This powerful sentence was uttered in the Nuremberg Palace of Justice’s quiet, wood-paneled courtroom in 1947 during the trials of twenty-two leaders of the Einsatzgruppen who were responsible for the wholesale murder of Jews, Gypsies, and others in the Soviet Union. There was poetic justice in this dramatic moment, which belonged to a Hungarian-born, twenty-seven-year-old Harvard educated Jew who was the American chief prosecutor. Benjamin Berrell Ferencz hailed from northern Transylvania, from one of the little villages in the Carpathian Mountains from which many of the Jewish inhabitants were sent to Galicia in 1941.

The Einsatzgruppen were not involved in the annihilation of Hungarian Jews either in Kamenets-Podolsk or anywhere else in Galicia. The only mention of their encounter with the Hungarian deportees was made in a German Situational Report, which indicated that they pushed one thousand Hungarian Jews back across the Dniester to the line of the Carpathian Mountains when the 10th Hungarian Pursuit Battalion transported them over the river. Their murderous deeds, though, can serve as an apt summation for the fate of the Hungarian deportees and their Galician brethren in 1941 and 1942.

Every mass murder has its own dynamics. The three-day Kamenets-Podolsk carnage was undeniably one of the defining moments in the debut of the Holocaust in Ukraine as well as the apogee of a Hungarian Jewish tragedy in 1941. It was a “raw atrocity” neither equaled in numbers nor in ferocity in the annals of genocide until that point, yet this massacre was not an anomaly within the unfolding annihilation process. It had an ominous prequel, for it was not a coincidence that, almost simultaneously with Kamenets-Podolsk, on August 26, 1941, SS troops unleashed a bloodbath in Orinin (also in Podolia), which harbored close connections with Kamenets-Podolsk. Both mass murders aimed to eliminate the wandering hordes of Jews expelled from Hungary. This spasm of killings also had a likely common fingerprint: that of Friedrich Jeckeln.
Orinin and Kamenets-Podolsk were only the opening salvo in the unbridled savagery that gripped the region. By German estimates, up to seven thousand Hungarian Jews remained in the Galician district after these two “signature” massacres. They were mainly concentrated in the southern tier, in Nadvórna (Nadvirna in Ukrainian), a small town in the southeast of the district, Kolomea, and Stanisławów. Thus, the character, dynamics, and pace of mass murder changed in the following months. We might characterize the pivotal massacre in Kamenets-Podolsk as a “targeted” carnage with a utilitarian and “problem-solving” rationale—a pivotal moment on the road to total genocide—the jumpstart of the Final Solution. The tragic role the Hungarian influx played in igniting it is undeniable. Kamenets-Podolsk was as “professionally” conducted as mass murder could be, at least in comparison to the ensuing bloodletting in the region in the fall of 1941.

By October 1941, a dramatic shift took place in the extermination process in which the almost detached professionalism of Jeckeln that could be summed up by Wendy Lower’s statement, “he was notorious for ‘getting the job done,’” was replaced by an orgy of killings that often bordered on chaos. This new phase, the “building blocks” toward the Final Solution, aimed to decimate the Jewish communities by unleashing waves of murder not only across the District of Galicia, but Ukraine as a whole. This period combined the “joy” of mass executions with corruption on every level. The executioners cloaked the carnage in racial and political terms, but they were able to bring this in sync easily with their visceral and almost pathological lust for brutality, murder, and outright thievery.

Thus, it was also an unbridled opportunity for personal enrichment and greed masquerading as ideology. The main players in this slaughter, Ukrainian irregulars and Nazi security agencies, exhibited an almost sadistic joy in torturing and killing the defenseless masses on the long and dusty roads of Galicia and in the shtetls and ghettos. This was not conducted in accordance with Himmler’s dictum of killing but not enjoying it—that is, conducting the killings professionally, without sadistic pleasure or, in the parlance of the SS, “remaining decent.”

**THE GATHERING STORM**

The situation in Galicia during the summer and fall of 1941 was complicated and the influx of Hungarian Jews made it even more complex. While Jews were the specific targets of extermination by the German security agencies, aided by Ukrainian paramilitary forces, they were not the only victims. After the elimination of the Jews, Nazi officers’ attention was to refocus on Poles and other perceived enemies of the Third Reich. Yet the Germans were not the only murderers. As the extermination of the Hungarian
deportees and local Jewish communities began, an internecine war that was accompanied by a systematic ethnic cleansing flared up between Poles and Ukrainians, between nationalist Ukrainians of Bandera and the perceived “Bolsheviks.” It was a time for settling scores. Adam Gopnick has observed so perceptively that the unfolding bloodletting in Eastern Europe of the fall of 1941 was a “convulsion in a long-disputed territory, in which everyone killed everyone.”

The period between September 1941 and March 1942 might be identified as a time of mass murder by bullets in Galicia. During that period, the Nazi plans for extermination became systematic, consistent, and premeditated. By 1943, though, the inauguration of a new and more efficient death by gas in Belzec rapidly superseded this form of genocide. The conditions for the implementation of the Final Solution in the District of Galicia, and within it the fate of the Hungarian Jews, lurched forward with the transition from German military to civilian rule on September 1, 1941. This was also the start of a most resourceful alliance between the understaffed security apparatus and the German civil administration for implementing the unfolding Holocaust. Christopher Browning noted that “without the active support of mayors, city councils, housing offices, and a plethora of local administrators, the identification, expropriation, and ghettoization of the Jewish population . . . would have exceeded the limited logistical capabilities of German occupation agencies.” This phase saw the reduction of the Wehrmacht’s participation, directly or indirectly, in the extermination process. Instead, civilian authorities became complicit and often directly involved in mass murder. They often supplied the transportation of the doomed to the murder pits. In Stanislawów, the German city administration provided the tracks for transferring the Jews to the New Jewish Cemetery for slaughter. In Buczacz, the tracks transporting the Hungarian expellees and the local Jewish intelligentsia to their execution bore the clear mark of “Für die deutsche Winterhilfe” — German Winter Relief. In Kolomea, the Kreishauptmann went far beyond that. Claus Volkmann became an active participant in the extermination of the Hungarian Jews.

As part of transferring the territories into civilian control, the District of Galicia became incorporated into the General Government as its fifth district, administered directly from Lwów (Lviv in Ukrainian, Lemberg in German). Parallel to this transition and filling the power vacuum created by the removal of Hungarian military control, security teams of seasoned SS officers were dispatched from Lwów to Stanislawów and Kolomea.

We can attribute the wholesale annihilation of Jewish communities across southern Galicia, and the Hungarian deportees along with them, to these “second-tier” SS men with regional authority. They followed the general dictum emanating from the headquarters of Major General Fritz Katzmann, who was appointed as Higher SS and Police Leader of the District of Galicia. Joining him in stage-managing the unfolding
genocide were two well-educated, high-ranking SS officers, SS Senior Colonel and Police Colonel Dr. Karl Eberhard Schöngarth and Major Dr. Helmut Tanzmann, who headed the Security Police in Lwów from August 1, 1941.

Jeckeln’s reputation had been cemented by his role in masterminding mass murders in Kamenets-Podolsk, Babi Yar, and Riga. While these three officers could not match the productivity of Jeckeln in murder, they were equally notorious for being ruthless and prolific murderers. Fritz Katzmann was not as well educated as many of his contemporaries in the officers’ rank. Yet, because of his party fealty, he rose rapidly in the ranks and was promoted to major general of police on September 26, 1941. One of his commanding officers from his early years in the SS called him “unusually ambitious . . . full of the fighting spirit . . . a fanatical political soldier.”

Schöngarth and Tanzmann, on the other hand, were both displaced intellectuals, well born and university educated with degrees in law. Schöngarth’s approach to murder was especially instructive: he ordered his commanders to follow his example in individually shooting Jews during executions—there was no option except to participate. Following such an episode, he made a speech: “You saw how it was done. Every man should join in the shooting. I will shoot anyone who doesn’t agree. I will back up every SS Führer who shoots a man for not obeying my order.”

The first priority for the security leadership in Lwów was to stabilize the border region adjacent to Carpathian Ruthenia and Bukovina, in Romania. This demanded a rapid expansion of security services in southern Galicia. This had, as we will learn later, direct connection with the Hungarian decision to transfer Jews to Galicia. In turn, the most immediate question is how this influenced Hungarian policies toward the deportation, and how this new security establishment impacted the fate of the already deposited deportees from Hungary.

The rapidly evolving administrative structure and corresponding policy of genocide became clear during the trial testimony of one of the main architects of the Holocaust in Galicia, Captain Hans Krüger. He testified in 1968 that the decision to secure the border and destroy Galician Jewry, and with it the remnants of the Jews deported from Hungary, was made in Lwów in early July 1941. As head of the security services reporting to Katzmann, Dr. Schöngarth instructed him to set up a branch office of the Regional Command of the Security Police.

Two weeks prior to Krüger’s arrival, an advance unit of six men, under the command of Oskar Brandt, was dispatched to Stanisławów for establishing security presence parallel to the Hungarian military’s departure. By mid-September, a whole network of police stations, border stations, and security offices came rapidly into existence along the line of the Carpathian Mountains thanks to the efforts of Krüger and his soon-to-be-arriving subordinate First Lieutenant Peter Leideritz. The rationale was clear. Setting up these outposts (Grenzpolizei-Kommissariat) along the lines of the Carpathian Mountains, in Tatarów, Wyszków, Śniatyn, Zabie, and other
locations, indicated the paramount importance of creating a buffer zone between the Galician communities and Hungary. Its explicit aim was to prevent any further transfer of Hungarian Jews into the General Government.

Thus, Krüger and Leideritz became the undisputed rulers of life and death for large swath of Galicia. The main control was concentrated in the offices of the Sipo in Stanislawów and Kolomea. To shore up the operation in Kolomea, reinforcements consisting of thirty-five men of the Vienna Schutzpolizei (Schupo) arrived in September. Beside Kamenets-Podolsk, these districts were the main regions where Hungarian Jews streamed in large numbers. In addition to blocking the border region, these command posts dictated the implementation of the first stage of the Holocaust across Galicia. Roving murder squads, pulled together from various border stations, security agencies, and local civil administrations, were dispatched to smaller towns and villages to finish the periodical cleansing actions. The hallmark of this stage of the unfolding genocide in Galicia could be found in the multilevel and overlapping authorities of Nazi bureaucracy. Top-down directives might have been issued, but they did not prescribe the mode of implementing the killings by these leaders. Local commanders acted with a surprising degree of autonomy. As one historian phrased it: “it was largely left to the judgment of the individual administrator how he would deal with 'his' Jews.” Replacing the mobile extermination units, stationary security offices across the region were able to pursue their own “Judenpolitik,” with corresponding killing operations.

Hungarian Jews were not the only concern of the incoming security agencies. To a lesser degree, these forces also faced Jewish refugees from the south, from Bukovina. Considering the massive Romanian expulsion of hundreds of thousand Jews from Bukovina and Bessarabia, their alarm was justified. However, the most vexing issue remained the large and sustained transfer of Jews from Hungary. Thus, the border security was given an overlapping command by Tanzmann to Krüger to immediately execute everyone routinely returned by the Hungarian border authorities. These included Hungarian Jews who had been captured by Hungarian border guards while attempting to flee and were sent back over the border as well as escaping Galician Jews from the ghettos, who desperately tried to find shelter in Hungary or Romania. The first shooting of about “100 young people up to 35 years of age, which was handed over by the Hungarian authorities, took place in December [1941] at the Wyszkow Pass.” Similar instructions were given to other border posts facing Romania.

