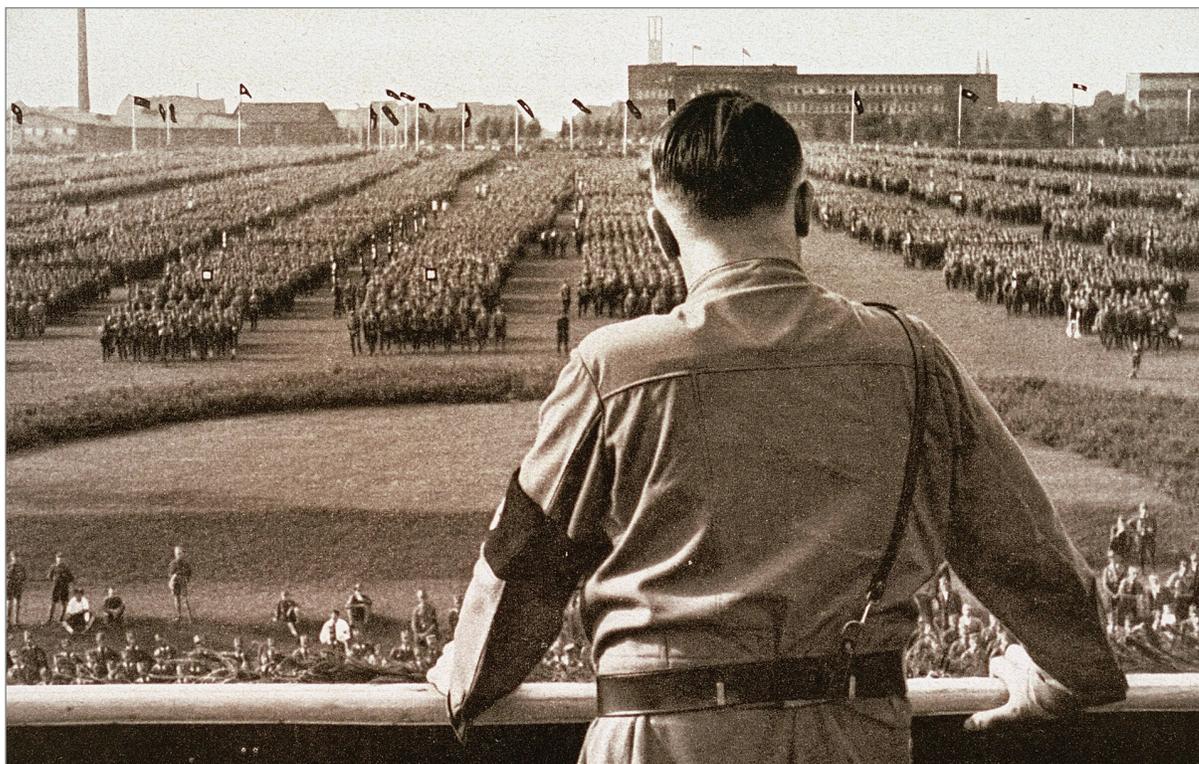


The German Military and Hitler



Adolf Hitler addresses a rally of the Nazi paramilitary formation, the SA (*Sturmabteilung*), in 1933. By 1934, the SA had grown to nearly four million members, significantly outnumbering the 100,000 man professional army. *US Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of William O. McWorkman*

The military played an important role in Germany. It was closely identified with the essence of the nation and operated largely independent of civilian control or politics. With the 1919 Treaty of Versailles after World War I, the victorious powers attempted to undercut the basis for German militarism by imposing restrictions on the German armed forces, including limiting the army to 100,000 men, curtailing the navy, eliminating the air force, and abolishing the military training academies and the General Staff (the elite German military planning institution).

On February 3, 1933, four days after being appointed chancellor, Adolf Hitler met with top military leaders to talk candidly about his plans to establish a dictatorship, rebuild the military, reclaim lost territories, and wage war. Although they shared many policy goals (including the cancellation of the Treaty of Versailles, the

continued >>

RESOURCES ON THE GERMAN MILITARY AND THE HOLOCAUST

German Military Leadership and Hitler (continued)

expansion of the German armed forces, and the destruction of the perceived communist threat both at home and abroad), many among the military leadership did not fully trust Hitler because of his radicalism and populism. In the following years, however, Hitler gradually established full authority over the military. For example, the 1934 purge of the Nazi Party paramilitary formation, the SA (*Sturmabteilung*), helped solidify the military's position in the Third Reich and win the support of its leaders.



