INDIFFERENCE AND EVIL:
WEHRMACHT OFFICER CORPS AND THE SHOAH

By: Franklin Marcus

Stud. ID [redacted]

INDIFFERENCE AND EVIL:
WEHRMACHT OFFICER CORPS AND THE SHOAH

By: Franklin Marcus

Introduction

From the invasion of Poland in 1939 until defeat of the German drive on Moscow in 1941 and the failures of the Stalingrad and Caucasus campaigns in 1943, the German army rolled over its enemies. In the wake of the Ostheer (Eastern Army), occupation authorities persecuted, harassed, and ultimately tried to exterminate the region's Jewish communities. I have tried to examine the attitudes of some of the army's officers, generally colonel and up, although some more junior officers are mentioned, to this extermination campaign, otherwise known as the Final Solution.

The effectiveness of the Final Solution depended in large part on the attitudes or actions of German army officers in areas where the *Einsatzgruppen* (Special Action Groups) operated and their willingness to support the deportations of Jews to the concentration camps. The army officers did not necessarily actively assist the Reich Main Security Office (RSHA) efforts to exterminate Europe's Jewish population, but indifference accomplished the same thing. The army's sins may have been largely those of omission, not commission, but its hands are definitely not clean. There were positive efforts to help Jews to avoid deportation or to hinder the operations of the *Einsatzgruppen,* but these were few and far between. These actions, even as rare as they are, show that there was not universal support for the Final Solution. This essay is a modest attempt to fill a gap in Holocaust literature, that is, what did the dissidents have in common and what motivated them to defy not only the General Staff, but Hitler himself?

The Question

In his book *Perpetrators: The World of the Holocaust Killers,* Guenter Lewy asks "Why did they do it ?[1] I think that there is a more interesting question. Lewy notes that there are eighty-five cases on record of Wehrmacht personnel who refused to execute civilians.[2] The question I ask is why did anyone refuse to kill Jewish civilians? What was it that allowed a few officers to go against the current and try to save lives? Anti-semitism is always in the background of German history, just as the ambient radiation left over from the Big Bang is always present. Yet some were able to overcome that influence and refuse to participate in mass murder.

The Army's Ethos

The army changed during the Hitler years. The officer corps rose from 3,858 officers when Hitler was appointed Chancellor in 1933 to nearly 21,000. As a result of the army's expansion and the conscious politicization of the military, the nature of the army changed and soldiers were turned into "functionaries of the Nazi Party."[3]At least one historian said that the generals were apolitical and that they paid no attention to "excesses" that interfered with operations.[4] This is probably due to the fact these officers believed in a more traditional nationalism and belonged to the traditional ruling caste.[5]

Enlisted men, non-commissioned officers, and junior officers were subjected to massive amounts of propaganda detailing the threat posed to Germany by the Bolshevik-Jewish conspiracy. This propaganda was not only spread during training, but for the younger soldiers, dated back to their school days. The school system of the Third Reich taught students that Jews in general, but especially those in Eastern Europe, "were dirty, dangerous, dishonest, and diseased, the enemies of all civilization."[6] The consequence of this constant pounding on that

theme, at least among the lower ranks of both the Army and the SS was “a desire to humiliate as well as destroy that was seldom present when they dealt with ordinary Poles, Russians, or other Slavs.”[7] As one sergeant put it, “Jewry is good for only one thing, annihilation….” He went on to say that he once rejected that solution as immoral, but he “didn't know any other solution.”[8] But then, what else could be expected from such indoctrination? As SS General Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski told the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg when asked if Himmler's orders to kill Slavs and Jews were in keeping with National Socialist thinking, “when for years, for decades, the doctrine is preached that the Slav is a member of an inferior race and that the Jew is not even human, then such an explosion is inevitable.”[9]

Hitler underlined the point during a meeting with 250 generals and senior officers on March 30, 1941 when he said that the war on the Eastern front was going to be “a war of extermination…very different from that in the west….(German) leaders must make the sacrifice of overcoming their scruples.”[10] Some officers bought into the argument that Jews, who were synonymous with Bolsheviks, were security and cultural threats to European civilization. General Erich Hoepner, at the time commander of the 4th Panzer Group, circulated an order to the troops dated May 2, 1941, that the coming war with Russia was “existential” and part of the “ancient battle between Germanic peoples against Slavs, the defense of European culture against Muscovite-Asiatic floods, the repulsion of Jewish-Bolshevism.”[11]

Field Marshal Walter von Reichenau in an order to the 6th Army dated October 10, 1941, wrote that the war was intended to eradicate “Jewish-Bolsheviks” and that the soldiers had to halt resistance activities in the rear which “are always instigated by Jews.”[12]

