WEAPON OF WAR
Rape and Sexual Violence

“It is to be mentioned here that the JEWS were stark naked when going to their fate. This applied equally to the women as it did to the men.”

These words by Alfred Kiefer, an active accomplice in the mass murder in Kolomea, betray one of the least understood and discussed elements of the deportation and mass executions in Holocaust literature. He stated this matter-of-factly, without remorse or introspection, during his testimony in front of the American war crime investigator in 1946. Indeed, Kiefer impressed the American officer as one of the coldest murderers he had the chance to interview. Was it a simple act of “stripping of dignity” of the condemned, as a memoirist opined? Or was it just an efficient way of distributing the worldly possessions of the doomed?

Kiefer noted, indeed, that the clothing and valuables were routinely collected and plundered by the executioners and their Ukrainian collaborators. Still, the question looms as to whether there was an underlying, more sinister motive for this prequel to murder? The widespread practice of making the victims undress before they were executed served not only to facilitate the plunder of their clothing and a search for valuables. We know that the process of total dehumanization and sexual degradation of a human being, used against the condemned, was an integral part of the extermination process, and that it did not differentiate between men or women. Marta Havryshko observed that “Sexual humiliation of the Jewish body was an inevitable consequence of the dehumanizing Nazi racial theories.” It was an exercise in perverted power to humiliate and debase, which defiled the individual and robbed their identity in the camps, ghettos, on the bank of Dniester River, or in front of the mass graves.

One perhaps needs to reframe this picture of naked rows of human beings standing in front of the executioners. Can we call it a “sexualized murder”? Or “genocidal sexual violence,” as Havryshko termed it? It can be construed, of course, also as a means to simply dispossess the Jews from their clothing and, sometimes, hidden gold and other
Fig 6.1, 6.2, and 6.3  The three phases of mass murder of women and children: collection, undressing, and execution. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Photo Archives, courtesy of Instytut Pamięci Narodowej.
valuable, making the looting undoubtedly easier. Either way, it is safe to conclude that sexual violence against Jewish men, women, boys and girls was not just a by-product of the war—it was part of the war itself—and such sexual degradation used against the condemned was prevalent all across the Holocaust universe, practiced by Wehrmacht soldiers, reserve police, SS personnel, the Ukrainian militia, and Hungarian troops, even when there was no material gain or even Jews, involved.\(^3\)

Yet, we know painfully little about this chapter of the Holocaust—especially in Galicia.

Often a missing element in the narratives, we must direct our attention to the sexual humiliation, the acts of rape, and sexual depredation inflicted on men, women, boys and young girls during World War II. Not surprisingly, this is a subject that has always been difficult to face, especially when the winning side of the war, the Soviet Army, also committed such atrocities.\(^4\)

On the other hand, many testimonies by victims have been constructed, perhaps subconsciously, to avoid this conflicted area, weaving a veil of silence around personal experiences and histories of the events that often border on the “unspeakable.” Sexual degradation of men during their humiliating experiences is even rarer. David Cesarani pointed out that these testimonies “maintain a discreet silence . . . on the sexual exploitation of Jews in ghettos and camps, in hiding and on the run.”\(^5\) On the opposite side, SS officers, soldiers, and members of the reserve police battalions rather self-servingly avoided any mention of their specific deeds during their interrogations, which could have incriminated them at their trials after the war. Finally, interrogations of many of the perpetrators, reflecting contemporary cultural attitudes by the interrogators themselves toward sexual exploitation, neglected the exploration of this sensitive subject.

In framing the multiplicity of sexual experiences in Galicia, it might be helpful to review the official attitudes and approaches of the various agencies in the eastern territories toward these issues. Even during the short one-and-a-half years that encompassed the deportation and ghetto existence for Hungarian Jewish women, we can discern a tripartite power structure relating to them. It started with sexual atrocities by Ukrainian irregulars along the long wandering, which followed a ghetto existence in which sexual violence or exploitation routinely occurred. The difference was that the coercive sexual atmosphere in the ghettos was exercised by various power structures within the ghetto hierarchy itself. Finally, the rapidly expanding Nazi security apparatus became involved in sexual slavery, which manifested itself in the establishment of brothels for work camp inmates, Wehrmacht soldiers, and the SS. The SS, entrusted as security personnel, further expanded their depredation of women by individual initiatives.
The Ukrainian militia had no ideological or political constraints for rape, sexual torture, and other sadistic practices. These forces were rarely, if at all, supervised or disciplined for any infraction. They remained in the initial phase of the war independent bands of thugs without a central governing mechanism. Thus, they were able to inflict cruelties that we might be able to equate to more recent Yugoslavian or Rwandan conflicts.6