The Military Oath under the Weimar Republic (1919–1933)

“I swear loyalty to the Reich Constitution and vow that I will protect the German nation and its lawful establishment as a brave soldier at any time, and will obey the President and my superiors.”¹

The Military Oath as of August 1934

“I swear by God this sacred oath: I will render unconditional obedience to Adolf Hitler, the Führer of the German nation and people, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, and will be ready as a brave soldier to risk my life at any time for this oath.”²

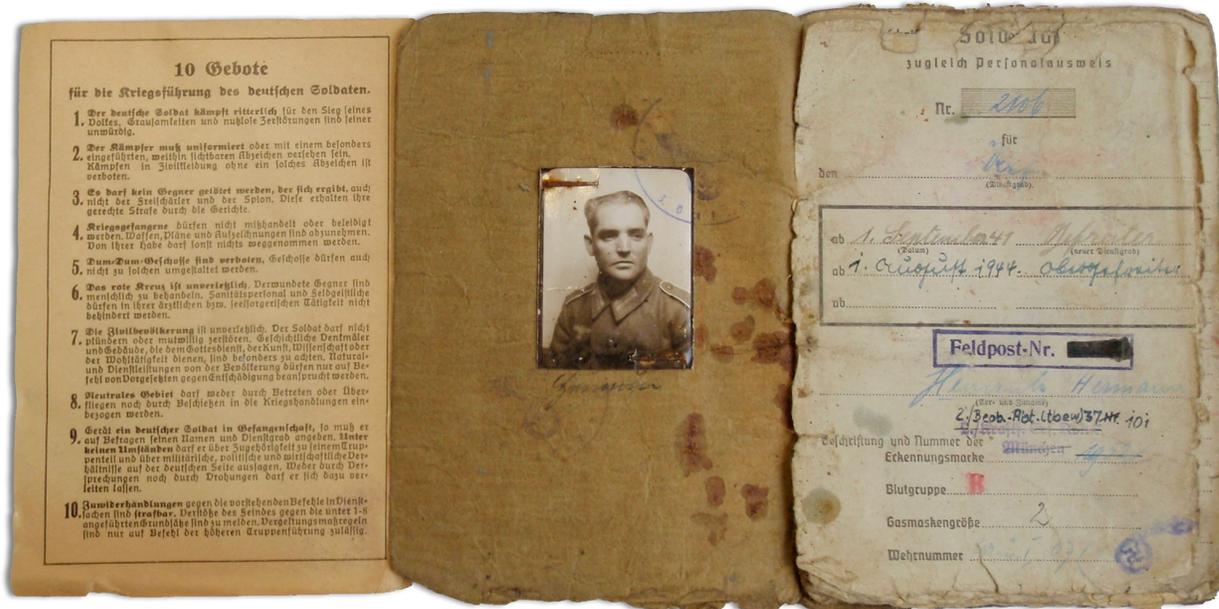
Hitler with the minister of war Werner von Blomberg and Werner von Fritsch, commander-in-chief of the army, during army maneuvers at the Munster training camp in 1935. *US Holocaust Memorial Museum*

¹ Robert B. Kane, *Disobedience and Conspiracy in the German Army* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2002), 227.

² J. Noakes and G. Pridham, eds., “The Nazi Party, State and Society 1919–1939,” in *Nazism, 1919–1945: A History in Documents and Eyewitness Accounts*, vol. 1 (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), 185–186.

RESOURCES ON THE GERMAN MILITARY AND THE HOLOCAUST

Codes of Conduct in the German Military



A German soldier's paybook, including "The Ten Commandments for the Conduct of the German Soldier at War." *Deutsche Dienststelle (WASt)*.

Germany was a signatory to all of the major international agreements regulating the conduct of war, including the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907 and the Geneva Conventions of 1864, 1906, and 1929. Despite this, Germany was among the many countries whose leaders violated these international codes when they found it advantageous to do so. For instance, during World War I, the German military used poison gas, an act forbidden by the Hague Convention of 1899.

Ten Commandments for the Conduct of the German Soldier at War¹

1. The German soldier fights honorably for the victory of his people. Cruelty and pointless destruction is dishonorable.
2. The combatant must wear a uniform or be marked with a special noticeable sign. Fighting in civilian clothing without such a sign is forbidden.
3. No opponent who surrenders may be killed. This includes even the guerrilla fighter and the spy. They will receive their just punishment before the courts.
4. Prisoners of war may not be mishandled or insulted. Weapons, plans, sketches are to be confiscated. None of their personal possessions may be taken.
5. Dum-Dum Bullets are forbidden. Ammunition may not be adapted into such bullets.
6. The Red Cross is inviolable. Wounded opponents are to be treated humanely. Medical personnel and field clergy may not be obstructed while performing their medical or spiritual duties.

continued >>

¹ Deutsche Dienststelle (WASt), trans. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

RESOURCES ON THE GERMAN MILITARY AND THE HOLOCAUST

Codes of Conduct in the German Military (continued)

7. The civilian population is inviolable. A soldier may not arbitrarily engage in plunder or destruction. Historical memorials and buildings which serve as houses of God, or serve science, art, or the general welfare, are especially to be safeguarded. Resources and services from the population may be demanded against compensation only on the orders of superior officers.
8. Neutral territory may not be involved in hostilities, either by incursion on the ground or by air, or by shooting onto that territory.
9. Should a German soldier be taken prisoner, if asked, he may give only his name and service rank. Under no circumstances may he give information about the unit to which he belongs or about military, political or economic conditions on the German side. He may not let himself be led into giving such information either by promises or threats.
10. Actions contrary to orders while in service is a criminal offense. Violations of the enemy against numbers 1–8 of the above guidelines are to be reported. Retaliation is only permitted under orders from higher military authority.