From the beginning, one of the chief mandates of the Nazi security apparatus — in fact a rationale for their existence — was the implementation of the rapidly evolving Final Solution. Within its context, the Hungarian Jewish influx assumed a special place. The fall of 1941 can be identified as a qualitative marking point in the solution of the “Jewish Question” in the Galician region. As the pulse of genocide in the following several months accelerated with a rapid escalation of the killings, its
character moved from spontaneous massacres to the systematic and utilitarian decimation of the Jewish population headed to the newly created ghettos or concentrated in large towns.

Again, the guiding rationale for the implementation of this policy, as Krüger explained in his pretrial interrogation of June 26, 1962, was: “when the heads of the various branch offices were installed by the new commander in Lwów, SS-Lieutenant Colonel [Helmut] Tanzmann, specific areas were assigned, and then the guidelines for work were set down…. Jews not suitable for deployment as laborers were to be shot on a regular basis, because space was no longer available.”

Without dismissing the underlying racial myopia as a base for the extermination of Jews, and Russian soldiers as well, an equally weighty factor was the German concerns about food shortages during 1941 and 1942. As a rule, the people of the conquered territories were condemned to a drastic reduction in food supply. The Jews were subjected to forced starvation and, later, outright killing. For example, the March 31, 1942, “Gross Aktion” in Stanisławów was precipitated by German concerns that “there were too many Jews to be fed. They decided that there is only food enough for 8,000 Jews.” As a side note, the Hungarian refugees who were housed in the Rudolfmühle (Rudolf’s Mill), a “warehouse” for those marked for death, were, by that time, dying daily from systematic starvation. The ghetto administration was not able to supply food even for their own population. Christian Gerlach argued persuasively that worry over food shortages sharply accelerated the mass killings. Yet these concerns were a reinforcing, not a primary, motive for murder. And since they realized that such shootings could not be organized overnight, the plan was that the residential areas set aside for the Jews should be progressively reduced. This poses the question as to how the influx of thousands of Hungarian Jews impacted the precarious communal balance in various Galician communities?

REFUGEES FROM “KARPATOROS”

With the commencement of German civilian rule, an estimated 30,000 to 40,000 Jews were killed in the District of Galicia alone by the end of 1941. Among the murdered in this sweep, the number of Hungarian Jewish victims can be placed at over 5,000. Because the majority came from or via Carpathian Ruthenia and adjacent areas, their common designation by the locals was “Karpatoros.” These peripatetic Hungarians, chased and hounded from town to town, were viewed by the emerging security establishment as a nuisance that needed to be eliminated. This is also the moment when the fate of the Hungarian Jewish expellees intertwined with that of the Jews of Galicia. Here may be an answer to one of the enduring questions that has occupied historians:
Why was the District of Galicia the first in the General Government to exterminate its entire Jewish population? Concurrently with the formation of civil authority, a sizeable number of the Hungarian Jewish survivors found themselves, after long and tortuous treks on foot, in the already crowded Jewish shtetls, thus increasing the Jewish population of cities and towns. In turn, these destitute masses strained the local humanitarian resources of the Jewish communities who were themselves under economic distress.

In tracing the fate of the Hungarian expellees across the region, we need to reexamine the follow-up phase to Kamenets-Podolsk, the implementation of the second and third waves of extermination in Ukraine. These subsequent phases coincided with a unique evolution within the Nazi administrative hierarchy from a centralized to a diffused power structure. By the fall of 1941, as Richard J. Evans perceptively noted, Nazi power ceased to be vertical. It was not taking its cues in every detail solely from Berlin. As German soldiers, policemen, and civilian authorities spread themselves thin over the occupied territories, mid-level security officers interpreted their role and mandate in administering the territories relatively independently.

The Galician Jews looked on the long columns from “Karpatoros” slowly winding through their towns, flanked by club-wielding, gun-toting Ukrainian paramilitaries, with compassion and a marked degree of trepidation. The town of Skala was located along one of the routes through which Hungarian Jews were funneled toward Kamenets-Podolsk. At the end of July, “the Jews of Skala saw the heartbreaking march of thousands of Jews from Carpathian Ruthenia, guarded by Ukrainians, taken to the old Russian border and from there to Kamenets-Podolski. The Skala Jews collected food and clothes and provided them with carts to carry the exhausted. All those people perished in massive killings in the environs of Kamenets-Podolski.”

Not everyone, though, ended up in that city. Thousands of them were directed, instead, to Kolomea, Horodenka, Czortków, Nadwóra, Delatyn, Kosów, Zabloțow, Jaremce, Kuty, Buczacz, and other locales where they shared inextricably in the fate of their local coreligionists. A letter, dated on November 13, 1941, openly informed relatives in Budapest that death became so ubiquitous that “we almost ignore it.” By working for the German military, the writer held a special pass that temporarily protected him, but he was also aware that whenever the roaming Gestapo men decided, “they empty a street where Jews live and take the people away though we don’t know where. They allegedly are executed.”

The majority, mainly from the Máramaros region of Carpathian Ruthenia, reached Stanisławów in early August. The concentration of these refugees increased the local population. This led to a regular sequence of slaughter, culminating in one of the most notorious mass murders in the General Government on October 12, 1941. In writing about the extermination of Jews in the District of Galicia, Thomas Sandkuehler
noticed that a pattern emerged when the ghettos as designed were “much too small from the outset to accommodate all the Jews of the city. This brought on hunger and disease. Added to this was a widespread famine due to the flooding and the deportation to this area of Hungarian Jews, only part of whom had been deported to the Ukrainian city of Kamenets-Podolsk and shot there.”

The extermination drive in the fall of 1941, sweeping unremittingly across Eastern Europe, culminated in October and November with a daily killing rate that surpassed that of Kamenets-Podolsk. This, of course, impacted not only the District of Galicia. One can detect a centralized course of planning emanating from Berlin via Kiev. Probably it was not a coincidence that almost parallel with massacres in this district, a sudden surge in mass murder was occurring in many locations, hundreds of miles away, as far as Dnepropetrovsk, Krivoy Rog, and other localities in Eastern Ukraine, by mid-October. The launching of the Holocaust in Galicia, though, started in August and September, earlier than other regions.

The next six months can be characterized as filled with overlapping murder waves that lurched toward the Final Solution: the ultimate annihilation of the Jewish community. They ranged from the elimination of the intellectual strata of various communities (Intelligenz Aktion) in the first week after the establishment of the German civil administration, to intermittent “culling” of specific groups within the Jewish community, mainly those expelled from Hungary and other European countries, and to large-scale “signature” massacres in mid-October and early November that gave focus to the genocide taking place in the General Government.

Under the psychological and physical stresses of German rule, the Hungarian influx into various communities complicated precarious intercommunity dynamics. Upon their arrival, the local Jewish community would extend spontaneous assistance to the worn out and traumatized multitude by establishing a tentative support system that included food distribution, housing, and orphanages. Orphanages were especially important because of the many families broken up during the military transportation to Galicia or the Ukrainian murder sprees.

This supportive arrangement rapidly disintegrated under the weight of an unremitting reduction in food supply and living space in the ghettos. The refugees (essentially) became a burden to the ghetto leadership. Baruch Milch summed up well this evolution: “The remaining Jews [Hungarians], who were able to settle among the local Jews in various ways, were vegetating terribly. They communicated with great difficulty with their mother country, they quickly used up capital and valuable property, which they had with them, as a foreign element in these lands they were always the first to be exposed to all manners of danger—whether burdened with forced labor, or round-ups for lagers, or in actions [Aktionen]. Our Jewry had enough work with itself, so that the committees, initially bringing them help, quickly ceased their work.”
The German demands for forced labor and, at the final stages, the systematic delivery of Jews to the slaughter, further eroded any semblance of unity within the community. The impact on the fraying communal solidarity because of the fate of the Hungarian expellees was incremental but inevitable. Eliza Binder in Stanisławów expressed this frustration of not being able to help: “an immense hatred awakens in me. . . . Still, it’s mostly about those Hungarian Jews. Besides them, isn’t it true that each day they put twenty hunger victims into a common grave?”27 Since they had no anchor in the host communities, and they had no means to bribe officials, they were the ones sent by the Jewish Councils (Judenrate) to satisfy the ever-increasing Nazi demands for slave labor or to death. A survivor, trying to reach the Hungarian border, was specifically warned not to register in the Horodenka Judenrat for aid, because “it sends the Hungarian refugees to German work camps.” One illuminating event was the building of a 1,360-mile-long “trans-Ukrainian highway,” the infamous Durchgangstrasse IV (DGSIV), in which Hungarian deportees also played a prominent role.28 Finally, the Hungarians were also the first ones to be marked for extermination within the various communities. The Jewish police in the ghettos had to fill a quota of Jews for the routinely conducted decimation, Aktionen, or their own family would be target for execution pits. Intercommunity cooperation or moral standards under these circumstances dissolved in the face of extreme conditions. The quote of a survivor from the Bolechow ghetto (Bolekhiv in Ukrainian) well sums up the general view of the Jewish police: “I was more afraid of them than anybody.”29 They often delivered the Jews of “Karpatoros” first. And, within these concentric circles in the rapidly fractured Jewish communities, the “foreign” Jews, those who were either expelled by the Germans in 1939 or transported from Hungarian internment camps, were perhaps the most defenseless, as they were on the bottom of the socioeconomic scale. These same international refugees viewed the “poor” and “religiously backward Jews” of Galicia with a degree of cultural superiority if not disdain. Blanca Rosenberg’s sharp words resonate in this context: “But even after that, they wanted nothing to do with the rest us [poor Polish Jews].”30 While these “foreign Jews” had very little common ground or connection to the Hungarian Jews, there was an even deeper cultural divide with the local communities. As a result, they had almost no chance for survival.31

CULLING THE DEPORTEES:
“INTELLIGENZ AKTIONEN”

The transition to German civilian control and setting up the security establishment signaled the second wave of extermination, commencing in late August and early September. It was invariably inaugurated by a decimation of the intellectual and
political leadership of the Jewish community and, to a lesser degree, the Polish intelligentsia—hence the term Intelligenz Aktion. This was the opening salvo in the annihilation process for many towns and cities in the District of Galicia. That is also the procedure SS-Captain Hans Krüger employed in launching the Galician Holocaust.

Krüger looms large in the successive wave of murders engulfing the region. By some estimates, he was singularly responsible for the murder of more than 70,000 Jews and the deportation of another 12,000 to death camps within the span of sixteen months. What is most astonishing is that he could accomplish this with a small cadre of men, sometimes as few as twenty-five, and a minimum of resources. But he could augment his security team with a wide array of human resources from security agencies, including a large contingent of Ukrainian auxiliaries, teams of ethnic Germans, railroad police (Bahnpolizei), and even the youngsters from the Hitler Jugend. Notably, Krüger had at his disposal a Volksdeutsche (ethnic German) unit recruited from Hungary that routinely participated in the exterminations. He also established a unit recruited from Romania. However the backbone of the successive “Judenaktionen” was Reserve Police Battalion 133, which participated in the collection, transportation, cordon duties, and the killing of the Jews. Finally, the logistical support of the German civil administration was also a contributing factor. Nevertheless, his accomplishments in genocide, at least in comparison with the Einsatzgruppen with a much larger cache of human resources, is gruesomely impressive.

