small number of Jews was rounded up, and both the policemen and the Jews feared that another massacre was imminent. After some hesitation, however, the action was broken off, and Trapp permitted the Jews to return to their houses. One policeman remembered vividly "how individual Jews fell on their knees before Trapp and tried to kiss his hands and feet. Trapp, however, did not permit this and turned away." The policemen returned to Biłgoraj with no explanation for the strange turn of events.[84] Then, on July 20, precisely one month after its departure from Hamburg and one week after the Józefów massacre, Reserve Police Battalion 101 left Biłgoraj for redeployment in the northern sector of the Lublin district.

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Reflections on a Massacre

AT JÓZEFÓW A MERE DOZEN MEN OUT OF NEARLY 500 HAD responded instinctively to Major Trapp's offer to step forward and excuse themselves from the impending mass murder. Why was the number of men who from the beginning declared themselves unwilling to shoot so small? In part, it was a matter of the suddenness. There was no forewarning or time to think, as the men were totally "surprised" by the Józefów action.[1] Unless they were able to react to Trapp's offer on the spur of the moment, this first opportunity was lost.[2]

As important as the lack of time for reflection was the pressure for conformity—the basic identification of men in uniform with their comrades and the strong urge not to separate themselves from the group by stepping out. The battalion had only recently

been brought up to full strength, and many of the men did not yet know each other well; the bonds of military comradeship were not yet fully developed. Nonetheless, the act of stepping out that morning in Józefów meant leaving one's comrades and admitting that one was "too weak" or "cowardly." Who would have "dared," one policeman declared emphatically, to "lose face" before the assembled troops.[3] "If the question is posed to me why I shot with the others in the first place," said another who subsequently asked to be excused after several rounds of killing, "I must answer that no one wants to be thought a coward." It was one thing to refuse at the beginning, he added, and quite another to try to shoot but not be able to continue.[4] Another policeman—more aware of what truly required courage—said quite simply, "I was cowardly."[5]

Most of the interrogated policemen denied that they had any choice. Faced with the testimony of others, many did not contest that Trapp had made the offer but claimed that they had not heard that part of the speech or could not remember it. A few policemen made the attempt to confront the question of choice but failed to find the words. It was a different time and place, as if they had been on another political planet, and the political values and vocabulary of the 1960s were useless in explaining the situation in which they had found themselves in 1942. Quite atypical in describing his state of mind that morning of July 13 was a policeman who admitted to killing as many as twenty Jews before quitting. "I thought that I could master the situation and that without me the Jews were not going to escape their fate anyway. . . . Truthfully I must say that at the time we didn't reflect about it at all. Only years later did any of us become truly conscious of what had happened then. . . . Only later did it first occur to me that had not been right."[6]

In addition to the easy rationalization that not taking part in the shooting was not going to alter the fate of the Jews in any case, the policemen developed other justifications for their behavior. Perhaps the most astonishing rationalization of all was that of a thirty-five-year-old metalworker from Bremerhaven:

> I made the effort, and it was possible for me, to shoot only children. It so happened that the mothers led the children by the hand. My neighbor then shot the mother and I shot the child that belonged to her, because I reasoned with myself that after all without its mother the child could not live any longer. It was supposed to be, so to speak, soothing to my conscience to release children unable to live without their mothers.[7]

The full weight of this statement, and the significance of the word choice of the former policeman, cannot be fully appreciated unless one knows that the German word for "release" (*erlösen*) also means to "redeem" or "save" when used in a religious sense. The one who "releases" is the *Erlöser*—the Savior or Redeemer!

In terms of motivation and consciousness, the most glaring omission in the interrogations is any discussion of anti-Semitism. For the most part the interrogators did not pursue this issue. Nor were the men, for understandable reasons as potential defendants, eager to volunteer any illuminating comments. With few exceptions the whole question of anti-Semitism is marked by silence. What is clear is that the men's concern for their standing in the eyes of their comrades was not matched by any sense of human ties with their victims. The Jews stood outside their circle of human obligation and responsibility. Such a polarization between "us" and "them," between one's comrades and the enemy, is of course standard in war.

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

If only a dozen policemen stepped out at the beginning to extricate themselves from the impending mass murder, a much

larger number either sought to evade the shooting by less conspicuous methods or asked to be released from the firing squads once the shooting had begun. How many policemen belonged to these categories cannot be ascertained with any certainty, but an estimate in the range of 10 to 20 percent of those actually assigned to the firing squads does not seem unreasonable. Sergeant Hergert, for instance, admitted excusing as many as five from his squad of forty or fifty men. In the Drucker-Steinmetz group, from which the greatest number of shooters was interrogated, we can identify six policemen who quit within four rounds and an entire squad of five to eight who were released considerably later. While the number of those who evaded or dropped out was thus not insignificant, it must not obscure the corollary that at least 80 percent of those called upon to shoot continued to do so until 1,500 Jews from Józefów had been killed.