In the first phase of the Hungarian odyssey, sexual violence was an integral part of their daily experience inflicted by their Ukrainian guards. This demonstration of sadistic power over defenseless people was inflicted by the Ukrainian paramilitaries during the long marches. Keith Lowe commented that “in the Second World War it was a phenomenon that grew beyond any previously known proportions: more rapes occurred in this way . . . than during any other war in history.”7 While sexual exploitation of Jewish women was also common among German security personnel, as we will see later, it was overwhelmingly the Ukrainians who imposed the mental and physical agony of rape in the early stages of the deportation during the long treks across Galicia. Lowe’s observation holds true in this context that the prevalence of rape is more widespread “where there is a greater cultural divide.”8 This cultural divide was also a prominent factor in the Ukrainian–Hungarian relations. Many Jewish accounts describe the self-satisfaction and smugness of the Ukrainian militia members when they killed or tortured Jews. It endowed them with a sense of unbridled power.

Was it the same cultural divide that guided the relationship between Jews from Bukovina and Romanian soldiers who committed unspeakable atrocities against them? David Cesarani gave special attention to the sexual depredation by Romanian soldiers during the deportation of these Jews to Transnistria. Indeed, if we attempt to find parallel to the Galician savagery, Cesarani’s descriptions of the Romanian Army’s behavior in Transnistria could come the closest to that of the Ukrainian militia. “Women were raped and murdered as a matter of course by the Romanian soldiers,” a witness reported. “During the night, the members of the new detachment and their helpers would pick out girls from the throng and abuse them until dawn. During the day, they managed to make a little money by ‘selling’ a girl to a peasant.”9

If we juxtapose this with the Galician experience, the similarities are striking. Thus, rape of young girls on mass scale became the norm. They were especially targeted out of an unbridled sexual sadism by their Ukrainian guards. To explain this phenomenon, psychologists often assuage the trauma of a rape victim by noting that “rape doesn’t have anything to do with sex. It’s all about power.”10 The previously quoted words of a shocked Hungarian observer in late August brings home the horror of the genocidal sexual sadism taking place: “They pull from the Dniester Jewish corpses day after day, old, young, even children 3 to 4 years old, but mostly young girls, violated and tortured
beyond recognition, that one could not look at them, our soldiers buried them in unmarked graves . . . at the end, they just let them float down the river.”

While Hungarian Jewish women were often reticent to provide full details about the sexual torment they endured in Galicia, stories filtered through the memories of the survivors in hushed tones. Marion Samuel started her journey with 2,000 people on a never-ending trek across Galicia. She described the long, interminable trudges from village to village and the terrifying nights that were filled with the screams of women being raped, their cries etched in her mind indelibly. As a defense mechanism, parents did everything possible to save their daughters from rape. They would hide them, dress them in rags, hide or cut their hair, and smear soot on their faces to make them unattractive. Being a teenager, Marion Samuel’s mother instructed her to march in the middle of the column and shield her face with huge bulky scarf to protect her from being singled out for rape—all to avoid attracting the attention of the militiamen who preyed on young women.

Simultaneously, young men routinely were pulled out of the transport, “sometimes there were ten, sometimes twenty,” under the ruse of taking them to work. Invariably, they never returned. As Samuel learned, the Ukrainians executed them in the forest. Other testimony reinforces this by stating that a form of sexual slavery also existed. Stopping in Czortków, as a survivor recalled in 1945, the Ukrainian paramilitaries took away the “major part of the men” from the transport, “but also several women. We never saw them [the men] again.” The women, however, were let go after three weeks: “They were ragged, had no shoes, and were bags of bones. The men who went with them had been all beaten to death.” This might have happened due to a desire to eliminate potential challenge and resistance by the men. In a terse allusion to the torment endured during the march, Samuel noted that “in the first three days many committed suicide . . . because of the stress almost all the women started menstruating at the same time.”