Krüger’s transfer to Stanislawów to organize the Final Solution in Galicia coincided with the influx of Hungarian Jews into the region. It was a well-calculated move on the part of his superior, Dr. Schöngarth. He could not have selected a more dedicated Nazi officer for such a task. Several weeks later, he was joined by SS-First Lieutenant Peter Leideritz, who assumed command of the Grenzpolizeikommissariat Kolomea. As it was noted earlier, these two officers crafted an impressive record in genocide. They were well-seasoned killers with prior mass shootings on their résumés. In turn, the two of them soon became the most productive executioners in the District of Galicia, if not in the entire General Government. Under their leadership, security teams from Stanislawów, Kolomea, and the various border stations fanned out to villages and towns where only German civilian authorities were stationed for periodical small-scale slaughters. There was a fierce rivalry between the two as to the number of exterminations. Both also harbored an enthusiasm for the art of plunder. It became common knowledge that they blatantly emptied the homes of their Jewish and Polish victims of all valuables upon their arrest and the inevitable executions.

Krüger’s arrival in Stanislawów on August 1, 1941 — parallel with the influx of thousands of Hungarian Jews in the city — was anything but uneventful. Wasting no time, he unleashed an immediate spate of killings, the so-called Intelligenz Aktion, starting the next day, August 2, 1941.
Anticipating his arrival, an order by the Gestapo was issued on July 29 to the Judenrat to compile a list of the Jewish intellectuals listed by profession. This included doctors, lawyers, teachers, and religious leaders. Poles and Jews of the professional and educated classes were ordered to report to the police under the guise of registering for work placement. The Judenrat refused to make this selection and give a list to the Germans. During the selection, the captain did not hide his omnipotent power over the frightened intellectuals, some of them members of the Judenrat, by introducing himself: “Ich bin der Herr von Euer Leben und Tod” (I am the Master of your Life and Death). He lived up to his words. By the time of his transfer sixteen months later, he had made Stanislawów “Judenfrei.” This included the destruction of close to 3,000 Hungarian exiles.

On August 4, he followed through on this pronouncement by shooting approximately five hundred Jews and ninety-nine Poles in the forest near the village of Pawelcze. The killers followed the well-rehearsed playbook of the SS in assuming operational control of a city. It was a short and lethal introduction to the second phase of the “Holocaust by bullets,” which by and large escaped the attention of historians. The aim of these “Intelligenz Aktionen” was first to decapitate the leadership of both the Jewish and, to a lesser degree, Polish communities, and second to instill physical and psychological terror in the community.

Hans Krüger’s candid admission during a conversation with the Polish Countess Karolina Lanckoronska, whom he arrested as a member of the Polish underground in 1942, is instructive of this modus operandi of the Gestapo. “When we march into a city,” Krüger boasted, “we always have lists, prepared in advance, of people who have to be arrested.” And, in this rare moment Krüger also proudly admitted to her his involvement in one of the most infamous examples of an “Intelligenz Aktion,” that of the executions of the leading intellectuals in Ukraine—the killing of the Lwów professors. It might be that this “confessional” moment was driven by his belief that the countess would not leave his prison alive. No one ever did. Nevertheless, it was a tactical error on his part, for the countess survived, thanks to the intervention of the Italian Royal House. His indiscretion later contributed partly to his downfall and consequent transfer; his transgression being not the killing itself, but “betraying secret information.”

Reminiscent of the rationale for the Intelligenz Aktion, and still within the framework of the second wave, was the practice of targeting specifically Hungarian Jews and with them other refugees from various European countries—many of them from Hungarian internment camps. These killings were conducted through the closing months of 1941 and spring of 1942. They might be termed “culling or cleansing actions,” with a goal of reducing the size of the ghettos as well as savings in the corresponding food supply.

The weekly killings of certain numbers of Hungarian Jews, concentrated in Rudolfmühle in Stanislawów, became a ritual for Krüger and other Sipo personnel.
In Czortków, the process was more covert. Penina Kaufmann, who was deported with her family from Kassa (today’s Kosice in Slovakia) to Czortków, recalled that announcements were posted in winter 1941–1942 for all persons “who were not the residents of the city” (i.e., Hungarian expellees) to report to the building of the Judenrat. Realizing that the decree spelled imminent doom for those who obeyed it, five Hungarian families set out the same night on the perilous journey toward the Hungarian border. Their concern was justified because those who reported were exterminated.41

In Kolomea, the security services were especially active in ferreting out “foreign nationals.” It might be that this general designation was used intentionally as a subterfuge by Peter Leideritz so he would not have to alert the Hungarian Army headquarters in the city when he exterminated Hungarian refugees. As head of the Sipo post, the commandant conducted such routine “culling actions.” As a perpetrator admitted in his trial, it was done “in three-week intervals.” He issued an order on December 23 that “all Jews who possessed a foreign passport were ordered to the Gestapo headquarters for ‘registration.’” For full compliance, the announcement promised to repatriate the foreign nationals to “their home countries.”42 Twelve hundred Jews, believing in this ruse, were imprisoned, tortured, and taken to Szeparowce Forest43 where they were killed. While this was specifically aimed to destroy the expellees from Hungary, German, American, Brazilian, Austrian, Czech, Cuban, and even Peruvian citizens were also mentioned.

A local survivor, Blanca Rosenberg’s, recollection of a dialogue with a German Jew who went willingly to the Gestapo with some Hungarians, is a chilling reminder of the vulnerability of the “foreign” Jews who had neither a cultural nor political affinity with the local Jewish community, nor with their fellow deportees from Hungary. This German–Jewish dilemma of believing in German culture, law, and decency, and the inability to adopt to an “alternate” reality—even on the brink of the abyss—doomed them. “I stared at him. ‘But you’re not going, are you? It’s certain death.’ ‘Don’t worry. It’ll be all right. After all, we’re German nationals. They can’t just liquidate us. Anyway, it’s an order.’” Rosenberg noted that “for him the Nazis weren’t German” and even this proud German Jew “in the end, remained loyal to a fiction.” The bitter irony of this moment was that neither the Hungarians nor the German Jews understood that this was not Schiller’s or Goethe’s Germany anymore.44

Such monthly culling Aktionen in the Kolomea Ghetto continued unabated in 1942: “On 24 January 1942, 400 Jewish intellectuals were imprisoned, tortured, and killed.” Among those 400, there were thirty Hungarians and four Romanians who were arrested in Kosów and transported to Kolomea. Finally, between March 9 and 16, 1942, the remaining 2,000 foreign nationals, which included over 600 Hungarians, in addition to Austrian, Czech, Slovak, and German Jews, were exterminated.45
Not less significant were the many ongoing extermination operations, on a more limited scale, in almost every corner of Galicia. Because of the deliberate Nazi policy of making the border zone between Hungary and Ukraine "Judenfrei," the cleansing of this area was a priority. Many Hungarian Jews were caught up in this deadly dragnet on both side of the border. While conditions were different from place to place, in the Kolomea and Stanislawów districts the hunt for Hungarian Jews was the most intense. It’s difficult to reach a reliable estimate about the number of expellees who were murdered in these “culling” operations in the smaller communities. From early October on, though, there was a noticeable shift in the policy of annihilation, focusing on a more comprehensive decimation of the Jewish population. With the aim of reducing their numbers as the implementation of ghettoization commenced, these killings took place prior to setting up the ghettos. Accordingly, directives from the office of SS-Lieutenant Colonel Helmut Tanzmann in Lwów were sent out in early October to the stations in Stanislawów and Kolomea. They instructed Krüger and Leideritz to prepare for a wave of extermination around mid-October that would dwarf in scope and size any previous killings.

DRESS-REHEARSAL FOR MASS MURDER: “PROBEAKTION”

The next phase of the Galician Holocaust was launched in the first week of October in a small featureless town, Nadwórna, not far from Stanislawów. Mass killing, as a form of absolute control over thousands of defenseless people, can be hard to renounce. It has an intoxicating power, as its perpetrator becomes an arbiter of life and death. Krüger and many of his fellow officers from the lower ranks tasted the power of murder and remained addicted to it even where there were almost no Jews left to kill. He pursued with equally visceral loathing the Polish community in the Stanislawów District. He singled out for special “treatment” Poles who befriended Hungarian officers. Countess Lanckoronska, who was arrested by Krüger in 1942, noticed a pattern in that “nearly all of them [Poles] were accused of ‘having contacts with Hungarians.’”

Considering that the Hungarians were close military allies of the Wehrmacht, one can only guess about the source of his hatred. The only creditable explanation might be found in a recurring theme in his Operational Situation Reports about Polish friendship with the Hungarian military. Another motivation for this “anti-Hungarian” complex might be his humiliation by Lieutenant General Szombathelyi in Kolomea, a notable episode that will be discussed later in forcing him to release a group of doomed Jews.46

The main target of annihilation for Krüger and fellow SS officers remained the Jews. Until October 1941, the killings were limited to sporadic massacres—mostly
“Intelligenz Aktion.” By mid-October, though, they faced the formidable task of drastically reducing the Jewish population. Krüger had participated in prior murders, but nothing prepared his fellow officers for the magnitude of a large-scale “Judenaktion.”

Killing thousands of human beings is a complicated task. It demands advance planning, logistical coordination, the diversion of human resources from other branches of the security services, and, above all, mental conditioning. The active and passive cooperation of the occupied population was equally important for shaping the impending wave of executions. In the end, it was the sheer German persistence, above all, that allowed for the success of the extermination of the Jews of Galicia and the Hungarians with them.

Krüger understood that for a well-planned program of extermination, with a Grossaktion in Stanislawów on his mind, there was a need for a dress rehearsal. Nadwórna, with a Jewish population of 5,000, seemed suitable for the first bloodletting. Twenty-five percent of the entire Jewish population was comprised of Hungarian refugees: “1,000 Jewish refugees were brought to Nadwórna from Karpatoros [Carpathian Ruthenia] who had been Hungarian citizens. The Jews of Nadwórna stretched out to them a helping hand, opened a community kitchen and housed them in the synagogue and in private homes.”47 They became the primary targets of the ensuing extermination.

The mass murder was envisioned as a “training exercise” for larger massacres to come. Because of the magnitude of the operation, Krüger brought in reinforcements from the border police, Ukrainian auxiliaries, and Reserve Police Battalion 133. Special efforts were made to foster camaraderie and boost morale prior to the execution. A major dinner with plenty of schnapps was provided for the officers the evening before. There was nothing unique about an evening like this; it was based on the SS manual’s instructions on how to condition the mind of the executioners for mass murder.

On the first day of the Jewish holiday of Succoth, October 6, the full-scale extermination began in Nadwórna. Two thousand Jews, among them 500 Hungarian and some Austrian deportees, were concentrated in the main square: “The Germans and the members of the Ukrainian police burst into the homes of the Jews and started to assemble them in the square near the church. On the way [there] many of those who refused to go were killed and those who tried to escape . . . In the afternoon trucks arrived and the Jews were transported to the Bukowinka forest,” where the victims were ordered to undress before their execution.48

The involvement of the German civil administration is notable; the Kreishauptmann (County Executive) supplied the trucks. Reserve Police Battalion 133, whose 1st and 2nd company were stationed in Stanislawów, also played a vital role in the massacre. Under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Gustav Englisch, the battalion was transferred from Nuremberg to Galicia in October. It was thrust almost immediately into mass murder.49
The slaughter started in the early afternoon and continued uninterrupted until the evening. An official from the municipal services commented that “only SS personnel from Stanislawów, who had come with their boss, Krüger, did the shooting.” Indeed, Krüger personally demonstrated, like Schöngarth, how to shoot efficiently. An eyewitness recalled that “during the killing many of them [Jews] were being beaten cruelly, and especially, both the Nazis and their helpers, taunted and physically abused the old, the women, the children and the handicapped. Some of the Jews were buried alive.” More than 2,000 of the Nadwórna Jews were killed in this Aktion as well as Jews from the surrounding villages: “Among the killed there were also the refugees from Karpatoros” [Hungarian Jews]. This was not the only recollection that mentioned the killing of the Hungarian Jews. The most moving epithet belongs to a Galician survivor who was able to escape Galicia and find shelter in Budapest. He was ordered to cover the mass graves again eight months after the murders in Nadwórna, because the site was not covered adequately by the requisitioned villagers, noted that “strewn all over [were] torn prayer books . . . some in Hungarian translation; most likely the Hungarian Jews (there were several hundreds of them) who had lost their lives there, had brought these prayer-books from Hungary.”