Section 47, German Military Penal Code (1872)²

If through the execution of an order pertaining to official duties, a penal law is violated, then the superior giving the order is solely responsible. However, the subordinate who obeys shall be punished as a participant:

- (1) if he exceeded the order he received or,
- (2) if he knew that the order of the superior concerned an act which constituted a civil or military crime or offense.

² Keller C., *Militär-Strafgesetzbuch für das Deutsche Reich*, trans. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (Berlin: Weidmann, 1873).

Planning the Invasion of the Soviet Union

From the beginning of operational planning in the winter and spring of 1941, German military and police authorities intended to wage a war of annihilation against the Soviet Union. Driven by their racial and ideological worldview, they targeted representatives of the Communist state and Jews. Prior to the invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, the military leadership issued a series of orders outlining the nature of the war on the eastern front.

Re: Regulation for deployment of the Security Police and SD in association with the Army, Army High Command (OKH), April 28, 1941¹

To implement special security police tasks *outside the ambit* of the military forces the deployment of special detachments of the Security Police (SD) in the area of operations is necessary.

With the agreement of the Chief of the Security Police and SD the deployment of the Security Police and SD in the area of operations will be regulated as follows:

1. *Tasks...*

(b) *In the Army Group Rear Areas*

To investigate and suppress anti-German and anti-state activities in so far as they are not carried out by enemy armed forces, as well as to inform the commander of the Army Group Rear Areas on the political situation

3. *Cooperation between the Einsatzgruppen or -kommandos of the Security Police and the SD and the Commander in the Army Group Rear Areas (re: 1b):*

Einsatzgruppen and Einsatzkommandos of the SP (SD) are deployed in the Army Group rear areas. They are subordinate to the representative of the Chief of the SP [Security Police] and the SD assigned to the headquarters of the Commander of the Army Group Rear Area, to whom they are subordinated with regard to deployment, accommodations, and supplies. They receive their functional instructions from the Chief of the SP and SD

The representatives and if need be the detachment commanders of the Einsatzkommandos assigned to the [Wehrmacht] security divisions are required to inform the military commanders in a timely manner of the instructions they have received. In exigent circumstances the commander of the Army Group Rear Area is authorized to issue restrictive instructions that take precedence over all other instructions.

The Einsatzgruppen or -kommandos are authorized as part of their mission to take executive measures against the civilian population on their own responsibility.

Signed von Brauchitsch

continued >>

¹ RG-242, NOKW-2080, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD, trans. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

RESOURCES ON THE GERMAN MILITARY AND THE HOLOCAUST

Planning the Invasion of the Soviet Union (continued)

Excerpt from “The Decree on Exercising Military Jurisdiction in the Area of Barbarossa and Special Measures by Troops” (Barbarossa Jurisdiction Order), May 13, 1941²

- I. Treatment of crimes committed by Enemy Civilians
 1. *Criminal acts committed by enemy civilians* are removed from the jurisdiction of the military courts and the summary courts-martial until further notice.
 2. *Guerrillas* are to be eliminated ruthlessly by the troops in combat or while escaping.
 3. *All other attacks by enemy civilians against the Armed Forces*, its personnel and its retinue also will be suppressed on the spot by the troops with the most rigorous methods until the assailants are annihilated.
 4. Where such measures were not taken or were not possible at first, *suspect elements will be brought before an officer immediately. This officer is to decide whether they are to be shot*
- II. Treatment of crimes committed against indigenous residents by members of the Wehrmacht and its retinue
 1. *Regarding actions committed by personnel of the Wehrmacht or its retinue against enemy civilians, there is no obligation to prosecute*, even where the deed is at the same time a military crime or misdemeanor

Excerpt from “Guidelines for the Behavior of the Troops in Russia,” June 4, 1941³

1. *Bolshevism is the deadly enemy of the National Socialist German people. Germany’s struggle is directed against this subversive ideology and its functionaries.*
2. This struggle requires ruthless and energetic action against Bolshevik agitators, guerrillas, saboteurs, and Jews, and the total elimination of all active or passive resistance.
3. The members of the Red Army—including prisoners—must be treated with the most extreme reserve and the greatest caution since one must reckon with devious methods of combat. The Asiatic soldiers of the Red Army in particular are inscrutable, unpredictable, devious, and brutish
4. When taking units prisoner *the leaders must be separated from the rank and file at once.*
5. In the Soviet Union the German soldier is not confronted with a unified population. The USSR is a state formation that combines a multiplicity of Slav, Caucasian, and Asiatic peoples held together by the violence of the Bolshevik rulers. Jewry is strongly represented in the USSR

² Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, “Kommissarbefehl und Massenexecutionen sowjetischer Kriegsgefangener,” in *Anatomie des SS Staates*, vol. 2, trans. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1989), 181–184.