The question as to the dividing line between the act of rape and sexualized violence cloaked in outright sadism has never been defined or addressed by Holocaust literature. Yaffa Rosenthal, from a transport of a 1,000 people that included Hungarian and Romanian expellees, described the senseless killing of a beautiful fifteen-year-old girl from Bukovina (Romania), whose brother had already been killed in the Dniester River. The Ukrainian guard submerged her head over and over in the river. Additionally, they did it to several other girls, and to Yaffa Rosenthal as well. The guard succeeded in killing this young girl in front of Rosenthal. In recalling the moment, she described the horror in a soft, almost inaudible tones. As Rosenthal recounted it, the pain on her face was visible. After fifty-five years, she still remembered vividly the girl’s “beautiful dark braids floating on the water.”

Hungarian refugees, mostly women, children, and the elderly, were the most defenseless to thwart rape or sexual mistreatment. It could happen along the routes of the
long wandering or in the sealed ghettos. In her video testimony, a survivor, who had wandered with her mother and sister from town to town, was stopped in a checkpoint around the town of Delatyn. After brief questioning, she was taken into the guard-post where she was “thrown on the mattress and raped repeatedly.” She described an act of unspeakable violence, in a simple sentence, sparse, and clipped to its essence like it might need no more elaboration. The unembellished description of the trauma of being raped by eight guards, four German and four Ukrainian, in a guardpost in the entrance to Delatyn, a small, unremarkable Galician town, might not be able to convey the lifelong trauma of being sexually assaulted. Upon her release: “I came out dirty and filthy from the ordeal,” she remembered vividly. As her eyes slowly clouded over, she recalled the moment her mother, without asking what happened in the guardpost, tried to ease her trauma by tenderly wiping her ski pants clean from the filth, softly asking, “Did they beat you?”

In viewing the video of her testimony—the furtive look, eyes darting back and forth between the camera and the interviewer, the short, clipped sentences, teared-up eyes, interspersed with painful silences—she admitted that her ordeal resulted in lifelong trauma, requiring psychological counseling after the war. Interestingly, she gave her testimony in Los Angeles in Hungarian, not in Yiddish, not in Hebrew. Was it, perhaps, on purpose? She spoke in the language of the country that expelled her.

Her torment did not end there. In a desperate attempt to escape toward the Hungarian border, in 1942, she also recalled a jarring episode in which sexual favors were demanded by one of the Ukrainian escorts. The hired Ukrainian, who was a member of a smuggling ring, tried to rape her on their way to the Hungarian border. Upon complaining to the Jewish underground, one of the Jewish labor companies that organized the rescue from Galicia, the smuggler was summarily executed with the rationale that “if he rapes defenseless women, he cannot be trusted and will also be willing to betray the organization.”

One cannot write about sexual relations in the Holocaust, forced or consensual, without discussing homosexual encounters. Sexual coercion was not confined to heterosexual partners. This is perhaps the most guarded subject, a taboo among the reminicences of the survivors. Thus, chance meetings in a homosexual context are rarely mentioned in Holocaust literature. In a very carefully crafted note in her testimony, a female survivor from Budapest recounted her lesbian relationship in which the balance of power between Germans and Jews was the central and guiding element. As a member of a cleaning crew in an officer’s residence, she came across a German officer who was abusive toward the girls. At the same time, his wife “acted rather humanely to the Jewish girls. It happened to be that, I don’t know whether I should mention it, but everything—but she had some tendencies for liking girls.” As the deportee phrased, “the question was whether to use this situation to your advantage or not to use it to your advantage. . . . Sometimes
you came to a point when the only thing on your mind was, you are twenty years old, and somewhere along in the sky when you looked up, there is a life yet for people.” These were very carefully chosen words, indeed. Were her ruminations an attempt to find justification for a moment in life when one had little control over the next day? In analyzing the possible motivation for such a relationship, Beorn noted that “when Jewish women had the chance to make decisions regarding these relationships, the motivation was almost assuredly survival, the options simpler, but the choices certainly far more agonizing.” Indeed, this survivor, in the end, had to make the decision, as she phrased, “whatever is possible but let’s survive. It happens to be that that woman helped me a lot to get easier job, to get more food until her husband came into the picture.”

