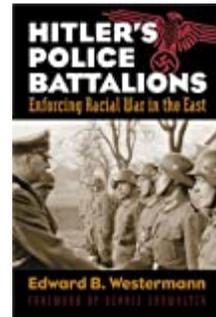


Klaus Jochen Arnold. *Die Wehrmacht und die Besatzungspolitik in den besetzten Gebieten der Sowjetunion: Kriegführung und Radikalisierung im "Unternehmen Barbarossa"*. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2004. 579 S. EUR 48.80 (paper), ISBN 978-3-428-11302-6.

Edward B. Westermann. *Hitler's Police Battalions: Enforcing Racial War in the East*. Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2005. 329 Seiten. \$34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7006-1371-7.



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Ordinary Men, Less Ordinary Men and Genocidal War in the East, 1941-1945

What made ordinary Germans, ordinary men and ordinary soldiers commit mass murder? This question has been at the center of Holocaust and Third Reich scholarship since the early 1990s, when pathbreaking books by Christopher Browning and Daniel J. Goldhagen and the sensational exhibition on the war crimes of the Wehrmacht provoked scholarly as well as public controversies. Browning was criticized for explaining the mass murder of Jews without considering antisemitism; Goldhagen was charged for exaggerating the lethal intention of antisemitism; the Wehrmacht exhibition was blamed for generalizing about how many soldiers actually participated in mass murder. The debate died down after a few years, leaving the demand for further research into the links between sociology and ideology. How were racial and eliminationist ideas and utopias transformed into deadly action and behavior?[1]

Edward Westermann, professor of comparative military theory at the School of Advanced Air and Space Studies in Montgomery, Alabama, and Klaus Jochen Arnold, scholar in Münster, Germany, claim to present new insights into this and related questions with the published versions of their Ph.D. dissertations. They do so with varying degrees of success. Westermann provides a thorough and reliable account of the ideology, organization and racial politics of the Ordnungspolizei (the uniformed police of National Socialist Germany) under Hitler (and Himmler). Arnold repeats well-known facts and figures on the Wehrmacht's genocidal war in the East.

For a long time, the Ordnungspolizei, unlike the Gestapo, did not receive much attention from Holocaust scholars. Convicted and condemned at the Nuremberg Trial, the SS in general and the Einsatzgruppen in partic-

ular were seen as being exclusively responsible for the mass killings behind the eastern front from June 1941 on. Browning's and then Goldhagen's case studies shed light on the fatal role "ordinary policemen" played in Hitler's racial war. Although German scholars have recently published overviews of the organization of the Ordnungspolizei and regional studies on its role in the Holocaust, Westermann presents the first comprehensive book in English on this aspect of the Nazi terror machine. He tracks the history of the police back to Weimar Germany and shows in his first chapter how Himmler's empire took charge of it in the 1930s. Chapter 2 focuses on certain elements of "martial identity," such as militarism and racism; the uniformed police adopted them as early as the 1930s and embraced them more thoroughly after the war had begun. Indoctrination resulted in the policeman as the "political soldier" who had completely internalized the Nazi ideology. These policemen stood "shoulder to shoulder with their counterparts in the SS" (p. 90). Chapter 3, entitled "Instilling the SS Ethic," looks more closely at the contents and mechanisms of that indoctrination. The next three chapters revolve around how police battalions actively carried out genocidal war in the East. Chapter 4, "Baptism of Fire," explores the police's key role in subjugating the Polish nation. Chapter 5 tracks the police's participation in the racial "crusade" in the Soviet Union from summer 1941 on. Chapter 6 finally presents a few more case studies and general considerations on the murderous occupational regime and how the German police cooperated with other organizations in Eastern Europe.

Throughout his book, Westermann proves the organizational entanglement between police, SS and Wehrmacht. He shows a continuous exchange of personnel as well as intense indoctrination, and considers their cooperation in the murder of Jews, Poles and other civilians. Westermann provides a broad range of small case studies that leave no doubt of the regularity and voluntarily of the police battalions' participation in the Holocaust. The crucial point of the book is its thesis. Westermann disagrees with both Browning's (or Stanley Milgram's) psychological focus on conformity and obedience and with Goldhagen's ideological approach; he rejects both as reductive. Instead, in Westermann's view, a certain "organizational culture" "established and promoted its own values, beliefs, and standards for behavior, that created an environment in which persecution, exploitation, and murder became both acceptable and desirable attributes of a police corps charged with preserving the German *Volk* and locked in an apocalyptic battle against the in-

ternal and external enemies of the Reich" (p. 239).

The concept of "organizational culture" is borrowed from Edgar H. Schein. It is seen as a set of "basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organization, that operate unconsciously, and that define in a basic 'taken for granted' fashion an organization's view of itself and its environment." [2] The term has recently been introduced into scholarship on earlier German genocidal traditions by Isabel von Hull to analyze "habitual practices, default programs," and "unreflected cognitive frames" of Imperial Germany's military. Hull wants to explain why the German military at that time (and later on, we might add) labored under "extremism" that was unable to accept anything other than "final, or total, solutions". [3] Whereas in Hull's view such "military culture" did not need racism to carry out genocide, Westermann asks how ideologies like antisemitism were transmitted into the feelings and actions of military units; following Schein, Westermann points to the impact of leadership as the "key mechanism in the creation of an institutional identity" (p. 8).