Not every officer bought into the argument that Jews had to be exterminated for racial reasons. Some generals and field marshals latched on to political arguments that were anti-semitic at heart, but which were more polite than other expressions of contempt. Field Marshal Erwin Rommel apparently had no opinions one way or the other about Jews as such, but apparently believed that Jews held dual loyalties.[13] It may seem contradictory given his concern about dual loyalty, but Rommel had Jewish friends and if he thought of them at all, saw them simply as people whom he hoped would convert to Christianity.[14] Nonetheless, he thought there was a Jewish problem because he believed that Jews had reservations about being loyal to Germany. That belief may have led him to endorse Hitler's speech at the War Ministry in December, 1938, in which he said that in the future, soldiers had to be “political” and stand ready to “fight for new policies.”[15]

At the same time, Rommel's subsequent behavior in North Africa as commander of the Africa Corps and later the Panzer Army Africa showed that he had little interest in abetting the mass murder of Jews. While the reasons may never be clear, the Einsatzgruppe in Tunis commanded by SS Obersturmbannfuhrer Walther Rauff, was never given free rein in North Africa. As noted above, murders in Poland began only 18 days after the German invasion, so the Einsatzgruppe had plenty of time to operate despite the fluid situation in Libya, yet it was never allowed to work outside of Tunis. Certainly the Italian reluctance to engage in mass murder played a role in limiting Einsatzgruppe activities, but the commandos never received Rommel's authorization to do its work. Field Marshal Rommel didn't actively oppose mass murders, aside from his remonstrance to Hitler, but neither did he help the perpetrators. The SS executed anti-Jewish measures in 1942 in Tunisia, but nothing else, partially because of reversals suffered by Rommel and because he apparently would not authorize them to commit mass murder. In any event, there is no evidence that

he maintained direct contact with Rauff.[16] This is not to say that there were no anti-Jewish actions in Rommel's rear areas. Several concentration camps, including one at the former Italian army base of Giado, were established in Libya in 1940.The internees had to live under harsh conditions, though not as bad as those Jews experienced in Poland. Although a significant percentage of inmates died, there was never any organized effort by Einsatzgruppe Rauff to exterminate the Libyan Jewish community.[17]

Many generals and field marshals were non-political like Rommel. It's estimated that only 29.2% of higher ranking officers were members of the Nazi party by 1941.[18] While they were not party members, the generals supported many of Hitler's goals and therefore had little reaction to the mass murders of Jews in the East. Field Marshal Fedor von Bock, the commander of Army Group North in 1939 was not an ideologue, but he supported Hitler's efforts to restore German pride. There is no record of his being anti-Semitic and he disliked the anti-Jewish policies that were followed in France and Belgium, but neither did he try to stop "violations of military propriety."[19] General Gotthard Heinrici, the commander of the XLIII Army Corps during Operation Barbarossa in 1941, was not a member of the Nazi party, but he favored German rearmament and suppression of the Social Democrats and Communists.[20]

The German officer corps was first challenged by Hitler's anti-Jewish policies after the conquests of Poland in 1939 and the Netherlands, Belgium, and France in the spring of 1940. The mass murder of Jews in Poland began within weeks of the German victory. The first killings were committed haphazardly and were executed by militias such as the Ethnic German Self-Protection militia the first of the militias to be authorized by Hitler. In the fourth quarter of 1939, this militia, under the command of Ludolf von Alvensleben, and other groups killed about 32,000 Poles and Jews.[21] At this stage, however, the policy of mass murders was

not completely unopposed.

The first recorded atrocity by members of the Waffen SS, the combat unit of the SS, took place on September 19, 1939. SS Private Ernst of the SS artillery regiment with Panzerdivision Kempf and an unidentified military policeman forced a work detail of 50 Jews into a synagogue and shot them. The two men were charged with manslaughter and were sentenced to three and nine years imprisonment respectively. The prosecutor appealed the sentences and asked authorities for the death penalty. A senior military judge in Berlin upheld the sentences, saying that Ernst was irritated by crimes committed by Poles against ethnic Germans and as a member of the SS, he "was particularly sensitive to the sight of Jews and the hostile attitude of Jewry to Germans and thus acted quite unpremeditately in a spirit of youthful enthusiasm."[22] The policeman's sentence was later reducced to three years and both were subsequently pardoned under an amnesty. Neither person served a day in prison.[23] To prevent a recurrence, the SS established its own court system.[24] This sequence set a precedent for the future SS actions and made it easier for regular army officers and enlisted men to go along.

The German army was full of personnel who were more than willing to assist the SS in its drive to eradicate the European Jewish community. We have to recognize, however, that there were differences in how things were done in Western and Eastern Europe. Western Europe did not witness the brutal mass killings that were a feature of German operations in Russia, although they were subject to deportations to the East. Instead, the Jews were subjected to the same denial of rights that German Jews suffered during the pre-war years. It was in this arena that officers were able, if they were so moved, to stop or at least modify persecution.

