During the first five years of their rule in Germany, the Nazis killed
scores of Jews; in the November pogrom of 1938 they murdered hundreds of
Jews; in the first weeks of the German-Polish war, 1939, thousands of Jewish
civilians were tortured and slaughtered by the Germans; selective murder
of individual Jews was going on in all other occupied countries (hostages,
shootings). Yet the German war on USSR opened quite a new stage in the
extermination of Jews — their extermination by the tens of thousands.

A. The Successive Periods in the Process of Extermination

The movement of German armies to Eastern Europe

The whole campaign of the mass extermination of Jews shows several
clearly distinctive periods: during the first six months (June-November 1941)
it spread exclusively over the newly occupied territories in Poland and
Russia, with one single exception — the slaughter of 12,900 Jews in Iasi
(Romania) on June 29, 1941. In November 1941 the campaign of mass extermina-
tion begins to spread over those parts of Poland which had been occupied by
Germans since September 1939, and from there it spreads further all over
the German occupied countries of Europe. By February 1943 already, all those
countries had been visited by this process and more than 3 million Jews annih-
ilated. Then came the defeat at Stalingrad; the pace of the German retreat
is speeded up, and along with it, the extermination of the remnants of the
Jewish population becomes even more thorough and intensive.

The first wave of the mass extermination of Jews followed exactly the
movements of the German army in its campaign against the USSR. The Central
Army Group, arriving at Moscow, overran, on June 27, 1941, the first large Jewish
community on its way, Bialystok. The same night the German soldiers surrounded
several streets populated by needy Jews and put to the torch all the houses
there. The Jews tried to escape in all directions, but the whole place was
so closely and so efficiently guarded by the Germans that almost no one was able
to make good his escape. Men, women, children, ran aimlessly among the burning
houses, screaming and praying in anguish, while the Germans poised their guns
with machine-guns and rifles or threw them alive into the fire, shooting
mockingly: "This is the thankfulness of the Bolsheviks for you!" More than
1,000 Jews were locked in the Great Synagogue and burned there.
The Ninth Army Group reached in Pillsen. Frankie and already on
June 25, 1941 the German soldiers started the first pogroms in the suburb
of this city. They broke into Jewish houses, looting and smashing with rifle
butts, beating all the adults they could find, and stabbing with their
knives children to death. Soon the pogrom spread all over the city; all
Jews found in the streets were murdered on the spot. Jewish houses were
attacked, their inmates assembled in courtyards and basements and put to
death. Several hundred Jews were brought to the bank of the River Vltava
(Neris). There they were forced to dig with bare hands their own graves
and then shot. Another group consisting of hundreds of Jewish men were
locked in the garage "Metka" and for hours cruelly tortured there: the Nazi
German soldiers tore out with vices the genitals of their victims, cut out
their tongues, cut out their eyes, chopped off their limbs; all this was done
under upermissive laughter and to the tunes of merry music played on an accordion.

More than 50 Jews lost their lives in this ghastly butchery.

In Jigs and Drins, in Hask and Imov, in hundreds of towns and villages,
the same story repeated itself on and. Yet, the regular German Army could
not waste too much time and energy on the extermination of Jews; it found
itself locked in a deadly fight with the Red Army, and its actions against
the Jews showed rather, for all their zeal and frequency, a superficial character. They killed ten, fifteen, in some cases even 25 percent of Jews, and then they had to move on. In all such cases the Gestapo and the powerful formations of SS and SD (Sonderabteilung a Secret Field Police) took over the unfinished job and followed it up methodically. Thus, in Rome, the S.A. Oberführer Meyer became the custodian of the Jewish population, together with Jordan, a high official in the Consularist of Jewish Affairs.

During the subsequent three months they organized four mass executions, killing off at least 15,000 Jews. Between these actions, which were nothing less than wholesale extermination of Jews, the Germans continuously resorted to "selective" murder; gangs of soldiers and Gestapo officials looted Jewish homes, tortured and killed their inmates. And here again the same thing repeated itself in all cities and towns occupied by the Germans.

