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The Final Solution in Serbia
*The Semlin Judenlager — A Case Study**

CHRISTOPHER R. BROWNING

THE EXTERMINATION PROCESS in Serbia took place at the very beginning of the Final Solution in Europe and spanned the transition from firing squad to gassing. The first systematic mass shooting of Serbian Jews in the fall of 1941 took place just days before the deportation of German Jewry began in mid-October, and the gassing of Serbian Jews in the spring of 1942 was complete in early May before Sobibor and Treblinka were even in operation. The mass shootings in Serbia were only partially analogous to the firing squad operations of the *Einsatzgruppen* begun the previous summer in Russia. In Serbia the executioners were primarily German army personnel, not SS units, and the victims were males between the ages of 14 and 70, not entire families. Furthermore, the firing squads operated under the pretext of carrying out reprisals for casualties inflicted by the partisans, not with the avowed aim of exterminating the entire Jewish population. Uncertainty over the ultimate goal and scope of Nazi Jewish policy was not prolonged, however. The survivors of the fall massacres, mostly women and children, were placed in a concentration camp at Semlin just across the Sava River from Belgrade and, regardless of

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age or sex, were murdered in a gas van in the spring of 1942. It is the second phase of the Final Solution in Serbia — the history of the Semlin *Judenlager* — that is the focus of this paper.

The Semlin Judenlager

After the Germans overran Yugoslavia in April 1941, the conquered country was immediately dismembered. Germany's allies received portions, an *Ustashe* state was established in Croatia, while Serbia remained an occupation zone of the German army. In the frantic ten days between Yugoslavia's unexpected rejection of the pact with Germany and the invasion on April 6, hurried plans were made for this occupation. An order of the Army High Command (OKH) of April 2 provided for an *Einsatzgruppe* of the Sipo-SD to be responsible for the same tasks in Serbia that fell to these police organs in the Reich, especially combatting enemies of the state. This, of course, included Jews.¹ The *Einsatzgruppe* of SS-*Standartenführer* Dr. Wilhelm Fuchs was subordinate to the Chief of the Military Administration, SS *Brigadeführer* (and soon promoted to *Gruppenführer*) Dr. Harald Turner, who supervised the entire administrative and civilian side of the occupation through four military districts (*Feldkommandanturen*). Turner in turn reported directly to a rapid succession of Military Commanders (*Militärbefehlshaber*) — Schröder, Danckelmann, Böhme, and Bader — who paraded through Serbia in 1941. Thus, before the invasion, the Serbian Jews were consigned to the jurisdiction of the SS, but the Military Commander in Serbia retained overall command of and responsibility for occupation policy.

¹ Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv Freiburg (hereafter — BA-MA), RW 40/79: Schröder memorandum, July 17, 1941, and Turner memorandum, August 27, 1941. See also: Helmut Krausnick, "Die Einsatzgruppen vom Anschluss Österreichs bis zum Feldzug gegen die Sowjetunion. Entwicklung und Verhältnis zur Wehrmacht," Part I of *Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges*, Stuttgart, 1981, p. 137.

In the aftermath of the invasion, however, this simple delegation of Jewish affairs to the SS did not go unchallenged. In fact a host of officials took part in effecting Germany's Jewish policy in Serbia. Within Turner's *Militärverwaltung* were two officials in charge of political affairs concerning the Jews and Jewish property respectively. On the staff of the *Feldkommandantur* 599, the military district including Belgrade, of Colonel von Kaisenberg, were officials for Jewish affairs and Jewish apartments.² Presumably the other military districts likewise had their own Jewish experts, as a summary of Jewish affairs was a mandatory section of the required situation reports of the *Kreiskommandanturen* (sub-districts) to the *Feldkommandantur* 610.³ Orders posted in Belgrade regulating Jewish shopping hours and curfew were issued over the name of the city Commandant, Kaisenberg, while orders for various categories of Jews to register with the police were issued on the authority of the Chief of the *Einsatzgruppe* of the Sipo-SD, Fuchs.⁴ Overall jurisdiction for Jewish property was assigned to the Trusteeship Administration for Jewish Property within the office of the General Plenipotentiary for the Economy in Serbia (Franz Neuhausen), who reported to Göring, though the personal property and jewelry of the Jews was reluctantly conceded to the Sipo-SD.⁵ And finally, the Foreign Office Plenipotentiary, Felix Benzler, was charged to handle all questions emerging in Serbia that touched upon foreign affairs, which he and Ribbentrop understood to include freemasons and Jews.⁶ In short, the chaotic administrative structure that typified the German oc-

² Vojno Istorijiski Institut Belgrade (hereafter — V.I.I.), German archive, 27-2-38, telephone book of the Feldnachrichten Kommandantur 32.

