War and Genocide on the Eastern Front, 1941–1945

NORMAN M. NAIMARK

Andrej Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord. Die Einsatzgruppe D in der südlichen Sowjetunion 1941–1943* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition 2003), 796 pp., €35.00 (hb), ISBN 3-930908-91-3.

Arnold Klaus Jochen, *Die Wehrmacht und die Besatzungspolitik in den besetzten Gebieten der Sowjetunion. Kriegführung und Radikalisierung im 'Unternehmen Barabarossa'* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2004), 579 pp., €48.80 (pb), ISBN 3428113020.

Birgit Beck, *Wehrmacht und sexuelle Gewalt. Sexualverbrechen vor deutschen Militärgerichten, 1939–45* (Schöningh: Paderborn, 2004), €39.90 (hb), pp. 370, ISBN 350671726X.

Jörg Echternkamp, ed., *Die deutsche Kriegsgesellschaft 1939–1945. Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*: vol. 9 in 2 parts (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt: 2004/05), 933 and 1,112 pp., €49.80 each (hb), ISBN 3421062366.

Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 384 pp., $45.00 (hb), ISBN 0801442583.

Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 450 pp., $24.00 (pb), ISBN 0521538548.

Manfred Oldenburg, *Ideologie und militärisches Kalkül. Die Besatzungspolitik der Wehrmacht in der Sowjetunion 1942* (Cologne: Boehlau, 2004), 365 pp., €39.90 (hb), ISBN 3412145033.

Christoph Rass, *'Menschenmaterial': Deutsche Soldaten an der Ostfront. Innenansichten einer Infanteriedivision 1939–1945* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 2003), 486 pp., €39.90 (hb), ISBN 3506744860.

Ben Shepherd, *War in the Wild East. The German Army and Soviet Partisans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 300 pp., $29.95 (hb), ISBN 0674012968.

Robert and Florence McDonnell Professor of East European Studies, FSI, Stanford University, Encina Hall E107, Stanford, CA 94305-6055, United states; naimark@stanford.edu.

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The historical connection between war and genocide is clear and apparent. Scholars of mass killing have repeatedly pointed out the linkages between the First World War and the Armenian genocide of 1915, between the Second World War and the Holocaust, between the 1993–4 war and the genocide in Rwanda, and between the war in Bosnia and the genocide in Srebrenica.[1] Scholars of war, most often military historians, have been less ready to tie what they see as two distinct social phenomena – war and genocide – into the same bundle. This was especially the case, until recently, for the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, and the subsequent mass murder of the Jews. The Wehrmacht, the German fighting forces, were seen to be implementing an enormously ambitious military campaign against the Soviet Union, which, in the end, they lost. Meanwhile, the Nazi security organs – the SS, the SD, and the Einsatzgruppen – carried out the 'Final Solution', inspired primarily by Hitler and the Nazi hierarchs.

In scholarship, this strict separation of the Wehrmacht and the murder of the Jews began to be challenged by German scholars such as Manfred Messerschmidt and Klaus-Juergen Mueller in the late 1960s, and was discredited altogether in the late 1980s, with the publication of a number of important studies, including those by Omer Bartov.[2] Moreover, the travelling 'Wehrmacht Exhibition', organised by the Hamburg Institute for Social Research in 1995, used first-hand documents, letters and, most importantly, photographs, to demonstrate the role of Germans soldiers and officers in the Holocaust. The evidence was incontrovertible. The Wehrmacht shared major responsibility for the mass murder of the Jews and for other genocidal crimes, including the starvation and inhuman torment of 3 million Soviet POWs.[3]

These new insights into the role of the Wehrmacht in the depredations in the east challenged a new generation of historians to demonstrate the actual mechanisms of mass killing up close and in the specific. Regional studies served as an extraordinarily fruitful way to trace the orders to kill, the executions and mass burials, the deportations to death camps and the subsequent reporting to Berlin. Historians found that the killing machine, well-organised and effective as it was, also varied according to local conditions, the personalities of the occupation officers, the dynamics of local bureaucratic rivalries, and the particularities of the relationship between Wehrmacht authorities and their SS partners.[4] In the end, this did not matter very much to the millions of Jewish victims, who were killed one way or another, at one point or

1 See, for example, Norman M. Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in 20th-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 187–90; Eric Weitz, *A Century of Genocide: Utopias of Race and Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 240–1; and, most recently, Scott Straus, *The Order of Genocide: Race, Power, and War in Rwanda* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 10–11.

2 See Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front 1941–45: German Troops and the Barbarisaton of Warfare* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), and his *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

3 A useful compilation of this scholarship in English is Hannes Heer and Klaus Naumann, eds. *War of Extermination: The German Military in the Second World War, 1941–1944* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000).

4 See, for example, Christian Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Mord: Die Deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weissrussland, 1941 bis 1944* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1999); Dieter Pohl, *Nationalsozialistische*

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another, during the war on the eastern front. But it does matter to our understanding of the history of the Holocaust and the genocidal actions of the German occupiers.

In the German books under review, the tendency to reconstruct and explore specific cases continues. As befits the Federal Republic in the twenty-first century, the authors approach the problem of war and genocide in the east with fewer inhibitions and a greater willingness to broach sensitive subjects. There is also more attention to the difficult questions about why, after all, normal German soldiers killed millions of Jews, Soviet POWs, and innocent Slavic civilians. Still, the highly empirical bent of German historical scholarship, for all its accomplishments, tends to leave the tough questions about the relationship between war and genocide to others.