³ Jacobsen, 187–188.

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Racial Ideology in Practice in the Soviet Union

One motivation for the German invasion of the Soviet Union was the desire to acquire *Lebensraum* (living space) for the German people to colonize at the expense of the Russian, Belarusian, Ukrainian, and Baltic peoples whom the Nazis considered racially inferior. Consequently, German forces murdered almost all of the Soviet Jews they could identify, and shot, starved, or worked to death millions of Soviet civilians and prisoners of war. This was the result not only of Nazi propaganda—in which the Soviet population was portrayed as subhuman—but also of the basic orders issued by the military leadership, who shared the Nazi view that Soviet soldiers and civilians were inferior.

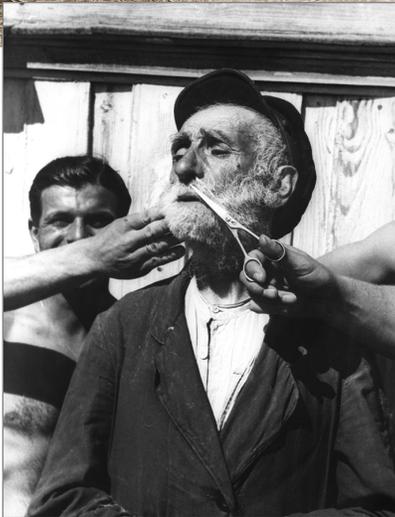


“Only a Jew can be a Bolshevik, for this blood-sucker there can be nothing nicer than to be a Bolshevik Wherever one spits one finds a Jew As far as I know ... not one single Jew has worked in the workers’ paradise, everyone, even the smallest blood-sucker, has a post where he naturally enjoys great privileges.”

— Lance-Corporal Paul Lenz, Russia, 1941¹

“Hardly ever do you see the face of a person who seems rational and intelligent. They all look emaciated and the wild, half-crazy look in their eyes makes them look like imbeciles These scoundrels, led by Jews and criminals, wanted to imprint their stamp on Europe.”

—Soldier Karl Fuchs on Soviet POWs, August 1941²



Top: This photo was found by an American liberator and was likely taken by a German soldier who fought with Army Group Center in the Soviet Union. Lieutenant Baier interrogates newly captured Soviet prisoners of war. *US Holocaust Memorial Museum*

Left: German soldiers publicly humiliate an elderly Jewish man in Ukraine by cutting off his beard. *Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-187-0203-11*

¹ Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 160.

² Bartov, 159.

RESOURCES ON THE GERMAN MILITARY AND THE HOLOCAUST

Belarus

From 1919 until September 1939, the area that makes up present-day Belarus was divided between two countries: Poland and the Soviet Union. The eastern part of Belarus, where this case study takes place, was part of the Soviet Union.

Jewish Life in Belarus

In Soviet Belarus, Jews suffered as much as non-Jews in terms of suppression of religious practices, loss of private property, and political oppression; however, there was little or no legal, educational, or economic discrimination based on their Jewishness. Thus, they assimilated more into the new Soviet middle and bureaucratic classes and had more chances for productive interaction with non-Jews. Given the relatively formative stage of Belarusian national consciousness, and the absence of strong national feelings about the Jews, antisemitism tended to be less pervasive and less intense than on the Polish side of the border, where such negative sentiment received official reinforcement.

Invasion of Belarus

In June–July 1941, the German military quickly advanced through Belarus. Many people in the Soviet Union initially viewed the German Army as a potential liberator from the oppressiveness of Soviet control. Some nationalist activist groups, especially in Ukraine and the Baltic states, collaborated extensively with the German invaders in the hopes that such collaboration would purchase national sovereignty. In Belarus, where the sense of national identity was much less developed, relatively fewer locals came forward in the initial months to assist the Germans with their anti-Jewish and anti-Communist actions.



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CASE STUDY: Army Group Center (Rear)

On June 22, 1941, three German Army Groups invaded the Soviet Union. Behind each Army Group's front-line combat zone, a special rear area headquarters, called the Army Group Rear Area, controlled a large area of occupied territory. Operating in the Army Group Rear Areas were special formations, including police battalions, security divisions, and Einsatzgruppen, which carried out mass killings of perceived racial, political, and military enemies. In Army Group Center (Rear) in eastern Belarus, these special formations and the German military established and liquidated 101 ghettos between June 1941 and spring 1942.