This does not mean, however, that officers who balked at carrying out mass murders or retaliation for attacks on German soldiers did so out of altruism. In France, Field Marshal Otto von Stulpnagel resisted orders from Berlin to conduct mass reprisals against Jews and communists for attacks on German personnel not because he was sympathetic toward Jews, but rather that the French would object and create more resistance to his military government. He suggested that already detained communists be deported to the East because that would have a greater impact.[25]

For at least the first year of the German occupation of Belgium, the military government did not actively persecute Jews.[26] Neither the Military Governor of Belgium, General Alexander von Falkenhausen, nor his deputy, Brigadier General Eggert Rieder, had any love for Jews, yet they refused to enforce the an order issued on March 4, 1942 requiring Jews to wear the Yellow Star.[27] They were more than willing to deport foreign Jews, yet in at least one case, General von Falkenhausen intervened to protect a German-Jewish refugee from deportation. According to the account, the military government revoked the refugee's exemption from wearing the star. He appealed the decision twice and the exemption was renewed only to be revoked each time. Finally, von Falkenhausen personally renewed the exemption just days before several Gestapo agents attempted to put the refugee on a transport.[28]

The deportation of Jews from Belgium began on August 4, 1942, but by December, two of Adolf Eichmann's deputies, Martin Luther and Franz Rademacher, complained on December 2, 1942, to Werner von Bargen, the Foreign Office representative to von Falkenhausen, that Belgian Jews were not being transferred to the East. So few Belgian Jews were being deported that by September 20, 1943, it was impossible to find enough foreign Jews to fill an Auschwitz bound transport.[29]

General, later Field Marshal, Fedor von Bock commanded the lower Somme army group during the invasions of Belgium and France May through June 1940. His performance during the campaigns led to his promotion to field marshal on July 19, 1940. He later commanded Army Group Center during Operation Barbarossa.[30] It was during his time in Belgium that he learned he learned of the occupation government's policies toward the Jews. He did not like the mistreatment of Jews, but he knew that Hitler would get his way and so von Bock devoted his time and energy to military matters.[31]

While in Russia, von Bock protested plans to send two trainloads of Jews into Army Group Center's rear, but according to his diary, the field marshal said that the "arrival of those trains must result in the loss of an equal number of trains vital to supplying the attack."[32] In this instance, he fought an order that interfered with his command's ability to conduct its operations, not because it was morally wrong. On the other hand, he told his subordinates not to enforce Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel's notorious Commissar Order of June 6, 1941, which ordered the troops to kill all Russian political commissars. Von Bock believed that the order to indiscriminately kill commissars and civilians violated international law and hurt discipline.[33] The true motives behind decisions to delay or stop mass murders are difficult to discern because as in von Bock's case, they may be hidden behind practical concerns or omitted from memoranda altogether in order to protect the officer's career. Few generals wanted to directly challenge Hitler's orders.

Rommel was one of the very few to actually question Hitler about the slaughter of the Jews. Field Marshal Rommel returned to Germany in March, 1943, prior to the Panzer Afrika Army surrender, for leave before assuming command of Army Group B, which was responsible for defending the French coast along the English

Channel against an Allied invasion.[34] It was during that leave that the Field Marshal learned from other officers of the mass murders in Poland and Russia, the Warsaw ghetto uprising, and the slave labor camps. He went to Hitler and said: “If such things are allowed to go on, we shall lose the war.” He proposed that the Gestapo be disbanded and that the SS be broken up and its units distributed amongst the regular army.[35]

Hitler took no action against Rommel, possibly because he recognized that the Field Marshal was impossibly naive and simple-minded about non-military matters and, of course, he wouldn't dare punish Germany's great war hero. In any event, Rommel went on to organize the Atlantic defenses and led Army Group B until he was implicated in the attempt on Hitler's life in 1944. Another officer, however, Col. Henning von Tresckow, a staff officer of Field Marshal von Bock, commander of Army Group Center, was moved by the same information to become one of the organizers of Operation Valkyrie, the plot to kill Hitler.[36]

Field Marshal Rommel's opposition to the mass murder of Jews based not upon the immorality of the genocide, but instead upon the practical grounds that mass murders would simply increase hatred of Germany and ultimately lead to its defeat. Regardless of the underlying rationale, Rommel was one of the few to oppose the atrocities.