After the guns fell silent, the macabre ritual of the distribution of the worldly possessions of the Jews who had just been murdered, scattered around in heaps, began. There was a pecking order, though. The Germans, members of the police battalions, were the first one to select the most valuable items, after which the Ukrainian auxiliaries could get a few pieces from the discarded garments. They even organized a public auction for the remaining items.

In the evening, the SS officers retired for a sumptuous dinner at the local restaurant, Kazia Hanus — the point of departure from where, that same morning, they had started the liquidation of half of the Jewish population of Nadwórna. It may have been the first, but it was not the last time that these men would celebrate mass murder with a party. There was a festive atmosphere in the air. Edwards Westermann labeled such an event as “Fellowship Evenings” or “Murder Banquets,” which not only celebrated the accomplished massacre, but also fostered camaraderie and, reflecting Himmler’s comment, “helped to prevent these ‘difficult duties’ from ‘harming the mind’ associated with mass murder.”

Krüger summed up the events of the day with a cynical quip: “The wedding was a success, but we had not been prepared for such a large number of guests.” What he meant was that despite running out of ammunition and the impending darkness that prevented the SS from finishing the job, it was a “successful” Aktion. The evening was both a victory celebration and a consultative meeting to assess the operation. Accompanied with the customary heavy drinking, it resembled, in some ways, a business enterprise with a jovial “corporate board meeting” about murder; the discussion
centered on lessons learned from this experience, what need to be changed, and constructive suggestions for future massacres to come.

As often with Nazi atrocities, the executioners did not bother with covering the mass graves. In this case, this task was left for the Jewish community: “The next morning, about 200 Jews were fetched from their homes, including me, and brought us to the site of the massacre. They had also brought shovels and lime and ordered us to cover the mass graves. The sight was catastrophic. We hurried along with our work, and then we were allowed to go home again.” What made this mass murder different from future Aktionen was its purpose: conditioning the executioners. Besides serving as a “dry run” for the much larger Stanislawów massacre a week later, this event marked the actual beginning of the “Final Solution” in the General Government.

“What made this mass murder different from future Aktionen was its purpose: conditioning the executioners. Besides serving as a “dry run” for the much larger Stanislawów massacre a week later, this event marked the actual beginning of the “Final Solution” in the General Government.”

“Wer noch lebt, kann nach Hause gehen, der Führer hat Euch das Leben geschenkt” (“Those who are still alive can go home, the Führer has gave you the gift of life”) were Hans Krüger’s closing words on the evening of October 12, 1941, signaling the conclusion of the most notorious and largest massacre in the General Government until then.

Die Blutsonntag (the Bloody Sunday), as it became known in Holocaust lore, resulted in the murder of an estimated 12,000 people during a short, snowy, and cold afternoon in the New Jewish Cemetery of Stanislawów. After a murder of such a magnitude, Krüger ran out of time to fully accomplish his grisly task. Reprieved at the last minute, for the dazed and traumatized survivors it might have sounded like a bitter irony that the killing had come to an end and they were free to go home. As darkness descended, among the murdered thrown into the hastily dug pits were more than 2,000 Hungarian Jews.

There are several questions that might help to understand the evolution of the tragic fate of these victims. How these Hungarians ended up in Stanislawów? Why their initial hearty welcome by the local Jewish community changed dramatically as time went by? How the Nazi administration viewed them? And, more importantly, why the Hungarians were singled out to be the first ones for the massacre? The Hungarian deportees, by some estimates hovering around 3,000, were the second largest contingent after those in Kamenets-Podolsk. Deported mainly from Máramaros County in Carpathian Ruthenia and northern Transylvania, the first large contingent arrived in this provincial town at the end of July and early August. Their life and death in Stanislawów became an especially grisly memento in the history of the 1941 deportation. Their entrance into the city was a pitiful sight, a genuine shock to the local Jewish community:

They came by foot, in front the women, others with infants on their breasts and some with beddings, the elderly walking propped up on their canes. A tragic sight, seeing the Eternal Wandering Jew... travelling by foot, they covered the 300 km, they arrived in Stanislawów to share the tragedy with the
local Jews. The Judenrat first put them up in prayer houses and the synagogue, then they were moved to the Rudolfmühle. It was a flour mill, that name was changed to the house of death. From this time, their lot was constant hunger, cold, not enough clothing to cover their bodies, exposed to all sorts of sickness like typhoid, dysentery, they were short on everything, hardly any similar situation on earth. 17

Additional Hungarian transports arrived periodically to Stanislawów. Their initial and direct treatment by the Gestapo, though, was even more ghastly. Upon arriving in Stanislawów, based on the testimony of a Hungarian prisoner, the Ukrainian guards led them directly to the Gestapo prison where they met SS-Captain Krüger: “This was the first time I saw a German. Until then only Ukrainians. . . . The first German officer, his name was Krüger. He came with a big dog. We were told to stand in attention—all the men took their hats off. One man didn’t take his hat . . . he was very old and shaky. . . . This German officer, Krüger, sent his dog on him and tore this man to pieces. That’s was our greeting there.”

Indeed, it was an apt introduction to a dystopian universe created by Krüger. During ten days in the Gestapo prison, which was known alternately as the “courtyard of the Jews” or “courtyard of death,” this Hungarian transport was kept under the open sky without food. When asked how they coped with hunger, Marion Samuel confided that “we didn’t feel anything . . . we were leaning against each other. You didn’t talk, you didn’t want to waste any energy.” 18 Some of the men were asked if they wanted to work and were shipped to an unknown destination—never to be heard from again. The remainder, mainly women and children, were marched off to the Judenrat, which directed them to Rudolfmühle.

They joined thousands of Hungarian exiles already confined in this building. It was a large, unoccupied redbrick building, several stories high, situated on Halitska Street. This depot, and the building next to it, the former Shutzman factory, housed 3,000 Jews in cramped quarters. Most of the Hungarians remained in that place even afterward, when the ghetto was set up separately. Despite humanitarian efforts by the Judenrat and selfless volunteers who “set up a kindergarten . . . washed them, deloused them. . . . All those activities were like a drop in the ocean. Because of the cramped conditions and the shortage of supplies, there were catastrophic hygienic conditions. Epidemics broke out just two weeks after the first victims were brought in. Daily 10 – 20 corpses were removed from the mill, due to starvation and contagious diseases.” 19 Consequently, Krüger had set up a brutal mechanism: he had ordered that all sick Jews be murdered there.

By the spring of 1942, the Rudolfmühle became the regular execution site for the Gestapo in their attempts to decimate the ghetto and exterminate the Hungarian survivors from the earlier bloodbaths. 20 Based on a letter from the local Judenrat to
Baroness Edith Weiss, who was from a rich family of Hungarian industrialists and was a noted Hungarian Jewish activist in Budapest, we know that by end of August, 2,300 Hungarian expellees were registered with the Jewish community. The urgent communication sent her on August 28, 1941, emphasized that the city could not cope even with the needs of the local population—not to speak of the newly arrived and destitute refugees from Hungary.

For the Nazi administration, just like in Kamenets-Podolsk, these Hungarians presented an unwelcome complication. A nuisance. Consequently, they directed the refugees to the care of the Judenrat. By early fall, though, the Stanislawów Jewish community faced, as was true across southern Galicia, intolerable humanitarian and sanitary conditions. Reflecting back again to Kamenets-Podolsk, this Hungarian influx to Stanislawów influenced and expedited the killing process. It has been proposed by several historians that the large number of Hungarians exacerbated the already tenuous situation, contributing to the specter of famine and disease and indirectly to the subsequent murder.

The Nazi solution to this dilemma used the well-tested scenario: an unprecedented bloodbath. To adjust the number of Jews to available space and food, and the eventual ghettoization, SS and Police Leader Fritz Katzman, in consultation with the Chief of the Security Office Helmut Tanzmann, “ordered the ‘superfluous’ Jews of the city to be shot.” For the Jewish police as well as the Nazi security forces, the most immediate and accessible population for extermination were the Hungarians in the Rudolfmühle.

The ensuing bloodletting of October 12, 1941, took place during the Jewish festival of Sukkoth (Hoshana Rabbah) in the New Jewish Cemetery, and created, again, a defining moment in the story of the deportation and the Holocaust. It the largest mass murder in the district of Galicia at that time and was conducted virtually in public. But there is another component of the killing mechanism: a massacre of such proportions under German civil administration was virtually unprecedented in Galicia.

SCHNAPPS AND MASS MURDER: “THE BLOODY SUNDAY”

The shooting started at midday. A member of the Judenrat, Juliusz Feuerman noticed almost instantly that “by the way they were leading the Aktion, I realized that this was not their first one, but something well-rehearsed.” The lessons learned in Nadwórna served SS-Captain Krüger well. Diaries and survivors’ testimonies present a detailed picture of physical and psychological brutality during the mass execution. Nor do they fail to mention that the murderers often held a bottle of vodka during murder operations. Indeed, alcohol served as both a literal and metaphorical lubricant for acts of
violence and atrocity. Westermann noted that “the consumption of alcohol was part of a ritual that not only bound the perpetrators together, but also became a facilitator of acts of “performative masculinity” — a type of masculinity expressly linked to physical or sexual violence.”

The preparation for the Aktion started, as Abraham Liebesman’s diary recounted, on October 10 and 11, when the building department (Baudienst) instructed Ukrainian police to dig huge pits in the cemetery. Because the Nazis were concerned that two pits would not be enough for the impending slaughter, a hastily dug third grave was prepared, almost at the beginning of the massacre. While these arrangements were explained as air-raid shelters, the Jewish community rightly understood that an impending Gross Aktion might be the real reason. Liebesman dryly noted that “on October the 11 rode Krieger on a [white] horse through the Jewish quarter. Since then whenever an action took place he always rode on a horse through the Jewish quarter.”

As customary before a major Aktion, a sumptuous dinner was provided to members of Krüger’s staff the night before, accompanied by a final conference with his commanders about the orders for the next day’s events. On the following morning, a motley assortment of security forces that included, beside his security detail, a Volksdeutsche unit, the Ukrainian police, the Reserve Police Battalion 133, and the railroad police, forcibly removed thousands of Jews from their homes, with the instruction to pack their valuables. Clinging to the hope of resettlement, many did just that. Concentrated in the Ringplatz market square in the center of town, they were force marched or transported in open trucks to the New Jewish Cemetery, which gave an inkling about the true purpose of the march. However, before transporting the local Jews, the collection of Hungarian Jews from Rudolfmühle as well as a large group that arrived in the Gestapo prison a night before started moving in early morning. For them, there was no selection.

