of thousands of people are shuffled around nonetheless.

It's important to note that most of the men who make up Reserve Police Battalion 101 during these early actions in Poland are later transferred to different units and go to different places. Very few of these original battalion members are still part of the battalion in July 1942 when it is ordered to execute over 1,000 Jews in Józefów. One of the Nazis' most well-documented beliefs was that Germans constituted a master race, but they had to be pure Germans. Just one drop of Jewish or Gypsy blood was enough to ruin a person's purity. By moving the Poles, Gypsies, and Jews away, the Nazis were helping to ensure that the "pure" Germans who moved in wouldn't "dirty" their bloodline by marrying and/or having children with anyone impure. All of this happens before the creation and implementation of the Final Solution, so the actions here are not quite as violent as the ghetto clearings and deportations to death camps that will come later.

A battalion summary report shows that all the policemen took part in resettlement actions, during which they managed to evacuate 36,972 out of the desired 58,628 people. In his postwar interrogation, Bruno Probst, a drafted reservist in the battalion, recounts that these actions were his first experience with excessive violence. The commission in charge of this resettlement is partially made up of SS officers, who "mak[e] it clear" that "nothing [can] be done" with the sick and elderly, implying that they should be killed. Probst only remembers two people being killed by noncommissioned officers after receiving these instructions. Other men in the battalion remember the resettlement but not the violence. One policeman says he remembers the battalion forming shooting squads for the Security Police to kill Poles in one village.

At this point, even when officers grant permission to kill people, few men choose to actually kill anyone (at least according to Probst and the officers who don't remember any violence during the resettlement actions). This, however, seems to contradict another policeman's testimony that the men were formed into firing squads to kill Poles. This is a prime example of the struggle Browning faces in his research: sifting through different stories, trying to determine if someone is lying, repressing a memory, or maybe remembering something that really happened that other people coincidentally forgot.

After five months of resettlement actions, the battalion's next set of duties involves providing manpower for "pacification actions" by hunting down Poles who escaped deportation during the resettlement. After this, the battalion is put in charge of guarding 160,000 Jews in the Łódz ghetto. The men have orders to shoot any Jew that tries to get out or gets too close to the fence, which the men obey. In his file, Probst remembers watching guards on the ghetto's main thoroughfare who would set their watches ahead, using this as a pretext to seize Poles, accuse them of breaking curfew, and summarily beat them.

The men who make up the battalion at this time do seem to have become more violent than they were during resettlement actions. This is seen in their willingness to shoot people and unnecessarily harass Poles for entertainment. These events are still occurring before the implementation of the Final Solution, although Himmler, Hitler, and other top Nazi officials are starting to formulate and plan for it. This means that, at this point, the men aren't carrying out actions that are designed to make it easier to kill the Jews. The Germans are still only trying to segregate them from the general population, although many of the policemen are clearly becoming indifferent towards the Jews' and Poles' lives and have no qualms about using unnecessary violence against them.

In May 1941, the unit returns to Hamburg to be dissolved and rebuilt with drafted reservists before undergoing extensive retraining. The men remember very little from this time beyond helping deport Jews from Hamburg. Hans Keller states that securing a spot as a guard on these transports was desirable because it meant getting to travel. During one deportation transport, Probst notes that the Jews believe that their belongings are going to follow them to their destination and so they don't put up a fight about not carrying their own luggage. However, at their destination, Probst learns that the Jews will be killed, and so it doesn't matter where their luggage is. Not wanting to be around for the shooting, Lieutenant Gnade (the commander for the group of guards on the transport) gets his men on a late-night train out of town.

It is worth noting that, when the battalion is dissolved and rebuilt, most of the men are drafted. This means that many of the men didn't choose to become policemen and thus had little to no interest in taking on a policeman's duties. This is important because it establishes that most of the men did not willingly join the battalion with the intention of getting to see some wartime action. The battalion's involvement with the transports and what they have to say about it reveals that they probably only had a limited understanding of what fate awaited the Jews until they arrived at their destination. For the most part, the men see guarding the trains as an opportunity to travel, not a serious task that will result in the deaths of hundreds or thousands or people. Notably, Lieutenant Gnade doesn't even want to stay the night when he hears that there will be violence. This reveals his genuine distaste for violence before the action at Józefów.

In June 1942, the battalion gets word that they will do a tour of duty in Poland. Only a few of the men currently in the battalion were part of it during the early resettlement actions in Poland or have experience with deportations and other potentially violent actions. Aside from a few World War I veterans, only a few men have any military experience. With just over 500 men, the battalion is divided into three companies, two of which are commanded by police captains and one by a reserve lieutenant, and each company is divided into three platoons.

Very few of the men have any experience with war or violence, so they've never really been in a position to hurt or kill another person. This makes the rest of their story—how they become so used to violence that some of them eventually genuinely like it—all the more interesting and powerful because they seem so ordinary. They don't seem to be predisposed to violence and most of the men have little if any experience with violence.

The battalion commander, Major Trapp, is a WWI veteran and career policeman. Despite being an Alte Kämpfer, Trapp is never taken into the SS because, as Browning says, he isn't SS material. In fact, his two subordinate captains (both in the SS) resent Trapp for being weak. Both captains are in their 20s. Wolfgang Hoffmann, a long-time Nazi and SS lieutenant, commands Third Company. Julius Wohlauf, also a long time Nazi and SS lieutenant, commands First Company and acts as Trapp's deputy battalion commander. Little is known of Trapp's adjutant, First Lieutenant Hagen, other than that he is killed in 1943.

Trapp is one of the few WWI veterans in the battalion, so he presumably has experience both committing violence and having to deal with the psychological burden of it. He understands better than most what it's like to cope with the fact of having killed another human being. This might have something to do with why he's not considered SS material by Nazi officials—having been a part of violence, he makes no secret about being less than enthusiastic about ever doing it again. His two captains, however, are young SS men who clearly do have more enthusiasm for war and the possibility of violent action. As Browning explains earlier, only men who are both able-bodied and truly believe in Nazi ideology are allowed into the SS, so both Wohlauf and Hoffmann are presumably anti-Semitic and embrace the idea of getting rid of the Jews (either through deporting them elsewhere or even by killing them) to make more room for German expansion.

Additionally, there are seven reserve lieutenants who are not career policemen but are trained as officers in recognition of their education and career success as civilians: Hartwig Gnade, Paul Brand, Heinz Buchmann, Oscar Peters, Walter Hoppner, Hans Scheer, and Kurt Drucker. Five of them are Nazis, but none belong to the SS. Out of the 32 noncommissioned officers about whom Browning has information, 22 are Nazis and seven are in the SS; all are prewar recruits. The rest of the men seem to be very ordinary. Most come from the working or lower-middle classes. Very few belong to the middle class. The average age of these men is 39—too old for the military, this age group is still useful as policemen. About 25 percent are Nazis; six of them are Alte Kämpfer.

It is important to remember that simply being in the German army was not the same thing as being a Nazi. The Nazis were a political party and being a member of it typically indicates that a person believes in Nazi ideology. Most of the noncommissioned officers and lieutenants are Nazis, but this is probably because military leaders prefer to put Nazis in positions of power over those who aren't part of the party. It is also important that the overwhelming majority of the rest of the men are not Nazis, which implies that they don't have the same ideological beliefs and therefore do not necessarily have a deep-rooted and long-held hatred of the Jews.

In general, the men in this battalion are not particularly well-educated, wealthy, or financially independent. Most developed their moral norms in pre-Nazi Hamburg, which was never a hotbed of Nazi culture. Most even come from the social class that was least supportive of the Nazis' rise to power. Because of this, Browning concludes that the men in Reserve Police Battalion 101 are not ideal candidates for committing mass murder in support of the Nazi vision of a Jew-free utopia.

To Browning, it is clear that when this battalion was formed, it likely wasn't done with the intention *of using the men to commit mass murder. If the battalion was originally meant to carry out violent actions, then the men that the officials drafted and selected probably would have come from a different demographic, most likely one more supportive of Nazi ideals.*

CHAPTER 6: ARRIVAL IN POLAND

At some point in the summer of 1941, Himmler tells Globocnik about Hitler's plan to murder all the European Jews and puts Globocnik in charge of overseeing the extermination of the Jews in Poland's General Government. There are so many Jews in the General Government area, however, that they decide that they must find a new method of killing them that won't be as psychologically damaging to German soldiers and policemen as shooting them. This leads to the creation of extermination camps with gas chambers that require little manpower. One camp, Bełzec, is in Globocnik's district and gassing there begins in March 1942. Globocnik creates two more extermination camps (Sobibór and Treblinka), but he struggles to get enough manpower to run everything. He also needs far more men to help clear ghettos and round up the General Government's 2,000,000 Jews.

Globocnik already has a reputation for being very cruel, so it's no surprise that he's apparently so willing to take on the task of causing the deaths of over 2,000,000 Jews. Creating gas chambers for executions helps depersonalize the process of killing. Instead of coming face to face with victims one at a time and looking at them, men can simply shut a door and pour in a chemical to wipe out hundreds or thousands of people at once. Not only does this make killing psychologically easier for the men to bear, but it also saves a great deal of time and requires less manpower.

The mass murder campaign against Jews in Poland is dubbed Operation Reinhard to commemorate Reinhard Heydrich who died in Czechoslovakia. Globocnik sets up a special staff to help coordinate the mass killings, deportations, and extermination camps. Additionally, he can use men from the SS, Gestapo, and the Order Police to help carry his plans out. Three battalions of Order Police are stationed in the district of Lublin (including Reserve Police Battalion 101) and they are the largest pool of manpower at Globocnik's disposal. Additionally, Globocnik gets permission from Himmler to recruit Ukrainian, Latvian, and Lithuanian prisoners of war to help. These units are called Hilfswillige, or Hiwis for short. This is the second largest pool of manpower Globocnik can use.

Globocnik only has a limited number of men to use because at this time Poland wasn't as active of a war zone as Russia or France. Germany had invaded and conquered Poland several years earlier, so by now they were firmly established there and no longer feared any major trouble from Polish partisan forces or neighboring countries. This shortage of manpower explains why the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 find themselves having to carry out duties that would be more appropriate for the military (namely, conducting mass executions).

The mass murders begin in March 1942 when 90 percent of the Lublin ghetto is killed, and 11,000 to 12,000 more Jews are sent to extermination camps from nearby towns. The gas chambers at Sobibór begin operating in May. By June 18, about 100,000 Jews from the Lublin district and about 65,000 from neighboring areas have been gassed to death at Sobibór and Bełzec. At the same time, more Jews are being brought in from Germany and other countries. The transports and extermination camp murders halt for about 20 days due to a shortage of rolling stock, and during this lull, Reserve Police Battalion 101 arrives in the Lublin district.

As seen in the sheer number of people killed, the gas chambers prove an invaluable part of the Final Solution. With Globocnik's limited manpower, there would have been no way for him to exterminate so many Jews in such a short amount of time. It's worth noting that Reserve Police Battalion 101 enters Lublin during a lull in the violence—they aren't immediately thrown into massive ghetto clearings or mass murders, nor do they expect that they will be because the area seems comparatively peaceful when they first enter it.

On June 20, 1942, district officials tell the men in the battalion they will help with a special action in Poland. According to Browning, there is no reason to believe that any of the men know what their orders actually entail and they likely believe that they will just be carrying out guard duty. Upon arrival, the battalion sets up headquarters in Biłgoraj and the units spread out to nearby towns. During the lull in gassings at the camps, the battalion helps move Jews from smaller areas to larger ones that will make it easier to move them to camps when killings resume. However, Globocnik loses patience with this and decides to use firing squads to kill the Jews. He selects Reserve Police Battalion 101 to do this.

The process of moving Jews from smaller areas into a bigger one is called concentrating. This makes it easier for a large number of Jews to be rounded up all at once to be deported to an extermination or work camp. The men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 might not totally understand what will ultimately happen to the Jews they are concentrating; remember, the use of gas chambers in this area only began a few months before and the men themselves think they're in Poland to provide traditional police services, such as guard duty or helping enforce rules.

CHAPTER 7: INITIATION TO MASS MURDER: THE JÓZEFÓW MASSACRE

Around July 11, either Globocnik or someone in his office contacts Major Trapp and tells him that Reserve Police Battalion 101 will go to Józefów to round up 1,800 Jews. This time, however, they will only prepare the men for transport, the rest—mostly women and children—must be killed on the spot. On July 12, most of the battalion congregates in Biłgoraj (Captain Hoffman and Third Company's Third Platoon will arrive later) and Trapp tells the company commanders what their orders are. Lieutenant Hagen passes this information on to Buchmann, who tells Hagen that he refuses to take part in the shooting and asks for a different assignment. Hagen assigns Buchmann to escort the male Jews selected for the work camps. The company commanders tell their men to prepare for a major action in the morning, but do not tell them what it is.

These orders single out women, children, and the elderly as the primary targets of mass murder. This is particularly unsavory because traditionally women, children, and the elderly are supposed to be spared in war. These orders, then, can be used to differentiate conventional warfare from a race war. Killing women and children sends a very particular message—it's not enough to kill some Jews in the present, as the Nazis want to destroy their ability to have a future, as well. This is at least part of the reason that Buchmann asserts that he won't participate even before arriving in the town. His refusal is important because he asserts himself even before Trapp offers to excuse men who don't want to shoot, indicating that, even before this, at least some men knew that they could refuse to participate in violence.

The men arrive in Józefów very early the next morning, July 13. Trapp tells the rest of the men what the orders are and then makes his unusual offer: older men who don't think they can carry out the task will be excused. Otto-Julius Schimke of Third Company steps forward, which infuriates Hoffman. Trapp, however, takes Schimke under his protection, after which 10 or 12 more men step forward, turn in their rifles, and stand back to await new orders.

Some men decide to step forward only after seeing Trapp take Schimke under his protection. They clearly feared being punished for stepping out, but Trapp's action lets all the men know that they will be protected if they choose not to shoot. Because of this, no man can rightfully say that he chose to shoot because he was forced to out of fear of serious punishment.