Junior officers were in a good position to render aid to Jews surreptitiously. Captain Ernst Junger passed on information, when able, to the French Resistance about transports and saved the lives of Jews.[37] He was neither court-martialed nor transferred to the east as punishment. Captain Junger was part of the invasion of France and subsequently served with the occupation forces in Paris. He kept a diary during his active duty with the army and he witnessed many events associated with the Shoah. Junger recorded in the entry for July 18, 1942,

that he witnessed the arrest of Jews who were to be deported. He heard wailing in the streets as parents and children were separated. One of the few officers who actually objected to the mistreatment of Jews on moral grounds. He could not forget, he wrote, “I am surrounded by unfortunate people who endure the greatest suffering. What kind of human being, what kind of officer, would I be otherwise? This uniform obligates me to provide protection wherever possible.”[38] He noted on June 7, 1942, that he saw the yellow star for the first time. The stars were distributed on June 6, and he “was immediately embarrassed to be in uniform.”[39]

There were similar but scarce acts in defiance of orders from Berlin to exterminate Jews in the East. Lt. General Kurt Agricola commanded the Second Army's rear area in Russia. There is no written evidence that he actively to tried to prevent massacres, but his former chief of staff testified after the war that Agricola was “very outraged” and when he heard that the SD was killing Jews near his headquarters, he prohibited further executions. He brought the murders to his superiors' attention and made sure that no Jewish POW was handed over to the SS for execution.[40] The murder of Jews was unusually personal for him because his wife, Martha Hahn was Jewish. General Agricola was forced to divorce her in order to continue his career and she fled to Brazil with their son to wait out the war. The other children were sent to the Bethel Institute in Bielefeld for their protection. The family was reunited when the general was released from a Russian prisoner of war camp in 1955.[41]

Colonel-General Johannes Blaskowitz, the Commander-in-Chief East from 1939-1940 protested the mistreatment of Jews and other civilians in occupied Poland. In a memorandum dated November 27, 1939, he protested “illegal executions” and the spreading brutalization of the German soldiers. He said that the encouragement of violence created an “unbearable burden” for the army. The

memo outraged Hitler and in a subsequent memorandum on February 6, 1940, Blaskowitz said that Jews and Poles "are our archenemies in the East."[42] Yet he also wrote in that same memorandum that operations killing "a few ten-thousand Jews and Poles…will neither destroy the idea of a Polish state…nor do away with the Jews."[43] Still, he wrote, the problems caused by present operations could have been avoided had the "slaughter" been executed in a more "premeditated and purposeful" manner. [44] Yet in another memorandum dated February 15, 1940, he wrote that the mass killing of Poles and Jews, drove more of them into the resistance, and ruined Germany's reputation. He further wrote that all soldiers were disgusted by these acts. The result of the memoranda was that Blaskowitz was relieved of his command in May, 1940.[45] Like Rommel, Blaskowitz may have been more concerned about the needs of the war and the effect the killings and brutality had upon the soldiers or he was hiding his moral revulsion over Hitler's policies. Either way, had more officers voiced their opposition, perhaps lives could have been saved.

Wilm Hosenfield was an army officer who served in the rear areas because of health problems. He was a teacher in civilian life, joining the SA (Sturmabteilung or storm troopers) in 1933 and the Nazi Party in 1935. He was drafted into the army on August 26, 1939, and was sent to Poland to build POW camps. He was shocked by the treatment of deportees and surreptitiously provided them with food.[46] Hosenfield was horrified by the mass murders of Jews. He wrote in his diary on June 16, 1943, "With this terrible murder of the Jews, we have lost the war. We have brought upon ourselves an indelible disgrace, a curse that can never be lifted. We deserve no mercy, we are all guilty."[47]

Hosenfield tried to protect Jews as much as possible, employing Jews and Christian Poles in the army sports administration to protect the Jews from arrest and risking his life by protecting an individual Jew in a way which challenged the

authorities. On November 17, 1944, Hosenfield discovered the pianist Wladyslaw Szpilman living in an abandoned house that he was inspecting for possible use as the new German military headquarters. He hid Szpilman in the attic after the Germans moved in.[48]

Other more junior officers opposed and actually sabotaged attempts to carry out mass murders. One company commander refused on behalf of his soldiers to participate in the killings and he and others like him were not punished for refusing to obey orders. There was even the startling case of members of the 7th company, 727th Infantry Regiment who issued false work permits to Jews to help them to evade arrest.[49] There is no way to know for sure whether these soldiers issued the work permits out of moral objections to the killings or simply out of a need to maintain a stable workforce, but it was a direct action that the least temporarily saved lives.

Those Who Killed

On the other side of the ledger, there are those officers who not only supported Hitler's overall policies and provided logistical support to the Einsatzgruppen and other SS formations, but permitted their troops to participate in the mass killings or, at the very least, just turned away as the slaughter went on. Colonel Karl Andrian, commander of the 747th Infantry regiment never conducted a mass killing, but he said nothing about the murders perpetrated by the 707th Infantry Division Order Police under the command of General von Bechtolsheim. General von Bechtolsheim ordered units in the General Commissariat of White Ruthenia to “cleanse” area of Jews and to exterminate those in the ghettos.[50] Even here, however, there is an interesting exception; the 727th Infantry Regiment that issued the false work permits mentioned earlier was a unit of the 707th Infantry Division which exterminated Jews living in ghettos.[51] So far as anyone knows, no

one was punished for distributing these documents.