Partisans in Belarus

In past wars, the German Army had developed a profound, even inflated fear of partisans. During the Franco-Prussian War and World War I, its field officers, with full support of the commanding officers, responded brutally to any real or perceived disorder behind the lines. On July 3, 1941, Soviet leader Josef Stalin called upon Soviet citizens to rise up and fight the Germans, proclaiming:

Partisan units, mounted and on foot, must be formed in the area occupied by the enemy; diversionary groups must be activated to combat enemy forces, to foment partisan warfare everywhere, to blow up bridges and roads, to damage telephone and telegraph lines, and to set fire to forests, stores, and transport. Conditions in the occupied regions must be made unbearable for the enemy and all of his accomplices. They must be hounded and annihilated at every step, and all their measures must be frustrated.¹



Men suspected of partisan activity sit on the ground awaiting their execution by firing squad in the Soviet Union during September 1941. German army soldiers and officers are visible in the background.
Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-212-0221-04

On July 16, Hitler responded, “the Russians have now ordered partisan warfare behind our front. This partisan war again has some advantage for us; it enables us to eradicate everyone who opposes us.” Hitler explicitly called for “shooting anyone who even looks askance at us.”²

In reality, there was little partisan organization or activity in 1941. Large groups of dispersed or bypassed Red Army soldiers remained at large in the countryside and some formed armed

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¹ Quoted in Leonid D. Grenkevich and David M. Glantz, *The Soviet Partisan Movement, 1941–1944: A Critical Historiographical Analysis* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1999), 75.

² Quoted in Waitman Wade Beorn, *Marching into Darkness: The Wehrmacht and the Holocaust in Belarus* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 60.

RESOURCES ON THE GERMAN MILITARY AND THE HOLOCAUST

CASE STUDY: Army Group Center (Rear) (continued)

groups to attack German infrastructure and units. No significant partisan movement developed in Belarus until 1942–43 when partisan activity emerged partly in response to the brutal German occupation policies. Nevertheless, German soldiers and SS-police killed tens of thousands of unarmed civilians and disarmed soldiers, justifying the slaughter by referring to an essentially invented partisan danger. From June 1941 until May 1942, Army Group Center (Rear) reported 80,000 “partisan” deaths and 1,094 German losses.

The Mogilev Conference: “The Jew is a partisan and the partisan is a Jew.”

This slogan was the main focus of the September 1941 Mogilev Conference on “combating partisans” initiated by General Max von Schenckendorff, commander of Army Group Center (Rear). Officers from various SS and police units, including the Einsatzgruppen, as well as Wehrmacht regimental commanders and an officer from each battalion participated in the conference. More than 50 percent of the participants were captains or lieutenants. The conference summary disseminated to the company level in all units of Army Group Center (Rear) contained the following statement:

The constant decision between life and death for partisans and suspicious persons is difficult even for the hardest soldier. It must be done. He acts correctly who fights ruthlessly and mercilessly with complete disregard for any personal surge of emotion.³

³ Quoted in Waitman Wade Beorn, *Marching into Darkness: The Wehrmacht and the Holocaust in Belarus* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 102–103.

Einsatzgruppe B in Eastern Belarus

Einsatzgruppe B followed Army Group Center as it advanced into Soviet territory, starting from Warsaw and fanning out across Belarus toward Minsk and Smolensk. It conducted mass killings of Jews in the area controlled by Army Group Center (Rear) as well as in areas closer to the front. Beginning in August 1941, Einsatzgruppe B was headquartered in Smolensk. In the fall of 1941, it operated largely west of the city in eastern Belarus. The following document is a report compiled at headquarters in Berlin detailing the actions of Einsatzgruppe B in the first week of October 1941.¹

The Chief of the Security Police and Security Service

Berlin, October 25, 1941
50 copies (36th Copy)

Operational Situation Report USSR No. 124

Einsatzgruppe B

Location: Smolensk

Actions against Functionaries, Agents, Saboteurs, and Jews

...In Mogilev, the Jews also tried to sabotage their removal into the ghetto by fleeing en masse. Einsatzkommando 8, with the help of the Order Police, blocked the roads leading out of town and liquidated 113 Jews.

In the vicinity of Shklov, about 50 km north of Mogilev, acts of sabotage were constantly committed, chiefly the destruction of the German Army's telephone communication lines. An inquiry showed that Jews of Shidov [probably Shklov] had taken part in these acts of sabotage; thus 627 Jews were liquidated. In a further action, another 812 male and female persons were given 'special treatment,' all of them racially and mentally inferior elements....

In Borisov, another 83 persons were shot individually during the time of this report. They were seditious Jews, former NKGB agents, and Communist functionaries.

Two large-scale actions were carried out by the platoon in Krupka and Sholopaniche: 912 Jews were liquidated in the former, and 822 in the latter. The Krupka district can now be considered free of Jews. The complete liquidation of all Jews in the two villages was deemed necessary in order to deprive the numerous partisans and parachutists in these parts of any assistance which the Jews in particular had given most persistently.

In Bobruisk, during the time under report, a platoon of Einsatzgruppe 8 executed 418 persons. Among them were rebellious Jews and persons who had shielded former Red Army soldiers or who had acted as spies for the partisans. Some of those executed had committed anti-German agitation, conducting whisper campaigns and distributing leaflets....