After this, the battalion is divided up and given different tasks. Two platoons from Third Company surround the town to shoot anyone trying to escape, and most of the rest of the men will round up the Jews, but they must shoot infants and those too sick to walk. Some men will bring the Jews to the **marketplace** where policemen from First Company will select men for work camps, and the rest of First Company will form firing squads in the forest. Second Company and the Third Platoon of Third Company will shuttle Jews to the forest. Trapp, however, spends the rest of the day in town, which upsets the men. All day long people report seeing him openly weeping, pacing, and saying he doesn't like the orders.

It is interesting that Trapp believes that he can give his men the freedom to choose whether to participate in the shooting, but he feels that he himself does not have the same freedom of choice (presumably, if he felt like he could refuse orders then he would have, at least in this instance). Still, Trapp's strong emotional reaction differentiates him from many of the men and possibly explains why Trapp wasn't considered SS material—he is too humane. The men who step forward to take up Trapp's offer in the beginning also turn in their guns. This means that they probably have nothing to do with the process of rounding Jews up, either. Being excused from firing squads, then, also means they are excused from the rest of the violent actions the battalion carries out (at least on this occasion).

While Trapp weeps, his men carry out their gruesome task. The town is so small that everyone can hear everything, including gunshots as the elderly are executed. In an aside, Browning says that the men who were interrogated gave varying stories about whether infants were actually shot right away. Some report seeing dead babies in doorways, but others say they let the women take their small children to the **marketplace** and they weren't shot until later. Regardless, on that day First Company is given instructions about where to shoot to cause immediate death with minimal mess. Meanwhile, Hagen selects the "work Jews" who will go to the camps. Some unrest occurs as the first shots ring out; Jewish men weep as they realize that the policemen are killing the women and children.

Throughout Browning's reconstruction of events, he points out times when the men's memories become confused and there are major discrepancies between their versions of events. In this case, there's some trouble determining if the battalion really did kill infants in their houses as ordered. It's interesting that the men choose to debate this point because, ultimately, they did kill the infants—the only difference is if the infants and small children were killed in their house or in the forest. Still, the varying stories also imply a deep shame. No man wants to admit to having killed an infant even though many of them undoubtedly did.

First Sergeant Kammer leads the first firing squad into the forest outside of town. When the first truckload of Jews pulls up, the men come face to face with them as shooters pair off with their victims. The policemen lead the Jews into the forest, make them lie down in a row, and Kammer orders the men to fire in unison. As the first firing squad leaves the forest, the second firing squad enters with their victims. This pattern continues throughout the day and into the night, only briefly stopping for a midday break. At some point, someone brings the shooters some alcohol. The men shoot for so long that they lose track of how many people they've personally executed.

The shooters pair up with their victims face to face, thus making the murder intensely personal. This is sharply contrasted with mass executions using gas chambers, which is an impersonal method. Coming face to face with their victims forces the men into the full realization that they are murdering other human beings. Still, most of the men choose to go through with it. In fact, so many of the policemen participate that it would seem odd for any man to opt out. This helps explain why so few men do choose to stop shooting or never shoot in the first place.

In the morning when Trapp first makes his offer, only a few men immediately come forward to be excused before any violence begins. For many, the reality of what they might be told to do does not sink in until later. Some ask to be excused after being shown where to shoot their victims or after taking part in at least one execution. Kammer readily excuses men who ask, but Hoffmann initially refuses to excuse men who say they can't continue. As the men who can't continue trickle back into town, Trapp sends them to the barracks for the day. Instead of asking to be excused, some men evade firing squad duty by hiding or making themselves look busy elsewhere. Still, when Sergeant Steinmetz offers to excuse some of his men from firing squad duty before their first round of executions, nobody takes up his offer.

In the early part of Józefów massacre, the men start to reveal which of the three main groups they will fall into: those instinctually opposed to violence (like Schimke), those willing to murder just to follow orders or conform to the group, and those who have no problem murdering at all. Interestingly, Steinmetz repeats this offer after executions have started and the men have had a chance to really think about it, but none step forward. This shows that it really doesn't take long for many of the men to become so accustomed to the idea of violence that they are willing to perpetrate it themselves even after seeing its devastating consequences and being given an out.

To speed the execution up, Trapp orders more men to join the shooting squads. Sergeant Hergert devises a system of transporting Jews and strategically choosing execution sites that get progressively closer to the collection point, which also saves time. In his postwar interrogation, Hergert insists that nobody explicitly gave the men in his platoon the option of stepping out before the executions, but almost immediately men ask him to excuse them and he does. The frequent rotation of shooters in Lieutenant Drucker's platoon creates so much confusion that some men simply slip off or stay by the trucks to avoid having to shoot.

Once the men have been given the option to step out, even those who don't take it at the time apparently feel comfortable asking for it later. This shows that the men feel like they have the freedom to make their own choice even when it's not being explicitly given to them. More importantly, their commanders respect these choices (although, as Browning states earlier, Hoffmann initially does not) and do not formally punish anyone for either declaring their intention to stop shooting or for slyly evading it.

The largest number of shooters who are interrogated after the war come from the Third Platoon of Second Company, and they provide valuable insight into the effect the executions had on the men. One policeman remembers being unable to go through with even one execution, and another is only able to execute one elderly woman before asking to be excused. Another man remembers being excused after botching his first execution by aiming too high, causing his victim's skull to explode. Yet another man opts out of executing the Jews after meeting a German Jew, saying the business became so disgusting to him that he couldn't go on. Most men who step out do so very early on, but some wait until they have committed up to 20 executions before asking to be excused.

It is easy to understand why so many men ask to be excused from the firing squads within the first several rounds of executions—being faced with their victim or actually committing at least one execution is very traumatic. The most interesting case here is the man who couldn't go on shooting after meeting a German Jew. As Browning explained earlier, the men had been taught to consider Jews a foreign threat to German identity. However, the Jew that the man meets is *German—how can this person be both German* and *an enemy of Germany? This is a question the men will have to face several times during their time in Poland.*

As night approaches, the execution process becomes hectic and the forest is so full of corpses that there's hardly room for the Jews to lie down. After 17 hours of shooting, the men finally finish and prepare to return to their barracks, leaving the dead simply lying on the ground. Back at the barracks, the men drink heavily and studiously avoid talking about the executions while Trapp tries to console them. Several days later Trapp and Wohlauf lead First and Second Companies to another village and round up all the Jews. After a moment of hesitation in which both the policemen and the Jews fear there will be another mass execution, Trapp sends the Jews home and the men return to their barracks. A few days later, the men prepare for redeployment to another area of the Lublin district.

One of the most important things to remember about these mass executions is that they are not quick. Executions take hours—hours of shooting other human beings, watching mothers cry for their children, and children crying for their parents to help them. As traumatic as this obviously is, it also gives the men ample time to become habituated to violence and bloodshed. Even still, Trapp seems to be aware that if he and his superior officers aren't careful, the men will break down under the trauma of killing. This is why Trapp lets the Jews go home in the next village. Trapp is aware that, even if the men grow accustomed to violence, too much all at once might send them on a destructive downward spiral.

CHAPTER 8: REFLECTIONS ON A MASSACRE

Only about a dozen out of 500 men immediately take advantage of Trapp's offer to excuse themselves from the mass murder. One of the reasons so few men choose to step out right away is that they have very little time to truly comprehend what killing another person entails. Another major factor is the pressure on the individual to conform and not separate from the rest of the group. The battalion is fairly new and their bond is still forming, but the men still don't want to step out on their comrades—doing so would be an admission of weakness. Indeed, some men cite fear of being called a coward in their decision to shoot. One man, on the other hand, says his choice to shoot that day was actually cowardly.

When Trapp first gives the men their orders to execute the Jews in Józefów, they are in a group setting. This immediately creates a certain type of pressure on each person not to make a choice that will set him apart from the rest of the group. As members of the same battalion during a war, the men have an extraordinarily strong feeling of obligation to one another. It's almost like a betrayal to walk away from a task that might create a bigger burden for the others, and it creates a new burden for the person refusing because he knows that the others will accuse him of cowardice.

According to Browning, most of the interrogated policemen struggle to explain why they chose to shoot when Trapp offered them the chance to opt out in the beginning. Some try to rationalize that stepping out wouldn't have changed the Jews' fates and one man even claims that killing the children was an act of mercy that saved them from life without their parents. What's clearest to Browning is that the men were more concerned for their standing within the battalion than with any sense of shared humanity with their victims. The Jews were simply beyond their obligation, which is a common element of the "us" and "them" mentality of war.

The men view Jews as an "other" and that makes it easier to kill them and justify it afterwards. Furthermore, the Jews are an enemy, and it should be the enemy's job to look out for themselves, which is what Browning means when he says that the men felt like the Jews' lives were beyond their obligation. These attempts to rationalize their individual decisions to participate in the shooting squads, however, do not justify their actions. Even in the us-versus-them mentality of war, the enemy is typically armed, which means that they can fight back and defend themselves. These Jewish women and children were unarmed, and not all of them were foreign enemies, but rather natives of Germany who were sent to live in Poland.

According to Browning, even if the men in the battalion aren't actively anti-Semitic, they accept the idea that the Jews are the enemy. Trapp appeals to this when he urges the men to think of how "the enemy" is killing German women and children while they carry out a mass execution of Jewish women and children. Between the dozen men who step out before the shooting begins and the number of men who either evade or request to be excused after it commences, Browning estimates that between 10 and 20 percent of the battalion opt out of the firing squads at some point. This is a significant number, but it still means that 80 percent of the men who initially choose to shoot keep going until all 1,500 Jews are dead.

One of the reasons the Nazis are able to kill so many innocent Jewish people during the war is that they effectively convince so many of their soldiers, police, and ordinary citizens that Jews are Germany's true enemies. According to Browning, what the men in Reserve Police Battalion 101 feel for the Jews isn't hatred of their Jewishness, but opposition to an enemy; presumably, most men would feel a similar opposition towards Americans, Russians, or the British.

Although the men who admit to shooting and then stepping out at some point cite physical disgust as their reason for opting out, Browning argues that, given their general lack of education, one can't expect an eloquent explanation of abstract principles like ethics or politics. However, just because they don't know how to talk about these things doesn't mean their disgust doesn't have roots in a more humane instinct. Some even do express political or ethical opposition to violence against the Jews, but it's rare. A couple of men, including Buchmann, claim their lack of interest in a lifelong career or promotion makes it easier to step out.

Browning points out that the men's general lack of education might have a role in why so few of them describe having ethical or political concerns about killing unarmed people. Ironically, this same logic might explain why so many men didn't seem to have a problem shooting all day long. Unable to articulate or possibly even identify an ethical or political reason not to shoot, many men might have felt that backing out without a good reason would be shameful.

After the massacre, everyone in the battalion resents that they were asked to kill people, including the men who chose to shoot the whole time. Still, only a few actively try to get themselves out of being put in such a position again, including Buchmann, who asks Trapp to get him a transfer back to Hamburg. Trapp and his superiors do not worry about the few people with ethical opposition to violence; their concern is the widespread demoralization resulting from the killing process. To alleviate this psychological burden after Józefów, most of the battalion's duties include clearing ghettos rather than committing mass executions, and auxiliary units help with the worst violence. This makes it easier for the battalion to continue their participation in the Final Solution.

Earlier, Browning noted that the gas chambers are designed to help alleviate the psychological burden associated with firing squads. Reserve Police Battalion 101, then, is a perfect example of how demoralizing being on a firing squad is. The demoralization is worrying because if the men become too depressed, ashamed, and angry then they won't function well in any other part of their job. After the prevalence of mental illnesses like shell shock (which today might be diagnosed as PTSD) after World War I, military leaders were very aware of how important it is to tend to their men's mental health as well as physical health.

CHAPTER 9: ŁOMAZY: THE DESCENT OF SECOND COMPANY

When the battalion redeploys to the northern part of the Lublin district, Gnade and the Second Company settle in the area of Biała Podlaska. The Final Solution began in this area in June 1942 with the deportation of 3,000 Jews to Sobibór. When Gnade and his men arrive, hundreds of Jews are concentrated in the village of Łomazy. Gnade leads the battalion's first joint killing action with a unit of Hiwis from Trawniki against the Jews in Łomazy. On August 16, the day before the mass execution, Gnade prepares officials in the town and his own officers for the action—all the Jews are to be shot. Gnade's men are only supposed to round the Jews up for the Hiwis to shoot, although rounding the Jews up includes shooting the elderly and anyone too sick to walk.

This mass murder will take place just a little over a month after the massacre in Józefów, so the memory of this first massacre is still fresh in the men's minds. This is also the battalion's first murderous action that will include the Hiwis. Because the Hiwis are supposed to be the primary shooters in this situation (aside from killing the elderly during the roundup), the men from Reserve Police Battalion 101 will not have to carry as heavy of a psychological burden as they did after the Józefów massacre. However, the men are also going into this situation knowing that they're capable of killing. This makes it far less traumatic for them when they hear what the orders are.

After the roundup, about 60 or 70 of Łomazy's 1,700 Jews are taken into the woods to dig a mass grave. After hours of waiting, about 50 Hiwis come into the town, apparently already drunk and determined to get drunker. When the grave is finished, the Jews, Gnade's men, and the Hiwis slowly make their way to the forest. The Jews are ordered to undress (the women and some men keep their underclothes on) and then lie on the ground to wait.

From the beginning, the massacre at Łomazy takes a far more sadistic turn than Józefów. A group of Jews is forced to dig not only their own grave, but the grave their family and friends will be murdered in. They are also degraded by being forced to take their clothes off and lie on the ground wearing only their underwear or shifts. This is a humiliating experience that makes their final moments all the more painful.

Most of the men's testimonies indicate that Gnade is a virulent anti-Semite with an unpredictable temper that grows steadily worse when he drinks. On the day of the massacre in Łomazy, Gnade is very drunk, which evidently brings out his sadistic side. Thus far in the war, Gnade seemed, at best, indifferent to violence, but at Łomazy he forces elderly Jewish men to undress and crawl in the dirt and mud for a while before getting his noncommissioned officers to help him beat the men with clubs. Just before the shooting, Gnade personally chases Jews from the undressing area to the grave.