Some generals simply followed orders to exterminate Jewish communities. General Dietrich von Choltitz obeyed his orders. In a conversation with General Wilhelm Ritter von Thoma recorded by British intelligence while they were POWs, Choltitz, the general who refused to burn Paris,said that “the worst job I ever carried out—which however I carried out with great consistency—was the liquidation of the Jews. I carried out this order *to the very last detail.”*[52] (ed. emphasis). Unfortunately, there is no record of which actions he directed.

The lower ranks could refuse to participate in the mass killings without repercussions. Even members of the Einsatzgruppen sometimes refused to commit atrocities. Some drank heavily, others “went mad and shot indiscriminately all around them.”[53] There were cases of nervous breakdowns and suicides. Finally, some members simply refused to kill. Officers simply transferred them to other units and no one was punished and very for refusing to kill. In fact not one person was executed or suffered any other severe consequences for refusing to murder.[54] Participation in the Einsatzgruppen's actions was generally voluntary, but one general in the Waffen-SS (Armed SS) used it as a punishment for various violations of military law or mores. According to General Georg Keppler, commander of the 2nd SS Panzerdivision “Das Reich”, soldiers who
were court-martialed for offenses such as sleeping while on duty were able to escape punishment by volunteering for the Special Action Groups. When volunteers understood what they were going to do and refused to participate in murder, they were told “the orders (were) given them as a form of punishment. Either they can obey and take that punishment or they can disobey and be shot.”[55]

One thing to keep in mind is that the SIPO (security police), SD (Sicherheitsdienst or Security Service) and other SS organs were subordinate to the army in its operating areas by order of Army Commander-in-Chief Walther von Brauchitsch issued on April 28, 1941.[56] The SD and SIPO chief appointed a representative to each army area to direct Einsatzgruppen in each area who in turn notified army commanders of directives sent to the SS units. In turn, army commanders could send orders to the SD and SIPO in order to minimize disruption of army operations. Finally, each organization was required to work with military intelligence when taking "executive measures with regard to the civilian population…."[57] The army was connected with SS operations in occupied Europe and so protestations of ignorance of the mass murders do not hold up.

The army provided logistical support to the Einsatzgruppen and sometimes went beyond that. The army in Greece actively rounded-up Jews for hard labor. Troops looted Jewish property in Salonika, destroyed cemeteries and some synagogues, while converting others into stables.[58] Cooperation with the SS became more blatant as security deteriorated on the Eastern Front and slaughter became easier to justify. The army cooperated in the Babi Yar massacre after Einsatzgruppe C blamed three fires in Kiev on the Jews. In the Crimea,General Hans von Salmuth allowed his XXX Corps to participate in the mass murder of Jews. [59]

Those Who Would Not Kill

So, we come back to the main question and that is, why did some officers save lives while others either actively killed or, at best turned aside? I looked at the lives of some of the officers who did not willingly participate in genocide. Where information was available, I examined their class status, previous army service, religious beliefs if any, and tried to determine whether they were members of the Nazi Party in order to determine what characteristics they had in common.

Among those who at the least did not allow the Einsatzgruppen to operate in the rear areas is, of course, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel. Rommel was born in the Kingdom of Wurttemberg, November 1891. He joined the Royal Wurttemberg army in 1910 and during World War I, served in Romania, France, and Italy, during which time he received numerous decorations for bravery under fire. He was not especially religious and was not a member of the Nazi Party. As noted earlier, he was not known to be an anti-Semite.[60]

Captain Wilm Hosenfield was born in 1895 in Hesse. As noted above, he joined the SA in 1933 and the Nazi Party in 1935. He performed his army service primarily in rear areas because of health problems. He was a practicing Roman Catholic. His religious beliefs probably motivated his dislike of the Nazi racial ideology because he resented the constant attacks on Christianity by the Nazi theoretician Alfred Rosenberg.[61] The conflict between party and religion began the erosion of whatever loyalty he had the Party.

Captain Ernst Junger, the officer who forwarded information to the French Resistance, was born in 1895. He went to war in 1914 and after suffering 14 battle wounds, he was awarded the Pour le Merite on September 22, 1918.[62] After the war he joined the Freikorps and the Stahlhelm veterans organization. He wrote for rightist publications and his political views were in some respects more extreme than those of the Nazi Party, but despite his nationalism, he never joined the party and he was not a racist.[63] He was a philosopher who was interested in religious beliefs, including those of Jews like the sage Maimonides, but he never espoused any particular religious belief or identity.