³ V.I.I., German archive, Prague microfilm, roll 8/frame 629.

⁴ V.I.I., German archive: 50-4-2, 50-4-7, 50-8-1, 66-2-3/a, 66-2-31.

⁵ NI-1575, summary report of Gurski, March 23, 1945.

⁶ *Akten zur Deutschen Aussenpolitik*, 1918-1945, Series D, Part 2, Göttingen, 1970, pp. 475-476.

cupation everywhere in Europe was fully evident in Serbia, Jewish policy included.

The Serbian Jews were quickly subjected to a wave of discriminatory measures: registration, marking, curfew, forced labor, restrictions on economic and social activities, and confiscation of property.⁷ Their situation became graver in the summer of 1941 with the outbreak of the partisan uprising, as Jews increasingly and disproportionately fell victim to German reprisal and counterinsurgency terror measures. The Banat Jews were uprooted and taken to Belgrade in mid-August: subsequently all male Jews over 14 in the Belgrade area, both local and from the Banat, were interned in the Topovske Supe camp.⁸ Beginning in early August the German Foreign Office Plenipotentiary, Felix Benzler, allegedly on the suggestion of Harald Turner, urged repeatedly the deportation of the Serbian Jews (preferably to Rumania) as a necessary precondition for pacification of the country. Berlin rejected the deportation request, and subsequently the interned male Jews provided a convenient pool of victims for the German army's reprisal measures, now systemized on a 100:1 ratio. The "problem" of the male Jews solved, the Germans turned to the question of the women, children and elderly, initially estimated at some 20,000. They were to be interned at a camp at Sremska Mitrovica, and deported to a "reception camp in the east" in the spring⁹

The Mitrovica concentration camp, planned first at Jarak and then at Zasavica, proved unfeasible because both locations were too flooded for construction. On October 28, 1941, the decision was

⁷ See especially the "Verordnung betreffend die Juden und Zigeuner" of May 30, 1941. Copy in the Jevrejski Istorijски Muzej Belgrade (hereafter — JIM), 21-1-1/20.

⁸ Zdenko Löwenthal, ed., *The Crimes of the Fascist Occupants and Their Collaborators Against Jews in Yugoslavia*, Belgrade, 1957, pp. 2-3.

⁹ Christopher R. Browning, *The Final Solution and the German Foreign Office*, New York, 1978, pp. 56-62.

taken to abandon Mitrovica and use instead the exhibition grounds — referred to as Semlin by the Germans and Sajmište by the Yugoslavs — across the Sava River from Belgrade.¹⁰ As this side of the Sava was Croatian territory, Benzler asked the German Embassy in Zagreb to inquire if the exhibition grounds could be used for a transit camp “in which at first Jewish women and children shall be brought . . .” The Croatians agreed, provided the camp was guarded by Germans, not Serbs, and supplies came from Serbian, not Croatian territory.¹¹ On the very day of the Croatian reply, Turner advised his regional commandants to prepare for the deportation of Jewish women and children to an assembly camp near Belgrade some time after November 15.¹²

Construction of the camp (conversion of the pavilions into huge barracks and the erection of barbed wire fencing) was undertaken by the *Organisation Todt*. In less than one and a half months after the military commander abandoned Mitrovica and selected the Semlin site, the camp was ready. On December 8, 1941, the surviving Jews in Belgrade were ordered to report to the police with several days' food supply and their lodging keys marked with name and address. They were immediately transferred to the Semlin camp.¹³ While the “Five kings of Serbia” — the Military Commander, Fuchs, Benzler, Turner and Neuhausen — were notoriously unable to agree on most things, the selection, diplomatic negotiation, construction and financing of the Semlin *Judenlager* proved a rare example of frictionless cooperation.

¹⁰ BA-MA 17 729.8: Gen. Kdo. XVIII-Quartiermeisterabtlg. Kriegstagebuch, entries for September 26 and 30, October 6 and 28, 1941. (NOKW-193 and 262).

¹¹ Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes Bonn (hereafter — PA), Gesandtschaft Belgrad 62/6: Benzler to Agram, October 29, 1941, and Troll to Belgrade, November 11, 1941.

¹² NOKW-801: Turner to Feld- and Kreiskommandanturen, November 11, 1941.

¹³ Löwenthal, *The Crimes of the Fascist Occupants and Their Collaborators Against the Jews in Yugoslavia*, 4.