Cipora Brenner’s insider account from the killing site is perhaps the most comprehensive description by an active participant in the unfolding drama and the horror endured by the local and Hungarian victims. The details are chilling. Her group arrived from Delyatyn by trucks a day before the slaughter. After enduring a night of torment and killings in the Gestapo prison, they were transferred directly to the cemetery in the early hours. As they were the first ones, these “early arrivals” were seated along the cemetery wall on the left side of the mass graves, which she credited for saving her and her mother’s lives. Her sister, however, was suffocated by hundreds of bodies piling upon her. Groups upon groups from the city filled the space between them and the huge pits, pressing them more and more against the cemetery wall. In the center, between the two large pits, were separate tables with sausage and alcohol set up for the Germans and Ukrainians. In her estimation, from the five hundred freshly transported Hungarians only five survived the massacre.
By all accounts, Fritz Katzmann, the Higher SS and Police Leader of the District of Galicia, assumed a critical role in the decision-making process for the massacre. Prior to the commencement of the execution, a phone call came in the morning, directly from him, officially authorizing the mass shooting. The members of the *Judenrat* and their families were spared. They were separated by the personal order of Krüger and were made to sit on the side of the mass grave, forcing them to witness the unfolding nightmarish scene. Was this a continuation of his “I am the Master of your Life and Death” fixation, exuding omnipotence? Or was it a form of torture and humiliation of the highly educated members of the *Judenrat*?

As they entered the cemetery, the victims were ordered to give up all valuables, which were promptly collected. After undressing, the shooting started by individual executions around one o’clock. Because of the arrival of wave upon wave of victims, however, the rate “of killing individually” became inefficient enough that Krüger ordered the Jews “to get into the ditch on top of the previous victims . . . and mowed them down by machine gun fire. Not everyone was killed immediately. Dead people were laying together with wounded ones. Small children were not shot, just simply dumped into the ditch. . . . the dead bodies simple choked them.”

A survivor recounted that amid the carnage, “I saw Krüger running back and forth, exhorting his subordinates to work [kill] ‘schneller, schneller’ [faster, faster]. In one hand, he held a pistol, in the other a bottle of schnapps. . . . The Germans and the Ukrainians [sic] shot and drank without interruption.”

The shooting was accompanied alternately by moments of indescribable drama and silences. As a mother was pleading for pity for her three-year-old daughter, “said the Gestapo, you may live, but your daughter must die. She was holding her daughter against her heart, they killed both of them.” Cipora Brenner remembered only an eerie silence, “no crying, not even a voice. . . . They kept walking between two lines of club-wielding Ukrainians who were beating them toward the grave.”

The killing continued into the evening. As night fell over the cemetery, Krüger, determined to finish the job, ordered trucks from the motor pool to illuminate the murder site with their headlights. There were serious concerns, though, on the part of the Gestapo about accidentally shooting their own men, for the executioners were too drunk to aim properly. Around six o’clock, the civilian administrator of the city, *Kreishauptmann* Heinz Albrecht, arrived, stopped the carnage, and ordered those alive to return home. It was a surprising development when a civilian head of the region made the decision to put an end to the carnage.

Krüger declared: “the Führer has granted you life. A hysterical atmosphere prevailed at the cemetery, uncontrollable laughter, cries, lamentation after dear ones all over.” By that time, however, the ground of the cemetery was covered by layers of dead bodies who were not shot but died as consequence of the huge number of people crowded
and pressed against the cemetery wall. As the executioners drove more and more people toward the mass graves, “everyone tried to move toward the wall, getting away from the pits.” One might be tempted to reenvision the terror with which the cornered mass of humanity inside the confines of the cemetery responded to this horrific moment. Human imagination, though, has a natural filter for providing a true picture of the fear and panic.

In the ensuing tumult and panic, hundreds were trampled, crushed, and suffocated under the weight of this compressed humanity. In her testimony, Cipora Brenner captured the chilling and surreal picture of the concluding moments of the nightmare: “I was under several layers of dead people as I heard my mother calling our names. After finding her, we started to look for my sister . . . we found her by removing the dead from top of her . . . she was still alive. She raised her hand with a faint wave and fell back, ‘finished.’ We didn’t cry, though. My mother pulled me away, ‘let’s leave that we can tell our story to the world. . . .’ Can you imagine, a mother is leaving her daughter?” This was the moment that she snapped and began bitterly to sob. This was also a moment of unexpected humanity. A German soldier, he might have been a policeman from Reserve Police Battalion 133, approached her and gently lifted her by the arm, softly imploring her: “My child, you have remained alive (dubistlebengeblieben), you cannot help her anymore . . . leave now and find a man with a beard who should surely be Jewish, he will help you.”

As for the members of the Judenrat, who were forced to watch the slaughter from beginning to its inglorious end, the spectacle must have been unbearable torment. One member, Juliusz Feuerman, and his family were released by the order of Krüger himself and were sitting on the side of the mass grave along with the rest. He recorded this agony in his diary:

We set on the ground, not moving, numb and indifferent. Wet snow was falling on us. I looked on at what happening all around us. A few times I had to force myself with all my will to realize that this is an actual reality and not some bad dream. After all, they were throwing into the grave pregnant women, mothers with children at breast, and shooting them continuously. . . . About 6 P.M. they stopped the execution and let the rest go home. I could hardly get up from the ground. During that one day, I became an old man. . . . Until now I knew how to work as if I were twenty. I didn’t even have a grey hair. That day, my temples became white.

The final act of the day was predictable. Krüger hosted a celebratory feast in one of the town’s trendy restaurants. No account has survived as to what was said or given as a celebratory toast. The mass graves were not covered until the next day. A few survivors
who were only wounded succeeded in climbing out and returned home under the shelter of darkness. One witness, however, distinctly remembered hearing a faint voice from the grave: “I am a Hungarian doctor . . . I am still alive . . .”

THE FLUIDITY OF GENOCIDE

The order for extermination across Galicia originated directly from Lwów, but the planning and implementation remained in the hands of the executioners. Extermination actions continued unabated at regular intervals across Galicia until 1943. The momentum spiked in and around the middle of October. While the largest slaughter took place in Stanisławów, the key players moved from town to town simultaneously with the Bloody Sunday massacre, sharing manpower and expertise with each other. The role of the Reserve Police Battalion 133 was especially significant in this rolling wave of murder. Starting in Nadwórna, the battalion moved to Stanisławów, Kolomea, Delatyn, Jaremce, Drohovycz, Bolechow, and other towns, leaving destroyed communities in their wake. They also assisted in the final liquidation of the ghettos and prepared transports to Belzec in 1942 from Kolomea and Stanislawów as the Final Solution transited from killing by bullets to death by gas.

The list of communities with a large number of deported Hungarian Jews is a long one and involves almost every town in southern Galicia. There were some notable stations that stood out for the number of victims and ferocity of their killings. What was typical of these successive waves of genocide was how even low-ranking SS officers became the lords of death. The example of Ernst Varchmin, the head of the Border Police Station in Tatarow, is instructive. As a low-ranking Hauptscharführer (sergeant), he orchestrated the destruction of the Jewish community of Delatyn and Jaremce on October 16, 1941. In both towns, there was a substantial Jewish Hungarian presence. With only two German officers under his command, along with several Polish and Ukrainian Kripo officers, he needed the manpower of the 3rd Company of Reserve Police Battalion 133 and Ukrainian auxiliaries for the shooting of 1,950 Jews. Geography here had a decisive role in the slaughter, because these were the most southern Jewish communities in the region.

Several days later, it was the turn of the Jewish community of Dolina, west of Stanislawów, where Sergeant Rudolf Müller from the Border Police at Wyszkow Pass commanded a unit that rounded up 3,500 Jews. After a selection in the marketplace, 2,000 Jews were taken to the local cemetery and shot in the usual way. Nevertheless, these were local actions that had to be authorized by higher-ups in the ranks. The common fingerprint for many of these Aktionen across the region invariably belonged to one SS officer, SS First Lieutenant Peter Leideritz from Kolomea. He had the rank and the
authority to implement this terror. He played a role earlier in Kosów and Horodenka. Local survivors meticulously recorded murder statistics from both places: “2,088 Jews had been shot [in Kosów] during the preceding two days, including 149 refugees from Hungary.” The date was October 18, 1941. Elsewhere, the author reports that the “first Aktion in Horodenka occurred on December 4, 1941. Half of the Jewish population of 4,000 was shot, as were 400 Jewish refugees from Hungary and Romania.”

In mid-October around 900 people, both local and deported Jews from Hungary, were shot by death squads in Jablonica. Parallel massacres were perpetrated in Zabie, Zablotow, Jaremcze, Kuty, and Buczacz. In general, the border area was singled out as a priority for stemming the Hungarian tide and securing the border between Galicia and Carpathian Ruthenia. The Hungarian deportees were pushed back closer and closer to the Carpathian Mountains by relentless pressure from German security forces in the opposite direction. A sizeable number of Hungarian victims were caught along this line and swept up consequently in cleansing actions in the smaller communities.

The fate of the Hungarian expellees in Kolomea was somewhat unusual. The town served as a transit point in the endless meandering of the deportees to their final destination in Kamenets-Podolsk. Equally important was the fact that it functioned temporarily as the headquarters of the Royal Hungarian Army. How much this impacted the operational freedom of the Nazi hierarchy toward the Hungarian Jews is not clear. While they shared the fate of their coreligionists, just like everywhere else, in Kolomea they, as “foreign Jews,” were singled out for extermination in a separate “special action” on December 23, 1941. This action was attributed to Kreishauptmann Claus Volkmann, the county executive; 1,200 Hungarian and Austrian Jews were massacred on this occasion.
This was followed a month later, on January 24, 1942, by a second wave. The number of killed can be estimated over 2,000.\textsuperscript{78}

The presence of the Hungarian Army did not impede the head of the Nazi security services, Leideritz, from conducting these killings. Besides these culling and *Intelligenze Aktionen*, the first large-scale massacre coincided with that of Stanislawów. On October 12, 1941, almost in competition with SS-Captain Krüger, 3,000 Jews were murdered in the Szeparowce Forest, near Kolomea. This “signature” *Aktion* did not reach the magnitude of that of the Bloody Sunday. Its brutality, however, matched that of Stanislawów: “A small girl who escaped from the mass grave in the night (she was only wounded) told us that during the execution, the Gestapo people were laughing: ‘Faster, faster, we will be late to the evening theater show . . . and the blood was flowing in streams.’”\textsuperscript{79}

Hungarian Jews were also included among those killed in the October 12 mass murder. One of them succeeded in crawling out of the grave, wounded but alive, and returned to the city.\textsuperscript{80} Overall, Leideritz’s murder rate in the recurring sweeps in Kolomea and its environs came close to that of Krüger’s. By some estimates between 70,000 to 100,000 Jews were murdered between 1941 and 1943 under his operational authority. During Leideritz’s and his fellow officers’ interrogation by American authorities, and later in his trial in Warsaw, several key details came to light that provide a clear picture about the method and scope of his activities in Kolomea. The testimonies of two of his associates, Staff-Sergeants and *Kriminalsekretäre* Alfred Kiefer and Albert Warmann, head of *Kripo*, clearly show that the utmost brutality was combined with a cunning ability to reassure the Jewish community “that the last operation had been the final one and that no harm would come to the remainder of the Jews.”\textsuperscript{81}

Otherwise, he was well known to viciously beat his victims prior or during the killing operation. A witness recalled that “A popular method of Leideritz was to beat these unfortunate people with a horse-whip until their skin completely peeled away. He carried out the Aktion in the ghetto with utmost sadism by locking people in the houses while setting the buildings on fire through the windows. These scenes were filmed by Leideritz and his officers.” We also learn from these confessions that all executions were supervised by Leideritz, who often participated in the shooting personally: “At these occasions, the *Sicherheitspolizei* [Sipo], *Kripo*, *Ordnungspolizei* [Reserve Police Battalion 133] were present.” The execution squad consisted of four Gestapo men, and to “shoot a batch of a thousand usually took four hours.”\textsuperscript{81}

These details betray a preoccupation with efficiency. Just like Krüger, the Gestapo chief of Kolomea had to contend with limited human resources while accomplishing a high rate of killing. Unlike Krüger, however, Leideritz had a committed, albeit contentious and competing ally in murder as well as plunder in the person of Claus Volkmann. As the *Kreishauptmann*, he represented the civilian authorities in the region. In contrast to other local administrators in southern Galicia, though, he was an eager and
active participant in mass executions. He also took an active part in the deportation of Jews from Kolomea, locals, and Hungarians to Belzec. In a testimony, survivors in the war crime trials of 1947 in Vienna, directly “accused him with the ordering of the liquidation of the Hungarian Jews in Kolomea.” He was named among the “leaders of mass murder together with Peter Leideritz.”