Michael Mann takes up the challenge of explanation in his engaging and erudite study, *The Dark Side of Democracy*. Mann is a theorist in the most refreshing sense of the term; he enjoys trying out a series of explanations for mass killing and following them through in a variety of historical cases. His theorising is neither abstruse nor detached from a firm base in the history of the modern world. Moreover, he is more than ready to acknowledge that some cases fit his theories better than others. Mann views the case of the Nazis, for example, as outside the norm; genocide is planned and carried out by the organised fascist state, rather than being the miscarriage of a democratic movement or the result of the competition of rival national groups over power and territory, as it was in so many other cases. Using large data samples of Nazi perpetrators, Mann also contributes to our understanding of the sociology of mass murderers. While, no doubt, the 'ordinary man' of Christopher Browning's classic study often pulled the trigger on the eastern front, those who organised the killing were, in Mann's view, far from ordinary.[5] These were senior officials whose careers were nurtured in the violent history of the Nazi past. The Wehrmacht was also part of this history; Nazi party members were attracted to its ranks and rose quickly to leadership positions (pp. 272–3). Officers and soldiers were easy prey for Hitler's racist ideology and its murderous content. Mann rightly insists that mass murder on the eastern front needs to be seen within the context of the history of fascism in general and the Nazi movement in particular: its violent rise, its social reach, its racist ideology, its attraction to war and its prophecies of expansion and destruction.

Mann's comparative theorising, sophisticated and supple as it is, cannot answer the hard question of why it was that the German government and people authored and carried out the most vicious and uncompromising case of mass killing in modern history, the Holocaust. In trying to answer this question, scholars keep returning to ideas of the *Sonderweg*, that Germany was somehow handicapped by its stunted social and political development, which in turn brought the Third Reich to power. Daniel Goldhagen's famous *Hitler's Willing Executioners* was only the most recent of a line of determinist arguments that the Holocaust derived from historical German

Judenverfolgung in Ostgalizien, 1941–1944 (Munich: Oldenburg, 1996); and Karel C. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine under Nazi Rule* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

5 Browning, like Bartov, has spawned many interesting and important lines of research. Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993).

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antisemitism.[6] The supreme challenge for historians of Germany is to construct a pre-history of the Holocaust without resorting to determinist arguments and supra-historical generalisations.[7] One of the ways to deal with this question is to accept the fact that there were many pre-histories of Nazism and the Holocaust. The jigsaw puzzle of the German past is made up of a number of identifiable pieces, each of which plays a role in the story of the Third Reich. For example, in a brilliantly executed history of the imperial German army, Isabel Hull has made an exceptionally important contribution to this problem by singling out the institution of the German military and exploring the development of its historical culture of racism, hierarchy, control and total destruction.[8]

Hull begins her study with the fateful transformation of German military culture during the Franco-Prussian War and concludes it with German military campaigns during the First World War. Hull argues – in my view with some overstatement – that for the German military, more than for other European armies, war became an 'existential' quest, meaning that 'it contained no limits and tended to develop its capacity for violence and destruction to the extreme' (p. 126). Civilians under occupation became subhuman in the military's mania for order and control that knew no compromise. In the name of victory, the destruction of civilians became completely legitimate. In this context, the 'pursuit and annihilation' of the Herrero and Nama peoples of South West Africa in 1904–7 only deepened the military's proclivities to destroying its enemies by attacking their very sources of existence, their villages, their animals, their routes of escape. The 'entire people' became the enemy, 'not just the combatants' (p. 21). In other words, the German army already engaged in genocidal actions in the colonial context. Hull's rendition of the war in South West Africa is exceptional in the exquisite detail of her research and the forceful concision of her prose. This is true as well of her reconstruction of the brutal German occupation of Belgium and her analysis of the German doctrine of 'military necessity' when faced with the 1915 Armenian genocide perpetrated by its Turkish ally.

Although she says almost nothing about the Holocaust itself, Hull's book should be on the reading list of everyone who wants to understand the relationship between the German military campaign in the east and genocide. First of all, the continuities between the destructive ideology of military culture of the imperial army and the Wehrmacht are too deep and abiding to ignore. Even the associated practices of German military tradition – the ruthless destruction of enemies, the indifference to civilian casualties, the mentality of victory at any price, the apotheosis of the

6 Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (London: Little, Brown, 1996).

7 An excellent example of this complex approach is contained in Hans-Ulrich Wehler's *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte: Vom Beginn des Ersten Weltkriegs bis zur Gruendung der beiden deutschen Staaten, 1914–1949*, vol. 4 (Munich: Beck, 2003).

8 Michael Geyer anticipated Hull's general approach in his work. See, for example, his 'German Strategy in the Age of Machine Warfare, 1914–45,' in Peter Paret, ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 527–97.

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'*Endkampf*', the tendency to ignore issues of provisioning while striking for quick victory – reappear in the genocidal character of the Second World War in the east. Hull suggests at the conclusion of her study that the issue is not so much continuity within the military as the adaptation of this imperial military culture by National Socialism. 'The "cult of violence" that epitomised National Socialism was simply the reification of practices and behavior (that is, action templates) that had become severed from the old Imperial military culture. In the Third Reich they were easily harnessed for the ideological ends of even greater mass destruction and death' (p. 333).