Yet sometimes the German tactics differed; after taking a city they did not start a massacre at once but waited a few days until a more complete and thorough job could be done. Thus, Eliau was entered by the German Army on September 19, 1933. Nine days later all Jews were ordered to appear on September 30 at a designated place and to bring along all money, valuables,
and worn clothes they possessed. Next day the whole Jewish population appeared at the designated place. Old folks, sick and invalids, all who were unable to walk were brought there on stretchers, blankets or simply on hands. There they were met by Gestapo officials headed by Paul Badecki and his assistant, Biedor, who took away from them all their money, valuables and worn clothes; then they were directed, under strong escort, toward the Babi Yar, a deep black ravine northwest of Kiev, where they were shot from tommy and machine guns. Children, as very frequently in such cases, were thrown alive into the graves. More than 50,000 Jews were slaughtered there by the Germans.

The same happened in Mukliv, where the whole Jewish population of 17,000 was annihilated with one single stroke a few weeks after the occupation, and in hundreds of other towns and villages.

Yet, this difference of tactics does not amount to very much, and the basic fact remains small, not one single village or hamlet where the Jews, as soon as they fall in German hands, were not made to suffer and to die, and the only factor which determined their fate was time, when was their town or village occupied by the Germans. Mariupol, for instance, was taken on
October 9, 1941, and on October 20, 1941, its whole Jewish population of 9,000
already perished. But Biala was taken only on November 3, 1941, and that
is the only reason why its Jewish population had a few more weeks of grace
than the population of Marigopol.

Meanwhile the German Government saw itself confronted with a new problem:
prisoners of war who, during the first months, and especially during the
first weeks of the campaign were taken by the tens of thousands. The question
how to feed and to transport these additional hundreds of thousands of prisoners
all right. But there were so many communists and Jews among these prisoners,
and they had to be identified and murdered at once. On July 17, 1941,
Himmler issued a special order concerning the "purge" of prisoners' camps: he
appointed the Major General von Lindenau and Lieutenant General Herrgott,
together with several others, to direct the activities of special squads
entrusted with this task. A German soldier, guardian in a prisoners' camp at
Chelm, wrote home: "Naturally we are not treating the prisoners too gently....
Jewish prisoners are shot on the spot. They must first dig their own graves,
then five of them are bound together so that all fall into the pit at the same
time. About 500 to 600 of these executions take place daily." Another German
soldier testified: "When a new transport of war prisoners arrived, Heyer, the
commander of the 3rd battalion of the 31st Regiment of the 36th Infantry Division, issued an order to shoot all Jews among the prisoners. The first
Lieutenant Weibert took over the execution of this order according to which 3000 Jewish soldiers were shot in the Uzhgorod-Petrovska district during February
1942. I saw with my own eyes how Weibert killed 30 Jews with his own hands
in one single day."

November 1941 brought an important change in the whole military situation on the Eastern Front. The offensive against Moscow made no progress at all and seemed to be stopped for good; the whole German army suffered terribly in the clutches of an unusually cold winter and, in addition to all that, the
Russians went on the offensive and have retaken Rostov. For the first time the German leaders must have got the idea that it would not be so easy to
obtain a final victory, so they tried at least to make the German victory
over the Jewish people more decisive and general. Beginning with November
1941, the wave of more extermination of Jews began to spread also in the opposite
direction, toward the West, steadily surmounting all countries occupied by the
Germans. "Khartoum" became the first victim: Jews from Khartoum, Deb, Pago, Ibadin,
together with many thousands Jews from the Lida Ghetto, 10,000 in all, were killed in the death camp Belzec. 16,000 Jews were killed in Rome in November 1943, and 12,000 more a few weeks later.

On Easter 1942 the Lublin Gestapo, headed by the notorious Goth, ordered the entire Jewish population of Lublin, about 50,000 people, to leave the town and to march toward Majdanek, the famous death camp. Goth did such a thorough job that already on April 15, 1942, the German newspaper "Beobachter Zeitung" could publish an article entitled "The Entire Jewish Population of Lublin Exiled Out." Not a trace of Jews was left in the whole district of Lublin, to be sure, with the exception of Majdanek, where no and so many Jews were still waiting for their turn to die. And the Gestapo man, Goth, who became famous now in Lublin, was sent to Craków as head of the concentration camp there.