Gnade seems to undergo an extreme and rapid transformation. Earlier, he was so concerned about witnessing violence that he got his men on a train and left before the Jews they'd just deported were shot. Now, however, he revels in excessive violence and deliberately humiliates the Jews. Gnade doesn't consider the Jews less-than-human, though. He revels in their very human emotions—humiliation, fear, pain, and despair. He toys with their feelings and derives a real pleasure from it. Given this, it's no wonder that his men describe him as an anti-Semite.

The Jews are forced to run into the mass grave in groups and the Hiwis excitedly shoot them, then they force the next group to scramble over a pile of corpses to get into the empty part of the pit. Eventually, the Jews must lie on top of dead friends and family. As the bodies pile up, the blood mixes with dirt and groundwater; soon, the shooters in the grave are standing in a knee-deep puddle of blood and mud. As the Hiwis start passing out from drunkenness, Gnade orders his own men to start shooting. The men are forced to take a different approach than the Hiwis because the pool of blood and mud is too deep and bodies—some of which are still moving—are floating everywhere.

The shooting at Józefów was bloody, but during the Łomazy massacre there are literally rivers of blood and the men are witnessing it all happen up close. The streak of sadism that characterizes the preparatory stage of the massacre continues during the shooting. In Józefów, the men attempt to bring their victims to areas of the forest where they won't see previous victims' bodies. During this massacre, however, the men exhibit total indifference to how their victims feel—there is no attempt to make them comfortable, alleviate their fear, or treat them with any dignity or respect. The men don't even make sure they are actually killing the Jews as they shoot, as shown by how many continue moving in the grave.

Gnade's men continue shooting until the Hiwis wake up enough to resume their task. Once the execution is over, the work Jews cover the grave with dirt and then the Hiwis shoot them as well. The thin layer of dirt over the grave continues to move. A few days later there's a sweep of the town to root out any Jews who evaded the initial execution and Gnade sends orders for them to be shot.

Gnade's men are willing to shoot as long as there's no other way to get the task at hand done, but once the Hiwis wake up they willingly stop and let them finish. This implies that, at least at this point, they're not as enthusiastic and eager to commit violence as their commander seems to be. The number of Jews who survive the shooting and are buried alive indicate that the shooters during this massacre are unconcerned with making sure their victims die quickly and without suffering. In other words, it seems like the men who take part in this massacre are finding it easier to put the suffering of others out of their minds.

The massacre at Łomazy differs from the one at Józefów in a few important ways. For example, more Jews try to escape, and the men steal their victims' valuables and clothes. This massacre is easier for the men of Gnade's company to deal with psychologically because the Hiwis do most of the shooting. Even the men who do eventually shoot seem to find it easier because they don't pair off with their victims, thus depersonalizing the process. Also, it doesn't take as long to finish the massacre, and the men are already somewhat habituated to violence because of their participation in the killing at Józefów.

Browning says that, at this point, the men are already habituated to violence, but it seems like they're also becoming habituated or even enthusiastic about other morally reprehensible things. They plunder their victims' belongings for fun, which indicates a growing callousness about the lives that are lost. No longer consumed with shame, the men see these murders as an opportunity to enrich themselves. Furthermore, they don't feel the same connection to their victims because they're not paired off with them face to face with time to have conversations and get to know more about them as they did at Józefów.

Another major difference between the two massacres is that the men experience a sort of "psychological relief" because Gnade did not explicitly give them the option to opt out of shooting the way Trapp did at Józefów. Without this option, the men assigned to firing squads are not burdened with the knowledge that they chose to do something terrible. Of course, this doesn't mean that the men didn't have a choice; some slipped off, but in small numbers. Most didn't even try to avoid shooting, because following orders falls in line with their natural desire to conform to the majority.

The men do not want to be confronted with the reality that they all have a choice here. Having a choice implies personal responsibility for their actions, and as willing as the men are to murder other people when they are ordered to, they still have some sense that it's immoral and that people back home will likely condemn them for the part they played in these massacres. By not offering a choice, Gnade frees them from the burden of admitting that they've consciously chosen to kill unarmed Jews. From now on, they can say that, in this event, they simply followed orders, thus placing the blame on someone else instead of accepting it for themselves.

Trapp didn't just offer to excuse men from participating in violence, he set a tone for the massacre at Józefów—he didn't want to hurt those who had to die, and his own pain at just giving the orders was evident. For this reason, the massacre was far more emotionally draining than later ones. Later "Jewish actions" are led by company or platoon leaders and they get to set the tone for those events. In this case, Gnade's sadism seems to have rubbed off on his men, and it helps them take an important step towards becoming truly callous killers.

One of the primary themes in Ordinary Men *is how powerful the desire to conform is. In this case, the men seem to be conforming and reacting to the tone their commanders set. When Trapp showed his despair, the men felt that it was okay for them to feel the same thing and they expressed it. Gnade expressed enthusiasm and sadism, so the men adopted those feelings (at least to some degree) and had far less trouble doing cruel and sadistic things (and experienced far less guilt afterwards).*

CHAPTER 10: THE AUGUST DEPORTATIONS TO TREBLINKA

Łomazy is far from any railway station, which is why the Jews were executed there instead of being deported to an extermination camp. Most of the rest of the Jews in the district lived in ghettos near railways, so Reserve Police Battalion 101's primary duties involved ghetto clearings and deportations instead of murder. Steinmetz's Third Platoon of Second Company is stationed in Parczew, home to about 5,000 Jews, when orders come down to round them up for deportation with the help of First Company and a unit of Hiwis. In Trapp's speech before the action, he "'indirectly' but without ambiguity" tells the men that all the old, frail, and sick must be shot on the spot, the rest are to march to the train station about three kilometers away. On the first day about 3,000 Jews are deported to Treblinka; several days later, the remaining 2,000 Jews follow.

Extermination camps like Treblinka are specifically designed to help make Poland and eventually the rest of Europe judenfrei. *The Jews who are sent there are not sent to work; they are only there to be killed. Helping round up and load Jews onto the deportation trains makes the men in Reserve Police Battalion 101 complicit in their murder. The gas chambers at Treblinka aren't a heavily guarded secret by this time, so the men know that the Jews they're rounding up will be killed. However, because they're not doing the killing themselves, it's easier for the men to create a psychological distance between their actions and what the results of those actions will be—namely, that people, including women and young children, will be killed.*

The roundups and deportations are largely uneventful. Some men even feel that the Hiwis are unnecessary during the second roundup. They all know where the Jews are going and what will happen when they get there; in this instance, putting the Jews' inevitable deaths out of sight seems to put them out of mind, as well. The clearing of the ghetto at Międzyrzec (home to 12,000 Jews, 11,000 of which are deported) just a few days later is far more memorable.

As the men in Reserve Police Battalion 101 become more and more active in the process of rounding up and deporting Jews to the death camps, the events begin blending together. The men get so used to casual violence and the standing order to shoot anyone who can't march to the station that the violence only becomes noteworthy when there's an abnormally large body count or if it's particularly bloody.

As a "transit ghetto," Międzyrzec must be periodically emptied to make room for more Jews. Reserve Police Battalion 101's First Company, First Platoon of Third Company, and Third Platoon of Second Company all show up to clear the ghetto. First Sergeant Kammer helps supervise and Captain Wohlauf, along with his pregnant young wife, arrives to help. Wohlauf's past career is full of difficulties. He is bright but lacks discipline and is very full of himself. Two of his past commanders simply gave up trying to work with him and shuffled him around before he landed under Trapp's command. Trapp helps promote Wohlauf's career, securing his company command and making him a deputy commander. The men, however, mock him for being so conceited and they believe that Wohlauf brought his wife to show off how much power he has.

A "transit ghetto" is a place where Jews are concentrated until it's time to deport them to the extermination camps. Wohlauf makes an odd choice by bringing his wife to a ghetto clearing. Even the uneventful ones involve the shooting deaths of elderly Jews or those too sick to walk—it is always violent, and presumably it'd be shocking to a young woman who's not used to violence. It's a testament to how habituated Wohlauf has become to violence that he apparently thinks she'll be more impressed than disgusted with what goes on there.

After arriving in Międzyrzec, Wohlauf sends some men out on outer guard duty but most are sent into the ghetto to help the Hiwis clear it with the usual order to shoot the old and sick. The Hiwis (who are quite drunk and trigger happy) and the policemen drive the Jews into the **marketplace**, where they're forced to sit or stand under the hot sun and are occasionally beaten. Wohlauf's wife is seen standing nearby, watching closely.

The Hiwis are usually only called in when they know something particularly violent will need to be done. This makes Wohlauf's choice to bring his wife even more questionable—if the Hiwis are there, the action is bound to be bloody. Furthermore, the men from the battalion might be more willing to use more violence because they are working with an extremely violent group. In other words, a mob mentality might settle in making the men willing to inflict unnecessary pain or humiliation.

After several hours, the roundup is finished. The policemen and Hiwis march the Jews toward the train station, shooting all those who are too tired to walk. At the train station, the men beat and whip the Jews to force them into overcrowded cars and then leave before the train pulls out. This is the largest deportation the battalion carries out in Poland. While the men themselves don't know how many people they shot, the Jews that are left behind to bury the corpses say it was 960. This number is notable because it means about nine percent of the Jews in the ghetto were killed. Comparatively, when the Warsaw ghetto (Poland's largest) was cleared, only 2 percent of the Jews were killed. The Jews in Międzyrzec, then, were brutally treated in a way that left an imprint on even the most calloused men's minds.

This roundup is even more violent than usual. This shows that a large number of the men are becoming more like Lieutenant Gnade, deriving pleasure from using violence against the Jews. Violence for these men has become, at best, ordinary and routine. It's part of the job now. One aspect of violence becoming routine is that the murders they commit in the ghettos are not personal, one-on-one events with the victims. They can shoot indiscriminately or without really paying attention to what they're doing. For most of these men, there is no longer any question whether it's right or wrong.

Part of the reason the ghetto clearing at Międzyrzec is so violent is that there are hundreds more policemen and Hiwis than usual. Furthermore, there are more than twice as many Jews to round up, which, combined with increased manpower, leads to increased brutality. So many Jews are sent to Treblinka at once—not just from Międzyrzec, but also Warsaw and Radom—that the killing process breaks down and it takes weeks to fix it. This offers the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 a brief respite from killing.

The more people there are shooting, the greater pressure the men feel to conform to the group. Furthermore, a sort of mob mentality sets in—the men begin committing violent crimes that they'd never commit alone or under any other circumstances. In other words, there is a sense of safety in numbers and individual men have less of an issue being extraordinarily violent, either just to get the job done or for their personal enjoyment.

CHAPTER 11: LATE-SEPTEMBER SHOOTINGS

Shortly before deportations resume in the northern Lublin district, Reserve Police Battalion 101 becomes involved in more mass shootings. The first takes place in Serokomla, a village not far from Kock. In September 1942, Lieutenant Brand's platoon of First Company rounds up all the Jews in nearby areas and brings them into the village. A few days later, the same platoon joins other units from First Company under Captain Wohlauf and the First Platoon of Third Company outside of town. Wohlauf sends men with machine guns up into some nearby hills and other vantage points, he sends a few more men to cordon off the area, and the rest of First Company goes into town to collect the Jews. Wohlauf doesn't initially explain the true nature of their orders, but Sergeant Keller states that it is obvious that the Jews will be killed.

The men have learned to recognize when they're going to be ordered to kill Jews even before the orders are explicitly stated. Still, most of them no longer feel any horror at this knowledge—they recognize that it's going to happen and now it's just part of the job. However, it's still important to keep in mind that there are men who still actively choose not to take part, either by asking to be excused or by evading being chosen for a firing squad. In fact, because the men have become so good at figuring out when a mass execution is about to occur, they have even more time to make up their minds whether to participate in the killing or get out of it.

About 200 to 300 Jews are rounded up in town before Wohlauf orders the men to bring them to some nearby gravel pits to be shot. Without the help of Hiwis, the policemen carry out the shooting the way they did in Józefów, matching up individual shooters with their victims and shooting about 20 or 30 Jews at a time. As the pile of corpses in the pit grows, subsequent groups have to look down on their dead friends and family before being shot themselves. Some of the men complain of Wohlauf's absence because he spends the day hanging out with Polish police in town. The shooting ends at about 3:00 in the afternoon. The men leave without burying the bodies and enjoy a special ration of alcohol back at their barracks.

During the massacre in Józefów, the men were careful to try to bring the people they were murdering to parts of the forest where they wouldn't have to see the bodies of people they knew. Now, the men have no problem making their victims see the bodies of the ones who were shot before. In the beginning, then, the men wanted to save their victims all the psychological distress that they could. Now, the men have no problem causing immense psychological pain. There might also be practical reasons for not concerning themselves with their victims' feelings—the whole process of rounding up and executing them only takes a few hours instead of nearly a whole day, in part because the men save time by not finding new execution sites for each round of victims (this and there are fewer victims this time).

Three days after the Serokomla massacre, one of the battalion's men is ambushed and killed near Talcyn on his way back to his barracks. Trapp sends word that the office in Lublin has ordered a retaliation shooting of 200 people in Talcyn. The same units that conducted the massacre at Serokomla meet once again to carry out these orders (everyone except Wohlauf, who briefly returns to Germany). Trapp and Hagen are present to lead the men. Working in conjunction with the mayor, Trapp selects only the poorest citizens to be shot and the men carry out orders; 78 Poles are killed. When they stop for lunch on their way back to the barracks, however, Trapp calls and says they must kill more people to meet the quota. Instead of killing Poles, Trapp orders the men to shoot Jews from the Kock ghetto.

During the war, if civilians in an occupied territory killed a German soldier or policeman then the Germans would retaliate by killing large numbers of people from the same village as the perpetrators. Trapp's decisions and demeanor here are a far cry from what he was like at Józefów. He doesn't mind killing the Poles because, in this instance, he feels totally justified in seeing the Poles as an enemy—after all, they killed one of his men. However, he only chooses the most "disposable" citizens of Talcyn and then chooses to make up the rest of his quota (and then some) by ordering the men to kill Jews, who are not part of the group that killed the policeman. Ostensibly, he made this choice to maintain good relations with the Polish natives, which shows that he values Jewish lives less than Polish lives, even though he has more legitimate grounds to consider the Poles (at least in this village) his enemies. On the other hand, this is a strategic move that lessens the likelihood of Poles from Talcyn deciding to retaliate.