Hull's work helps us to understand how the Nazi state and its vast armies could engage in mass murder on the eastern front. But the actual mass killing of civilians was neither predetermined by military culture nor initiated primarily by military generals. Hitler and the Nazis treated the eastern front as an apocalyptic racial war of elimination, something quite unlike the conflict in the west. Even before the launching of Operation Barbarossa, Hitler deliberately suspended the rules of war and instituted a series of four 'criminal' orders that targeted mythological 'Jewish-Bolsheviks' for elimination, suspended the jurisdiction of military courts over the soldiers' actions, called for unrelenting hardness and brutality in the fight against the Red Army, and insisted that the soldiers supply their needs from the land. The extent to which these orders, and the Nazi eliminationist ideology behind them, made inevitable the mass murder that followed is debatable. The optimistic Nazi scenario was a quick defeat of the Soviet Union in the late summer and early autumn of 1941 – like the lightning victory over France – and the implementation of the SS-devised *Generalplan Ost*, according to which Slavs and Jews were to be deported en masse beyond the Urals to Siberia and the far north, where, no doubt, many millions would die. Those who remained in the Nazi colonial realm of the east would be enslaved and starved. It is hard to argue, then, that a short and victorious war would have prevented genocide. In any case, what transpired was a long and barbarous conflict, one that destroyed the lives of millions of innocent civilians and set back civilisation in ways that are still hard to calculate.

Four of the German books under review, by Andrej Angrick, Klaus Jochen Arnold, Manfred Oldenburg and Christoph Rass, tell the detailed story of the German occupation of and mass killing in the east through military and police documents. All four explore the general idea that the barbarisation and brutalisation of the soldiers in the process of the conflict made them more willing to commit atrocities. All note the importance of the Nazi occupation of Poland in 1939–41 as a preliminary stage in the development of strategies of mass killing. All four talk about the increasing radicalisation during the campaign against the Red Army of both formal orders from the Wehrmacht hierarchy and the actual violence by soldiers and police. All four make it clear that there is every reason to include Wehrmacht officers and men in the crime of genocide, sometimes as accessories, sometimes as instigators. The SS and Einsatzgruppen were primarily responsible for the identification, rounding up, ghettoisation and mass murder of the Jews. But in each of these routinised stages of the anti-Jewish 'actions', the army, mostly under the guise of guaranteeing the

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'security' of its territory, also played an important part. From early autumn 1941 the victims included men, women and children, who by no stretch of even the Nazis' distorted imagination could be considered to fall under rubric of 'Bolshevik Jews', which had ostensibly justified the killing in July and August. By mid-1942, the mass deportation and killing of Jews spread far and wide across the European continent, the last stage of the 'final solution'. These German books confirm, as Michael Mann notes, that there was no 'smoking gun' of Hitler's orders to kill all of the Jews in the east (p. 210). But army units joined with the Einsatzgruppen to make sure that none of the Jews would survive. The killing of civilians was merciless, brutal and essentially without German opposition, either from the Wehrmacht hierarchy or from individuals. These books are guidebooks to a man-made hell.

A combined review cannot do justice to the arguments and scholarship represented by these works. Arnold, Oldenburg and Rass's volumes are hefty revised dissertations; Angrick's book on Einsatzgruppe D is a massive scholarly book about the killing in the south of Russia. They contain fascinating new material and are written with force and conviction, though all of them also go through the conventional, familiar and somewhat mind-numbing literature reviews and scholarly conventions that are characteristic of German published dissertations. It is no doubt fruitless to suggest that German scholars write with greater concision, with many fewer (and less dense) footnotes, and with greater attention to the reader's need for a well-crafted narrative.

In his provocative book Arnold asks the legitimate question, to what extent did Soviet policies and practices on the eastern front influence the orders and behaviour of the German officers and soldiers of the Wehrmacht? Enemies on the battlefield learn from each other and are influenced by each other. Yet Arnold's answers will surely be controversial and some are completely unconvincing. For example, he writes that 'the atrocities carried out by the Red Army in the beginning phases of the war exerted a great influence on the attitude of the troops and led to [German] excesses'. Wehrmacht soldiers troops were particularly 'embittered', he claims, by the shooting of their wounded in hospital beds and the 'horrible killing' of German medical workers and their patients (pp. 177–9). He suggests that the National Socialist propaganda about 'Asiatic Untermenschen' was 'confirmed' (his quotation marks) by the widespread knowledge of these Soviet atrocities (p. 180). He further opines that the atrocities committed by the NKVD against local political prisoners throughout the region on the eve of the Soviet retreat had a powerful radicalising effect on the officers and men of the Wehrmacht, convincing them of the perfidy of the Bolshevik enemy. 'Prejudices [about the Bolshevik commissars] and actuality correlated', states Arnold, and this created a 'powerful mixture' within the Wehrmacht (p. 210).[9]

In Arnold's view, then, almost any action taken by Stalin and the Red Army leadership to defend their country served as a provocation for German radicalisation. The Soviet 'scorched earth' policy provoked the Wehrmacht, as did the successful

9 Here and elsewhere in his book, Arnold argues in particular with Gerlach's powerfully documented presentation of the Nazis' premeditated eliminationist occupation policy in Belorussia. See Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Mord*, 44–81.

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destruction of transport and bridges. The German troops had trouble getting reinforcements and supplies from the homeland. They were forced, in Arnold's view, to starve the big cities to feed themselves. In this scenario, those Soviet POWs who could not work would have to die (p. 323). The partisans contributed to the brutalisation of the Wehrmacht because of their many successes behind the lines. In Arnold's view, the intensification of the anti-partisan campaign forced German soldiers to become more involved in the Jewish 'actions', because Jews and partisans were deemed by the Nazis to be one and the same (p. 456). The successful Soviet defence of Moscow, the hardness of the Russian winter and the bitter defiance of Soviet troops physically and psychologically exhausted the Wehrmacht commanders, contributing to their radicalisation (p. 236). Arnold's basic story that there was a 'reciprocal brutalisation' between Wehrmacht and the Red Army depredations captures an important aspect of the cataclysmic war in the east (p. 444). But it also misses a crucial point. The Germans attacked and occupied Soviet territory. One cannot argue that this was a just war. Therefore the invaders are ultimately to blame for the brutality of the conflict, not the defenders.