In Craków the mass extermination campaign started in June 1942, when, under supervision of the Gestapo men, mass, 13,000 were deported to the death camp Belzec - only 3,000 were allowed to remain in the city. A few months later, mass had 5000 Jews driven to a forest near Craków; there the grown-ups were mercilessly machine-gunned, the children were thrown alive into the graves and all buried together. The rest, 3000 people, were sent to the
concentration camp at the Jeruzalenska street, where the Gestapo men, both,
took care of them.

In March 1942, Heinrich Himmler, paid a visit to Poland. During his
stay in Poland he issued an order to the effect that 60% of all Polish Jews
had to be exterminated by the end of that year. In July 1942 Himmler came
to Poland again, according to the Polish underground sources, he declared
at a meeting in Warsaw that:

1) Hitler had personally told him that the Jews had commenced the war
and should, for that reason, be punished.

2) the Jews are the scum of the earth and must be converted to dust.

3) All Jews must die, but not before going through suffering and agony.

A special "Vernichtungskommission" was organised, with Commissar Fay
as Chairman and a large office in Warsaw. This commission had to supervise
the work of Jewish extermination in Poland; its members continuously visited
different parts of the country and directed the mass slaughter of the Jewish
population. Chairman Fay was directly responsible to Himmler.

Less than a week after Himmler spoke these portentous words, there began
the extermination of the largest ghetto the world ever saw, the Warsaw Ghetto with
its more than half a million population. Every day several thousand Jews were
deported to Treblinka or other death camps, and this was done so consistently,
even if with a few interruptions, that by the end of 1942 not more than
40,000 Jews remained in the Warsaw Ghetto. On April 19th, the Germans
entered the Ghetto in order to deport the remainder of its Jewish population.
Yet this time they were met with small arms fire and hand grenades. It took
the Germans 12 days to overcome the desperate resistance of the Jews who
gave up only after the Germans methodically destroyed and burned out the
whole Ghetto with their „lebensraum.

In September 1942 the Germans deported 40,000 Jews from the Lodz Ghetto
to different death factories, sent 15,000 Jews from Holomys to their death
in Belzec. In Lvov between March 31, 1942 and June 2, 1943, seven formal
actions and numerous informal ones took place; not less than 100,000 Jews, and
probably several scores of thousands more, perished there during these
actions.

The winter 1942-3 brought the first decisive defeat of the German Army
at Stalingrad. The German retreat began, first at the Volga and in the
North Caucasus, then slowly spreading all over the Eastern front, back to
Poland and further back to Germany. This retreat revealed one fact with
absolute certainty; however ruthless the advancing German Army was, however
cruel and destructive the German occupational authorities were - the
Germans surpassed and even themselves and reached new depths of
cruelty and destructive fury that they beggar any description and any im-
sagination. The Jews should never be able to enjoy the defeat of their worst
enemies, or, as Hitler put it, the Jews should never celebrate another Purim
(Jewish festival commemorating defeat of Haman’s plot) in his memory. Thus
the most complete destruction of all Jews they could get hold of became one
of the main concerns of the retreating Germans. In lskahly, the Germans flooded
the coal mines and, besides, drowned so many Jews there that more than 20,000
corpses were found there afterwards. In the whole region of Donetsk, the Germans
did not leave behind one single Jew but a few in hiding. In Kharkov the Germans
took such great pains to kill off all Jews that on the eve of the evacuation
of this city they could bestow upon it the Eckart’s medal of honor - to be
freed from Jews. In the whole territory of the Ukraine, in the
thousands of its towns and villages formerly densely populated by Jews, only
some of these Jews survived the German occupation who joined the Russian partisans.

In Wilno the final liquidation of the Gheto began in the first days of
September 1943. The SS Feldwebel Weiss and Rampin Rittel, a former movie actor,
surrounded the Ghetto with military units and let the Gestapo men enter the houses, only to find out that most of the houses were barricaded from within.