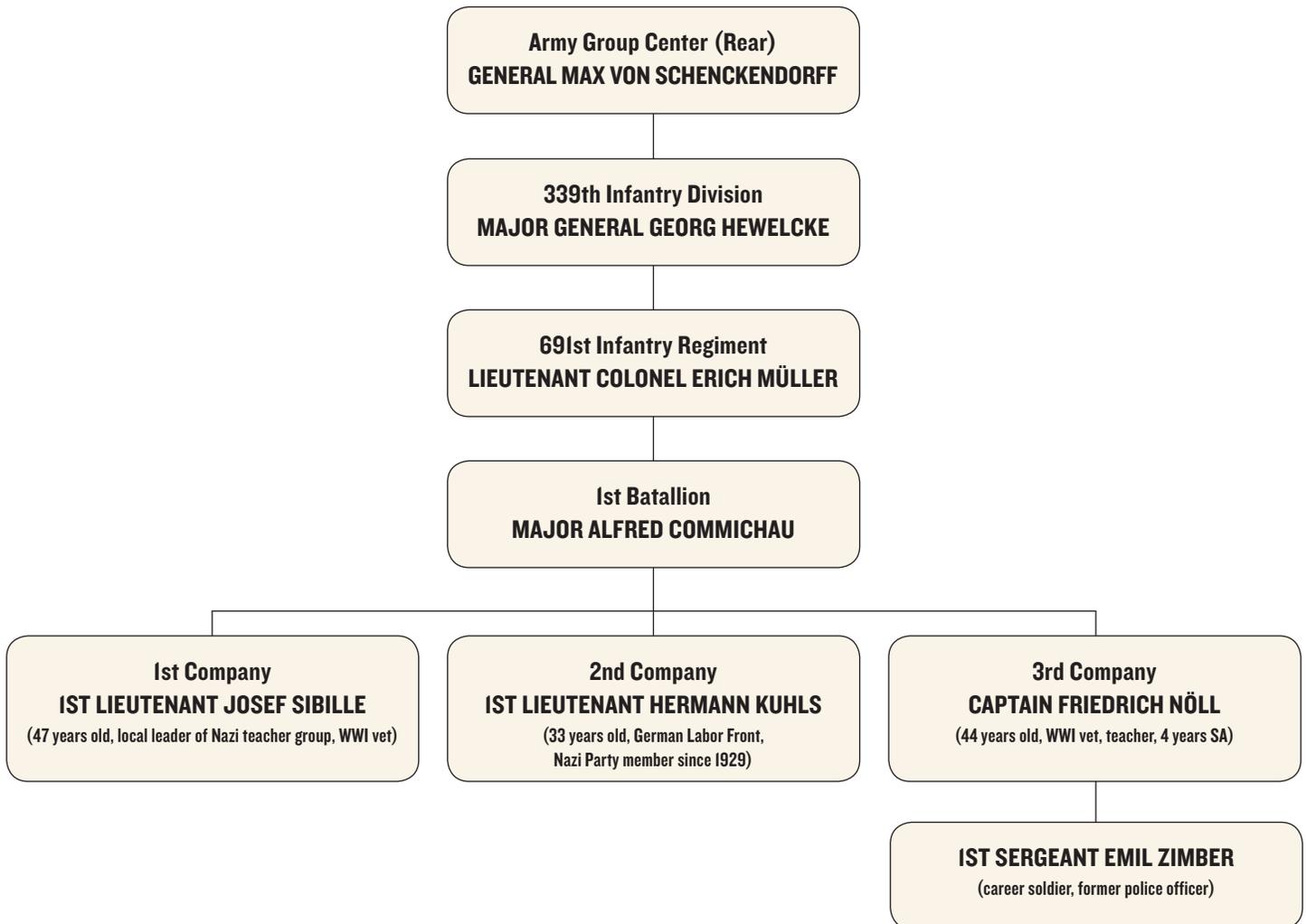
On October 8, 1941, the complete liquidation of the Jews in the Vitebsk ghetto began owing to the imminent danger of epidemics. The number of Jews who came under 'special treatment' amounted to about 3,000....

¹ Yitzhak Arad, Shmuel Krakowski, and Shmuel Spector, eds., *The Einsatzgruppen Reports: Selections from the Dispatches of the Nazi Death Squads' Campaign Against the Jews in Occupied Territories of the Soviet Union July 1941–January 1943*, trans. Stella Schossberger (New York: Holocaust Library, 1989), 204–206.

RESOURCES ON THE GERMAN MILITARY AND THE HOLOCAUST

CASE STUDY: 691st Regiment in October 1941¹

In the fall of 1941, the Wehrmacht's 691st Infantry Regiment was charged with "security and pacification" duties in occupied Belarus, in the area west of Mogilev, Orscha, and Vitebsk. Although the regiment's 1st Battalion reported daily about "enemy contact," there was no indication of a partisan threat. In late September 1941, the battalion adjutant took part in the Mogilev Conference. In early October 1941, Major Alfred Commichau, Commander of 1st Battalion, issued a verbal order to his three company leaders, Hermann Kuhls, Josef Sibille, and Friedrich Nöll, to shoot the entire Jewish population in the localities in which the companies were quartered.



