

A Core Competency look at the “Complexity” and “Confusion” of the Holocaust by Bullet Killers: Two Primary Sources investigating the Einsatzgruppen in the Soviet Union, August 1941

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At the beginning of Genocide 12, I provide students with an essential focus question: *How and why did the Holocaust and subsequent genocides occur?* This provides students with a lens through which to study the Holocaust. Whether it is the study of the Holocaust or other genocides, I require students to move beyond the mere regurgitation of facts and dates, and I teach in a way that debunks any notion that genocides "just happen". A six stage pyramid of escalation, titled a *Pyramid of Hate*, is used as a framework to demonstrate the progression, players, decisions, similarities, differences, and uniqueness of various genocides. *The Pyramid of Hate* serves two purposes: to show the “evolution” and progression towards mass murder and genocide; and to recognize the multitude of individual players needed in order to carry out a Holocaust. Studying the Holocaust and genocide by referencing an escalating pyramid of hate is an attempt to address the multiple perspectives of studying this discipline. Within this pyramid the Einsatzgruppen is taught in what I refer to as stage four, “The Holocaust By Bullets.”

Rather than guide students toward single answer assessments that stifle independent thought and perspective, the nature of these two Einsatzgruppen document tasks focus on the core competencies of communication, thinking, and personal and social responsibility. Students are afforded the freedom to come up with their own justifications and rationalizations for perceived inferences / conclusions and observations / evidences in relation to the actions of the Einsatzgruppen. They do so based on previous taught facts, history, and events of both the Holocaust and the Einsatzgruppen between 1933 and 1941. This primary source analysis engages students in critical thinking, has them make judgements, interpretations, decisions, justifications, and analyses of documentation.

The two primary source documents that students analyze are titled “If the victims didn’t do as they were told...” and “Problems during mass shootings.” These documents, from the field of Einsatzgruppen operations, are an Affidavit of Otto Ohlendorf, Head of Einsatzgruppe D, and a report submitted by Wehrmachtoberpfarrer Kornmann, protest divisional chaplain of the 295th infantry, August 21st, 1941.⁷⁵ At the first stage of analysis, students are instructed to read the documents on their own, taking notes, highlighting, and underlying key aspects directly on the handout. Once they have gone through a first read, a classroom discussion ensues that has the teacher, with the students’ insights, go through the document word for word, line by line. Before engaging in this aspect, they are afforded a look at past teacher and student exemplars of what have been previously analyzed. The evidence documents are marked up and thoroughly analyzed. Students are somewhat surprised with the amount of time it

⁷⁵ E. Klee, W. Dressen, & V. Reiss eds., *The Good Old Days: The Holocaust as seen by Its Perpetrators and Bystanders* (William S. Konecky Associates; Reprint edition, 1997).

takes to go through each document – there is a plethora of information: details, insights, and thoughts that are sparked and extracted from almost every line of each the primary documents.

At the conclusion of this students are introduced to how to draw out inferences / conclusions and observations / evidences from the texts. The first part of the assignment’s instructions read as follows:

- You are to make two inferences / conclusions about the Einsatzgruppen from each source
- Your two inferences / conclusions are summary statements based on observations from the evidence; the conclusion you reach should be based on an observation(s) that you made from the evidence
- An inference is what you conclude, based on what you observed in the specific document, they need to be plausible
- Several inferences can be made from the same subheadings, there is not one right answer, but multiple plausible answers
- These are summary statements (identifications)

The second part of the assignment reads:

- Observations / Evidences provide detailed, supporting evidence for your inferences
- Observations are factual observations that support an inference; proof, data, quotes, words taken from the source itself
- Observations determine and support the validity of your inference
- Observations are your reason for believing something; why you came up with your conclusion or inference
- These are explanations to back up your inferences / conclusions

See attached primary source documents, teacher’s notes for analyzing the texts, and the final outcome from students after the exercise. In sum, the exercise allows students to read primary sources critically and draw conclusions from these texts. Genocide 12 is a demanding course that explores and goes beyond single dimensional explanations for how and why genocides happen and what they look like. This task proves to be very insightful into individual students’ abilities, understandings, and the processing of the role played by the Einsatzgruppen in the totality of the Holocausts.