In Kock, Jews are mercilessly rounded up and those who can't walk to the shooting site are killed on the spot. One policeman takes advantage of the confusion to simply walk around and avoid shooting, since the massacre is distasteful to him. The captured Jews are led to a walled courtyard and Lieutenant Brand gives orders for them to be shot in groups of 30. Trapp sends word to Lublin that three bandits, 78 Poles, and 180 Jews are killed in this retaliation shooting. It's clear that Trapp, who cried throughout the massacre at Józefów and didn't like the idea of killing random Poles, has no qualms shooting even more Jews than is necessary to meet his quota.

Browning particularly notes one man who chooses to walk through the ghetto without shooting because he doesn't like the violence. This is an important reminder that not all of the men were hardened killers, even though the majority were. It is noteworthy that the man still tries to make himself look busy by walking through the ghetto instead of just sitting somewhere and watching. By walking around, he can appear busy and people will be less likely to accuse him of doing nothing. Trapp has successfully put enough psychological distance between himself and what he's asking others to do that he no longer recognizes the human cost of his orders.

Trapp may have reconciled himself to the violence, but Buchmann evidently has not. After the Józefów massacre, Buchmann tells Trapp that he won't take part in any Jewish actions and asks for a transfer back to Hamburg, but Trapp can't get him one immediately. Instead, Trapp does what he can to protect Buchmann and spare him participation in the violence. Sergeant Grund, Buchmann's deputy, helps in this by indicating when the men are assigned to Jewish actions so that Buchmann can stay out of it. However, since the Talcyn shooting didn't start out as a Jewish action, Buchmann is there for it, and he is extremely indignant about Trapp's orders. Kammer berates some of Buchmann's men who say they don't want to shoot either but he lets them step out—as long as there are enough willing shooters, it is easier not to make trouble over those who aren't willing.

Although there are a lot of men who keep themselves out of the firing squads, Buchmann is the only man who consistently verbalizes both his own unwillingness to be a part of the violence and criticism of the violence itself. In this, Buchmann makes himself a radical nonconformist within the battalion. His words and actions inspire others to stand up and demand to be excused from the violence, as well. It's also noteworthy that Kammer excuses them even though he clearly doesn't want to (shown by how he berates them beforehand instead of simply letting them off). Throughout the battalion's time in Poland, this is the worst the men can justifiably expect from their commanders if they don't want to shoot. They might get insulted, but they don't face heavy punishments for not wanting to kill unarmed civilians. This is because their commanders are unwilling to create more problems for themselves by harassing the minority of men who don't want to participate.

CHAPTER 12: THE DEPORTATIONS RESUME

By the end of September 1942, Reserve Police Battalion 101 has participated in the shooting of 4,600 Jews and 78 Poles. Additionally, they have helped deport about 15,000 Jews to Treblinka. These events took place over eight actions and three months, and most were done without the help of Hiwis. Between the beginning of October and early November, however, the action speeds up—events blur together, and the men struggle to separate individual ghetto clearings in their minds. To reconstruct the following events as correctly as possible, Browning uses research done by other historians and institutions.

The action speeds up during this time (late 1942) because Globocnik begins really pushing hard to carry out his part of Hitler's Final Solution—he wants to quickly move the Jews to extermination camps so he can kill them and establish a Jew-free district in Poland. It's also important to remember that Browning is relying heavily on testimonies from men who are trying to recall events that took place over 20 years earlier—their memories are bound to be distorted and biased because no man wants to admit that, by this point in 1942, they were nearly all guilty of having participated in one of the world genocides in modern history.

In early September, a new security zone is created, allowing for the transfer of the First and Second Platoons of Gnade's Second Company into new territory, including Międzyrzec and Komarówka. In the fall, the Międzyrzec ghetto is restocked with Jews from nearby areas. The policemen are active in these transports, but the events blur together. One deportation is memorable because a Jewish lady on the transport owned a movie theater in Hamburg that one of the men used to frequent. This shuffling around and concentrating of the Jews is a prelude to renewed transports to Treblinka as part of the mission to make Lublin judenfrei. Reserve Police Battalion 101 provides the bulk of the manpower in rounding up and deporting Jews from Radzyn county in October.

In the period leading up to the beginning of World War II, Germans were taught to see all of their enemies as foreign, starting with Bolsheviks in Russia and soon expanding to the countries who fought against Germany (namely America and England). The Nazis successfully incorporated Jews into the general image of a foreign enemy, but here the men meet another Jew from Germany and again they are faced with the realization that somehow one could be both a German and an enemy. That is why this meeting (and every other time the men meet a Jew from Germany) stands out in so many minds. At this point, the men have no doubt about what is going on in Poland—the Final Solution is not as big of a secret as it once was, and by now the men in the battalion have had plenty of time to notice that they are following a pattern of rounding Jews up from small areas, concentrating them in large ones, and then deporting them to known extermination camps.

Six weeks of continuous ghetto clearings, deportations, and shootings begin on October 1. By the time it's over, Reserve Police Battalion 101 has helped deport over 27,000 Jews to Treblinka and has killed around 1,000 more in the process. What the policemen remember about these actions is extremely varied. Apparently, there are relatively few shootings on the spot, although shortly after the first transport, Steinmetz's Third Platoon of Second Company shoots 100 Jews who miss the deportation train. During the clearing of Międzyrzec, Gnade's Second Company and Drucker's Second Platoon join up with some Hiwis to drive the Jews into the main square before heading to the train station. Gnade's first sergeant says that Gnade apparently gets pleasure out of whipping and shooting the Jews at the train station.

Ghetto clearings offer each man a lot more freedom to choose whether to use violence against the unarmed Jews. As seen in an earlier testimony, it is possible to simply walk around in the ghetto without ever hurting or killing anyone. Still, most men clearly choose to either shoot or, like Gnade, take it a step further by hurting the Jews just for the sake of hurting them. Once again someone says that Gnade seems to enjoy the pain he inflicts on others, which raises the question of whether he was somehow predisposed to violence before joining the battalion. If so, the war gives Gnade and other people like him the opportunity to willfully inflict both physical and psychological pain on other people without fear of punishment.

At the train station, no amount of violence can make all the Jews fit into the limited number of train cars, so Gnade orders Drucker to shoot the 150 Jews that won't fit. First Sergeant Ostmann brings the shooters some vodka and jokes with at least one of the men who has thus far evaded shooting that he'll have to be ready to shoot the women. All the men shoot about seven or eight times that night. One Jewish man lunges at Drucker, but he is quickly subdued and shot. The rest of the Jews waiting to be shot are very emaciated and quiet, according to one guard.

In this situation, the men haven't received orders from Lublin to shoot the Jews—they've decided on their own that it would be better to shoot them. This means they've moved beyond just being willing to murder when they have instructions to do so. In this case, they choose to do it independently of formal orders—and, considering Gnade's sadistic streak, it is possible that they're doing it because they like it, not because they feel like they have to. It is also clear that some of the men who didn't shoot at Józefów are beginning to shoot now. Ostmann jokes with one man that he'll have to shoot, but given the well established history of commanders saying these things and still excusing men who don't want to shoot, there's no reason to believe the man would have been forced to participate or harshly punished if he chose not to.

It's hard to determine how many victims there are in this deportation, but a few days later the Międzyrzec ghetto is restocked with 2,000 to 3,000 Jews. The ghetto is once again cleared in late October and early November. Gnade, now completely in charge of these actions, oversees both clearings and introduces a new step in the deportation process: the Jews are forced to strip and then the policemen search them for valuables, after which the Jews are forced to march to the train station without clothes despite the extreme cold. Between August and September, Reserve Police Battalion 101 helps deport 25,000 Jews to Treblinka.

Gnade has made the Jews he's about to execute take their clothes off in the past, but in this case, they're taking their clothes off and then going on a train. Gnade is thus making them endure a much longer period of discomfort and humiliation. This would have been extremely traumatic for women, especially because the men would search their bodies for valuables (jewelry, for instance). Gnade's sadism seems to increase in proportion to how much power he has over a given situation. In these situations, he is the highest-ranking officer and he derives pleasure from exerting his power to hurt others and to order his men to cause their victims unnecessary pain and humiliation. The men are sending tens of thousands of Jews to extermination camps in a very short amount of time because they are reaching the height of the Final Solution process in their district.

Meanwhile, First Company carries out similar actions in Łuków, but Wohlauf is no longer their leader. After an illness and the deaths of his brother and father, Wohlauf returns to Germany permanently. His men, however, carry out deportations from Łuków with help from Steinmetz's men and a unit of Hiwis. A total of 7,000 Jews are deported over two days, but the events seem to have been more "humane" than the deportations from Międzyrzec—relatively little shooting and violence. After these deportations, battalion headquarters moves to Łuków and Steinmetz's platoon returns to Parczew. About 700 Jews from Kock transfer to Łuków and the final deportation begins the next morning. About 3,000 to 4,000 Jews are deported to Treblinka and 50 people are killed in retaliation for the Jewish ghetto police's failure to report hidden Jews.

The men describe the deportations at Łuków as "humane," but this description must be understood in the context of how habituated they have become to violence at this point. Most of the men no longer seem to think twice about shooting someone (especially the sick and elderly) and some of them have developed a real liking for murder. While someone who is not in this position might think any amount of killing is inhumane, these men seem to applaud themselves on there only being a few shootings. This is contrasted with their horror and disgust at being asked to kill unarmed Jews for the first time at Józefów, as well as how angry and ashamed they were afterwards. If the men feel any shame after these actions, Browning either found no evidence of it or has chosen not to include it in the book.

During the deportations, the Security Police attempt to lure out Jews who are hiding by announcing that new identity cards will be passed out and everyone must have one. Some of the Jews who show up are spared, but two more groups are shot. The Order Police help in at least one of these shootings. Trapp isn't there, so Security Police make Buchmann and his men help and he is present for the execution of one group. When other men from the battalion staff show up and hear that they will also have to shoot, several ask to be excused, which Buchmann allows. This places Buchmann in a similar position to Trapp at Józefów, and like Trapp Buchmann puts physical distance between himself and the shooting when he can. Shortly after this, Buchmann finally returns to Hamburg and is later promoted.

Despite Buchmann's well known aversion towards violence, he is put in a very difficult position by the Security Police. Suddenly, Buchmann is confronted with a new kind of choice. He felt like he was safe refusing to take part in the violence in Józefów because he knew Trapp would let him, but now he doesn't feel as free to make that same choice. Like Trapp, Buchmann does what superior officers tell him to do even though it goes against his conscience, and like Trapp he puts physical distance between himself and the violence after he gives his orders so he doesn't have to witness the results. The men differ in that Buchmann then takes steps to make sure he'll never feel compelled to do something that goes so far outside of his understanding of moral behavior again. Despite Trapp's sadness and regret in Józefów, he was clearly not as opposed to it as Buchmann because he did not officially try to remove himself from the situation permanently.

CHAPTER 13: THE STRANGE HEALTH OF CAPTAIN HOFFMAN

Before the fall of 1942, Reserve Police Battalion 101's Third Company and their commander Captain Hoffmann were largely spared from the killing and violence—the men had not been part of firing squads at Józefów and only Lieutenant Peters' First Platoon had to take part in deportations or shootings because most of the company were so far away from the action. In early October, however, Third Company is ordered to help clear the ghetto at Konskowola, home to about 2,000 Jews. Third Company must help make Northern Lublin judenfrei along with First Lieutenant Messmann's gendarmerie, about 100 Hiwis, and several SS men. In an unusual move, the Hiwis go cordon with the police while Messmann's gendarmeries and some of Hoffmann's men search the ghetto and round up the Jews.

Most of Hoffmann's men have been near violence and murder, but they have not perpetrated any systematic mass murders nor extremely violent roundups yet. While they have some idea of what murder is like, their lack of personal experience is bound to make this event very traumatizing. However, because they are rounding up the Jews first, each man initially has a choice—they can either shoot, or they can make themselves look busy elsewhere instead of shooting. Because of this and the pattern that began in Józefów, it is reasonable to assume that the roles the policemen choose for themselves in the first hour or two (non-shooters, men who will shoot if directly asked to but otherwise have no interest in participating, and men who are willing to shoot without question or complaint) will define their roles in the rest of the company's violent actions.

The ghetto has lately been afflicted with an epidemic of dysentery, so many residents can't walk or even get out of bed. As a result, shooting can be heard everywhere, including the hospital where men kill every patient. In the **marketplace**, the Jews are separated by sex and some of the men are selected for the work camps. Witnesses report that between 500 and 1,000 Jews are selected for work, but they're so weak that about 100 are shot on the way to the train station. The rest of the Jews (about 800 to 1,000) are shot in the woods at the edge of town. When it's all over, some of the men find a nice farmhouse and spend the rest of the afternoon playing cards.

It seems that, for most of the men, their first real experience killing other people isn't as traumatic as it was for the men who shot at Józefów. Instead of losing their appetite and feeling depressed, the men enjoy a game of cards. This callousness, of course, might have been a front. Hoffmann's men aren't just surrounded by their own comrades—they're with other units they aren't familiar with, so they might be trying harder to seem unbothered. On the other hand, Browning notes that most men became habituated to violence at Józefów, so they might not have needed prolonged exposure to violence to become indifferent to it. Either way, the fact that the men have apparently reached a high degree of callousness is evident in how different their post-execution behavior is from how it was in Józefów, namely that they go play cards as if they hadn't spent most of the day killing people.

Twenty-five years later, Hoffmann claims that he remembers nothing of the action at Konskowola despite his men killing up to 1,600 Jews that day. This might be due to his health problems, which in 1942 he blames on a bad dysentery vaccine. In the 1960s, when he's interrogated, Hoffmann says the illness was actually due to stress from the Józefów massacre. His illness includes painful stomach cramps that are aggravated by bumpy movements (like driving), so he stops accompanying his men on actions. Most of these bouts of cramps coincide with orders for violence and the men began saying that if they are going to have to do something unpleasant then Hoffmann is sure to be ill. Still, it takes a long time for Hoffmann to seek medical help. During his second trip to Germany for treatment in 1943, Trapp relieves him of his company command.