Arnold also makes some questionable assertions about the Wehrmacht's attitudes towards and role in the killing of Jews. In contrast to the generally welcoming local Belorussians, he states, the Jews' attitude towards the Germans was 'mistrustful' and they fled at the first opportunity, therefore exacerbating the Wehrmacht's sense that the Jews were enemies (p. 504). Because Jews (quite understandably) fled the Germans to the surrounding forests and swamps, they were also identified by the Germans as 'the pioneers of the partisan movement' (p. 505). That local populations – Ukrainians, Belorussians, Poles, Lithuanians and others – so enthusiastically engaged in pogroms against the Jews also, says Arnold, contributed to the antisemitism of the Wehrmacht soldiers, encouraging some army units to join in the killing with the Einsatzgruppen and pogromists. But the Wehrmacht as an organisation, he concludes, did not engage in a *Vernichtungskrieg* (war of elimination) against civilians and Soviet POWs (p. 529).

Manfred Oldenburg's study of the occupation policies of the 11th and 17th Armies in the south of the Soviet Union is much less controversial on these issues. He follows these armies east into the Crimea and then the Caucasus, tracing their attempts to find support among the local populations, especially Crimean Tatars and North Caucasian peoples, while carrying out their orders to destroy the Jews and other designated targets in the region. This is much less a story of the brutalisation of soldiers caused by the violence and the brutish determination of the opponent, as one of following orders and doing one's job in the face of the need for food and 'security', on the one hand, and the ideological, antisemitic predispositions of their military leaders, including the commander of the 11th Army, General Erich von Manstein, on the other. Sometimes, as in Donetsk, security considerations meant that the local population needed to be fed. At other times, as in the starvation of Simferopol, the Wehrmacht judged that masses of local people would have to die in order to feed the army's own soldiers and workers. But the need to feed soldiers of the occupation in the end tended to undermine the Wehrmacht's attempts to recruit local

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populations, even those most sympathetic to the Third Reich.[10] As Oldenburg notes, 'The [11th and 17th] armies had to systematically plunder the conquered regions ... in order to rescue their troops from starvation' (p. 324).

Oldenbourg generally supports the conclusions of recent Holocaust scholarship that the army leadership adopted the *Feindbild* (enemy image) of the Jews without question or contradiction and was 'ready to support logistically and with personnel' the genocidal actions of the Einsatzgruppen (p. 320). More than that, the Einsatzgruppen received all the help they asked for in some actions, like the implementation of the 'final solution' in the Crimea, which was fully supported by von Manstein and the 11th Army commanders in November and December 1941. In the Donetsk region, as well, the 17th Army took part 'systematically in the pursuit and murder of the Jews'. Their commander, General Hermann Hoth, made it clear that the 'elimination [*Ausrottung*] of the Jews ... is a commandment of [our] self-preservation' (p. 321). Oldenburg relates some cases where soldiers and police asked to be excused from the mass executions of Jews (the execution of ninety-eight 'mountain Jews' in Shaumian, for example). Here, as in all other cases we know of, says Oldenburg, no soldier or SS man was executed for refusing to participate (pp. 221–2).[11] However, as one soldier speaking for millions put it in a postwar trial, 'One did what was ordered' (p. 224).

Andrej Angrick's 800-page study of Einsatzgruppe D traces roughly the same geographical route east as Oldenburg's about the 11th and 17th Armies. He starts earlier, with the deployment of the SS group to the German military mission in Romania and follows it through southern Ukraine, the Crimea, Don, Kuban, Caucasus and Caspian until its break-up in May 1943 in the Pripet marshes bordering Ukraine and Belorussia. The author asks how a relatively small group of police and SS men, 600 to start with and not all that many more at its height, could destroy so many hundreds of thousands of lives within its two-year history. (All four Einsatzgruppen had no more than 3,500–4,000 men altogether on the eve of Barbarossa.) The easy answer is that the Einsatzgruppen were empowered by Hitler and Himmler to undertake the Nazi holy mission of murdering the Jews and destroying the ability of the native Russian and Ukrainian populations to resist Nazi occupation. In this mission, as Oldenburg and Arnold also point out, it was aided and abetted by the Wehrmacht. The hard answer and the real answer, Angrick maintains, is to be found in the detailed interaction of SS and police units, army detachments and local population in every scene of mass murder across the south of the Soviet Union. Every case was different, depending on the personalities involved, the priorities of the German units and the readiness of the local population to collaborate.

10 This problem was first explored by Alexander Dallin in his classic, and in many ways still unsurpassed, history of the occupation, *German Rule in Russia, 1941–1945: A Study of Occupation Policies*, 2nd rev. edn (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1981). Dallin's study was first published in 1957.

11 Karel Berkhoff concurs: 'there is no evidence that any German in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, or anywhere else in the "East," ever lost his life for refusing to carry them out [the orders to kill]'. *Harvest of Despair*, 306.