¹ This case study is based on research conducted by Waitman Wade Beorn. See his book, *Marching into Darkness: The Wehrmacht and the Holocaust in Belarus* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

RESOURCES ON THE GERMAN MILITARY AND THE HOLOCAUST

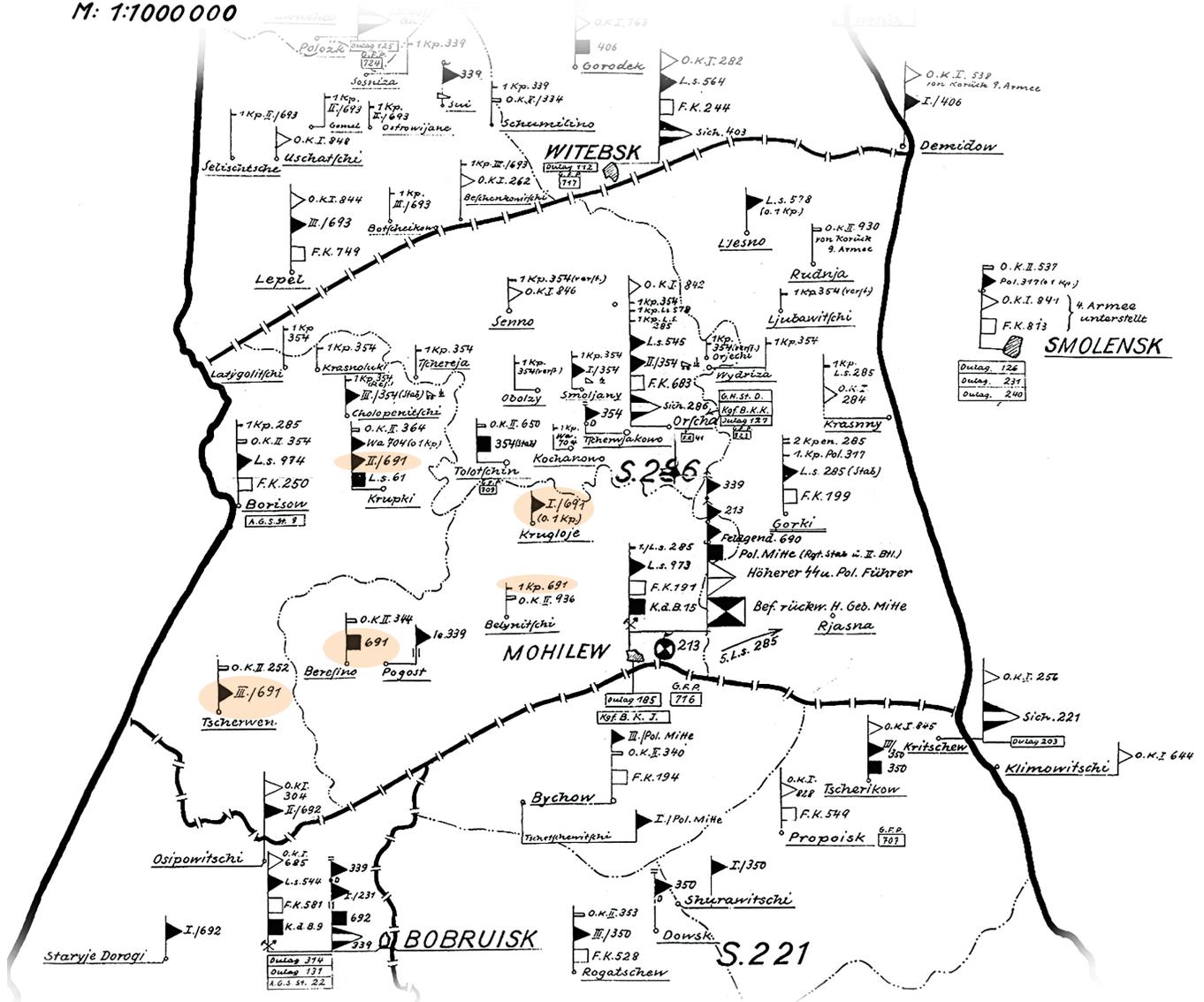
CASE STUDY: Army Group Center (Rear) in October 1941

The 339th Infantry Division served in the Loire Valley in France from May to August 1941. In September, it moved to Army Group Center (Rear) to take over security operations from another division. This map detail, produced by Army Group Center (Rear), shows the locations of its composite units for October 9, 1941. The 691st Infantry Regiment was headquartered in Berezino; its first battalion, under Major Commichau, was headquartered in Krugloje.