Postwar investigations revealed that Leideritz had another, rather unlikely partner in Kolomea, his wife, Anneliese Leideritz. Wendy Lower described in her arresting book, *Hitler’s Furies: German Women in the Nazi Killing Fields*, how German women became complicit in direct killings in the East, mainly working for the occupational authorities in various administrative roles. Her statement that besides gawking proudly at their “men at work” during mass execution, genocide became also “women’s business” could be applied to Kolomea where some willingly pounced on the opportunity to loot and kill. Indeed, these inquiries also implicated Anneliese Leideritz in unabashed seizure of property that belonged to Jews. A fellow officer from Kolomea testified in 1946 that “it should be mentioned that the procurement of things (civilian clothes and uniform) as well as shoes and boots by Leideritz and his wife has taken on such a large volume, that it aroused the envy of most of the members of the department.”

According to Jewish witnesses, however, the wife of Peter Leideritz went far beyond gawking or plundering. In 1946, she was accused of murder. Anneliese Leideritz had no official title, no official position in the Nazi hierarchy. For all practical purposes, she was
a typical “Hausefrau.” Yet, Holocaust survivors’ testimonies painted a damning picture of a woman who was an overeager volunteer in the business of murder. They present a vivid portrait of this “Satansfrau” [wife of Satan], as a survivor titled her, who routinely participated in the whipping and shooting of the Jews while riding a horse in the ghetto and during mass murder in the Szeparowce Forest: “It made no difference to her whether she shot at women and children…. She never entered the ghetto without a revolver or riding whip and she used these without provocation…. Anneliese Leideritz acted during this street action as a supervisor.”

Perhaps the most revolting deed attributed to her, as one account described, was the liquidation of the Jewish Orphans’ Home on September 9, 1942. The orphanage housed approximately four hundred children, mostly Hungarians whose parents had already been murdered or were now waiting in the wagons for “resettlement” to Belzec. The orphanage was in Ghetto 2, and when this was liquidated, it was planned to move the children into Ghetto 1. By that time, the older children were already on the train. In the morning, before the transfer could take place for the youngest ones, several Schupo (city policemen) entered the facility. This fateful morning suddenly turned into perhaps one of the grisliest moments of the Galician tragedy. During the trials of the main characters, Officer Friedrich Knackendoeffel admitted under cross-examination that he was specifically ordered to kill the children. He had taken them to the garden—fifteen of them. Infants were carried out, according to an eyewitness, by Anneliese Leideritz. The children were forced to lie face down on the ground, side by side. Knackendoeffel killed them, one by one, with a bullet to the head. According to this witness, the wife of Peter Leideritz was present in this massacre.

She was arrested on July 31, 1946, in her hometown of Kirch-Beerfurth. Three Kolomea survivors’ testimony implicated her in mass murder by placing her in the ghetto as well as the site of the mass murder of the Kolomea Jews in the adjacent forest. Yet these witnesses did not mention her participation in the murders of Jewish children in the orphanage. In their face-to-face encounters they unfailingly identified her as the perpetrator of the crimes of indiscriminate murder. During her interrogation, though, she denied all the charges by stating that “I was never present at a shooting of people, whether they were Jews or from other religions…. And I further deny ever having struck Jews with my riding whip, or ever riding behind transports of Jews.”

She willingly admitted to owning a small pistol, a Browning 6.35 mm. It was a gift from her husband in 1943, a year after the massacre in the ghetto, but she insisted that she never used it. Two secretaries working for the SS offices in Kolomea, and a business manager with his daughter, who employed Jewish workers from the ghetto, testified for the defense. The central argument was of mistaken identity in which Herta [Hertha?] Abicht, the secretary of the regional district head (Kreishauptmann), Dr. Herbert Gorgon, was identified as the culprit. Other witnesses from the German civil
administration supported this claim by testifying that “her behavior described by the survivors was not characteristic to her.” The defense lawyer, Franz Haus, on the other hand, has went as far as accusing the survivors of pursuing a vendetta in order to punish her for the sins of her husband. 99

The American military authorities apparently did not believe her, because she was extradited to Polish authorities, to face a trial in Poland, on December 10, 1947—following her husband, who was transferred a year earlier on December 18, 1946. 92

COMPETITION IN MURDER: THE TALE OF TWO SS OFFICERS

Christopher Browning aptly sums up the atrocities in Galicia: “the large-scale massacres were concentrated in the southern region of the district and were carried out above all by just two of the Security Police branch offices—Stanisławów and Kolomyja [Kolomea].” 93 Not surprisingly, SS-Captain Hans Krüger and SS-First Lieutenant Peter Leideritz, contending ferociously with each other in the business of mass extermination, and equally for theft and plunder, headed these offices. In turn, they collected a coterie of subordinates who became complicit in mass murder and the full despoliation of the Jews prior to that. An associate of Leideritz openly admitted to his interrogator that “it was the general rule that both the Kripo and Gestapo were allowed to requisition anything they wished of Jewish property. This can explain the terrific amount of loot that subject was able to send home for his own use of his wife, daughter and other relations.” 94

Again, one may recall Jeckeln’s impersonal, almost detached style of murder, in which emotions were relegated to the hidden recesses of his mind. But Krüger and Leideritz and other newly emerging killers on every level were drafted from a different cloth. The thread that runs through their bodies connects opportunism, corruption, outright petty thievery, and an insatiable lust for murder. Perhaps an anonymous Polish doctor summed up best this experience, “[It] was like living in a country where all the thieves and gangsters had been let loose.” 95

Mass killing, the absolute power over thousands of defenseless people, can be hard to renounce, for it has an intoxicating power. Both Krüger and Leideritz tasted murder and remained addicted to it even when there were no Jews left. They pursued with equal zeal other perceived enemies of Nazi Germany, like the Poles. However, the Jews from Hungary had a special place in the Final Solution in Galicia. In the hierarchy of those to be killed, they were the most immediate target. For both Nazi officers, they were a nuisance that could not be exploited; there was nothing to barter for their lives. Hungarian military personnel and, consequently, Ukrainian paramilitaries saw to it
that they reached an accidental destination utterly destitute, without geographic connection, and without roots in the host community. Thus, in this life-and-death chess game, they were truly dispensable.

We often meet soldiers and SS men in Holocaust narratives who found an ideological justification for their behavior by invoking a rationale cloaked in a cosmic life-and-death struggle between Nazism and the diabolical Judeo-Bolshevism. In a letter to his wife, one of the killers excused his shooting of “women, children, and numerous babies, aware that I have two babies of my own at home, and these hordes would treat them just the same, or even ten times worse, perhaps.” But, the majority did not need ideological justification. In Tluste, “Children were thrown into the pits alive, and covered up with the corpses. A German would grab a child by the neck and shout: ‘Nimm das dreck und schmeiss herein!’ [Grab the filth and throw it in.] The children were swimming in blood in those pits.”

Krüger and Leideritz created and ruled over such a relentlessly dystopian Holocaust universe. From diaries, survivors’ recollections, and the postwar trials of Leideritz and, much later, Krüger, they emerge as the personification of evil without discernable political motives. Not that they were devoid ideological motivation. They were able to combine Nazi ideology and the insatiable quest for murder with equal zeal for brutality, and, finally, with a penchant for plunder. The list of Leideritz’s crimes during his interrogation in the American Zone included a special paragraph about how he “requisitioned much Jewish property for his own purposes. He accepted huge bribes and presents from the Judenrat of Kolomea and other towns.”

While many of his contemporaries in Galicia were court-martialed for their insatiable quest for riches, the question as to how Leideritz was able to evade the watchful eyes of the SS authorities is an intriguing one. His fellow officers’ testimonies after the war shed some light on this question. He was very careful not to send packages directly to his home address. He conveniently enlisted his wife’s family in hiding the goods from the East. Albert Warmann, head of Kripo, informed the American investigator in 1946 that: “From time-to-time he [Leideritz] dispatched very large parcels to Germany, part of them to consignees in Cologne bearing the name of Leideritz.” His fellow officer from Kolomea was even more candid: “Leideritz especially accepted a lot of things from the Jews. His wife’s name is Anneliese, the wife’s parents are called Heim. The parents—they are the foster parents—live in Frankfurt and have a gardening business there.” Many of the packages were sent to them.

Leideritz possessed a degree of cynicism that was not easily surpassed even in the surreal Holocaust universe. He brought this “economic opportunism” directly to the killing process itself. In making a policy of billing the various Jewish communities for the expenses involved in the ongoing genocide, he implemented a new concept in the annals of extermination, which later became common practice in Galicia: “self-financing
of murder.” After each mass killing, the Jewish community was billed for the expenses of the killing itself. After leading the massacre of 2,000 Jews personally in Horodenka, including the 400 Hungarian and Romanian deportees, “Leideritz went to the Jewish Council [Judenrat] and presented it with a bill for his expenses — gasoline, bullets, wear and tear on the cars, etc. — in the sizeable sum of 10,000 zlotys, payable within ten hours.” In Zablatow, following the murder of 1,000 people, on December 22, 1941, among them 600 Hungarian Jews, and in Tluste, where 3,400 people were shot, his demand was the same. In Tluste, though, the community had to pay also for “the wine that had been drunk up.”

That this practice became widespread can be seen in the murder of the Jews, local and Hungarian, in Buczacz. Even a low-level Gestapo officer, Sergeant Kurt Köllner, could introduce a highly detailed bookkeeping system by forcing the Judenrat “to pay 20 Zloty for every bullet fired during the action. The amount paid was registered in the Judenrat’s accounting books . . . and Thomanek [a mere corporal] would be given a receipt.”

It should not come as a surprise that the extermination of the Jews was both understaffed and underfinanced. Most victims, if not buried alive, “died, in a sense, one by one, by single shots to the back of the head or neck, not by machine-gun fire, because of the killers wanted to be as sure as possible that they had not missed or wasted ammunition.” Every bullet had to be accounted for. Krüger’s modus operandi was exactly the same. After the mass killings of the Jews of Bolechow, north of Stanislawów, the Judenrat had to “pay for the ammunition expended [and] . . . beyond that, they forced them to pay 3 kg of granular coffee for labor expenses.” Hayes commented that “the Holocaust was not only self-financing but also . . . a profit-making enterprise.”