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In contrast to Arnold, Angrick underlines the fact that Wehrmacht soldiers sometimes enjoyed participating in, and also watching and photographing, the murder of Jews. Their superiors interceded periodically, not because they worried about the fate of the Jews, but because they were concerned about maintaining discipline among their men. They therefore strictly forbade them from engaging in the 'voluntary participation in executions' (p. 229). When ordered, however, army units rounded up and sometimes massacred Jews. As Oldenburg also notes, General von Manstein believed in the mission of killing the 'Jewish Bolsheviks', meaning for him all the Jews, and this message was spread throughout the 11th Army units. Angrick writes, 'The troops therefore knew what their CO [von Manstein] thought and what they were to do' (p. 338). Angrick does not adhere to the 'brutalisation' thesis that the eliminationist activities of the Wehrmacht related to the duration and strains of the conflict. Rather, the 'final solution' was a seamless unfolding of a murderous set of events that were not planned, but were inherent in the contingent playing out of the war (pp. 558–9).

Angrick also makes a strong case for including in his study the individual hopes and personalities of the mostly Jewish victims of Nazi mass murder. He is only partly successful in doing so. Without Hebrew and Yiddish, not to mention Russian sources, it is very hard for him to reconstruct the worldview of the victims. Still, the fact that one puts down the book with vivid images of individual Jewish lives destroyed means that the author has accomplished part of his goal. The members of Einsatzgruppe D – the lawyers, the specialists, the killers – are starkly portrayed in his study, including photographs, sometimes taken of them together with their wives. The final chapter of the book includes a thoroughgoing analysis of those who stood trial after the war, those who did not, and those who became, at least for a while, solid citizens of the Bundesrepublik. The central point of his analysis is well documented; this was a very diverse lot with varied backgrounds, who shared 'cold-blooded careerist aims' and a readiness to follow and give murderous orders (p. 450).

Among the many shorter histories that are included in Angrick's volume is that of the gassing van (*Gaswagen*), which was used to kill Jews along the path of Einsatzgruppe D in the south. In witnessing the shooting of a group of Jewish men in Minsk on 15 August 1941, Himmler apparently concluded that this was far too messy a business for his troops to withstand psychologically. Many seemed near breakdown from the 'stress' of the ongoing mass murder, at the beginning 'just' of Jewish males. Supposedly Himmler himself felt sick at the sight. In any case, Himmler came to the conclusion that one could not simply shoot all the Jews who were doomed to destruction and therefore ordered his subordinates to come up with a better and cleaner alternative. A series of experiments were conducted on Jews and Soviet POWs with a variety of means to kill more effectively and cleanly. Initially, there was a preference for using explosives in enclosed constructions. But that proved even messier and more uncertain than shooting. There was the idea of using gas in stationary enclosures. But that, too, at least for the moment, was rejected. The gassing van proved ideal. It had been used earlier to murder the mentally handicapped until the practice was ceased because of public pressure. Now it could be used by

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Einsatzgruppe D (and the others) as the unit made its way east to accomplish its primary task, the murder of the Jews. As described by Angrick, the 'action' followed an evil repetitive pattern. The Jews were rounded up by the Einsatzgruppe and its helpmates from the army and local population. The victims were stripped of their clothes and valuables. Then they were piled into the vans; the door was sealed; the exhaust pipe was fitted to the bottom of the van; and the motor was turned out. After several minutes, the Jews were killed by carbon monoxide poisoning. The van was driven to waiting trenches. The bodies – often twisted together into grotesque positions – were tossed into mass graves. The vans returned for another 'load' (pp. 361–85).

Many of the same questions posed by the Angrick, Arnold, and Oldenburg books are asked in a slightly different way by Christoph Rass in his impressive study of rank-and-file soldiers in the 253rd Infantry Division who served on the eastern front from Barbarossa to the end of the war. They were mostly a mixed bag of 'ordinary men', in terms of their social background, from Rhineland-Westphalia. But in line with Michael Mann's analysis, Rass notes that they were fully inculcated into Nazi ideology, even if they were not necessarily party members themselves. This army group experienced it all, from the rush of easy victory in the initial offensive through Lithuania and Latvia to serious losses in the battle of Velikie Luki. The soldiers marched through the mud and snow to outskirts of Moscow in the fall of 1941. They lived through the fierce Soviet resistance during the bitterly cold winter of 1941–2, and took irreplaceable casualties in the territory of Rzhevsk in winter 1942. The division was reconstituted in July 1943, when its remnants were transported to the Orel front under the 4th Army. The soldiers of the 253rd fought the hopeless battle to stabilise the front in western Belorussia and retreated with the rest of the Wehrmacht through Poland. They committed war crimes and killed innocent civilians. Most serious in this connection was their involvement in the events in Osarishchi (south of Bobruisk) in March 1944, when more than 45,000 supposedly 'superfluous' men, women and children – those unable to work – were driven out of their homes into three detention camps (pp. 386–97). There were no housing or sanitary facilities for the internees. They died by the thousand of hunger and typhus. Many were transported in unheated railway trucks; others were simply killed when they refused to move or fell behind when marched in columns to the railheads and camps.

Rass is much more careful than Arnold about attributing the brutality of Wehrmacht soldiers to the harsh actions of the Red Army. Instead of Soviet atrocities instigating the brutalisation of Wehrmacht soldiers, he writes that 'the instrumentalisation of these kind of events by the Wehrmacht served as a confirmation of their own propaganda' (p. 334, n. 16). Given the fact that there was very little dissension from basic Nazi precepts in the first place, it was unlikely that the soldiers would protest against killing POWs or rounding up Jews for the Einsatzgruppen. Rass also observes that there was no notable radicalisation of the 253rd Division as a consequence of heavy losses in the first year of the war (p. 406). The division maintained its social coherence even after the setbacks of 1942; its officers were able to train and indoctrinate the reinforcements called up to replace the dead. Rass's

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history resonates with Hull's analysis of the exceptionally destructive military culture of the German army. He writes in the conclusion, 'This analysis of the war practices of a *completely normal infantry division* makes clear that it is impossible to distinguish between conventional war-making on the front and a war of destruction in the rear' (p. 410, emphasis in original). Although soldiers of the division played no more than a peripheral role in the actual mass murder of the Jews, they did kill POWs, murder civilians and engage in the widespread exploitation of the land and peoples of the east. As Rass indicates, when they could determine their own actions they often engaged in 'brutal, inhuman and criminal deeds' for their own individual reasons (p. 411).