Rückw. H. Gebiet Mitte

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1 Map of Army Group Center (Rear), October 9, 1941. Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv RH 22-227

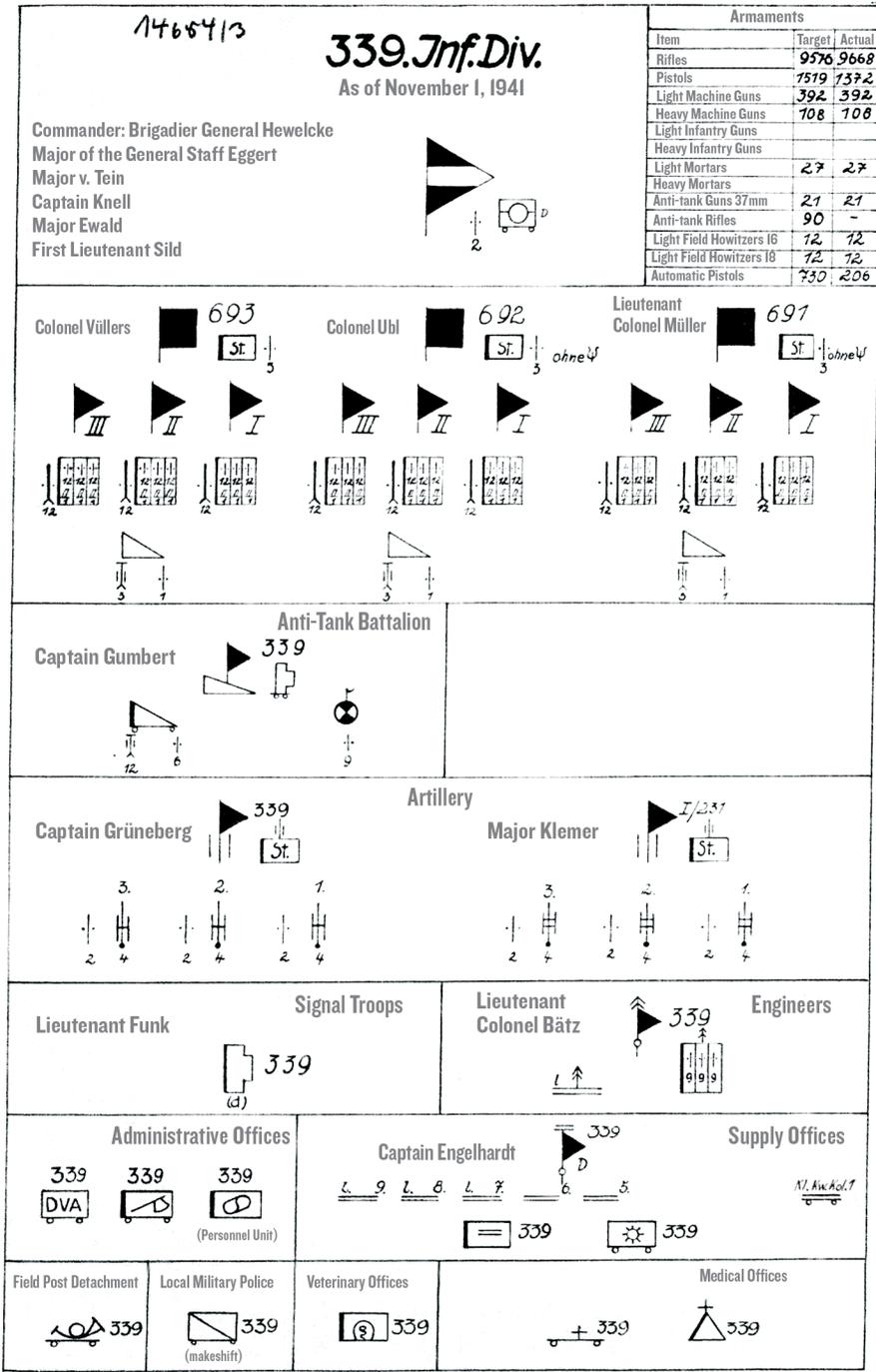
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339th Infantry Division Table of Organization and Equipment¹

157



- Division HQ
- Infantry regiment HQ
- Staff company HQ
- Infantry Co. (split in 3 platoons)
- Anti-tank gun platoon
- Pak 37mm anti-tank guns
- Anti-tank battalion
- Motorized signal platoon
- Cavalry bicycle recon. company
- Motorized anti-tank Co.
- Artillery battalion
- Artillery staff company HQ
- Signal Co. (d)
- 105 mm light field howitzer (16)
- 105 mm light field howitzer (18)
- Motor. divisional supply office
- Motorized butcher Co.
- Bakery Co.
- Light motor transport column
- Motorized field post detachment
- Motorized local military police
- Veterinary Co.
- Light machine guns
- Motorized map printing office
- Battalion HQ
- Anti-tank gun platoon
- Pak 37mm anti-tank guns
- Cavalry bicycle recon. company
- Motorized anti-tank Co.
- Combat engineering regiment HQ
- Horse-drawn engineering transport column
- Combat engineer Co. (with 3 platoons)
- Horse-drawn transport column
- Supply Co.
- Motorized maintenance platoon
- Division Service of Supply HQ (partly motorized)
- Motorized ambulance platoon
- Medical Co.

¹ Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv RH 22-225 p.157. trans. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.