Colonel General Gotthard Heinrici was born in 1886 in the town of Gumbinnen, on the Polish border. He joined the army in 1905 and fought in the First World

War. He supported Hitler's drive to rearm Germany, but although he was sympathetic to large parts of Hitler's policies, he never joined the Nazi Party.[64] He was deeply prejudiced against Jews, but his wife was half Jewish. He was a religious Protestant. [65]

Lt. General Kurt Agricola was born on August 15, 1889, in the Kingdom of Saxony. He enlisted in the Royal Saxon army in 1908 and served in the German army through 1945, with the exception of a brief retirement from January 31, 1939, through the invasion of Poland. He was appointed commander of Koruck 580 (Commander of the Rear Area Army Territory) on December 19, 1941, and served in that capacity through the end of the war.[66] There was no information regarding his religious beliefs or his politics. Still, there was no indication that he was a member of the Nazi Party and he was known to have been angered by the government's anti-Semitic policies in Russia.

General Alexander von Falkenhausen was born on October 29, 1878 in Gut Blumenthal, Prussian Silesia. He enlisted in the German Army and in 1897, was commissioned 2nd lieutenant. Von Falkenhausen served in various fronts during World War I, including a posting as a military advisor with the Ottoman Army in Palestine. After the war, von Falkenhausen joined the Reichswehr and retired in 1930. He subsequently went to China as a military advisor to Chiang kai-Shek and continued in that post until he was forced to resign after Hitler decided to recognize the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo. Von Falkenhausen was recalled in 1938, later promoted to General of Infantry and was appointed Military Governor of Belgium in 1940, a post he held until 1944, when he was arrested on suspicion of supporting the attempted assassination of Hitler.[67]

Colonel-General Johannes Blaskowitz was born on July 10, 1883, in Paterswalde, East Prussia. He enlisted in an East Prussian regiment as an officer cadet and

later served as an officer on both Eastern and Western Fronts during the First World War. After the war ended, Blaskowitz served in the Weimar Republic's army or Reichswehr. In 1939 he commanded the 8th Army during the invasion of Poland and was Commander-in-Chief East until he was relieved in May 1940 after sending his two protests concerning the mass executions in Poland. Blaskowitz was subsequently assigned to a relatively minor post in France until he was rehabilitated and appointed commander of Army Group G to fight the Allied invasion of Southern France.[68]

Why did these officers complain about Nazi racial policies to superiors or even try to save lives? Several, such as Captain Hosenfield were religious Catholics or Protestants and took the teachings of their respective churches seriously. Others, however, were not particularly observant or their beliefs, such as in the case of the officer who issued fake work permits are unknown. Religious observance probably did not determine an officer's response when confronted by SS actions. In fact, as Lewy notes, there were almost 18,000 Catholic chaplains in the Wehrmacht and not one protested the mass murders.[69]

There were officers who pushed the issue on moral grounds regardless of their religious beliefs. General Wilhelm Ritter von Thoma's religious beliefs are unknown, but he protested the massacres he witnessed in the Crimea to the attention of the Chief of the Army General Staff, General Franz Halder. Halder said the killings were political and none of his business. General von Thoma then sent a memorandum to Army

Commander-in-Chief Walter H. Brauchitsch asked von Thoma if he wanted to take the matter further, because “anything might happen.”[70] Von Thoma said he wanted to go further because he was “ashamed to have experienced anything like that.”[71] There is no apparent record of the matter going any further or any action

taken against General von Thoma, who was taken prisoner in North Africa.

Most of the officers mentioned above not only had no love for the Jews, but were even known anti-Semites. Colonel-General Heinrici was anti-Semitic and General von Falkenhausen did not care for Jews as a group. Nonetheless, they protested the SS treatment of Jews and von Falkenhausen intervened when he could to save lives. In some cases, practical concerns led officers to oppose the genocide. General von Falkenhausen was not only worried about the effects the murders would have on German personnel, but that mass reprisals for partisan attacks and mass murders of Jews would alienate the French.

Let's assume that in any group involved in any endeavor only a minority either actively supports or opposes leaders and their policies. Sometimes a reluctance to oppose something can be attributed to indoctrination. One factor is that all military personnel had to swear an oath of loyalty to Adolf Hitler.[72] Thus, each member of the German military swore personal loyalty to Hitler and not Germany, placing the country and people second to the commands of the leader, making him paramount. In short, the army no longer pledged loyalty to an abstraction but to a person. Therefore, protests against orders to assist in the deportation or even mass murder of Jews would have been viewed as a personal betrayal of Hitler. In any event, the potentially huge personal price for such a betrayal undoubtedly caused most officers to put aside whatever sympathy they had for Jews. Of course, officers could also resort to standard anti-Semitic beliefs to justify assisting in the Shoah.

Still, some of the generals and some of the less senior officers were not as supportive of the war against the Jews as Hitler and his acolytes desired. Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, Chief of the Armed Forces High Command, felt compelled to issue an order on 12 September 1943 telling the army to take

"ruthless, energetic, and drastic measures…against the Jews, the main carriers of Bolshevism."[73] The mere fact that Keitel had to issue the order indicates that while the military was not a hotbed of resistance, it was not engaging in mass murder with the enthusiasm that Hitler would have preferred.