IN THE GHETTOS

A particularly sore and sensitive subject area is the fact that not all instances of sexual exploitation were perpetrated by Nazis or their allies. One tends to forget, or perhaps subconsciously avoid, that in the ghettos even the Jewish police or members of the Judenrat became complicit in such exploitation. A significant number of cases of rape and sexual coercion, or sexual barter, took place among Holocaust victims themselves. In this case, sexual encounters were not always violent, but based on power relations. Several authors mention, for example, that prostitution in Warsaw, Lodz, and other ghettos was rife—often for food. Even after the war, in a rather unguarded moment, a survivor blurted out an incident in the displaced persons camp when Jewish men ‘raided’ the women’s block, initiating sex.

During the Holocaust, consensual relations offered comfort and escapism. The Jewish police and the fire brigade in the Stanislawów ghetto oversaw the Hungarian Jews in the Rudolfmühle. Cipora Brenner remarked about their nightly visits to find companionship and, along the way, to seduce her and her roommate. She made it a point in her testimony that they both resisted their advances. Even in this case, the relationship was based on power. But, then, it often boiled down to life or death when a policeman or an official could prevent one’s deportation to a death camp in exchange for sexual favors. It might be pertinent to remember that in various ghettos, the foreign Jews who had no anchor in the local community were the first ones to be selected for slave labor, delivered for killing “Aktionen,” or sent to Belzec. Indeed, one of the policemen, with whom she became friends, saved her and hid her during the deportation of the Hungarians, in the spring of 1942, from the Rudolfmühle to Belzec. He also provided her more food and comfort in his own residence. That this relationship also reflected a degree of inequality might be deduced from the fact that she attempted to commit suicide during her time spent hiding in his attic.
Of course, not only Hungarian deportees but local Jewish women were raped, beaten, and subjected to sexual violence. Wendy Jo Gertjejanssen provides a tentative number of women in sexual slavery: “It is safe to assume from the evidence available that the Germans enslaved at least 50,000 women into sexual slavery during World War II, but it is likely that the number is far higher.” We do not know how many Jewish women were included in this number, but then, the question as to how much the Nazi doctrine of racial hygiene, which explicitly forbade sexual relations between Jews and Aryans, influenced the practices on the ground, however forced they were, might be a moot one. Again, the words of Havryshko sum up this point: “The notion that sex with a Jewish woman (even coercive) would constitute ‘racial defamation’ (Rassenschande) was not an effective mechanism for preventing rape by Germans because some of them did not consider this rape to be a crime.” Indeed, German military authorities established hundreds of brothels across the Reich in which also Jewish women were coerced into sexual slavery. The military culture, with its cult of physical strength, hegemonic masculinity, and dominance over women, highly contributed to sex crimes, especially when it came to gang rape. As feminist scholars point out, in some military groups gang rapes served as a tool for building military brotherhood. Reflecting this attitude by the military, as Richard Evans noted, “the courts dealt with this kind of offence leniently.” He presents some revealing statistics in that among “1.5 million members of the armed forces . . . only 5,349 were put on trial for sexual offences.”

This was, however, mainly applicable for the Wehrmacht. SS officers were held to a higher standard. Himmler’s dictum explicitly forbade it: “In April 1939, Himmler made it clear in his order on the self-esteem of the folk (Befehl über die völkische Selbstachtung) that any connection [sexual contact] with those of non-German populations was forbidden for members of the SS and police.” He threatened demotion and discharge for those who did not obey this order.

In Galicia, all racial and ideological inhibitions, dictated by the Nuremberg Laws, rapidly evaporated, if they were taken into consideration at all. Sexual slavery by SS officers became common practice across the occupied territories. It was especially true for stationary security outposts where Nazi officers interacted with the Jewish community. In an interview with a witness in Busk, in western Galicia, Father Patrick Desbois recorded that the commandant of the outpost selected the most beautiful Jewish girl for himself: “Silva, who was very beautiful—wasn’t killed straight away. Silva had to live with the German commander.” The commander was not alone: “The Germans kept 30 or so very pretty Jewish women that they set to work in the offices of the Gestapo but whom they also used as ‘sex objects’ for the police [Ukrainian?] and the Germans.” It was not an official brothel in the true sense of the word. Of course, the term “sex object” might also be a misnomer, for they were sex slaves in the full sense of the word. This saved their lives temporarily. The witness explained later that all the women became
pregnant. A decision had to be made. The Germans, not having the “courage to kill them themselves” before escaping from the rapidly advancing Soviet forces at the end of the war, called in a murder squad from a neighboring town to massacre these women.16