The final two scholarly monographs for review, Ben Shepherd's *War in the Wild East* and Birgit Beck's *Wehrmacht und sexuelle Gewalt* share several characteristics. They both tell very important stories associated with the war in the east: in Shepard's case the fierce struggle between the Wehrmacht and the Soviet partisans, and in Beck's the sexual crimes carried out by Wehrmacht soldiers against women and girls in the east. The confrontation with the partisans not only significantly influenced the outcome of the war, but it infiltrated every aspect of the occupation, from accelerating the mass murder of the Jews to making the Wehrmacht's job of pacifying occupied territory extremely difficult. Beck's analysis of the military trials against perpetrators of rape, while not significant to the outcome of the war, reveals important aspects of the violent behaviour of individual soldiers. Both books also share the weakness of having incomplete sources for the stories they want to tell. Shepherd – like all of the authors here who write about the eastern front – cannot use Russian sources. This is particularly problematic in trying to reconstruct the war between the Nazis and the partisans. Beck's problem is that military trials against perpetrators of sexual crimes in the east are very few and far between; the materials that are there tend to derive from trials in France and elsewhere in the west. There was much less interest in bringing soldiers to court on the eastern front, although, interestingly, local women often reported the assaults to the authorities. There were also very few memoirs or *Feldpostbriefen* (field letters) that referred to sexual violence and crimes in the east.

Like several of the books reviewed above, Shepherd's book is a revised dissertation that follows soldiers in a single Wehrmacht unit, in this case field officers of the 221st Security Division, operating mostly in what is today Belarus between 1941 and 1943. In contrast to the big German books, Shepherd's volume is mercifully slim, focused and a 'good read'. It will be particularly useful for the university classroom. His conclusions, however, will not be surprising to those who have reviewed the recent literature on the Wehrmacht. An escalating brutality demonstrated by the 221st against local civilians derived from its increasingly stretched circumstances and the growing threat of the enemy. Some officers whose careers he examines behaved with extreme ruthlessness when faced with partisan threats. Others, more reasonably, tried to cultivate friends among the local population and construct fortified 'strategic hamlets' of locals who were willing to collaborate with the Germans (p. 172). The tension between the goals of crushing partisan opposition and winning the adherence of the Belorussian population with 'constructive engagement' doomed the entire

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effort to failure, especially as the war started to go bad for the Germans further east (p. 228). In summer and autumn 1941 the brutality of the anti-partisan campaign far outweighed the real threat. Shepherd attributes this to the German military's 'singularly brutal tradition of anti-guerrilla warfare', going back to the nineteenth century (pp. 42–3, 224). In this and other ways, Shepherd reinforces the arguments made by Hull.

Beck uses military justice records to address a number of questions about Wehrmacht sexual violence on the eastern front. She is appropriately restrained in trying to answer the most fundamental. We cannot really know just how much sexual violence took place in the occupied areas of the Soviet Union because so little was reported by soldiers and victims, recorded by officers or punished by superiors. We also know too little about the actual incidents of rape to support the thesis, sometimes argued by historians, that the Wehrmacht used sexual violence as a tool of war or as a mean to punish the local population. There may be important Russian sources on these subjects, but Beck is, in any case, unable to use them. We know that the Wehrmacht instituted bordellos in the occupied territories and forced local women – Poles, Russians, Ukrainians and others (but not Jews) – to serve the sexual 'needs' of their soldiers. We also know from the military justice records that there were indeed cases of 'crimes against morality', primarily rape, brought before the tribunals. But this was a relatively small number (some five thousand) out of a total of 1.5 million cases, most of which had to do with various forms of indiscipline (pp. 326–7). Strikingly, Beck reports that cases of 'rape murder', so common in the Soviet taking of Berlin or in the 1937 Nanjing massacre, were cited only twice in the several hundred cases of rape she examined.

Perhaps Beck's most interesting finding is that the Wehrmacht's military justice system tried rape cases at all. In preparation for Barbarossa and the murderous occupation, Wehrmacht soldiers were explicitly released from judicial responsibility for any acts committed against the civilian population by the 'criminal order' of 13 May 1941. Nevertheless, some soldiers were tried in cases where they 'severely injured the image of the Wehrmacht in the eyes of the civilian population' (p. 251). The military authorities also tried soldiers who raped when they obviously broke discipline to do so, in the middle of an operation, or when assigned to accomplish a particular task. The actual fate of the women involved was of little interest to the military courts. There seemed to be no particular opprobrium attached to raping a Russian woman; '*Rassenschande*' (racial defilement) played no role in the cases studied by Beck (p. 277). Beck also notes that there is no reason to believe that Jewish women were protected from rape by their alleged racial inferiority. All in all, one is left with the impression of deep, even lunatic, contradictions within the military justice system. There could be long and complicated cases of rape brought against individual soldiers for injuring the image of the Wehrmacht, while German soldiers supervised the ghastly deaths of 3 million Soviet POWs, saw to the starvation of Kiev and Donetsk in 1942–3, and participated in the shooting of Jews at will.