The historian's job is to explore how that transmission worked—that is, how "ordinary policemen" adopted and internalized those ideological offerings and pressures, and how all that finally translated into individual and collective action. This transmission, however, is not the focus of Westermann's research. Instead he presents a collage of three things: reviews of NS and SS propaganda material and speeches used inside the police, information on its hierarchical structure and reports on its murderous actions. The book does not investigate how these three elements were interwoven, how racist stereotypes or martial images made these men commit mass murder. Instead, the concept of "organizational culture" serves to cover the gap between the questions raised and missing answers. The message of the book is that organizational culture *somehow* managed that transmission, even if we don't know how it did so. Learning more about that "somehow" would have meant to look for—changing and varying—choices of units and individuals. For that, Westermann might have profited from the sociological, psychological and anthropological literature on homosocial relations and male bonding in the military and other organizations. [4] Another issue are racial and martial traditions, which were well-developed long before those men became policemen. The concept of "organizational culture" distracts from the fact that Nazi policemen had absorbed racism and martial masculinities long before they became policemen; the police in Nazi Germany were not a racist island midst in a functioning

civil society. Since civil society no longer existed, I doubt that the concept of “organizational culture” is especially useful in analyzing genocidal societies at all.

These criticisms aside, Westermann nonetheless provides a welcome introductory overview regarding the role of the uniformed police. His book is well written, well organized and a good choice as a textbook for any upper undergraduate or even graduate seminar on Holocaust perpetrators or on the Nazi terror machine in general. In some parts the book is redundant, but that might not necessarily be a fault when it is read by non-specialists.

The same is not true for Arnold’s study on the radicalization of warfare and of the occupational regime of the Wehrmacht in the Soviet Union. Why did the honorable German military become involved in one of the worst crimes of human history? The question is not new, but still worth considering. However, this book brings neither a new approach nor new answers. Arnold does cover a broad range of topics. He starts with the planning and preparation of Operation Barbarossa, focusing in two chapters on the Wehrmacht’s politics of occupation and exploitation. He describes the mass death of the Soviet POWs and finally moves on to the radicalization of the partisan war and the participation of the Wehrmacht in the Holocaust. All this material is based on the files of the army, that is, mostly on orders and official reports. Such primary sources reproduce and confirm the hierarchical structure of the military. Not surprisingly, Arnold’s introduction (p. 29) makes a clear point in stressing the significance of obedience for anything that happened and was done by military units and individual soldiers. Looking critically on recent scholarship (and obviously also on the controversial first Wehrmacht exhibition, launched in 1995)—which left no doubt that there was still some choice for individuals as well as units—Arnold runs the danger of marginalizing the impact of order structures. Wehrmacht soldiers, including those at the top level, don’t perform in this book as agents but as victims: victims of Hitler; anti-communist and antisemitic Nazi propaganda; and not least of disastrous logistics, lack of supplies and the dysfunctional transportation system in the East. Most of all, the soldiers are victims of the partisan war initiated by the Soviet Union behind German lines, and so on. The bottom line, summarized on the back cover and repeated throughout the book is this: crimes committed against the Germans resulted in their committing crimes: “Für die Verwicklung der Wehrmacht [sic] waren die unerwartete Entwicklung der militärischen Operationen ...,

die Härte der Kämpfe sowie die Verschärfung des Klimas durch Verbrechen und Propaganda wesentlich.”

Arnold has spent a great deal of energy working through a huge amount of files in the Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv in Freiburg; it would not have been necessary. Most of his results follow the line set by the voluminous project “Germany and the Second World War” provided by the Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt in Potsdam. This ten-volume work is indispensable. At the same it serves as the most influential point of reference for a line of research that does not deny the strong relation between Wehrmacht and Holocaust but distracts from the Wehrmacht’s active and often initiative role by presenting a tragic and victimizing master narrative.[5]

Not only did Hitler’s soldiers have choices, historians have them as well. The radicalizing dynamic of the partisan war in the East has drawn recently the attention of military historians and Holocaust scholars. Whoever is interested in the state of art of current research might consider two new English books: first, Ben Shepherd’s *War in the East* (2004) convincingly points to the disastrous traditions of “guerillaphobia” in the German military since the nineteenth century; and second, Alexander Hill’s *War behind the Eastern Front* (2004)—which is based on Russian as well as German documents—tells the story of the Soviet partisans and the helix of violence from 1941 on.[6]

The two books under review here will stimulate the ongoing debate on an extraordinarily sensitive topic. Arnold’s book, however, leads in the wrong direction. It was awarded the prestigious Werner Hahlweg Prize in Germany; it would be worrisome if this signals a new (regressive) trend in German military history.

Notes

[1]. See Gerhard Paul, “Von Psychopathen, Technokraten des Terrors und ‘ganz gewöhnlichen’ Deutschen. Die Täter der Shoah im Spiegel der Forschung,” in *Die Täter der Shoah. Fanatische Nationalsozialisten oder ganz normale Deutsche?*, ed. idem (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2002), pp. 13-90.

[2]. Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1985), p. 6, quoted by Westermann, p. 7.

[3]. Isabel von Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 92, pp. 1f.; see my forthcoming review in *The History Workshop*