We can safely assume, of course, that not all the routinely collected funds, wine, coffee, and furs after each murder operation were dutifully remitted to the Reich’s treasury — as Himmler has decreed. Plunder in general was the hallmark of the Nazi hierarchy across the General Government; only the extent and quality differentiated the Head of the General Government Hans Frank, who pilfered a Leonardo da Vinci painting before escaping from Cracow, and Krüger who confiscated coats or furniture. The testimony of Countess Carolina Lanckoronska about Krüger’s penchant for thievery, small-time and grand, underlines the corruption of the entire SS officer class in Galicia. If the people belonged to the affluent classes, “he would arrest them personally and with his own hands, and before their very eyes, would remove the more valuable contents of their homes — above all whole wardrobes of men’s clothing, as well as provisions, while not disdaining silver or linen.” Their conduct begets the question of where we can trace a dividing line when mass murder descends from political
or racial ideology into the realm of assuring personal pleasure by inflicting pain, murder, and robbery. The trenchant observation of Saul Landau, the American filmmaker, that “the essence of Nazism was not so much ideology but a complex web of corruption, and in order to maintain this corruption, they [Nazis] needed an ideology,” well summarizes the events in Galicia. For Krüger and Leideritz such a line between ideology and corruption was blurred completely. Within the SS’s profoundly corrupt hierarchy, it was not enough to fulfill a duty. For someone to gain a high position, it was necessary to project and abuse power on every level.

During their service in the District of Galicia, many similarities emerged in their conduct, attitudes, and even their mode of communication. They both aimed to deprive, as the psychologist Herbert C. Kelman phrased it, “groups of human beings of their right to be regarded as human.” While their competitive streak was evident, their language, the language of the SS, was strikingly uniform. The introductory words of Krüger to the Jewish community were: “I am the Master of your Life and Death.” He exercised this maxim to its full power. In her testimony, Cipora Brenner recalled an almost surreal meeting of a “German officer” riding on a horse in the middle of an Aktion. The officer ordered her to follow him. She walked along. “I looked at him and asked, ‘would you let me say a few final words?’ He answered tersely, ‘Do you know where I am taking you? . . . think about that.’ I answered, ‘Exactly because I know that this is my death sentence, I want to say my final words.’ He became silent and I started to talk. Suddenly the officer shouted at me, ‘Gehen nach Hause und verstecken! [Go home and hide].’”

Hers was the desperate monologue of the doomed. What Brenner, an eighteen-year-old woman, did not know at the time, or even during her testimony in 1994, was that her life was spared by none other than the mass murderer Hans Krüger, riding on his white horse. This encounter demonstrated that he was, indeed, the ultimate arbiter of life and death in the Stanisławów Ghetto. It was no different in Kolomea or elsewhere. As Blanca Rosenberg recounted in her postwar memoir, Leideritz used a curiously analogous exclamation during a selection. She was kicked back in the line of those who were deemed fit enough to work, at least until the next Aktion, with the words: “You’ll live, damn you. I’ll decide on life or death here.”

In these two officers’ deeds, a picture emerges that defies conventional imagination. One curious fact: no reference was made during their trials to victims deported from Hungary. They were nameless, just like in Kamenets-Podolsk. Their trials, and that of Anneliese Leideritz, twenty years apart, provide an interesting contrast. While the Leideritz couple were handed over and tried by Polish courts in 1947, Krüger was lucky enough to be caught and charged with mass murder in West Germany, where the death penalty was abolished. Their attitudes during their trials differed dramatically. Leideritz and his wife disappeared after the war, only to surface in the American Zone in 1946.
Their arrest was almost anticlimactic. After changing his name to Peter Lewald, Leideritz settled and worked as an unobtrusive farmhand in a neighboring village, periodically visiting his hometown of Kirch-Beerfurth. Unbeknownst to him, a Kolomea survivor patiently watched his ancestral home from across the street in the small village and promptly alerted the American occupational authorities to his presence. After the couple’s arrest, American military personnel emptied the house and removed the loot plundered from the Jews of Galicia. It took two truckloads.  

While in the early stages of his arrest in Germany, he defiantly claimed that “I never shot or killed any person during my stay in Kolomea and I can say the same for my wife.” During his trial in Warsaw, Leideritz exhibited more submissive behavior, bordering on obsequiousness. He repeatedly contradicted himself and his comments in claiming that “it’s not true,” or that “I was not there at that time.” This was easily rebutted by the prosecutors. It is impossible to glean from the official accounts, though, if Leideritz had true remorse for his past deeds. He knew that no mercy could be expected. Leideritz’s own fellow officers in the Kolomea Sipo, Kripo, and Gestapo incriminated him, and each other, by revealing inside information about his behavior, murders, blackmail, and plunder. A telling characterization of the attitudes prevailing in Kolomea during Leideritz’s rule can be gleaned from the concluding remark of the American military investigator of one of his subordinates in 1946: “He talks about brutalities, murder, and beatings as if he was talking about a tea-party.”  

By charging him with the murder of 70,000 people, the Polish court sentenced Leideritz to death on November 17, 1947. In turn, he appealed for “a fair judgment.” His claim “that he is a victim of the Hitler system,” though, was outright rejected by the court, with the rebuttal that Leideritz himself was part of the “Hitler system.”

The final act, though, had to wait for almost two years. In his last appeal directly to the president of Poland, he claimed he saved the lives of four Jews. By that time, though, Poland was controlled by the Communist party. Boleslaw Bierut, the staunchly Stalinist president of Poland, and himself a Jew, did not entertain clemency. In his official reply he noted that “The nature of the crimes committed and the extent of the evil is clear enough that the convicted Peter Leideritz deserves no mercy.”

The Polish authorities hanged Leideritz in Warsaw on February 22, 1949. His wife, on the other hand, continued to maintain her innocence, rather forcefully. But, then, Anneliese Leideritz case was much more complicated and less clear-cut. While Jewish survivors from Kolomea described in graphic and dramatic details a woman, identified as Anneliese Leideritz, there were enough contradictions to cast a doubt on their testimonies. Indeed, in reviewing the evidence presented by defense witnesses, including a woman from England, her guilt was not fully proven. As it was mentioned, the specter of “mistaken identity” and the image of Herta ABICHT’s the real murderer loomed over the proceedings. Was she confused with this another woman?
Were the revolting deeds in the Jewish orphanage also committed by Herta Abicht? But the most puzzling question, posed by a German historian, could be if Anneliese Leideritz was to “made to atone for her husband’s serious crimes?” The Polish court could not answer these questions. It had serious doubts, though, about the testimonies of the Jewish witnesses. As a compromise, she received a sentence of ten years, with the reasoning that although “under these circumstances, the court doubts about the alleged eyewitnesses’ findings regarding the individual and mass killings of Jews or regarding participation in such killings. However, since the beating and mistreatment of the Jews lead to their final annihilation, the court has found the guilt of the defendant (Anneliese Leideritz) proven.”

The saga of Anneliese Leideritz, though, did not end here. Upon her appeal for the dismissal of her sentence, and concurrently by the prosecutor to increase it, the court overturned it on May 3, 1950, and, with a curious twist, imposed the death penalty. This in turn, was commuted, again, to ten-year imprisonment in 1951.

She died from tuberculosis at age forty in a prison hospital in Grudziadz—some two hundred kilometres from Warsaw in 1955.

Hans Krüger’s trial in West Germany in the 1960s, in the words of Countess Lanckoronska, one the most surprising witnesses, was chaotic. She perceived that with his loud anti-Semitic outbursts during the proceedings, the accused reinforced the impression that his beliefs and behavior had not changed since the Stanislawów days. He regretted nothing and learned nothing. He became and remained silent only when Countess Lanckoronska entered unexpectedly in the courtroom. The face-to-face meeting was dramatic. He hoped that no one could testify against him—no one remained alive. Krüger believed that the countess had also died in the Ravensbrück concentration camp for women: “The Judge turned to the accused and asked him what he had to say, in view of what he had heard from the witness [the countess]. Krüger was silent.”

He escaped punishment in France where he was sentenced to death in absentia in Lyon on October 6, 1953. His sentence of life imprisonment in West Germany reflected the prevailing judicial climate of the time. He was set free in 1986, two years before his death.

From the fragmentary evidence, it is not easy to produce deep psychological insights into the mindset of either Krüger or Leideritz. About the roots of their hatred for Jews or Poles one can only guess. No interviews were ever conducted with them, comparable to those in Nuremberg, for unearthing their world views or beliefs. Even more surprising, and considering their “achievements” in murder, very little can be found about them in major Holocaust archives. Their legacy should be told, then, through the recollection of survivors, trial minutes, and the investigative works of a few German historians. In perusing the biographies of these officers and their subordinates, the most striking aspect is how low their relative ranks and how uneducated they were. Both
Krüger and Leideritz were disappointing and mediocre individuals. Yet they were elevated to more senior positions in the occupied lands than they could have ever dreamed to hold at home. What unified these two and their subordinates was that they enjoyed the killing, savored the unbridled power over the powerless, and, equally, were there for the loot.

How could such banal and ordinary individuals, with relatively limited human potential, assume a power as arbiters of life and death, as the organizers of mass murder? Peter Longerich suggested that Nazism “offered men of limited gifts, of which only ruthlessness was indispensable, unique opportunities for advancement from relatively humble circumstances.”

Dieter Pohl summed up the General Government that the Nazi regime placed in the occupied territories as not a “perfectly functioning super-bureaucracy,” but rather a “colonial administration that is as corrupt and criminal as it is dilettantish.”

**WHAT WAS DIFFERENT IN GALICIA?**

This last statement poses a challenge for finding a rationale for the behavior of these relatively low-level Gestapo personnel who were entrusted with the implementation of genocide in Galicia. It begets the question of how their behavior conformed to the norms within the murder mechanism of the Holocaust. What was different in Galicia from other districts in the General Government or from other regions in the East? We know from surviving trial records that their conduct contravened the code that governed that of the SS, the Wehrmacht, and the police battalions in Galicia.

In many ways, Galicia was not a typical microcosm for the general handling of the genocide taking place in the East. It was a late comer in the war — almost two years after the outbreak of World War II — and to the General Government. The corollary question is why was the situation in Galicia so ripe for abuse? A German historian opined that in Poland and Belarus a “triangular relationship” existed between the civilian authorities, the SS, and the Wehrmacht. In Galicia it was bilateral, in which the military was absent from the direct killing process. While soldiers of the Wehrmacht became complicit in the extermination of Jews by bullets in Belarus and elsewhere, in Galicia the directive of General von Roque explicitly forbade the direct participation of military personnel in the extermination campaign. Unlike in Belarus, where Wehrmacht complicity in genocide was extensive, they did not participate even in the transportation to or serve as cordon personnel in the murder sites. The Einsatzgruppen were also absent from the waves of massacres in Galicia.114

The management of the extermination campaign in Galicia rested on the shoulders of a thinly spread security establishment, undermanned by low-level Gestapo
officers, and German civil administration. They were assisted in their task by Reserve Police Battalions 320 and 133 and Ukrainian auxiliaries. These units were highly mobile, rapidly moving from town to town, without an “anchor” in the day-to-day management of the community, which limited their opportunity for loot. The policemen provided the cordon while the mass shooting was done by the cognoscenti of murder—the “specialists.” At best, they could pilfer or share the meager belongings of the victims and sometimes some valuables. The feverish pace of extermination and collection for transport to Belzec, as Christopher Browning described the work of Reserve Police Battalion 101, left little time for finding riches in occupied Poland either. The groundbreaking work of Waitman Beorn regarding the atrocities committed by the soldiers of the Wehrmacht implicates the German armed forces in genocide in Belarus. But the war did not provide the time or opportunity to enrich the rank-and-file common soldiers. His comment that “a long-term association with the murder of the Jews” abetted also the plunder, might be a key to understanding why stationary personnel were able to materially benefit more substantially from the genocide. In Belarus, as he describes it, the civilian authorities, the Gebiets-kommissars (regional administrators), were the main beneficiaries of extorting large sums of money from the Jewish Councils, after which they routinely murdered them.