To do away with these obstacles, the Germans resorted to dynamite and blasted many houses, sometimes whole blocks away. The Jews tried to save themselves by crawling into the drainpipes, but the Germans filled these pipes with water. Thus, of the 14,000 inhabitants, 2,000 were drowned, blasted or shot, 11,000 were deported to death factories and only 2,000 remained to be liquidated in July 1944 when the Red Army threatened to encircle Vilna. When finally the Red Army entered the city, only a few Jews were found there in hiding; this happened itself all over Russia and Poland, and it would not be an exaggeration to say that not one single Jew survived the German occupation 'legally.'

The mass annihilation of deported Jews in so-called Transnistria, while perpetrated by Romanians, goes back to German initiative. This applies also to other satellites.

In Yugoslavia, the German Prinz Eugen Division killed in the village of Ranki 16,000 Jews, most of them from near-by Belgrade; many thousands of Jews were sent to the concentration camps of Krupac, Vadovo and Novi Becej there to perish; many more thousands were sent to the death camps of Poland. In the
year 1944, only 800 Jews remained in Croatia — all in hiding, and not very many were in Serbia, also in hiding. "Legally" only 4,000 Jews lived in Yugoslavia — they all drugged as slave laborers in the War mines, and they all were killed by the retreating Germans, all with the exception of two men who succeeded in escaping and are now alive to tell the tale.

In Hungary, since the German "putsch" of October 15, 1944, several hundred thousand Jews perished as a result of deportations. Yet, there was at least one outright extermination of Jews in Budapest. It started on October 15, 1944, lasted for several days and took the lives of no less than 15,000 Jews.

In the rest of Europe under German rule, the mass extermination of Jews took on the form of deportations towards the East. Everywhere in Western Europe the Jews perished in batches of scores and hundreds; they were killed as hostages, tried and executed as saboteurs, starved and tortured to death in concentration and labor camps. Yet the bulk of the West European Jews was deported to the East and perished there in the death camps of Poland and the USSR.
The campaign of methodical mass extermination of Jews which started in
the summer of 1941, confronted the Germans with the problem of how to dispose
of those scores of thousands of bodies they piled up in the conquered territo-
ries. To continue with the practice of burying them everywhere in the
fields and forests would have even more emphasized the fact that the Germans
transformed Europe into a huge cemetery. Besides, in many places the local
population grew restless because of the stench from those poorly dug graves
which surrounded those towns and villages.

There was another idea, too, which haunted the German minds: could not
these bodies be put to some kind of commercial use? Thus the death factories
were built as an attempt to solve these problems. But it took the Germans
many months to strike upon the comparatively best solution, as it can be
sufficiently proved by the existence of such mass-slaughter camps as, for instance,
the Forts No. 7 and 9 in Rumbach or the extermination centre of Chełmno. Three
grave-diggers who could escape from the latter camp, told that the killing was
done there with the help of self-propelled gas chambers: "Once the group of
Jews had been jammed inside..., the driver who also served as executioner,
turned on the gas apparatus. As the gas seeped up from the vents in the
bottom of the body of the truck, anguished cries and sobs and muffled crying could be heard from the interior of the vehicle. After about fifteen minutes usually, the noise stopped... The trunk was driven to the foot of the mass-grave and Jewish grave diggers would be forced to drag the bodies out of the gas chamber and throw them into a pit.

Thus, Chelmno improved the technique of killing, but not the way how to dispose of corpses. In Belzec the process of killing was a different one. The Jews were cremated into special chambers with steel bars on the floor and walls; then the chambers were filled with water and a powerful electric current went through those bars. Besides, there was in Belzec a special building with several gas chambers, and the German scientists recently experienced there on Jews with all kinds of poisoning gases they invented or improved. The children, if healthy, were used as involuntary blood donors for the German Army. Mostly these children were blinded white to such a degree that they died shortly afterwards. Special factories produced in Belzec soap and candles, out of Jewish fat; yet, this business was never really profitable, probably because of the Jews being in the third year of an acute starvation period and there was not much fat left on their bodies.
The weak point of Belzec was the way the bodies were disposed of...