Hoffmann's symptoms seem to be psychosomatic, especially because they tend to flare up just before violent actions. However, it takes Hoffmann a long time to seek medical advice. This could imply that, on some level, he knows his symptoms are really a strong reaction against violence and conventional medicine cannot help him. To Hoffmann, these symptoms are a sign of weakness. As a leader, it is more important for him to seem tough and strong because he is supposed to inspire those qualities in his men. Admitting weakness could be devastating, even more devastating for regular rank-and-file policemen. Unfortunately, his refusal to admit that something is wrong has the same effect—his men mock him for having stomach cramps before violent actions. These same men generally respect Trapp, implying that if Hoffmann had just been honest about not liking violence (like Trapp) then his men might have more respect for him.

Hoffmann and Trapp's relationship sours over time. It starts when Hoffmann refuses to sign a document stating that he won't plunder or steal and gets worse when some men tell Trapp about Hoffmann's mysterious illness. Hoffmann resents losing his company command and appeals to Trapp's superiors, but Trapp's decision is upheld and Hoffmann transfers to a new police battalion in Russia. While in this new unit, Hoffmann earns the Iron Cross Second Class and by the end of the war he becomes a first staff officer for a high-ranking police general. He does not suffer from his mysterious illness in Russia. Hoffmann's illness likely wasn't cowardice—it might have been psychologically induced. The fact that Hoffmann tried to hide his illness of so long indicates he was ashamed of it, not purposely using it to get out of work.

Details about Hoffmann's duties in Russia aren't provided, but presumably something about this new assignment isn't as stressful to him as his duties in Poland. The Iron Cross Second Class is typically only given to people who display great courage in the face of danger or who provide services that go above and beyond their duty. Hoffmann doesn't just succeed once he is taken out of Poland and the particularly distasteful duties he was asked to perform there—he thrives. Hoffmann's story and mysterious illness show that even the men who aren't personally involved in shootings (Hoffmann typically helped form firing squads, but it isn't clear if he regularly took part in them himself) suffer a huge amount of psychological distress just from seeing them. This presumably includes those who consistently choose not to shoot; they might not be shooting, but they hear and see it happening and likely do suffer a lot of trauma and distress as a result.

CHAPTER 14: THE "JEW HUNT"

By mid-November 1942, after a string of mass executions and deportations, the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 have killed at least 6,500 Jews and helped deport at least 42,000 to Treblinka. With the towns and ghettos clear of Jews already, the battalion's next task is to hunt down all the Jews who are hiding in the area and make their region judenfrei. It is easier for the Jews in the battalion's district to hide because, unlike in other districts, many of their ghettos are not walled in and the Jews are freer to move around. Although the battalion that was stationed in the area before Reserve Police Battalion 101 did occasionally execute Jews they found outside of approved zones, systematically hunting them down doesn't really pick up steam until after the ghettos are cleared.

A major element of the Nazis' Final Solution is their vision of a utopian world that is entirely free of Jews and where Germans reign supreme. To achieve this, they plan on killing every single Jew in a given area, sometimes replacing them with "pure" Germans who can have a lot of children to increase the populations of the "master race." Consciously making a place judenfrei *by systematically hunting down individual Jews is one of the advanced stages of the Final Solution—it means all sizable groups of Jews in that area have been killed, and all that is left are individuals who are hiding and trying to survive.*

Parczew is the first ghetto in Reserve Police Battalion 101's security zone to be completely cleared (it is not clear if the battalion cleared it or another unit), but even after that, Steinmetz continues finding Jews in the area. He imprisons them at first, but then Gnade orders him to kill them and any other Jew he finds. Steinmetz is essentially tasked with keeping his region judenfrei. This becomes an official order in numerous areas in October. The battalion creates special patrols to find any Jews (called "suspects") who are hiding. They call this process the judenjagd, or "Jew hunt." The *judenjagd* is not just one big event, but a prolonged and important phase of the Final Solution.

Participation in the "Jew hunt" requires the men to have a much different mindset than when they commit an isolated mass murder. Instead of simply rounding the Jews up, the men must purposely go looking for them, which frequently includes turning houses inside out and combing the surrounding countryside and farms, knowing that if they find any Jews they must be shot on sight, not brought back to the group to possibly be killed by someone else. Using the word "suspects" to describe the Jews they are looking for encourages the men to continue thinking of the Jews of an enemy because it implies that the Jews have committed a crime.

On two occasions (fall of 1942 and spring of 1943), the battalion launches two huge sweeps of the Parczew forest looking for both Jews and escaped Russian prisoners of war. According to one man from Third Company, during the first battalion-wide sweep they struggle to find any Jews in the woods until their second walkthrough, when they discover chimneys sticking up out of the ground. They realize that entire families of Jews are living in underground bunkers, and they are all shot on the spot. According to one policeman's estimation, the body count for the first sweep is about 500.

By this point in 1942, the Jews are well aware that they are being systematically executed: deportations occur far more frequently, word travels about ghettos being cleared, and it is no secret that going to Treblinka means going to its gas chambers. Realizing that Hitler genuinely means to kill every Jew in Poland, the underground bunkers in the forest are many Jewish families' last bid for survival. This once again forces the policemen to make the difficult decision whether to carry out their orders and shoot women and children or choose not to shoot but risk their reputation within the battalion. Because so many of the policemen are middle-aged family men, this decision is harder to make than a decision to shoot adult men.

In the spring, the judenjagd intensifies and becomes more dangerous. During the sweep, the men find a camp full of escaped Russians and Jews who are armed and ready to fight. The escapees and policemen exchange gunfire and ultimately all 100 to 120 Jews and Russians are killed. In addition, Lieutenant Hagen is accidentally killed by one of his own men. There is also some trouble with the Jews who work on nearby "agricultural estates." When a unit of Steinmetz's platoon kills all the Jewish workers on one estate, the owner is furious. The owner of another estate has a different problem—Jews in hiding sneak on and act like workers, so first Hoffmann and then his replacement Messmann periodically kill the excess Jews.

One of the things Jews were told when the Nazi occupation of Poland first began was that, if they could make themselves useful by working (digging trenches, tending farms, working in factories, and so on), then they'd be allowed to live. In all likelihood, the Nazis did mean it at the time because this would have been before the Final Solution. Now that the policemen are beginning to systematically murder all the Jews in the region including those who are working on the estates or in camps, however, it's generally understood that the arrangement will only last until Polish or German workers can take their places. The presence of the armed Jews and Russian POWs is one indication that the Jews are becoming more desperate because they fully realize that the Nazis intend to wipe out their entire population.

The battalion also sweeps the town for Jews, occasionally finding them in basements and getting them to give up the locations of other hideouts. On one occasion, a Jewish woman runs away from the battalion and the men track her down to her father's house. They tell the man to choose between his own life and his daughter's—he promptly turns over his daughter and she is shot on the spot. It's often Polish informants who discover bunkers. The battalion then comes out, throws a grenade in the bunker, and shoots anyone who survives the blast. The "Jew hunts" become such a frequent event that, in their interrogations, most men can't remember how many times they participated in them.

The story of the man who turns his own daughter over to the policemen knowing that they'll kill her is a memorable one and can be interpreted in a couple of different ways. The man may genuinely want to save his own skin and doesn't care if it costs his daughter her life, but it could also be that he is afraid of what will happen to her later if he doesn't allow the men to kill her quickly. Either way, his choice likely encourages the German belief that Jews are inhuman. What kind of father, after all, chooses his own life at the expense of his child's? Because the judenjagd *becomes such a prevalent part of the battalion's job, it also becomes another way for the men to bond. As has been seen in earlier actions, the men who shoot remain a tight-knit group while those who don't are generally considered "cowards" and "weak." There is a new kind of peer pressure at work during the hunts because if the people choose not to even go on them, they'll not only be choosing not to serve with their comrades, but also choosing not to be with them on potentially dangerous missions (as seen in the skirmish that resulted in Hagen's death).*

In Browning's estimation, the battalion's involvement in the judenjagd is them coming full circle—their killings at Józefów were intensely personal, subsequent actions were (mostly) not as personal, and with the "Jew hunt" they once again come face to face with their victims and the killings are again personal. Additionally, each individual policeman has a lot of freedom of choice, and the choices they all make reveal the clear division between the "tough" and "weak" in the battalion. Since the initial massacre in Józefów, some men have become numb to the violence or are even enthusiastic about it, while others consciously try to limit their involvement with violence whenever it's easy to do so, and a very small minority consistently abstain from violence entirely.

Another thing the judenjagd *has in common with Józefów is that the men are destroying entire families. Part of what made Józefów so traumatic for so many was that they were killing mothers and their children (and, in some cases, the fathers; however, most of the men were sent away to work camps). This happens again with the* judenjagd*—entire families are obliterated in an instant. It is also important to remember that the minority of people who are consistently refraining from having anything to do with violent actions are doing so at a great personal cost. They are constantly reminded that they're not quite part of their group, they don't quite belong, and some of their comrades look down on them. Earlier, when one policeman said he chose to shoot at Józefów because he was a coward, what he meant was that he didn't have the bravery to face the rest of the battalion's judgment if he refused to kill. That means that the men choosing not to shoot even now are the truly brave ones.*

The men's behavior after shootings reveals a growing callousness. After the Józefów massacre, every man had been bitter and didn't want to eat or talk about what had happened. Over time, however, they become less sensitive to the violence. One policeman remembers some of his comrades making jokes about eating the brains of slaughtered Jews after a shooting. Whenever there is a judenjagd or shooting task, many men are happy to volunteer; in fact, there are so many volunteers that sometimes men must be turned away. One thing most of the policemen agree on is that there is never trouble finding enough shooters when they are needed, and anyone who says they can't keep shooting is allowed to stop.

This transformation from unwilling executioners into eager and enthusiastic killers who can joke about the people they murder takes place over just a few months. Surrounded by violence and encouraged to participate in it nearly every day during the judenjagd, *it clearly didn't take long for the men to not only get used to it but also to learn to enjoy it. Equally important is that they still have a choice about whether to participate—anyone can stop, nobody is* forced *to kill anyone. This is something of which Browning frequently reminds the reader throughout the book, which emphasizes that the freedom of choice and what the men do with that freedom is what Browning finds most compelling, and the most troubling.*

The minority of men who don't want to participate in any of the violence typically take one of several lines of action: they either never volunteer, keep their distance from the officers while they organize firing squads or patrols, and some are very open about their personal dislike of violence. Otto-Julius Schimke, the first man to step out at Józefów, reports in his interrogation that, because he asked not to shoot the first time, he was excluded from all other violent actions. Other men who voice their discomfort with the violence are also spared having to be part of it. Another policeman claims his personal dislike of violence is the reason he is excluded from violent actions because the commanders want "men" to participate in the actions and they no longer consider him a man.

Schimke (and presumably the handful of other men who chose to take up Trapp's offer right away) is never asked to join a firing squad again. Having made his choice once, he is not asked to make the same choice over and over again. On one hand, this is a show of respect for his decision on his commander's part, and it saves him from having to reiterate it and thus set himself apart from his comrades time and again. On the other hand, it might also be interpreted as him being rejected from the group, as reported by the other policeman who says his commanders reject him because he isn't enough of a "man" to join them. In either case, Schimke and the others are still excluded and they're still made to feel their "otherness" during these actions.

When distance and reputation aren't enough to get the men out of violent actions, they have to blatantly refuse. Lieutenant Hoppner soon earns himself a reputation as a judenjagd enthusiast and tries to make all of his men shoot at some point in time. One of his men remembers Hoppner telling him he must shoot a Jew, but when the opportunity arises later, the man refuses. He credits Trapp with saving him from being punished. Some men only shoot when an officer is around and even let Jews go if they know they won't get in trouble for it (like when they're with trusted friends).

It is harder for the men to outright refuse to take part in the violence than it is to slyly evade it through distance or by making themselves look busy already. For commanders who perhaps don't sympathize with their aversion to violence, refusal to carry out violent orders is simply an act of blatant disobedience and disrespect. Fortunately, as the policeman here states, the men know that even if their immediate commanders don't like their choice, Trapp will protect them from being formally punished. This is something the men have known and relied on since the massacre in Józefów when about a dozen men found the strength to step forward when they saw Trapp protect Schimke from Hoffmann.

There are no reports detailing how many hundreds or thousands of Jews the battalion kills during the judenjagd but reports from other units provide a valuable clue. From May to October 1943, after the bulk of the Jews who have been hiding in the woods or elsewhere have been killed, a report for the Lublin district (which includes Reserve Police Battalion 101) says 1,695 Jews were killed. Another report for a gendarmerie unit in Warsaw reports 1,094 Jews are found and shot between March and September 1943. This supports Browning's assertion that the *judenjagd* is an important part of the Final Solution. Because it goes on for so long, is so violent, and occurs so often, the *judenjagd* is also important in understanding the men's mental state (namely, that many have become thoroughly habituated to violence)—for the battalion, the *judenjagd* is an existential condition, not an isolated event.

Reserve Police Battalion 101 kills hundreds of Jews in the judenjagd. *This is a large number, but not as deadly as other massacres they have participated in. Unfortunately, this is because they are killing some of the last Jews left in the area. The reality of the Final Solution is that the Nazis are not just focused on the large numbers—how many tens of thousands of Jews they can kill in this or that action—but that they consider every individual Jew a problem that they must eliminate through murder. In the process, they decimate entire villages, ruin economies, and rip an entire country apart using perfectly ordinary men (who consistently* choose *to help the Nazis do this) like those from Reserve Police Battalion 101.*

CHAPTER 15: THE LAST MASSACRES: "HARVEST FESTIVAL"

On October 28, 1942, the SS and Police Leader for the General Government decides that only eight Jewish ghettos can remain in operation. Four of these are in Reserve Police Battalion 101's security zone: Łukow, Parczew, Konskowola, and Międzyrzec. Many Jews flee these ghettos out of fear of being shot or deported in October and November, but they return for shelter during the winter months, even though the danger of being shot is ever present. After four months of calm, Second Company and a unit from Trawniki descend upon Międzyrzec and deport somewhere between 700 and 5,000 Jews (reports vary) in one action, around 1,000 in another, and the Security Police shoot the rest in one final action. After this, Międzyrzec is proclaimed judenfrei. In May, 3,000 to 4,000 Jews are deported to Treblinka from Łuków.