The officers had little in common other than that they were older and had served as officers in the First World War. They were not subject to the constant barrage of anti-Semitic propaganda that was the fate and curse of students and post-World War I officer candidates. This is not say that they escaped the ambient anti-Semitism of the time; no one, not in Germany, not in the United Kingdom, not in the United States, could completely escape this endemic fear or dislike of Jews, especially in certain social classes. Two of the more junior officers were party members.

Conclusion

In his review of Wolfram Wette's book *The Wehrmacht: History, Myth, and Reality,* Jeff Rutherford notes that anti-Semitic messages formed a major part of the army's propaganda and "made clear to the troops themselves the course of a future war."[74] This suffusing of anti-semitism within the army, combined with anti-Bolshevism and their oaths of personal loyalty to Hitler, plus the risk of severe punishment deterred officers from assisting Jews or at least not fully enforcing the worst decrees. The risk of punishment was real, as shown by the execution of Sgt. Anton Smid on 13 April 1942 for helping Lithuanian Jews to dodge Einsatzgruppen.[75] In Smid's case though, he actually tried to subvert the system and thus he had to go. Overall, however, those refusals that went unpunished did not challenge basic policy and it was simply a matter of replacing reluctant soldiers with more willing personnel. Regrettably, few officers believed as Capt. Junger did that the massacres, "enrage the cosmos against us."[76]

The refusal of these officers to fully participate in the attempted extermination of Europe's Jews saved lives, but none of them deserve to be included in the lists of the Righteous Among the Nations kept by Yad Vashem in Jerusalem or the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. They did not, with one or two notable exceptions take their misgivings to higher authorities, nor with the exception of Rommel, did they go to great lengths to prevent the Einsatzgruppen from conducting their murderous business. They allowed some to be killed in order to save others. So, in the end, they kept their heads down most of the time. But, and this is an important But, although they did not totally redeem the army's honor, they did save lives and for that we should be grateful.

End Notes

1. Guenter Lewy, Perpetrators:The World of the Holocaust Killers, (NY:Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 5.
2. Ibid., p.79.
3. Theo Schulte, The German Army and Nazi Policies in Occupied Russia, (Oxford:Berg,1989) p.19..
4. Charles Messenger, Rommel:Leadership Lessons From the Desert Fox,
(NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009) p. 185.
5. Richard J. Evans, The Third Reich at War (NY: Penguin Press, 2009) p.492.
6. p. 317
7. ibid., p. 316.
8.ibid.
9. George H. Stein, The Waffen SS, Hitler's Elite Guard at War, 1939-1945, (Ithaca:Cornell University Press, 1966), p.129
10. Donald M. McKale, Hitler's Shadow War (NY: Cooper Square Press, 2002) p.189.
11. Ibid. Also Erich Hoepner, Wikipedia, accessed April 22, 2020
12.Charles Messenger, The Last Prussian. A Biography of Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt 1875-1953, (London: Brassey's, 1991), p.147.
13. Messenger, p. 29.
14.David Fraser, A Life of Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, (London: Harper Collins, 1993). p.131.
15. Ibid., p.132.
16. Ben H. Shepherd, Hitler's Soldiers, The German Army in the Third Reich, (New London and London: Yale University Press, 2016) p.105.
17., p.132.
18. wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazi_Party#Military_membership
19. Israel Gutman, ed. Encyclopedia of the Holocaust, III(NY: MacMillan Publishing, Co., 1990)
20. Evans, p.494.
21. Ibid., p.492.
22. Evans, pp.14-15.
23. Stein, p.271
24.Ibid., p.272.
25. Wolfgang Seibel, Persecution and Rescue: The Politics of the “Final Solution in France, (Ann Arbor:University of Michigan Press, 2016) pp.76-7.
26. p.105
27“The Destruction of the Jews of Belgium”, Holocaust Education and Archive Research Team, www.HolocaustResearchProject.org. Accessed April 26,2020.
28. “Von Falkenhausen,” letter to the editor, Manchester Guardian, May 31,1947. Wikipedia.org., Press Folder 20th Century, doc.6, accessed April 26,2020.
29. Holocaust Education and Archive Research Team.
30.“Field Marshal Fedor von Bock.” Britannica.com/biography/Fedor-von-Bock. Accessed May 4,2020.
31. Evans, p.494.
32.Andre Mineau, Operation Barbarossa, Ideology and Ethics Against Human Dignity, (Amsterdam:Editions Rodopi B.V.) p.110.
33. Evans, p.176.
34. Desmond Young, Rommel, (London:Collins, 1950) p.218.
35. ibid., 219.
36. Ben H. Shepherd, p.29.
37.Ernst Junger, A German Officer in Occupied Paris, The War Journals, 1941-1945, (NY: Columbia University Press, 2019), foreword, p. xvii
38. Ibid., p.76.
39. Ibid., p.69.
40. Ben H. Shepherd, p.172-173.
41. General Kurt Agricola, wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurt_Agricola. Accessed May 8,2020.
42. Lewy, p.85
43. Omer Bartov, Hitler's Army, Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich, (N.Y:Oxford University