At this point I should like to turn the reader's attention to two substantial volumes, roughly 1,000 pages each, put out by the pioneers of Wehrmacht historiography in

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Germany, the Military History Office. Jörg Echternkamp should be commended for mastering the complicated task of organising the volumes and editing the long and interesting articles contained in them. The scholarship in these volumes is of unusually high quality. Most of the articles are written by experienced historians and are broadly interpretive in their ambitions. The volumes deserve to be read and consulted in full; this essay will review only those contributions that bear directly on the subject of war and genocide. In his lead article for volume 9/1, Echternkamp examines the relationship between German society at home and the fighting on the front ('Im Kampf an der inneren und äusseren Front: Grundzüge der deutschen Gesellschaft im Zweiten Weltkrieg', pp. 1–94). He summarises the state of the historiography on the war and genocide question as follows: 'Members of the military . . . not only knew about the genocide, but co-operated with the perpetrators; individual units of the army and the Waffen-SS directly took part in genocidal actions' (p. 58). The Wehrmacht's brutal occupation policies and its participation in the mass murder of POWs led to the conclusion that the army as an institution was fully complicit in genocide.

One of the foremost historians of the Wehrmacht, Jürgen Förster, addresses the problem of the intellectual backdrop of changing Wehrmacht strategy and tactics during the war ('Geistige Kriegführung in Deutschland 1919 bis 1945', vol. 9/1, pp. 469–640). The brutality of the war in the east was due to a pronounced escalation of ideological motivations for the Wehrmacht's actions. The need for an eliminationist campaign against the Judeo-Bolsheviks was fully inculcated into the officers' corps before the launching of Barbarossa. The 'criminal orders' were only part of the story. Once the war began, sinister propaganda materials about Jews and Bolsheviks – their hateful faces, ugly noses and lying eyes – infiltrated every branch of the military. Förster notes, however, like Arnold, that Stalin's own wartime tactics exacerbated the brutality of the conflict (p. 519). As several Wehrmacht generals observed, this would be a war that would end in a different way from that in France. When the initial hopes for a victorious Blitzkrieg faded in early 1942, Hitler was in no way willing to let up on his ambitions for the east. His 'uncompromising position', Förster writes, 'was primarily ideological, and only secondarily strategically founded' (p. 539). Once Barbarossa failed, Hitler was convinced that the worldwide struggle against the 'Jewish-capitalist-Bolshevik world' could only be won if the Third Reich seized the iron mines of Donetsk and the petroleum of the Caucasus (p. 539).

With Stalingrad, everything changed; the troops' confidence in victory faded; they began to harbour deep doubts that their sacrifices were worthwhile. Even the SS, Förster writes, 'noted with envy how successfully schooled the Russian soldiers were in ideological matters'. The Nazis attributed the Russians' 'unheard of ability to resist' to this deeply inculcated set of beliefs (p. 571). Even Goebbels noted in his diaries that the Wehrmacht needed 'National Socialist political commissars'. The more hopeless the outcome of the war, the more determined were the Nazi leaders to create a 'National Socialist high command' of the Wehrmacht. After the unsuccessful assassination attempt of 20 July 1944, the Nazis sought to create a 'National Socialist army' (pp. 590, 621). It is difficult to know, Förster concludes, whether this intensified

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Nazi campaign to ideologise the army and its leadership – combined with repressive measures – kept the Wehrmacht fighting much longer than it otherwise might have. Separating Nazi convictions from the individual soldier's commitment to defend '*Heimat* and *Vaterland*' is not all that easy (p. 639). This analytical problem, Förster wisely concludes, will keep historians arguing for a long time to come about the reasons why the Wehrmacht fought so persistently in the east long after the war was lost.

Volume 9/1 is dedicated to themes having to do with 'Politicisation, Destruction, Survival', Volume 9/2 to 'Exploitation, Interpretations, Exclusion'. Particularly relevant to the theme of war and genocide in the east is Rüdiger Overmans's article about the POW policy of the Third Reich ('Die Kriegsgefangenenpolitik des Deutschen Reiches 1939–1945,' vol. 9/2, pp. 729–877). At Nuremberg, Wehrmacht treatment of POWs was a substantial part of the indictment against the German generals for war crimes. Hitler rejected attempts by the Red Cross to negotiate a convention about POWs with the Soviets. He also purposely disseminated among Wehrmacht soldiers a highly exaggerated picture of the extent of Soviet cruelty against German prisoners. As a result, many soldiers committed suicide on the eastern front before allowing themselves to be captured (p. 800). On the Soviet side, of course, Stalin made it clear 'that the Soviet soldier was not taken prisoner, but rather gave himself up to imprisonment' (p. 801). Abandoned by their own government and in the hands of the racist and indifferent Wehrmacht, the 3.35 million Soviet prisoners (December 1941) had good reason to fear for their lives. From September on, when their prewar physical constitutions began to give out, 1–2.5 per cent of them died every day of hunger, disease and exposure. Overmans describes the scenes of 'life' in the huge camps, surrounded by barbed wire, with no shelter or food. Every edible insect, root, blade of grass and twig was gone. Cannibalism was a daily affair; the guards would shoot the perpetrators if they could be found. 'Yesterday six of these cannibals were caught fresh from their deed and shot; five more were captured today and will be shot tomorrow' (p. 808). Responsible Wehrmacht officers rejected pleas from some officials to help: those POWs who could not work would be starved. This situation only changed in spring 1942, when Soviet POWs were seen as a potential source of forced labour for the Reich and when the Nazi leadership concluded that Soviet soldiers fought as hard as they did because they knew the fate of their comrades in German hands.