1. Primary Source: “If the victims didn’t do as they were told...”

The Einsatzgruppen and Einsatzkommandos were led by personnel from the Gestapo, the SD or the Kriminalpolizei. Additional men were recruited from the Ordnungspolizei and the Waffen-SS. Einsatzgruppe D consisted of some 400 to 500 men and had about 170 vehicles at its disposal. When the German army advanced into Russia I was the commander of Einsatzgruppe D into the southern sector and during the year that it was under my command it liquidated about 90,000 men, women and children. The majority of those liquidated were Jews but there were also some Communist officials amongst them. For the purpose of carrying out this extermination programme the Einsatzgruppen were subdivided into Einsatzkommandos and these Einsatzkommandos were subdivided into smaller units: the so-called Sonderkommandos and Teilkommandos. Generally the smaller units were commanded by members of the SD, the Gestapo or the Kriminalpolizei.... In Einsatzgruppe D I never sanctioned shootings by individuals. I always gave orders for several people to shoot simultaneously, in order to avoid any individual having to take direct, personal responsibility.⁷⁶

I would also like to mention that as a result of the considerable psychological pressures, there were numerous men who were no longer capable of conducting executions and who thus had to be

⁷⁶ ‘If the victims didn’t do as they were told...’ Problems during mass shootings Affidavit of Otto Ohlendorf, Head of Einsatzgruppe D; in *The Good Old Days*, 60.

replaced by other men. On the other hand, there were others who could not get enough of them and often reported to these executions voluntarily.

Gustave Fix, member of Sonderkommando 6

2. Primary Source: “Problems during mass shootings”

Wehrmachtoberpfarrer Kornmann, O.U.
Protest Divisional Chaplain
to 295th Infantry Division
21 August 1941

I submit the following report to 295th Infantry Division:

Yesterday (20 August) towards 1500 hours two military chaplains from a military hospital unit in this area came to see me and the Division’s Catholic Military Chaplain and reported to us that nearby, some 500 m away, about 80 to 90 children from babies to school-age were being held in the upper story of a house. The children could be heard from a long way off shouting and crying and as they had already been there 24 hours, the soldiers quartered in the neighboring houses were being sorely disturbed at night. The two military chaplains had been made aware of the presence of the children by the soldiers themselves. Together with the two chaplains and my Catholic colleague, I went to the house in question and saw the children lying and sitting about in two small rooms. They were partly lying in their own filth, there was not a single drop of drinking water and the children were suffering greatly due to the heat. A man from the Ukrainian militia was standing guard downstairs. We learned from him that these were Jew children whose parents had been executed. There was one group of German soldiers standing at the watch post and another at the corner of the house. Some of them were talking agitatedly about what they had heard and seen.

As I considered it highly undesirable that such things should take place in full view of the public eye I hereby submit this report. The two military chaplains were from Military Hospital Unit 4/607 and were named Wilczek (Protestant) and Tewes (Catholic).

F.d.R.

Kornmann

Signed: signature Wehrmachtoberpfarrer
Lieutenant and 0.1 (1.Ordonanzoffizier)⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Report by Wehrmachtoberpfarrer Kornmann in *The Good Old Days*, 144.

Problems during mass shootings & report by Wehrmachtoberpfarrer Kornmann

Question: The Einsatzgruppen killers, what was their mindset?

Aspects of daily life

working conditions

freedoms

other

Document #		Inferences/conclusions	Observations/Evidence

③ Secret - ④ cost

23

24 Einsatzgruppen
no defendants

22 tried

① Inefficient
② Time consuming
③ Psychological effect on the "killers"
Killings hard to hide from general population
Russian Jews

1. 'If the victims didn't do as they were told ...'

Problems during mass shootings: method of extermination
Identity Einsatzgruppen "problems": by the Einsatzgruppen

(November)

Indicting himself

How many groups?

admission

ultimately guilty & responsible for?

bureaucratic & purposeful systematic

why?

unrepentant leader (head in charge)
Affidavit of Otto Ohlendorf, Head of Einsatzgruppe D:
Father of S: Jews will suffer = amalgamation of previous killers

The Einsatzgruppen and Einsatzkommandos were led by personnel from the Gestapo, the SD or the Kriminalpolizei. Additional men were recruited from the Ordnungspolizei and the Waffen-SS. Einsatzgruppe D consisted of some 400 to 500 men and had about 170 vehicles at its disposal. When the German army advanced into Russia I was the commander of Einsatzgruppe D in the southern sector and during the year that it was under my command it liquidated about 90,000 men, women and children. The majority of those liquidated were Jews but there were also some Communist officials amongst them. For the purpose of carrying out this extermination programme the Einsatzgruppen were subdivided into Einsatzkommandos and these Einsatzkommandos subdivided into smaller units: the so-called Sonderkommandos and Teilkommandos. Generally the smaller units were commanded by members of the SD, the Gestapo or the Kriminalpolizei. ... In Einsatzgruppe D I never sanctioned shootings by individuals. I always gave orders for several people to shoot simultaneously, in order to avoid any individual having to take direct, personal responsibility.

→ Otto Ohlendorf
overall responsibility then rests with D

tried? punished?