In southern Galicia, where the Hungarian Jews were deposited, the acts of rape and sexual violence, against both men and women, became equally endemic. The difference was that the perpetrators in the south would personally kill the rape victims soon afterward. The elimination of these women and girls in these “makeshift” brothels also was fueled by the necessity to remove any potential witnesses to the sexual crimes. An equally weighty factor, just like in Busk, was that “as soon as one of them became pregnant she was exterminated.”26 A case in point was the border police outpost (Grenzpolizei) in Sniatyn, just across the Hungarian border. Under the command of SS-Untersturmführer (second lieutenant) Paul Elsner, the outpost was established for blocking the influx of Hungarian expellees, which also included their arrest and summary execution. Reporting to Peter Leideritz, in Kolomea, between September 1941 to February 1942, Elsner instituted a reign of sexual terror in the outpost with the full participation of his staff. Even in a short span of six months, he established and maintained a private “harem” of Jewish women, together with his fellow SS officers, with corresponding orgies, the victims of which he subsequently murdered. His sexual perversion exhibited itself in commanding his dog to attack attractive girls who were ordered to undress prior to the attack. All this to the accompaniment of blaring music from the radio: “The ferocious animal first ripped the girl’s dress off and then tore hunks of flesh from her body until she bled to death.” Elsner’s removal from his command in early 1942 was not due to his deviant sexual activities but, rather, was because he was caught stealing Jewish valuables, for which he was court-martialed.27

In close proximity to Sniatyn, in Mielnica, where a large number of Hungarian exiles found refuge, heavily inebriated German border guards roamed the streets, “rioting through the town and harassing Jews whom they happened to encounter in the streets. They broke into houses at night and raped young girls. Many Jews never undressed for the night or simply slept out of their houses until dawn.”28 In this case, alcohol acted as a catalyst to violence and sexual predation. Even a low-level corporal in the Gestapo, such as Paul Thomanek, in Czortków, could demand from the Judenrat a supply of alcohol and women for his entertainment.29

KRÜGER IN STANISŁAWÓW

No studies or references by scholars have raised the question of what role SS-Captain Hans Krüger may have played in instituting sexual terror in Stanisławów and the surrounding areas, nor was any mention made about his deviant sexual activities during
the deliberations at his rather chaotic trial in the 1960s. However, memoirs and testimonies paint a picture of Krüger as a psychopathic sexual predator, which might have been exceptional even within the ranks of the SS.

Three days after assuming his post as the commander of the Gestapo in Stanislawów, and perhaps as an introduction to things to come, he ordered a sex orgy in which Jewish women doctors and pharmacists were paraded nude and subsequently raped by German officers and Ukrainian militia men. Abraham Liebesman, a noted physician in the ghetto, was personally acquainted with Hans Krüger. As a keen observer of the ghetto scene, his remark that Krüger harbored special “animosity toward well-educated women” was especially poignant. He provides a graphic scene of this orgy that took place on the evening of “Monday the 4th of August . . . the band was playing when they brought in naked women [all physicians] pressed one against the other . . . . Thereafter came in naked men, among them the Rabbi Horowitz, his beard shaven. They forced the old rabbi to make advances to Dr. Zaslawski [a noted physician], when he refused, they beat him up until he was unconscious.” The next day, the participants of the evening, almost the entire intelligentsia of the community, were carted off to an adjacent forest near the village of Pawelce and murdered.

Evenings like this, when naked girls and men were forced to dance together, became routine entertainment for the Gestapo in the ghetto. In addition, Krüger demanded cultural activities and theatrical and musical performances for his own entertainment, at least until the spring of 1942, when most of the performers were transported to Belzec.

Reading contemporary testimonies, one comes away with the impression that in addition to sexual sadism toward women, especially well-educated ones, Krüger had a special animus toward rabbis. During his time in Stanislawów, he was able to combine the two, for eerily similar scenes were described about the first Aktion in Bolechow. The town, with a sizeable Jewish population, was located close to the Carpathian Mountains, some forty-five miles from Stanislawów. While the initial evening of an Aktion of sexualized violence in Stanislawów took place on August 4, the first such operation in the town of Bolechow was relatively late in the wave of murders sweeping through Galicia—October 28, 1941. Until then, the town was spared, by and large, from Nazi atrocities. It’s ferocity, though, matched that already described Aktion in Stanislawów, and, it was conducted according to Hans Krüger’s playbook.