While general directives for the extermination were forwarded from Lwów, the overall deportment of the Final Solution in Galicia was left to men on the ground with a wide berth for its implementation. This independence of action, and corresponding lack of direct supervision was one of the main differences between Galicia and neighboring regions. The officers in these outposts dealt with the Jewish communities directly, for an extended period, and as capriciously as they saw fit.

This direct connection between the Gestapo and a helpless community created a never-ending opportunity for extortion and blackmail, demanding bribes and offering temporary reprieve. This cycle of thievery, as we have seen earlier, went to absurd lengths when morality became an optional commodity among the officers. The fact that Krüger was able to empty entire apartments after the arrest of their occupants should not come as a surprise. But the demand for reimbursement for the expended fuel, ammunition, and coffee with the customary schnapps after mass murder from the decimated Jewish community was a Galician invention—it might have been unique even in the otherwise dystopian universe of the Holocaust.

It seems self-evident that there were shared ideological, social, and emotional motivations for killing a race of “subhumans” across the Nazi universe. The words of Hayes in describing the district leaders in the General overnment who were ideologically committed Nazis, but “often the most incompetent, greedy, or scandal-ridden.” However, Galician reality was “site-specific,” and murder, plunder, and sexual exploitation freely intertwined in that ideology. One cannot discard an inherent contradiction in the Nazi
promotion of group conformity, camaraderie, and the ferociously competitive environment across the Nazi universe. Eric Larson aptly noted that Hitler’s Germany was ripe for competing agendas and interests not only by Göring, Goebbels, and Himmler, but in every segment of the security establishment. The competition in Galicia between the main players regarding the number of those murdered and, simultaneously, the opportunity for plunder, was just as fierce. In reading the investigative reports by the American military, one comes away with the sense that camaraderie was not the binding principle. They undermined each other at every turn, including testifying against each other.

Perhaps the best testimony for the rampant bribery and robbery within the ranks of Gestapo officers was the fact that the highest number of SS trials dealing with corruption in the General Government was concentrated in Galicia. From Berlin’s perspective, the proceeds of the plunder were intended for the Reich. In an order dated March 18, 1942, and distributed to the SS and police, Himmler warned against withholding “even the smallest amount.” In fact, during his speech to SS and police leaders in Posen a year later, Himmler threatened to impose death sentences on anyone within the SS found guilty of keeping “even one Mark.” That tells us that “ideology” very rapidly gave way to a code of conduct, which was not compatible with “SS values.” It might not be a coincidence that several major players in Galicia became the target of such investigation launched by Himmler himself into the theft of Jewish property in Galicia, in 1943. As a direct consequence, Krüger’s superiors in Lwów, SS Brigadenführer Dr. Eberhard Schöngarth, Nazi security police chief, was removed from his post in Poland and sent to Greece. Helmut Tanzmann was only suspended. Again, it’s worth to note that these two officers broke the image of the Nazi perpetrators as primitive, poorly educated, proletarian thugs. They belonged to a strikingly homogenous group of young academics, who came from the educated, bourgeois stratum of society, as they started to identify with the Nazi concept of Volksgemeinschaft, which labeled Jews as enemies of the people and justified their murder.

At the same time, Hans Krüger also became implicated in several bribery and looting scandals. The official report after the inspection noted that “lots of cash, including gold, and various currencies that included $6,000 was found. Whole boxes with valuable jewels [i.e., diamonds] were found. None of these were registered…. The estimated monetary value alone amounted to 584,195.28 złotys. The jewels themselves were appraised over one-hundred thousand German Mark.” The report also noted that the provenance of the loot was assumed to be the Jewish community.

No studies have explored fully the circumstances leading to his downfall, but one can assume that the impetus for his removal came from inside the ranks. He was openly loathed by his own comrades in arms in Lwów, as Countess Lanckoronska recalled. After conviction by an SS court, he was removed from his post in 1943 and transferred...
to Dijon, France. To add insult to injury, he was demoted from captain to the rank of second lieutenant.

Finally, and in competition with SS officers, even heads of the civil administration were accused of misappropriating Jewish property or the outright theft of valuables in Galicia. In investigating civilian authorities in Galicia, a Nazi court found that the Kreishauptmann of the Nadwórna region took 880–900 wedding rings and five sacks of jewelry, some of it the property of Hungarian Jews, after the mass murder of October 6, 1941. Consequently, this county executive and his secretary were found guilty and executed. The investigative reports by the American military in 1946 noted that the rivalry of Peter Leideritz and Claus Volkmann, the Kreishauptmann of the Kolomea region, was also legendary on this account. They genuinely detested each other. The conflict between the two started with the issue of extermination. Leideritz favored the direct extermination of the Jews. Volkmann advocated first taking over Jewish property, and, prior to extermination, demanding payments from the town’s Jews. Then, murder. Not surprisingly, Volkmann was also court-martialed and transferred from Kolomea because of endemic corruption.123

THE FINAL JOURNEY: BELZEC

The year 1942 saw the introduction of the Final Solution—industrialized murder. By some estimates, one-third of the Jews of Galicia, among them between 2,000 to 3,000 Hungarian Jews who were still alive in Galician ghettos, were transported to and exterminated in Belzec. By late 1942 and 1943, very few Hungarian Jews had survived the militia massacres, mass shootings, starvation, and slave labor. The transition from mass shootings to killing by gas was not clear-cut. Shootings remained a mode of extermination almost until Galicia was declared Judenrein. Ongoing executions, especially during roundups for transportation to the extermination camp, or to reduce the population of the ghettos, remained always an option.

The only detailed testimonies that convey the last few months of the Hungarian Jewish odyssey and daily life at that time inside the Rudolfmühle, belong to two survivors: Cipora Brenner and Marion Samuel, both from Carpathian Ruthenia. They portray graphic scenes of hunger, pain, and death. The withholding of nourishment, however meager it was, amounted to a form of slow execution. Marion Samuel saw her three-year-old brother dying slowly yet stoically. The prisoners didn’t receive food for almost two weeks. While no human life can be reduced to an individual sentence, her words are gripping in their simplicity: “I saw him . . . he wasn’t crying, just lying there, very quietly and dying day by day.” Hiding on the top floor of the building, Samuel was the last survivor of the Rudolfmühle. She slowly descended to street level in the morning
to an eerily deserted street. The Rudolfmühle became empty of its human cargo. The Hungarian Jewish tragedy came to an end in Stanislawów. Having done their job, the Jewish police and the SS disappeared. Discarded clothing littered the street. The last of the Hungarians were carted off to the New Jewish Cemetery to be shot, including her mother. Later she learned that her mother jumped off the truck and also made her way to the ghetto. Reunited, they escaped a month later, embarking on a long, perilous journey toward the Hungarian border.¹³⁴

There were also local witnesses to the extermination of the last Hungarian Jews in Stanislawów on March 31, 1942 (on the eve of Passover 5702). Abraham Liebesman, a doctor in the ghetto, wrote, “at the Rudolfmühle lived a few hundred Hungarian Jews. Those were the worst of the lot. Nobody cared or paid attention to them. When somebody dropped, fainted in the streets, the Ukrainian police and the SS men just loaded them into trucks that cruised in the main streets, they just shot them to death. . . . This way 1,500 people were liquidated.”¹³⁵

A young diarist in the ghetto, Elza Binder, recorded their final journey in touching simplicity: “On the 31st of March they started to search for invalids and old people. . . . From the attic in which we hid, we could see the transport of the last few of the Hungarian Jews as they were led away from the Rudolfmühle. I saw children, orphans, wrapped up in sheets and the sight was illuminated by houses burning in the ghetto.”¹³⁶

Cipora Brenner described the same inferno from her hiding place in an attic in equally dramatic terms: a “horribly beautiful sight.” As a helper in the orphanage in Rudolfmühle, she witnessed the final collection of the children. To assure compliance with deportation orders, the Germans delivered a truckload of soup, bread, and jam to the starving and emaciated adults and children who, in turn, willingly lined up for their final journey. It was the standard “carrot and the stick” policy used all over the Holocaust universe: “On a Tuesday. . . . Two days later, they took all the children, hundreds of them, and executed them in the New Jewish Cemetery.” Within the six thousand Jews deported from the Stanislawów Ghetto in March, the remaining 1,000 sick and frail Hungarian Jews were the first to be killed in this Aktion — shot or sent to Belzec. These destitute Hungarians, broken in body and spirit, were “slowly marching toward the waiting train” taking them to their final destination, the gas chambers of Belzec.¹³⁷

Krüger was able to shunt the Jews from Hungary to a central location, separate from the ghetto, by creating a murder “warehouse” called Rudolfmühle. Conversely, no such collection points existed in Kolomea and other ghettos. The Hungarian refugees were distributed among and blended in with the local Jewish families. Thus, successive transports of the local Jewish population to Belzec automatically included Jews from Hungary. For example, German records showed that a thousand Jews from Hungary were dispatched in March 1942 by train from Kolomea and Stanislawów to Belzec. In
other cases, like in Czortków, we find only a cryptic note in the transportation logs of August 1943 that the shipment of Jews to Belzec “included many Hungarian Jews.”

The only separate institutions that were dedicated to Hungarian refugees in Kolomea and elsewhere were the orphanages. Four hundred older children from the Kolomea children’s home, originally set up for Hungarian children separated from their parents in the chaos of transportation or after being by the Ukrainian militia, were deported to Belzec on October 11 and 13, 1942. Their three social workers, one of them also Hungarian, faithfully accompanied them to their final journey. A similar act was described in Horodenka, where a special home was set up for orphaned Hungarian children. As usual, a day before the Aktion, the Germans brought a sack of apples for the children, to make the “Jews think that nothing was going to happen…. I found the tables laid out for breakfast with pieces of bread and butter and pieces of apples. The children never had a chance to taste the fruit. They were taken out early in the morning and led to their death.”

Mila Sandberg-Mesner survived the Kolomea Ghetto. She recorded in her postwar memoir the fate of one Hungarian family, assigned to her home, and their five-year-old daughter, Éva. Her notes encompass a year in the experiences of the Hungarian deportees in Galicia—from arrival to Kolomea to deportation to Belzec. The parents and Éva came every day to ask for food: “She had big, dark, sparkling eyes trimmed with long lashes. She was always smiling. Her black hair swept down over her little arms in soft beautiful waves. She was full of life, running and playing games, hugging, and kissing her parents, moving, and chattering endlessly.” By the winter of 1941, however, only the father and daughter came to the host family. After the mother was killed during a Nazi Aktion, “She [Éva] stood there silently. Her big, dark eyes expressed bewilderment. She kept very close to her father and would not leave his side for a moment. She no longer smiled and not a sound came from her little lips.” In the spring of 1942, Sandberg-Mesner reported that all the Jews were forced into the ghetto and soon “hunger began to gnaw at our insides.” On one gray fall day, the father was killed too: “Éva stood alone in the doorway. Horror and panic reflected in her face.”

We can assume that with the hundreds of abandoned children in the ghetto after each murder spree, she was put in one of the children’s homes. By that time, though, a dramatic change took hold of the child: “Her beautiful dark hair was gone, shaved to the scalp, but her face remained beautiful. Her wide-open eyes seemed to take up half of her face. The bewildered look was still there. She was swollen from hunger and could barely walk.” The end came swiftly with the final round-up of Jews for deportation to Belzec. “On a cold October day” of 1942, she was swept up in the dragnet of 6,000 other people “awaiting to be transported to the gas chambers…. Éva sat on the brown sparse grass, shivering from cold and fright. She was panic-stricken and understood that something terrible was going to happen to her. Now they were going to kill her, just as they had killed her mother and father. Éva was weeping.”