Press, 1991), pp.65-66.
44. Ibid., p.66.
45. Ibid., p. 26
46. Evans, p. 30.
47. Ibid., p.318.
48. Ibid., p.557. Szpilman was the subject of the film “The Pianist.”
49. Shepherd, p.175
50. Ibid.,p.173.
51.wikipedia.org/wiki/707th _Infantry _Division _Wehrmacht.
52.Sonke Neitzel, Tapping Hitler's Generals: Transcripts of Secret Conversations, 1942-45 (St. Paul: MBI Publishing,2007) p.192.
53. Theo Schulte, The German Army and Nazi Policies in Occupied Russia, (Oxford:Berg,1989), pp.324-25.
54 McKale, p. 210
55. Stein, p.263
56. Schulte p.324
57. Ibid., p.325
58. Shepherd, p.307.
59. Ibid., p.172.
60. Erwin Rommel, wikipedia.org/wiki/Erwin_Rommel accessed May 20, 2020.
61. Evans. p.30
62. Junger., introduction, xi.
63. Ibid., xiii
64. Evans, pp.492-93.
65. General Gotthard Heinrici, wikipedia.org/wiki/Gotthard_Heinrici accessed May 8, 2020.
66. General Kurt Agricola, wikipedia.org
67. Alexander von Falkenhausen, wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_von_Falkenhausen. Accessed May 21, 2020
68. Johannes Blaskowitz,wikipedia.org/wiki/Johannes Blaskowitz
69. Lewy, p.86
70. Neitzel , p.169.
71. Ibid
72. Laurence Rees, The Holocaust: A New History, (NY: Public Affairs, 2017) p.84.
73. Shepherd, p.172.
74. Jeff Rutherford, Review of The Wehrmacht: History, Myth, and Reality by Wolfram Wette and Deborah Lucas Schneider. Journal of Contemporary History, vol. 44, no.2 (April, 2009) p. 364
75. Ibid.
76. Junger, p.212.

Bibliography

Books and Articles

Bartov, Omer. Hitler's Army, Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich, (N.Y:Oxford University Press, 1991)

Evans, Richard J. The Third Reich at War (NY: Penguin Press, 2009)

Junger, Ernst. A German Officer in Occupied Paris, The War Journals, 1941-1945, (NY: Columbia University Press, 2019)

Lewy, Guenter. Perpetrators: The World of the Holocaust Killers, (NY: Oxford University Press, 2017)

McKale, Donald M. Hitler's Shadow War (NY: Cooper Square Press, 2002)

Messenger, Charles. Rommel:Leadership Lessons From the Desert Fox, (NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009)

Mineau, Andre. Operation Barbarossa, Ideology and Ethics Against Human Dignity, (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B.V.)

Neitzel, Sonke. Tapping Hitler's Generals: Transcripts of Secret Conversations, 1942-45 (St. Paul: MBI Publishing,2007

Rees, Laurence. The Holocaust: A New History, (NY: Public Affairs, 2017)

Rutherford, Jeff. Review of the Wehrmacht: History, Myth, and Reality by Wolfram Wette and Deborah Lucas Schneider. Journal of Contemporary History, vol. 44, no.2 (April, 2009)

Schulte, Theo. The German Army and Nazi Policies in Occupied Russia, Oxford:Berg,1989

Seibel, Wolfgang Persecution and Rescue: The Politics the “Final Solution” in France, (Ann Arbor:University of Michigan Press, 2016)

Shepherd, Ben H. Hitler's Soldiers, The German Army in the Third Reich, (New London and London: Yale University Press, 2016)

Stein, George H. The Waffen SS, Hitler's Elite Guard at War, 1939-1945,

Ithaca:Cornell University Press, 1966

Young, Desmond. Rommel, (London:Collins, 1950)

Internet Sources

General Kurt Agricola, wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurt_Agricola.

Britannica.com, Field Marshal Fedor von Bock.Britannica.com/biography/Fedor-von-Bock.

Holocaust Education and Archive Research Team The Destruction of the Jews of Belgium, www. HolocaustResearchProject.org.

“Von Falkenhausen” letter to the editor, Manchester Guardian, May 31,1947. Wikipedia.org., Press Folder 20th Century, doc.6.

wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurt_Agricola

wikipedia.org/wiki/Johannes_Blaskowitz

wikipedia.org/wiki/Gotthard_Heinrici.

wikipedia.org/wiki/Erwin_Rommel

wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_von_Falkenhausen

wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazi_Party#Military_membership

wikipedia.org/wiki/707th_Infantry_Division_Wehrmacht