Mainly targeting the town Jewish intelligentsia, the raid collected close to a thousand people of all ages in the Dom Katolicki [town hall]. Krüger arrived in the morning, briefly overseeing the arrangements. As he left half an hour later, he handed the command over “to Gestapo Officer Schindler.” Based on testimony by a survivor in 1946, and confirmed through interviews by Daniel Mendelsohn, the scenes of that afternoon and evening easily challenge human imagination: “Nine hundred people were
packed into the hall. People were stacked on one another. Many suffocated. They were killed in the hall, shot or simply hit over the head with clubs and sticks.”

The amusement started around four o’clock in the afternoon. The testimony emphasized that “the rabbis were especially targeted,” and that sexual brutalization was not confined to women: “Rabbi Landau was ordered by one of the Gestapo men to stand naked on a chair and declaim a speech in praise of Germany.” He was beaten simultaneously and later killed. As a blind piano player played on the stage, the wife of a noted lawyer “had to dance naked on naked bodies.” Also, another rabbi was forced to sing and dance, “his eyes running blood,” with a naked Jewish girl while beaten by “one of the Gestapo men.” His eyes gauged out, the rabbi refused the German command to lie on top of the naked girl, upon which he was killed. “It is said that [the rabbis] were thrown into the latrines.”

Why was there a need to design uniquely anti-Semitic sexual torments, in a manner calculated to be particularly humiliating, when the fate of the assembled Jews to be exterminated the next morning was already decided? One psychological explanation is that in order to kill a group of people, you must reduce them, dehumanize them to a state in which you cannot see them as humans. In this sense, increasingly brutal action could be used to convince oneself of his own virulent anti-Semitism, which then provided a justification for exterminating them with corresponding savagery.

These actions raise also some fundamental questions as to how Krüger’s behavior reflected Nazi ideology and policies. And if they did not, what was different in Galicia? The directive from Heinrich Himmler as SS-Reichsführer clearly listed among the nine “virtues of the SS man,” the “abstinence from alcohol” (Alkohol vermeiden). He especially threatened to double punishments for men convicted of crimes committed while under the influence.

As for behavior with women in the east, as we have already noted, Himmler outright forbade sexual intercourse with women of a different race, especially with Jewish women. Any transgressions were to be reported to him personally. While this kind of sexually fueled savagery, prior to the killing of the arrested, was the hallmark of Krüger, sexual crimes were not the sole domain of the SS leadership in southern Galicia. As numerous studies show, they were endemic across the Eastern Theater. One finds a common denominator, though. There was a direct connection between heavy alcohol consumption, mass murder, and sexual violence. Edward Westermann’s observation that “acts of sexual violence by SS and police forces were commonplace, and the abuse of alcohol was often a key contributing factor” sums this up well. It provided a bonding experience before the act and a diversion from the horrors of the crime committed afterward. Indeed, alcohol-fueled sexual predation ranged from voyeurism to rape and ultimately murder.
But there was an additional factor in Krüger’s modus operandi, which was somewhat unique to southern Galicia. The number of people coerced in these acts of sexualized violence was extraordinary even by SS standards. As several scholars demonstrated, Wehrmacht soldiers committed sexual savagery in Belarus and Poland—mainly directed at a limited number of women. Yet, officers by and large did not condone such behavior or did not initiate it.

The fact that Krüger was never called upon to answer for the sexual crimes committed by him and his security team is at best enigmatic. It shows perhaps a tacit complicity on the part of the security circle of fellow officers around Krüger in a behavior that was blatantly contrary to the SS code of conduct. The answer might lie also in the residual and corollary effects of such unbridled sexual violence. Again, we can rely on Abraham Liebesman’s recollection in describing the immediate health results for sexual promiscuousness. As a physician in the Stanislawów ghetto, Liebesman was aware of the rapes and promiscuity of the German officers and Ukrainian policemen, for there was a veritable epidemic of venereal diseases, such as syphilis and gonorrhea, among the Gestapo personnel and the victims. He personally treated Krüger himself, who had several Jewish and Polish mistresses whom he infected with venereal diseases. In turn these women infected other officers as swapping mistresses became common. Unfortunately, for the Jewish sexual victims there was no need for medical treatment. As often was the case, the SS commandant routinely and expeditiously murdered them. Liebesman noted that Krüger was rumored to keep a photo album in which nude girls in various poses were depicted with guns pointed at their head—they were killed regularly. This testimony illustrates that Krüger and fellow officers’ behavior exhibited a deviant streak that might have diverged dramatically from the SS code of conduct, mandated by Himmler, but fostered a code of silence.