The systematic deportation and murder of every individual Jew in the ghettos is another sign that the Final Solution in this area is about to reach its climax. No longer content with just regular deportations to death camps, the Nazis increase the killing in one area at a time, rapidly moving through the Lublin district with the goal of making it entirely judenfrei *in a very short amount of time. Reserve Police Battalion 101, then, is now an important part of the Final Solution. This is ironic because so few of the men actually belong to the Nazi Party and because quite a few of them joined the Order Police because they* didn't *want to participate in violent military action, but now they are participating in one of the most deadly genocides in modern history.*

By this time, many of the men who were part of Reserve Police Battalion 101 when it arrived in Poland in July 1942 had been shuffled around. Men born before 1898 are sent back to Germany, some men are taken out of each unit to create a new special unit under Lieutenant Brand, some of the younger noncommissioned officers are reassigned to the Waffen-SS, and Lieutenant Gnade takes Steinmetz with him to Lublin to form a special guard company. Some reinforcements are brought in, but the battalion is not as large as it once was. Only a portion of the policemen who had been at Józefów are still part of the battalion in November 1943 when it is called to participate in the Erntefest ("harvest festival"), the largest German killing operation against the Jews in World War II, during which approximately 42,000 Jews are killed.

Erntefest *is supposed to be the final action in the Lublin district to make it* judenfrei. *Although Browning says the number of Jews killed during the operation is 42,000, some estimates vary between 39,000 and 43,000. These numbers are hard to pinpoint because there's simply no way to adequately keep paperwork on every individual person that's killed. There's always the chance that someone escapes, people are counted twice, or that someone in charge simply didn't count at all. However, as Browning has mentioned before, these numbers are generally conservative estimates. In other words, there's a good chance that more people died than what the paperwork shows.*

Erntefest is the climax of Himmler's mission to obliterate the Polish Jewry. After the ghetto deportations in May 1943, the only Jews in the Lublin district are spread out in Globocnik's labor camps, (about 45,000 workers). It is soon apparent to Himmler that these Jews must be killed in order to make the area truly judenfrei. More importantly, Jewish resistance is on the rise in some of the camps as Jews begin to realize that making themselves useful workers won't save them from the gas chamber. Because of this, Himmler knows that he can't kill the Jews slowly, one camp at a time—they must all be killed in a single operation or else they'll fight back. Planning and preparation for the event begins months in advance, including making the Jews dig large trenches that will become their graves.

Browning mentions that the Jews are beginning to fight back, and this is why Globocnik and Himmler decide to carry out such a big action all at once instead of gradually killing the Jews one camp at a time. The fact that the Jews are beginning to revolt is more evidence that they themselves realize what is about to happen—they know that the Nazis are truly planning to kill all of them, no matter how useful they make themselves as workers. Furthermore, it is no secret at this point that the war is not going as smoothly for the Germans as it was in the early years. There is a renewed sense of urgency to carry out the Final Solution as well as to eliminate anyone who might be able to testify to the crimes the Nazis themselves know they've committed.

On November 2, the night before the killings begin, Globocnik's recent successor as SS and Police Leader of the district meets with the commanders of the units that will help with the Erntefest, including Reserve Police Battalion 101. The men from the battalion take part in nearly every part of the operation. Some march Jews from small work camps to the larger Majdanek concentration camp and others position themselves on the road into the camp to prevent escapes. They watch as 16,500 to 18,000 Jews file past while music blares from the speakers. Even with the music, everyone can clearly hear the gunfire as Jews are murdered. One witness remembers watching the Jews being forced to undress, run into the graves, lie on top of the previous victims, and then wait to be shot by executioners from above.

Participation in Erntefest *creates a new kind of pressure for the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101, especially those who have thus far tried to distance themselves from every kind of violence. They are not acting as a lone group or with the help of Hiwis, whose opinions they didn't necessarily respect; instead, they are working with over 1,000 other people, all of whom are watching and are on edge, which might actually create the feeling that they don't have a choice. Although there is a good chance that some men from Reserve Police Battalion 101 take part in the shooting, it seems like, at least officially, they are only on a sort of guard duty to stop people from running away. Still, they know what is happening and don't seem to feel any remorse or horror over what's happening just a few yards away.*

Meanwhile, similar executions are being carried out in a Trawniki work camp (about 6,000 to 10,000 victims) and a few smaller camps. Nearby, 17,000 Jews are still alive at Paniatowa and smaller camps that will be spared because the Jews work on aircraft parts. Poniatowa is scheduled to be hit the next day, and Reserve Police Battalion 101 evidently participates in this action as well. In the minds of the men from Reserve Police Battalion 101, the two days of killing at the two camps merge together and are somewhat confused. As at Majdanek, the Jews undress and then march naked into the graves while music plays over the speakers. One witness remembers that some of the Jews did not die immediately but lay in the grave cursing the men while others were shot on top of them.

The men know that after these actions, the district will likely be formally declared judenfrei, *which could help explain why the men are botching so many executions. There is added pressure to get the job done quickly (even if it's not done* well *and it causes unnecessary suffering) so they can help fulfill the ultimate goal of making the General Government totally* judenfrei. *Witnesses note that not all of the Jews who are shot actually die right away—they lie in the grave, cursing the Nazis. This means the men are apparently firing indiscriminately, without worrying about making sure their victims die right away (as at Józefów) and with complete indifference to their immense suffering.*

Although the men are used to killing, they are not accustomed to the process of disposing of so many bodies. According to one of Gnade's men, the stench of burning bodies in Majdanek permeates Lublin for days. The men of Third Company, on the other hand, view the body disposal for themselves: half-decomposed bodies are disinterred, placed on an iron grill, and burned.

In previous killings, the bodies of the policemen's victims were either left out in the open or buried in a shallow mass grave until another group of workers could burn them. Burning the corpses serves more than one purpose. It is a fast and efficient means of body disposal, but it also means there is no mass gravesite for people to mourn. No pilgrimages will be made to these spots because there is nothing there; or so, at least, is the logic.

After Erntefest, the district of Lublin is essentially judenfrei and Reserve Police Battalion 101's participation in the Final Solution ends. Using conservative estimates of about 6,500 Jews shot at mass executions like Józefów, 1,000 Jews shot during the "Jew hunts," and a minimum of 35,000 Jews shot at Majdanek and Poniatowa, Browning concludes that the battalion has participated in the murder of 38,000 Jews. Additionally, the men have helped to deport around 45,000 Jews to Treblinka. With fewer than 500 men, the battalion effectively causes the deaths of 83,000 Jews.

As Browning says, the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 cause—either directly through shooting or indirectly through deporting them to extermination camps—the deaths of 83,000 people. Divided evenly, that would mean each individual policeman has caused the deaths of 166 Jews in just over one year. This is deeply disturbing because these men are not soldiers. They're policemen, and a policeman's primary job is to protect other people, not kill them. Still, many of the men become enthusiastic about killing and others choose to participate in mass murders just to fit in with the majority of the battalion, testifying to how transformative war can be.

CHAPTER 16: AFTERMATH

As Germany begins suffering more losses in the war, the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 find themselves engaging more and more with Polish resistance groups and enemy soldiers. Hagen is accidentally killed by police fire during a judenjagd in 1943; in the final year of the war Gnade, Hoppner, and Peters die in action, and Drucker is injured and sent back to Germany. Trapp also returns to Germany in 1944. Many men go back to their prewar jobs. Hoffmann, Wohlauf, and quite a few other men, for instance, continue their career as policemen.

Many men chose to join the police to avoid being drafted into the army—they didn't want to go to war. It's ironic, then, that in the end, the police battalion is called upon to take up military duties by fighting resistance fighters and soldiers. As Browning mentions, a lot of the men go back to their old careers and their old lives, but one must question how they reconcile their actions in Poland with the roles they take up back in Germany.

Ironically, it's not the hardcore, violent SS men from Reserve Police Battalion 101 that have the most postwar consequences to face, but Trapp, Buchmann, and Kammer. The three men are extradited to Poland in 1947, and in 1948 they are tried for killing 78 Poles in Talcyn, not for their actions against the Jews. Trapp is executed, Buchmann is sentenced to eight years, and Kammer is sentenced to three years.

Although Kammer did berate men who didn't want to shoot, he still honored their choices. Trapp hated violence (at least at first) and was very accommodating to those who had a similar aversion and didn't want to shoot. Buchmann hated and refused to participate in violence from the start, although he did lead a mass execution when Security Police ordered him to. In other words, two of the men who were the least enthusiastic about murder and who protected those who didn't want to kill anyone from punishment are the men who are held responsible for it. Notably, it's not the deaths of thousands of Jews, but the execution of 78 Poles that the men are punished for. This shows that, even after the war, non-Jewish lives are considered more important than Jewish ones. This is a harsh reminder that anti-Semitism didn't end with the war, but continued; indeed, it still continues to this day.

Further judicial investigations of the battalion are not conducted until the 1960s, when a task force with the Central Agency for the State Administrations of Justice stumbles on witness reports of the battalion's crimes. In 1962 the judicial authorities in Hamburg (where most of the men are still living) begin investigating. Over the next five years, hundreds of former members are interrogated and fourteen men are indicted and sentenced, including Hoffmann (eight years; reduced to four), Wohlauf (eight years), Drucker (eight years; reduced to three and a half), Steinmetz (not included in the verdict due to failing health), and Bentheim (six years). While these sentences might seem inadequate, it must be remembered that this was one of the only trials of any of the Order Police—few investigations lead to indictments and even fewer to convictions. Still, it's Browning's hope that the interrogation files will serve history better than they did justice.

Today, we recognize the Holocaust as one of the most tragic events in modern history, and the men who perpetrated it are generally vilified and hated. It seems natural that the men responsible for the Holocaust would all receive heavy penalties, particularly during the Nuremberg Trials (when most high-ranking Nazis were tried in court for war crimes). However, the truth is that most people weren't punished, or only received a handful of years in prison for their part in killing over 6,000,000 innocent European Jews. In some cases, justice came so late that the men had already lived full lives with families and grandchildren and successful careers. This is what happens for most of the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101, who, by the time they're tried in court, are old and have had 20 years to freely enjoy before they're even faced with the possibility of being punished.

CHAPTER 17: GERMANS, POLES, AND JEWS

Pretrial and courtroom testimonies by the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 must be read with caution—hesitancy to incriminate themselves and comrades, 25 years of memory distortion, and psychological defenses like repression and projection all influence these testimonies. An ideal example of the testimonies' unreliability is seen in the way the men discuss German-Polish-Jewish relations. The men portray German-Polish and German-Jewish relations as "extremely exculpatory" and Polish-Jewish relations as "extremely damning." For example, the men imply that banditry was a huge problem in Poland and so their primary occupation there was to deal with the Polish bandits, not to be violent towards Jews. Others try to portray German-Polish relations as downright friendly. Probst contradicts this by highlighting how willing the policemen were to shoot Poles for inadequate reasons and the fact that sexual relationships between the Battalion's soldiers and Polish women were banned.

During their interrogations, the men have to make another choice—to be honest about their actions and behavior or twist the truth to make themselves look better. This makes them unreliable narrators of their own stories. Still, Browning frequently uses Probst's testimony to highlight what he thinks the truth probably is. In many ways, Probst does seem to be more of a realist and more willing to be honest about the men's activities in Poland. The ban on sexual relationships between the German men and Polish women can be traced to the Nazi-supported belief in the Germans as some sort of master race. In other words, whether the men admit it or not, they followed policies that made Poles their inferiors. This would make it difficult for there to be truly "friendly" relations.

During their time in Poland, the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 exhibited a growing callousness towards Polish lives that is somewhat similar to their callousness towards the Jews. For example, Trapp was so reluctant to ruin German-Polish relations in Talcyn during the reprisal killing that he only selected the poorest members of the town to execute and then killed Jews to make the rest of his quota. In 1943, however, Hoppner's men went ahead and killed 12 to 15 elderly Poles even after learning it was unnecessary to do so. Afterwards, they went to the theater in a nearby town.

As the war went on, the men seemed to believe that Poles were their enemy, as well. They didn't necessarily think that Poles were as disposable as Jews, but their attitudes were heading that way in 1943. Coincidentally, this is around the same time that the number of people joining the Polish resistance began to swell as the tide of war turned against the Germans. This meant that there may have been justification for seeing Poles as enemies instead of friends, but it does not absolve the men for indiscriminately killing Poles, as Hoppner's men did.

One omission in the testimonies involves the German attitude towards the Jews, which is understandable because—from a legal standpoint—it is important for the men not to admit to racial hatred. Additionally, the men don't want to admit that the Nazi ideologies of the 1930s and 1940s made sense to them at the time. This would have been shameful to admit in the 1960s, when the political culture was so at odds with what it was before. Hoffmann, who was active in the Nazi Party since his childhood, simply denied agreeing with Nazi ideologies. Drucker, however, admitted that he felt an aversion to the Jews, but not a downright hatred of them. Some of the men discussed the anti-Semitism of others. For example, many accused Grund (Buchmann's deputy) of being a real Nazi that few people liked.

Most of the men seem to vilify Grund for being a real Nazi. Earlier, they said similar things about Gnade, particularly when it came to discussing Gnade's behavior at deportations and executions. By doing this, the men distance themselves from Nazi ideologies. They believe if they show a horror at what others believe, then nobody will think they harbored some of the same thoughts. In German law, admitting to racial hatred in connection with killing is likely to get them an automatic guilty verdict, which is another reason the men want to distance themselves from anti-Semitism as much as possible in their testimonies. It is also possible that the men really weren't anti-Semitic in the 1940s, or maybe they were but have changed their mindset over 20 years. The question of whether the men were genuinely anti-Semitic is one that Browning simply cannot definitively answer.