Even twenty or twenty-five years later those who did quit shooting along the way overwhelmingly cited sheer physical revulsion against what they were doing as the prime motive but did not express any ethical or political principles behind this revulsion. Given the educational level of these reserve policemen, one should not expect a sophisticated articulation of abstract principles. The absence of such does not mean that their revulsion did not have its origins in the humane instincts that Nazism radically opposed and sought to overcome. But the men themselves did not seem to be conscious of the contradiction between their feelings and the essence of the regime they served. Being too weak to continue shooting, of course, posed problems for the "productivity" and morale of the battalion, but it did not challenge basic police discipline or the authority of the regime in general. Indeed, Heinrich Himmler himself sanctioned the toleration of this kind of weakness in his notorious Posen speech of October 4, 1943, to the SS leadership. While exalting obedience as one of the key virtues of all SS men, he explicitly noted an exception, namely, "one whose nerves are

finished, one who is weak. Then one can say: Good, go take your pension."[8]

Politically and ethically motivated opposition, explicitly identified by the policemen as such, was relatively rare. One man said he decisively rejected the Jewish measures of the Nazis because he was an active Communist Party member and thus rejected National Socialism in its entirety.[9] Another said he opposed the shooting of Jews because he had been a Social Democrat for many years.[10] A third said he was known to the Nazis as "politically unreliable" and a "grumbler" but gave no further political identity.[11] Several others grounded their attitude on opposition to the regime's anti-Semitism in particular. "This attitude I already had earlier in Hamburg," said one landscape gardener, "because due to the Jewish measures already carried out in Hamburg I had lost the greater part of my business customers."[12] Another policeman merely identified himself as "a great friend of the Jews" without explaining further.[13]

The two men who explained their refusal to take part in the greatest detail both emphasized the fact that they were freer to act as they did because they had no careerist ambitions. One policeman accepted the possible disadvantages of his course of action "because I was not a career policeman and also did not want to become one, but rather an independent skilled craftsman, and I had my business back home. . . . thus it was of no consequence that my police career would not prosper."[14]

Lieutenant Buchmann had cited an ethical stance for his refusal; as a reserve officer and Hamburg businessman, he could not shoot defenseless women and children. But he too stressed the importance of economic independence when explaining why his situation was not analogous to that of his fellow officers. "I was somewhat older then and moreover a reserve officer, so it was not particularly important to me to be promoted or otherwise to advance, because I had my prosperous business back home. The company chiefs . . . on the other hand were young men and career policemen who wanted to become something." But

Buchmann also admitted to what the Nazis would undoubtedly have condemned as a "cosmopolitan" and pro-Jewish outlook. "Through my business experience, especially because it extended abroad, I had gained a better overview of things. Moreover, through my earlier business activities I already knew many Jews."[15]

The resentment and bitterness in the battalion over what they had been asked to do in Józefów was shared by virtually everyone, even those who had shot the entire day. The exclamation of one policeman to First Sergeant Kammer of First Company that "I'd go crazy if I had to do that again" expressed the sentiments of many.[16] But only a few went beyond complaining to extricate themselves from such a possibility. Several of the older men with very large families took advantage of a regulation that required them to sign a release agreeing to duty in a combat area. One who had not yet signed refused to do so; another rescinded his signature. Both were eventually transferred back to Germany.[17] The most dramatic response was again that of Lieutenant Buchmann, who asked Trapp to have him transferred back to Hamburg and declared that short of a direct personal order from Trapp, he would not take part in Jewish actions. In the end he wrote to Hamburg, explicitly requesting a recall because he was not "suited" to certain tasks "alien to the police" that were being carried out by his unit in Poland.[18] Buchmann had to wait until November, but his efforts to be transferred were ultimately successful.

The problem that faced Trapp and his superiors in Lublin, therefore, was not the ethically and politically grounded opposition of a few but the broad demoralization shared both by those who shot to the end and those who had not been able to continue. It was above all a reaction to the sheer horror of the killing process itself. If Reserve Police Battalion 101 was to continue to provide vital manpower for the implementation of the Final Solution in the Lublin district, the psychological burden on the men had to be taken into account and alleviated.

In subsequent actions two vital changes were introduced and henceforth—with some notable exceptions—adhered to. First, most of the future operations of Reserve Police Battalion 101 involved ghetto clearing and deportation, not outright massacre on the spot. The policemen were thus relieved of the immediate horror of the killing process, which (for deportees from the northern Lublin district) was carried out in the extermination camp at Treblinka. Second, while deportation was a horrifying procedure characterized by the terrible coercive violence needed to drive people onto the death trains as well as the systematic killing of those who could not be marched to the trains, these actions were generally undertaken jointly by units of Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Trawnikis, SS-trained auxiliaries from Soviet territories, recruited from the POW camps and usually assigned the very worst parts of the ghetto clearing and deportation.

Concern over the psychological demoralization resulting from Józefów is indeed the most likely explanation of that mysterious incident in Alekzandrów several days later. Probably Trapp had assurance that Trawniki men would carry out the shooting this time, and when they did not show up, he released the Jews his men had rounded up. In short, the psychological alleviation necessary to integrate Reserve Police Battalion 101 into the killing process was to be achieved through a twofold division of labor. The bulk of the killing was to be removed to the extermination camp, and the worst of the on-the-spot "dirty work" was to be assigned to the Trawnikis. This change would prove sufficient to allow the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 to become accustomed to their participation in the Final Solution. When the time came to kill again, the policemen did not "go crazy." Instead they became increasingly efficient and calloused executioners.