INSTITUTIONALIZED SEXUAL SLAVERY

One of the corollary effects of the rapidly spreading venereal diseases prompted the Wehrmacht and the SS leadership to address this issue head-on. The most immediate and rational solution was the establishment of several hundred brothels across the Reich and the East. We cannot discount an additional and rather obvious rationale for these brothels—satisfying the soldiers sexual desires or, perhaps more accurately stated, their sexual demands. However, from a health point of view, the weightiest factor for the SS officers was to bring the venereal diseases under control.

German military records inform us that five hundred brothels, catering to camp inmates, Wehrmacht soldiers, and SS officers, were functioning during the war across the
Reich. In the moment, women were coerced to work in them, with the Wehrmacht and security services complicit in the institutionalization of sexual violence. In the District of Galicia, we know of four brothels that were in service: Lwów, Drohobycz, Tarnopol, and Stanislawów. As the highest-ranking officer, the brothel in Stanislawów might have been Krüger’s brainchild. While the first attempt, undertaken in November 1941, was not successful, we know that by February 14, 1942, it was fully operational, located in the German Officers’ Club. While relegating the administration to company and sanitation officers in the Wehrmacht, usually the field commander was in charge of such institutions. It seems likely that the brothel in Stanislawów was under the jurisdiction of Krüger.

Krüger was transferred from Stanislawów a year later, in early 1943, after the liquidation of the ghetto. The town was declared Judenfrei. His transfer was not precipitated by the orgies and by his sexual transgressions against the Reich’s racial laws. Rather, his cardinal sin, as seen in the previous chapter, was his predilection for looting and robbing his victims in the ghetto. However, his legacy of sexual slavery continued long after his departure from a “Jew-free” Stanislawów. The brothel centered around the German Officers’ Club was housed on the fourth floor of the Gestapo building. By that time, the only Jewish women still alive were those in this brothel.

As it was noted, military brothels were integral part of the Nazi Reich, in concentration camps, cities, and military installations. There was a priority order, though, in setting up this network. Gertjejanssen noted that “women who were less than pretty were
sent to the brothels established in concentration camps for male prisoners, the prettier to the Wehrmacht brothels and the prettiest to the SS brothels.” It is assumable that the German Officers’ Club in Stanisławów could be considered such a “handpicked” SS brothel, because it catered to the local security officers only. The women enslaved in this establishment received more food and better sanitary condition, which included three times a week medical examination for venereal diseases.

We would have no knowledge or information about the brothel’s existence and its operational details if not for an unexpected source. Michael Jackson (Jakubovics), a Hungarian Jew from Carpathian Ruthenia, who was drafted into a labor battalion attached to the Hungarian Army, arrived in Stanisławów around December 1943. His reminiscences of being deported in 1941 to Galicia could be the material for a film drama: a stateless Jew in Stanisławów, an escape back to Hungary over the Carpathian Mountains, and being sent back in a military unit to the scene of the “crime” two years later. It may seem a cruel twist of fate that he was drafted a year after his escape from Galicia into the Hungarian Army and transferred back to Stanisławów.

During his stationing there, for close to six weeks, he often worked in a four-story building that housed the German officers’ club—entrusted with cleaning the staircases and rooms. Upon wandering to the fourth floor, he inadvertently stumbled upon a brothel staffed by Jewish and Polish women that served the officers. The officers used these young women as sex slaves, in the full sense of the word—without recourse, except suicide. We know that because “after sometimes the girls disappear and never come back. . . . The women were not allowed to leave the floor . . . and some of the girls jumped out of the windows.” In turn, the Germans installed bars on the windows to stop a rush of suicides by the despondent and traumatized victims.

Since the forced laborers from Carpathian Ruthenia spoke Yiddish among themselves, one of the girls tearfully approached him and confided in him about her life in the brothel. An emotional Jackson recalled in his testimony in 1997 the final words he exchanged with this Jewish girl: “If you survive the war, tell our story, tell the world what these beasts did to us.” Michael Jackson later, on camera, concluded his testimony on a tearful note: “My dear Jewish sister, now I am fulfilling your request. I looked into your eyes, and I saw and felt your pain.”