By then, however, it was too late for the vast majority of the 3.3 million, who died in the camps. This, of course, does not include those Jewish and 'commissar' POWs, some 100,000 altogether, who were seized by the Einsatzgruppen in the camps and transported to their deaths. (The Wehrmacht more or less gave their SS colleagues free rein in the camps.) Altogether, states Overmans, of the roughly 5.5 million Soviet troops who became prisoners of the Wehrmacht during the Second World War, only a little over half survived (p. 820). This was a crime of deliberate neglect of and indifference to starvation, exposure and disease. In Overmans's view, which contrasts with some of the historiography, this was neither planned by Hitler nor by the Wehrmacht authorities. The death of the Soviet POWs in the Wehrmacht's

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hands was a war crime of enormous proportions, but it was not genocide. It was also not the result of the increasing barbarisation of the war, Overmans notes, because the worst phase was the initial one, September to December 1941 (p. 874).

In his contribution, Bernard Chiari focuses on the issue of the Wehrmacht's relations with the many 'nations' the army encountered in its occupation of the Soviet Union ('Grenzen deutscher Herrschaft: Voraussetzungen und Folgen der Besatzung in der Sowjetunion,' 9/2, pp. 877–977). After an interesting discussion of the crucial interwar background to ethnic relations during the wartime German occupation of eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the author takes the reader on a 'tour' of the German Reich in the east, from the Baltic to the Caucasus, complete with excellent maps. The fundamental question he addresses is that of collaboration and interaction between occupier and occupied. It is certainly the case that the Germans could not have occupied such a huge stretch of territory, and policed and kept order among a population of 55 million people, without the co-operation of vast numbers of the local population (p. 969).[12] Most scholars also believe that it would have been impossible for the Nazis to carry out the final solution with such relative ease without the participation of local police, informers and executioners. The extent of collaboration depended on the neighbourhood and circumstances. Sometimes Nazi ideology and SS policy decisions played a prominent role. Collaboration was more extensive in the Caucasus, the Baltic and the Crimea (among Tatars) than in Russia proper. Especially at the beginning, collaboration was widespread in western Ukraine and much less in eastern Ukraine.

Befitting the recent historiography of the Second World War in Europe, Chiara sees great complexity in the collaboration story, especially since most civilians did what was necessary to survive under extremely difficult circumstances.[13] 'The participation of the local population in the worst mass crimes of the Germans should not obscure our view of the diverse shades of co-operation' (p. 968). There were areas of severe Wehrmacht oppression and exploitation, where the Russians and Ukrainians bitterly hated the German presence and did everything they could to give succour to the partisan cause. There were also areas in which civilians lived in relative peace and quiet, where Wehrmacht soldiers were housed idyllically in simple peasant homes and were looked after by local women, who did the cooking and cleaning. The norm was somewhere in between.

The Germans levelled the western lands of the Soviet Union and decimated the Soviet population. Twenty-seven million Soviet citizens lost their lives during the war begun by the Nazis, the vast majority on the eastern front and in German-occupied territories. The SS and Wehrmacht supervised the 'final solution' in the east, killing some 1.5 million Jews in former Soviet territory. In the 'Bolshevik-Jew',

12 Chiara notes that 3.3 million German soldiers (87 per cent of the army) stood on the eastern front at the beginning of Barbarossa, 100,000 of whom were designated for security in the rear. In addition there were some 30,000 military and civilian functionaries in the fully developed occupation administration. Ibid., p. 969.

13 See Istvan Deak, Jan T. Gross and Tony Judt, eds., *The Politics of Retribution in Europe: The Second World War and its Aftermath* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

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the Nazis created a mythological opponent so thoroughly dehumanised that killing, starving and brutalising were its only just fate. That millions of Soviet POWs died under dire circumstances was part of this same story. The Nazis also successfully unleashed nationalist passions of the occupied peoples, which in turn spawned wars within the war and even more killing and destruction. Modern warfare had reached the pinnacle of destructiveness due only in part to its ability to organise formidable opposing armies with technologically sophisticated weapons of destruction.

The impressive historiography of the Wehrmacht on the eastern front described above generally does not try to separate analytically the killing in the east from the history of genocide. We know that there were deliberate plans to murder 'Bolshevik-Jews' on the eve of Operation Barbarossa and to treat the Soviet Union as a vast swamp filled with insidious enemies who had to be eliminated. We know from Isabel Hull's work that the German military had an ongoing cultural bias towards complete destruction and annihilation of its enemies. We know, too, from the works of Michael Mann, Andrej Angrick and Christoph Rass, among others, that German soldiers and officers were fully inculcated with Nazi ideology. There were few 'ordinary men' among them; or, better, ordinary German soldiers tended to have strong Nazi views, even if they were not Nazis themselves. Just how much the circumstances of war – the hardships of the late autumn and winter, the fighting spirit of the Soviets, the difficulty in supply and transport, the danger of Soviet partisans and so on – brutalised German fighting men and made them more likely to commit war crimes and genocide, as argued by Arnold and reinforced to some extent by Förster, is hard to document. But there were enough Wehrmacht generals who shared the criminal predispositions of the Einsatzgruppen to insure the mass murder of the Jews, the starvation of Soviet POWs and the harsh subjugation of the Slavic peoples of the Soviet Union. From the works examined in this essay, the sheer magnitude of the war crimes in the east – including the 'crime of crimes', genocide – continues to weigh on the conscience of Germans and to frustrate the ability of scholars in Germany and around the world to explain what happened.

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