In their testimonies, the men display a range of attitudes towards Jews—some comment on how dirty the Jews were compared to the Poles while others apparently consider the Jews victims wearing rags and starving. Similarly, some men describe the Jews at the shooting sites as nearly complicit in their own deaths by being so passive; others describe the silence of the Jews as dignified. For the most part, the Jews they killed are anonymous, but the men do have clear memories of the times they met Jews from Germany. The fact that they remember them so clearly shows that the experience was shocking to them at the time. Another exception is their attitudes about Jews who worked for them. Some men claim to have helped these Jews, including saving a kitchen worker's family. Other men, however, had no problem eventually killing the Jews who worked for them.

These varying attitudes towards the Jews testify to how many men effectively dehumanized the Jews in their minds. A lot of the men simply couldn't connect with their Jewish victims on a human level and saw them as degraded animals, unwilling to fight even to save their own lives. Other men, however, recognized the Jews as human. It is not clear if this belief was limited to the men who refused to shoot or if such men participated in the killing. The Jews with whom the men spent a lot of time and who personally helped them engendered sympathy from more of the men, but even then, a number of men had no problem shooting people they knew. The men, then, can be broken up into two groups: those who saw the Jews as human beings, and those who dehumanized the Jews to the point where they didn't mind killing even people they personally know.

In contrast, the Germans frequently portray Polish attitudes towards Jews as totally hostile. This might be because they naturally had more contact with Poles who supported the Final Solution by helping them find Jews hiding in the forest or even trying to get favors from the Germans by acting enthusiastically anti-Semitic. On the other hand, Poles who were helping the Jews obviously avoided interacting with the policemen. The men might also have been projecting their own anti-Semitism onto the Poles—unwilling to portray themselves or their comrades as anti-Semitic, the men found psychological relief in placing as much blame as possible on the Poles.

It is very likely that the men projected their own anti-Semitism onto the Poles. This not only alleviates their own sense of guilt for their beliefs, but also helps eliminate anti-Semitism as a possible motivator behind their own choice to participate in killing Polish Jews. There is no doubt about their guilt in actually killing people, but the motives behind their choices are important. As Browning pointed out earlier, if the men admit to or clearly reveal their own anti-Semitism, then they will effectively destroy any chance they have of being found innocent during their trials.


The men's accusations of Polish anti-Semitism begins with Józefów. Some men claim that the mayor gave them all schnapps and others describe Poles zealously trying to flush the Jews out of their homes and then bringing even more Jews to the **marketplace** all afternoon. Hoffmann claims to remember a pair of Polish students giving him vodka and saying that, while they didn't like the way Hitler treats them, they were thankful to finally be getting rid of the Jews. Virtually none of the men omit that Poles played a big role in helping the battalion find Jews in the forest during the judenjagd. In fact, many of the "hunts" were instigated by Poles with tips about hidden Jews, according to Probst. Probst is also the only man who confesses that Polish families who helped hide Jews were routinely executed.

It is a well-documented fact that local people in Nazi-occupied countries frequently turned Jews or people who were hiding Jews over to the Germans. However, this was, at least in some cases, a form of self-protection. In their minds (and probably in reality), helping the Germans in any way would save tipsters from being victimized like the Jews. Furthermore, the Poles became nearly as habituated to violence as the German units in Poland. The Poles might not have been responsible for mass executions, but they frequently witnessed them. They listened to the shooting during ghetto clearings, and Germans remember seeing Poles watch from the rooftops during the Erntefest.


The policemen provide numerous examples of Polish complicity in German crimes against Jews. One policeman remembers a group of Poles trying to out a Jew who was dressed in disguise and others remember Poles keeping Jews prisoner (and beating them) until the Germans arrived to collect them. On the other hand, Bentheim remembers offering a Polish policeman the opportunity to shoot some Jews but the policeman adamantly refused. Unfortunately, these descriptions of Polish complicity are all too true. The story of the Holocaust, after all, is one with too many victims and not nearly enough heroes. The German policemen's portrayals of these relationships are, nevertheless, distorted. They leave out how many Poles tried to help their Jewish neighbors, and how the Germans punished them for it. It is Browning's belief that the Germans' comments about the Poles say more about themselves than the Polish people.

The men undoubtedly do have ample reason to believe that many Poles were just as anti-Semitic as the Nazis. However, the reader must still remember Browning's earlier point that the men naturally have more experience working with Poles who are turning Jews in than with Poles who are trying to help save Jews. Bentheim's story about the Polish policeman who wouldn't shoot the Jews is notable because it contradicts the image of all Poles as violently anti-Semitic. In Browning's opinion, when the Germans describe Polish attitudes towards Jews, there is a good chance they're actually describing their own attitudes towards the Jews because they are looking to both alleviate their own guilt and to distance themselves from racial hatred. This, however, still doesn't mean that a lot of Poles weren't anti-Semitic. As usual, it is important to remember that many Poles were probably willing to sell out or victimize Jews to save their own lives, not out of racial hatred. These contradicting possibilities further highlight how difficult Browning's job as a historian and a writer is—there simply is no easy answer here, and even all of the material evidence Browning has at his disposal to try to find an answer is problematic and unreliable.

CHAPTER 18: ORDINARY MEN

The question of why so many men in Reserve Police Battalion 101 chose to perpetrate violence against Jews has no easy answer. Many factors contributed to it, but none without some kind of qualification. Certainly, when there are divisive racial stereotypes combined with the high negative emotions of a conventional war, normal conventions and rules are shattered. Of particular interest to Browning is the role of wartime brutalization in explaining the behavior of the battalion's men—especially in the context of a race war (as the Nazi's war in Europe became in the 1940s) rather than a conventional war.

A race war is a very different kind of war than a conventional war. Conventional wars typically have geographical borders, and Germany's war in Europe did start out this way. A race war has no borders. It can include people from every nation, even one's own. This also means that wartime brutalization changes shape. The perpetrators, in a sense, have to turn on people that they are ostensibly supposed to protect. This is why it was so important for the Nazis to merge the image of the Jew into the image of a foreign *enemy, and why it was so jarring for the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 to meet Jews from Germany while they were in Poland.*

There are two forms of war crimes that Browning identifies: atrocities committed in the heat of the moment in a frenzy, and those committed through government policy. Both kinds occur within wars, but men who carry out "atrocity by policy" are in a very different state of mind—they are not spur of the moment decisions, but coldly calculated by the perpetrator. The men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 belong to the second group: aside from the few World War I veterans, the men in this battalion had not been desensitized to violence through prior combat. As soon as they began killing at Józefów, though, they became callous and eventually violence was merely routine for them. In this case, their desensitization is an *effect* of the men's behavior, not the cause.

The first kind of atrocity that Browning mentions is often easy to excuse. An example might be if a soldier who has watched close friends die in combat then brutally kills several enemy soldiers on the side of the road later that day. It happens when emotions are high and there's a clear thirst for revenge. The second kind, however, is not an emotional event and there are two kinds of perpetrators—those who create the policies (Browning calls them "desk murderers"), and those who carry them out. Reserve Police Battalion 101 is the second type of perpetrator. At Józefów, the men didn't have time or reason to get personally mad at the Jews before executing. They were not in an emotional frenzy, and they had the opportunity to think about what they were doing and whether they wanted to actually do it. This is a major part of why their story is so disturbing.

War is not just about combat and brutality, though. It's also an us-versus-them struggle in which a person objectifies their enemy and thus strips them of their humanity. This makes conventional war particularly suitable for governments looking to enact policies that justify and even encourage atrocities. The us-versus-them mentality also makes it easier to create a psychological distance between a perpetrator and their victim, and this is one of the keys to understanding Reserve Police Battalion 101's behavior. Some people create this distance by limiting their role to that of a bureaucrat, signing papers and giving orders. But this isn't the case for most of the men in Reserve Police Battalion 101: they did not do their jobs behind a desk; they were the actual shooters.

Conformity plays a major role in why so many men in the battalion chose to go along with so many executions. To not contribute to the violence was to separate from the group, and that is no easy task in a wartime situation in which every man relies on his comrades and knows they're looking out for him as well. Within the battalion, all the men become an "us," and all the people they're ordered to shoot become a "them" or an "other." Still, their job is arguably harder because they can't put physical distance between themselves and the results of their actions. To them, their victims are not just numbers on a printed page, but actual people whom they personally shoot. However, as seen in the battalion's experience and transformation, even this loses meaning over so many hours or even days of seemingly nonstop killing.

The division of labor in several of the bigger mass shootings is important to note. While the men nearly always provided the cordon and helped drive the Jews, at the biggest mass executions the men had help from the Hiwis or other units, which meant that others typically did most of the shooting (as at Łomazy). Some of the men did still shoot, but overall, the division of labor seemed to also create a notable sense of detachment from the killing process.

In the men's minds, if they are not the ones doing the actual killing then they are not responsible and should not feel guilty. However, they are still complicit. They enable others to kill innocent people and facilitate that killing by preventing the victims from escaping. This also holds true for the deportations—the men aren't killing the Jews themselves, but even they know they are sending the Jews to their deaths by putting them on trains to Treblinka's gas chambers. During deportations, the men show little mercy to those who try to escape, shooting at them as they run and sending men to hunt the Jews down if the shooters miss.

One question Browning has is whether the policemen in the battalion were specially selected to help implement the Final Solution. He concludes that this is almost definitely not the case; in fact, the middle-aged, working class men from Hamburg are probably the opposite of who should have been specially selected for the task at hand. Nor are the officers the type of men one might identify as ruthless killing machines. Trapp has a reputation for being too sentimental and Buchmann is known to be against violence. Even the younger officers, Wohlauf and Hoffmann, have less than impressive records. The one surprising officer is Gnade, who is initially disgusted with violence and yet he becomes the most ruthless officer in the battalion. It seems like the most reasonable conclusion to reach is that the men in the battalion *weren't* specially selected to shoot Jews in Lublin.

Contrary to what some think, the Final Solution wasn't why the Germans went to war. In fact, the idea was first broached in the early 1940s, particularly in the parts of Russia that Germany was occupying. More formal talks about implementing it in other parts of Europe didn't start until 1942, shortly before Reserve Police Battalion 101 was sent to Poland. Still, police battalions were never meant to carry out mass executions, they were meant to act like a regular police force and help keep order. For this reason, choosing men like Trapp makes sense—he is supposed to keep order, and his moral compass would help him do that effectively and fairly. In other words, these men were specially selected, just not for the purpose of committing mass executions.

If the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 were not specially selected by military leadership, they may have "self-selected" themselves by joining a potentially murderous police force. Numerous studies of Nazi killers focus on the possibility of self-selection to the Nazis or SS by naturally violent people. These studies consider possible psychological factors and situational or environmental influences that might explain why seemingly ordinary people are drawn to such violent groups. One researcher proposes the possibility of a "sleeper," or certain personality characteristics in violence-prone people that remain latent but activate under the right conditions. The rise of the Nazis might have activated these qualities in people who then sought membership. Another researcher says the "sleeper" is so common that most people can become violent under the right conditions. Yet another researcher says the real "sleeper" is someone who resists authority to maintain moral autonomy.

This theory of self-selection is somewhat problematic for the case of this battalion, primarily because, as Browning has stated, a large percentage of the men were drafted and therefore didn't choose to join. Still others did choose to join, but they did this to avoid violence (Order Police were supposed to be safe from conscription into the army). Browning highlights three different kinds of "sleepers" and they each do seem to be present in the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101. Wohlauf, for example, joined the Nazi Party pretty early on, and in Poland he seemed to revel in the violence. He even brought his new wife to witness some of it with him. He is probably a good example of the first type of "sleeper" Browning mentions. Most of the rest of the men seem to fall into the second definition. They aren't particularly violent, but they're capable of becoming so when the conditions are right. However, because they're not prone to violence, they don't get as much pleasure out of seeing or committing it as men like Wohlauf. Schimke falls into the final category. He resists the orders Trapp gives him and maintains moral autonomy throughout their time in Poland (at least as far as Browning has been able to determine).

Still other researchers emphasize the importance of situational factors and point to the infamous Stanford prison experiment led by Philip Zimbardo. After screening out people with authoritarian personalities, Zimbardo randomly divided participants into guards and prisoners and placed them in a fake prison. Violence was prohibited, but within six days, the guards began sadistically dehumanizing and humiliating the prisoners. The part of this study that is most relevant to the story of Reserve Police Battalion 101 is the spectrum of behavior that emerged in the guards: about a third became cruel and tough, a slightly bigger group was tough but not cruel, and only two (less that 20 percent) tried to help the prisoners.

The Zimbardo experiment questions what freedom of choice, habituation to violence, pressure to conform have to do with perpetrating violence. This makes it a particularly useful study in trying to explain the transformation that the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 underwent in Poland. In both the study and in the battalion, most individuals chose to do whatever they saw the majority doing, even if they were less than enthusiastic about it. This is perhaps why so many men in the battalion went through with the executions—the majority of people were doing it and it was easier to join them than go against them. Only people who are very secure in themselves can go against what the majority is doing (like Schimke).

One more factor regarding self-selection must be considered here: most men did not choose to become Order Police during wartime. They were conscripted or joined before the war because they wanted to pursue a career in the metropolitan police or even avoid being drafted into the army. Given this, it's not likely that self-selection by latently violence-prone people can explain why most of the men in Reserve Police Battalion 101 so willingly engaged in violent behavior. Additionally, careerism can't explain *everyone's* willingness to shoot—a lot of men weren't career policemen nor did they have an interest in becoming so. On the other hand, some men *did* want to pursue lifelong careers in the police, and so ambition likely played an important role for them.

Because most of the men were either conscripted, joined the Order Police to pursue a lifelong police career, or signed up to avoid military duty, it is unlikely that people with latent violent tendencies were drawn to the group because they wanted to engage in violent actions. Browning's explanation here is a good example of how difficult it is to assign one factor to explain the entire battalion's behavior. Although Browning is trying to discuss an entire battalion, the reader must remember that the battalion is still made up entirely of individuals. What explains the motives of one likely won't explain the motives of another. This is why using careerism to explain the motives of the whole group won't work—undoubtedly some of the career policemen did see participation as a possible in-road to a promotion back home. However, not all the men were career policemen. Buchmann, for example, owned a family lumber business before the war.