They, or their remains, were loaded on railway cars and transported to a
spot where a group of Jews already prepared a grave, whereupon this whole
group was instantly executed. After a few months of mass grading in
high gear, all the fields along the railway were filled with mass graves.
 Layers of ground broken and decomposed remains of human bodies were spread
everywhere around the graves, and the stench became so intensive, that the
 peasants of the nearby villages deserted, their farms and land, and the whole
population of Belzec left this shantytown.

In the death camp of Sobibor the process of killing was still more perfected.

A special brick building was constructed there, and as soon as about 800 people
were pushed into this building, the heavy doors were locked and an electric engine
in an adjoining room pumped poison gas into it. As a rule, in fifteen minutes
all the people were dead; then the floor in the building slid apart automatical-
sely and the bodies fell into the basement, from where they were taken in
special carts to woods and buried there.

So it went on till the end of 1942, when the news of eventual defeat or,
at least, evacuation of all conquered territories gripped the German hearts.
Now it became more urgent than ever to destroy all traces of committed crimes,
and the Germans decided to burn the bodies, even those previously buried. Yet
the problem of burning Jewish bodies proved to be a very tough one. The
Germans kindled huge bonfires, but the bodies just did not want to burn.

The reason lay again with the starvation, with the lack of fat in the Jewish
bodies. Finally the Germans struck upon the right idea. Huge holes were
cut into the ground and filled with grates made of rails, the bodies were laid on these
crates and intense fires kindled underneath them. Now it worked. A special
dragge was brought, old graves dug up and many thousands of bodies burned
every day. The ashes were collected in sacks and sent to Germany for use as
fertilizer.

Trocklinden had a much greater "productive capacity" than Belzec or Sobibor. It had first three gas chambers, then two were added, and it was able to cope with as many as 20,000 people a day. Just as in Sobibor, the corpses were first buried, then burned on huge bonfires.

Majdanek was established in the summer of 1941 as a huge concentration camp; in the spring of 1942 an extermination camp was added to it. In all, a gas chamber and crematorium were built. Yet, while the gas chamber could "accommodate" as many as 3,000 people a day, the crematorium was not able to burn more than a few hundred bodies a day. Thus, the Germans were forced to resort to extensive burying of corpses.

In the summer of 1942 the extermination business was so flourishing in Majdanek that the productivity of the gas chamber, too, appeared simply laughable. Three new gas chambers, each of them about twice as large as the old one, were installed, and a new crematorium built, with five furnaces instead of the former two; besides, these furnaces developed much stronger heat and could burn the bodies twice as fast. But even now the furnaces could not dispose of more than 2,000 bodies a day, while the gas chambers
could kill so many in one single gassing. To help the situation, the
Germans killed now and then, huge pyres, burning in this way thousands of
bodies.

On November 9th, 1942, Wojsławko had a great day: 18,400 people were killed
in this single day. In the official report sent on this day to Berlin, the
camp authorities wrote: "The difference between the number of prisoners con-
fined in the camp in the morning and in the evening, is the result of a special
annihilation of 18,000 persons."

Oswiecim was the oldest and largest concentration camp in Poland. There
were about 200,000 prisoners in this camp, and the regime was so severe that
solitary less than 2,000 - and very often more than 3,000 prisoners were killed
there daily. Thus, already in the summer of 1941 a special gas-chamber and
a crematorium were built there. The productive capacity of these installations
was large enough to satisfy the needs of the camp itself. But when, in 1942,
the campaign of Jews extermination was put in high gear, the possibilities of
Oswiecim appeared to be ridiculously inadequate. In July 1942 Heinrich Himmler
paid a visit to the camp and laid down plans how to make Oswiecim the largest
dead factory the Germans ever established. Four new large crematoriums, each
connected with a gas-chamber, were built, able to cremate 500 people in an hour,
12,000 in a continuous work of 24 hours. And still, despite this amazing productivity, so many people were killed on some days in Oswiecim, that huge pyres of corpses had to be kindled there.

Not less than 4,000,000 people perished in Oswiecim, not less than 1,600,000 of them were Jews. Exhibits K, L, J, K.