I would also like to mention that as a result of the considerable psychological pressures, there were numerous men who were no longer capable of conducting executions and who thus had to be replaced by other men. On the other hand, there were others who could not get enough of them and often reported to these executions voluntarily.

out Killed

Goldhagen
Gustave Fix, member of Sonderkommando 6

smaller units

choice for the perpetrator
Fear pressure
Fear
Humiliation
opportunistic

How many "killed" to must be responsible? 9
Differentiate between type of soldier? No

3. Report by Wehrmachtberpfarrer Kornmann

PRIMARY SOURCE

Pastor

to a higher authority
General, German Army, Chaplain?

Wehrmachtberpfarrer Kornmann
Protestant Divisional Chaplain → implies some 21 August 1941

early so not accustomed
or trained to kill kids...

Start of Einsatzgruppen
OUT some months that they made the USSR (initial stages war in the east)
perpetrators

I submit the following report to 295th Infantry Division:

Yesterday (20 August) towards 1500 hours two military chaplains from a military hospital unit in this area came to see me and the Division's Catholic Military Chaplain and reported to us that nearby, some 500 m away, about 80 to 90 children from babies to school-age were being held in the upper storey of a house. The children could be heard from a long way off shouting and crying and as they had already been there 24 hours, the soldiers quartered in the neighbouring houses were being sorely disturbed at night. The two military chaplains had been made aware of the presence of the children by the soldiers themselves. Together with the two chaplains and my Catholic colleague, I went to the house in question and saw the children lying and sitting about in two small rooms. They were partly lying in their own filth, there was not a single drop of drinking water and the children were suffering greatly due to the heat. A man from the Ukrainian militia was standing guard downstairs. We learned from him that these were Jew children whose parents had been executed.

rather you talk about ethics

don't want to see soldiers turn to chaplains? not acting alone

(Jewish) why not killed? not conditioned... not psychologically conditioned to kill babies...

where do you think parents are? his description implies he cares, or does it? neutral-description

There was one group of German soldiers standing at the watchpost and another standing at the corner of the house. Some of them were talking agitatedly about what they had heard and seen. What charge As I considered it highly undesirable that such things should take place in full view of the public eye I hereby submit this report. The two military chaplains were from Military Hospital Unit 4/607 and were named Wilczek (Protestant) and Tewes (Catholic).

TIME
time, become numb? psychologically?

F.d.R. signed: signature Lieutenant and O.I (1. Ordonanzoffizier)

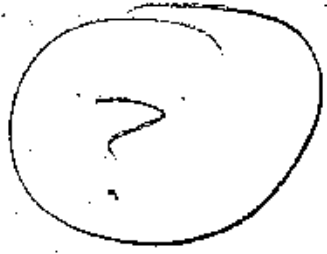
Kornmann Wehrmachtberpfarrer

What fate bestowed these children?
DEATH

* lack of structure & command

* sensitized to mass murder babies (children)
* loss of compassion & empathy
* Evolution of Einsatzgruppen

Einsatzgruppen is not efficient in Aug. 1941, care 80 to 90 left



Cameron Allen

Who are "the children"

Inference / Conclusion:	Observation / Evidence
<p>Report by Wehrmachtoberpfarrer Kormann</p> <p>the children's parents were executed so it seems that the children were next to die, therefore they did not receive any care of nutrition. as they were going to die anyways, it almost functioned as a small scale version of the ghetto system, where the children were left to die naturally until a plan was made to kill the rest.</p> <p>insightful</p>	<p>30-90 sold children were being held captive in a house by German soldiers and Ukrainian Militia, the children were Jewish and were held in un-liveable conditions and occasionally suffered from lack of sanitation and hydration.</p> <p>A -</p>

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Holocaust 12: A Blueprint for Modern Societal Tragedies

The Einsatzgruppen - The Holocaust With Bullets, Stage 4 of the Holocaust escalation

Name: _____

Alley Thompson

Inference / Conclusion:	Observation / Evidence
<p>Report by WehrmachtOberpfarrer Kornmann</p> <p>At the start of Operation Barbarossa, the Einsatzgruppen was not yet bureaucratically organized, and the members were not yet desensitized to killing.</p> <p>(a couple different points, let follow one another...)</p> <p>Well supported, beauty.</p> <p>A</p>	<p>According to this primary source, no one in the Einsatzgruppen really knew what to do with the now orphaned children after their parents were killed. It is evident that the Einsatzgruppen was not yet divided into sub-groups such as Sonderkommandos or Totkommandos, otherwise the soldiers soldiers who had found the children would have likely gone to their commanders, the Gestapo, or Kommandos. The fact that they went to military chaplains proves that there was not yet a clear system for such things. It also shows that the soldiers did not know what to do when confronted with the children, because later in the war, men, women, and children were killed immediately. It is likely that the soldiers went to their chaplain because they were normally unsure about killing Jewish children.</p> <p>The Einsatzgruppen members mentioned the quote. "Some of them were talking agitatedly about what they had heard and seen," could also suggest that these soldiers were not yet used to such brutal mass killings.</p>