Of course, one common justification that the men gave for their decision to shoot is that they didn't dare disobey orders—they didn't have a choice, they had to follow orders or they (and even their families) might be executed or sent to concentration camps. Because of this, they claimed that they can't be held accountable for their actions. There is one major problem with this argument: over the past 45 years, nobody in any of the hundreds of trials after the war has been able to find a single example of someone who was seriously punished for *not* killing an unarmed civilian. Another argument is that the men didn't *know* they wouldn't face deadly consequences, especially when NCOs like Hoppner insulted nonshooters. Even this doesn't hold true for Reserve Police Battalion 101—from the beginning, Trapp protected from punishment those who didn't want to shoot.

Most people take for granted that all orders delivered during wartime must be obeyed. However, this isn't necessarily true. Even today, there are laws that allow a soldier or some other officer who feels that their commander is telling them to do something criminal to refuse orders (although they might have to justify this to higher authorities who will determine if they were justified in refusing or not). In this battalion's case, there is no justifiable reason for any of them to believe they'd be punished. Trapp gave them the freedom of choice, and even after that he protected those who chose not to follow orders to shoot. For this reason, all of the men in the battalion should *be held accountable for their actions.*

It is true that even the men who vocally opposed the violence (like Buchmann) still participated in other Jewish actions, such as roundups. But even then, the men were free to choose whether to shoot or not. Numerous men from the battalion report choosing not to shoot babies or others during the roundups without being punished. This raises the question of whether simple obedience to authority explains the men's violent behavior. Citing experiments where scientists made average people believe that they were delivering increasingly painful shocks to another person, Browning addresses this question. The experimental results varied based on conditions; more people stopped the shocks if they could see or hear the actor pretending to be hurt than if they couldn't.

Closely tied with the idea that the men must follow orders is that they must obey authority. The general belief behind this is that people are socialized to obey authority from the time they are children, and this makes it very hard to disobey authority as an adult. People are also supposed to trust that authorities know what they are doing and have a good reason for it. This would help explain why the men in the battalion were willing to do as their commanders said even though the men themselves frequently described the orders as repugnant.

Most people in these experiments did not obey orders if a non-authority figure delivered them, many stopped complying if they saw and heard that the person receiving shocks was in pain, and if the subject was part of a group and most of that group decided to refuse, then the subject would also refuse about 90 percent of the time. Furthermore, when people were given the freedom to choose the level of electrical shock, then most consistently chose the lowest level. In Stanley Milgram's experiment of this kind, most people obeyed orders even when the person receiving the shocks was obviously in pain. Milgram largely attributes this to socialization, which teaches people from a young age to defer to authority. Interestingly, the subjects also didn't feel personally responsible for their actions because someone else ordered them.

Milgram makes an interesting discovery: when the authority figure is not around, people are less likely to hurt the person they're supposed to be shocking. This can explain why some of the men in Reserve Police Battalion 101 chose not to shoot or even let Jews escape during the "Jew hunts." Without authority figures nearby, they feel freer to make their own choices. This also explains why some people tried to make themselves look busy during shootings or ghetto clearings. Like the people in Milgram's experiment, they made it look like they were doing what they should while still trying not to cause harm.

However, there are numerous differences between these experiments and the experiences of Reserve Police Battalion 101: the battalion was operating under a dictatorial regime, and their victims were not being shocked but outright killed. Still, some of Milgram's insights seem to be confirmed in some of the men's testimonies. Trapp had middling authority, but he would invoke authorities higher on the chain of command. This raises the question whether the men who followed the orders did so in response to Trapp's personal authority or the higher authorities he invoked. Milgram notes that most people explain their behavior by saying they are obeying an authority rather than conforming to peers. The policemen, on the contrary, largely say they were driven by the desire for conformity and concerns over how their peers would view them, not authority.

When the men decided to obey Trapp, they were likely obeying not Trapp himself, but the chain of command. This seems to confirm Milgram's belief that the stronger an authority is, the more likely people are to respect it. However, the men themselves seem to believe that they succumbed to peer pressure. This isn't to say they had no respect for authority, just that their immediate concern was more with their social standing than showing deference to authority. Part of this might be explained by the fact that their authority figure gave them the choice not to obey him. Having gotten permission not to follow authority, the strongest remaining influence over the men is the expectations of their peers.

It is quite probable that a combination of desire for conformity and respect for authority plays an important role in the men choosing to shoot. One thing Browning questions that these experiments don't really touch on is the role of indoctrination: were the men barraged by propaganda to the point where they could no longer think or act independently? Namely, were the Jews so heavily devalued in this indoctrination that the men felt justified in killing them? Himmler was a fan of propaganda because he wanted his men to be both good soldiers and warriors for Nazi ideology. To this end, Himmler supported indoctrination efforts in the police. Part of basic Order Police training included ideological training, part of which entailed reading pamphlets about German superiority and Jewish inferiority.

Himmler's propaganda is notorious today for how effective it was in shaping the average person's mind and beliefs about Jews and other "undesirable" people (Gypsies, gay people, people with mental illnesses, and so on). Himmler used pamphlets, posters, newspaper ads, and even the radio. People were surrounded by these messages for years. The question here is whether the propaganda was actually explicitly supportive of killing the Jews and, if it was, whether the men were so vulnerable and suggestive that they would internalize that message.

Ideological training was an ongoing part of being in the Order Police, including weekly and monthly sessions explaining Nazi ideology. The men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 undoubtedly complied with these trainings (Wohlauf and Hoffmann were even formally recognized for their skill in ideological training). In exploring some of the ideological educational materials they would have used, however, Browning discovers that, while the material is racist, relatively little space is given to explicitly anti-Semitic sentiment. Furthermore, the pamphlets are kind of boring and would likely have sent the readers to sleep. Even in material about Hitler's vision of a judenfrei Europe, the scant attention paid directly to the reserve police seems to assume they're doing nothing important to further Hitler's ambitions. It's unlikely that Reserve Police Battalion 101 would have found the material particularly inspiring.

The ongoing ideological training the men underwent is important because it meant they were openly encouraged to embrace Nazi ideology. However, this is where the men's ages become important. These are not young and impressionable men; they are middle-aged men with families and careers. They are settled in their ways and have been for a long time, so it's questionable whether the boring pamphlets and long sessions really left a noticeable impact, although they might have left a subconscious one. Browning emphasizes that the parts of the propaganda material that paid attention to the Order Police portrayed them as relatively useless. This actually reinforces Browning's earlier conclusion that the men in Reserve Police Battalion 101 were not specially selected to kill Jews, nor were Order Police supposed to play such a vital role in carrying out the Final Solution. Still, this propaganda played an important role in transforming what began as a geopolitical war into a race war characterized by the slaughter of the Jewish people.

Another series of pamphlets used in the ideological education of Order Police dealt with the importance of racial purity, German superiority, and Jewish inferiority. One pamphlet implies that only through the destruction of the Jews can Europe end the race struggle and bring peace. Still, neither of these pamphlets end with a specific call to kill the Jews—instead, they call for people give birth to more pure Germans. It is particularly important to note that the most detailed pamphlet didn't come out until 1943 (after Reserve Police Battalion 101 committed most of their mass murders) and the other one was meant more for young men who just started their families, not middle-aged fathers. Furthermore, the policemen were older and developed their sense of morality *before* the rise of the Nazis, making them less susceptible to their propaganda.

Thanks to the pamphlets, the men were aware of the Nazis' racism and possibly even their plan to kill the Jews, but interestingly the propaganda doesn't specifically call on average people (like the Order Police) to participate in this. This, again, reinforces the assertion that the Order Police were not meant to be used as executioners in Poland. Furthermore, wasn't around for most of the battalion's formative years. Therefore, it could not have been a motivating factor in the men's decision to participate in the executions of thousands of Jews throughout 1942. The men's ages are important because they did not grow up in a world surrounded by Nazi propaganda that would shape their early beliefs about race.


While the men may have been influenced to believe in the superiority of the German race, even the pamphlets that deal with the necessity of a judenfrei Europe don't actually urge direct participation in killing the Jews. Order Police pamphlets do urge the men to be prepared to kill resistance fighters, but not unarmed Jewish women and children. In Russia, Jews were killed as "suspects," but there was no similar situation in Poland until the judenjagd. Another point worth noting is that groups who were sent abroad specifically to carry out mass murders were trained and prepared for it beforehand; Reserve Police Battalion 101 was not. This supports Browning's conclusion that, while the men were surrounded by propaganda that might have led them to see Germans as racially superior and Jews as the "other," it did not specifically prepare them to kill Jews.

The pamphlets sort of prepare soldiers for the deaths of Jews, but not for them to kill Jewish people themselves. The pamphlets talk about destruction and the necessity for it, but they don't call for the average reader to start participating in this destruction. This plays an important role in why so many people, the men in Reserve Police Battalion 101 included, weren't as shocked and horrified by the systematic murder of Jews in the streets as they might have been otherwise. The propaganda effectively made these murders seem like a necessity. Choosing to round up Jews as "suspects" subtly conveys the idea that Jews are criminals and therefore any violence used against them is justifiable. However, this isn't always the case for the men in Poland—they're told to kill Jews just because they're Jewish, not because they've committed any crime.

The next factor that possibly explains the men's behavior is conformity. Between 80 to 90 percent of Reserve Police Battalion 101 chose to shoot even though they were reportedly horrified about the task when Trapp first ordered it. Stepping out would be shockingly nonconformist behavior; for most men, it was simply easier to shoot than do that. Furthermore, the men knew that their battalion would have to shoot even if they themselves chose not to, so stepping out would create an additional burden for their comrades. This might lead to ostracization, leaving people with nowhere to turn for support. Stepping out also might be seen as a moral reproach, though most nonshooters insisted to their comrades that they were "too weak" not "too good" to kill. Most men believed it was better to at least try to kill before backing out than not to try at all.

Even though one of Browning's primary focuses in this book is the role of choice—that it was always a choice, the men could always have said no—it's important to remember that saying no was never that simple. It's not just saying no to killing, it's saying no to one's comrades and commander, and separating one's self from them. Browning also makes a good point here about how others might perceive the minority's decision not to shoot; namely, that they might perceive some kind of moral rebuke. This is why those who don't shoot try to convince the majority that they are actually the ones in the wrong (they say they're "too weak"). This is the minority's attempt to pacify their comrades and keep the peace as much as possible.

Returning to the "mutually intensifying effects" of racism, war, and constant propaganda, Browning addresses the pervasive belief at that time that Jews were inferior to Germans. This arguably made it easier for the men to conform to the battalion's norms, including violence and murder. Years of anti-Semitic propaganda combined with decades of German nationalism also made it all too easy to merge the image of the Jew with the image of Germany's enemies. While the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 probably did not embrace Nazi ideology entirely, they likely did embrace the image of Germans as superior. Ultimately, World War II made it all too easy for the Nazis to wage a race war.

German nationalism did not start with the rise of the Nazis. For well over a century, a lot of Germans dreamed of a large German state, but creating it would require war because Germans wanted to control more territory and needed to take it from others. This, of course, played an extremely important role in Hitler's decision to invade neighboring countries. It also made it very easy to convince 20th-century Germans to believe they were racially superior, especially to the Jews. One thing Browning doesn't touch on here is that there is a long history of anti-Semitism in Europe, as well. The Nazis essentially had centuries of racist beliefs about Jewish people that made it relatively easy to transform the geopolitical war for territory that Germany had wanted for over a century into a race war, the victims of which had been looked down on for centuries.

Another writer, Primo Levi, developed a concept of a "gray zone" in the Holocaust, which interests Browning. People in the "gray zone" include Jewish victims who became collaborators, such as the Jews selected in concentration or extermination camps to help victimize other Jews. According to Browning, although the concept of a gray zone can apply to perpetrators as well, one must remember that the two situations are not the same: perpetrators never risk becoming victims, even though some victims become perpetrators. The range of choice is very different. Reserve Police Battalion 101 is a good example of gray zone perpetrators: men who are initially horrified become willing perpetrators with time, including those like Buchmann who tried to avoid any involvement in violent actions but participated when authorities demanded it. Another example is Trapp, who sent his men to kill the Jews while he himself was overcome by tears.

In Levi's "gray zone" (where the way men act outwardly does not reflect their true thoughts, feelings, or impulses) perpetrators have much more freedom to choose what role they play in a war. If they get uncomfortably close to getting caught and punished for helping the victims, they can return to the safety of simply being a perpetrator. Victims, on the other hand, are trying to escape their victimhood. They have to play by the perpetrator's rules or else they risk being victimized even further.

Addressing the reader, Browning rhetorically asks what one is supposed to take away from the story of Reserve Police Battalion 101. He describes experiencing a sense of unease resulting from this story about men who committed terrible deeds even though they did not have to. They can't even be absolved by the claim that anyone in the same position would do the same—the numerous nonshooters in the battalion proves that. However, the battalion's collective behavior has some bleak implications. The factors that contributed to their choice to commit violence—racism, war mentality, respect for authority, desire for conformity, peer pressure, and the way bureaucratization reduces one's sense of personal responsibility in implementing policies—can and do exist everywhere. This leads to the ultimate question: if these men could become killers under these common circumstances, what group of people might not?

One of the concerns Browning expressed in the Preface to Ordinary Men *is that when researchers and historians focus on understanding the perpetrators of the Jewish genocide during World War II, that understanding might breed sympathy which might breed forgiveness. In researching and writing this book, however, what Browning learns is that the men don't necessarily deserve forgiveness. They were given the freedom to choose, and they chose to kill innocent people. They truly were ordinary men, and the factors that contributed to transforming them into killers are uncomfortably common things that most people have experienced to some degree. Browning's question at the end is meant to challenge the reader and the general belief that only exceptionally evil people could have committed such violent atrocities during the Holocaust.*

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Greenwood, Alissa. "*Ordinary Men.*" *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 30 Apr 2020. Web. 30 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Greenwood, Alissa. "*Ordinary Men.*" LitCharts LLC, April 30, 2020. Retrieved April 30, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/ordinary-men.

To cite any of the quotes from *Ordinary Men* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Browning, Christopher. Ordinary Men. Harper Perennial. 2017.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Browning, Christopher. Ordinary Men. New York: Harper Perennial. 2017.