Life in the *Judenlager* was very harsh, especially in late December and January when the temperature dropped so low that the Sava River froze over. The huge exhibition halls were unheated. To maximize sleeping space so that thousands could be crammed into two large pavilions, multi-storied wooden scaffoldings had been constructed through which one had to crawl on hands and knees. In addition to hunger and cold, work details to shovel snow from the nearby airfield took their toll. A prisoner "self-administration" was formed (the "camp elder" was a young woman under 30 named Sarfas), and met with the commandant each morning. Both the administrative work and physical labor in the camp were done by the Jews, even patrolling the inside of the fence to keep prisoners away from the wire. It was forbidden to bring food into the camp, and children who slipped through the unelectrified wire to beg in the suburb of Zemun were beaten if caught.¹⁴

In October the Germans had estimated the total of Jewish women, children and elderly in Serbia at 20,000. In early December the Military Commander's staff expected 16,000 Jews and Gypsies to be interned in Semlin.¹⁵ Both estimates proved much too high. By December 15, 1941, the incarcerated Jews numbered 5,291.¹⁶ As Jews from other parts of Serbia were deported to Semlin throughout the winter months, the total number of Jewish prisoners gradually rose. The two existing sets of figures do not agree, however. The Yugoslav records (of the Department of Social Welfare of the

¹⁴ JIM, 24-2-2/4, testimony of Dr. Lev Brandeis; Landgericht Köln, 24 Ks 1/52 and 2/53, Strafverfahren gegen Emanuel Schäfer (hereafter — Schäfer process), II, pp. 730-741 (testimony of Hedvig Schönfein); Landgericht Dortmund, 45 Ks 2/68, Strafverfahren gegen Herbert Andorfer (hereafter — Andorfer process), II, pp. 8-11 (testimony of Herbert Andorfer); Institut für Zeitgeschichte, München (hereafter — IfZ), Document from the Eichmann Trial (hereafter — Eichmann document), 1432 report of Milan Markovic.

¹⁵ NOKW-1150: Memorandum of Major Jais, December 5, 1941.

¹⁶ NOKW-610: 10-day report of the Plenipotentiary Commanding General in Serbia, December 20, 1941.

Belgrade municipal government) show a maximum of 6,800 prisoners by the end of February.¹⁷ German records report 5,780 at this time.¹⁸ Another 500 Jews from Kosovska Mitrovica were deported to Semlin on March 19, which would have raised the total to 6,280.¹⁹ According to the German commandant, SS-*Untersturmführer* Herbert Andorfer, at least 10 percent of the prisoners were Gypsies,²⁰ and it is possible that the two different figures represent the total number of prisoners on the one hand and the Jewish prisoners on the other. In any case, neither reflects the considerable death rate over the winter months, and therefore the official Yugoslavian estimate that 7,500 Jews died at Semlin seems quite reasonable.²¹

Even if the total number of prisoners in the Semlin *Judenlager* remained well below the Germans' initial expectations, provisioning of the camp was a problem. Almost immediately the Germans at the camp complained of inadequate supplies. On December 31, 1941, the first commandant, SS-*Scharführer* Edgar Enge, requested a doubling of the bread ration, which was immediately vetoed by *Oberkriegsverwaltungsrat* Dr. Ranze of the *Feldkommandantur* 599.²² Nine days later Enge requested a 33 percent increase in milk delivery because of the large number of sick children.²³ This was followed by a series of complaints about many unfilled orders and

¹⁷ V.I.I., Nedic archiv, 36-33/8-20, bill for feeding the Jewish camp.

¹⁸ NOKW-1221: 10-day report, March 10, 1942.

¹⁹ NOKW-1077: daily report, March 19, 1942.

²⁰ Andorfer process, II, p. 42.

²¹ Löwenthal, *The Crimes of the Fascist Occupants*, 4; IfZ, Eichmann document 1119 (report of A. Alexander).

²² V.I.I., Nedic archive, 36-22/1-1 and 3: Enge to Belgrade municipal government, December 31, 1941, and Belgrade municipal government to commandant of Jewish camp, January 1, 1942.

²³ V.I.I., Nedic archive, 36-26/11-1. Enge to Belgrade municipal government, January 1, 1942.

ENLAGET
EMLIN

Semlin, den 16. Februar 1942

En/D

An die

Gemeinde der Stadt Belgrad,

Belgrad.

Wegen Anschaffung von Zucker fuer die Lagerin-
sassen teile ich Ihnen mit, dass sich heute im Lager befinden:

Maenner: 332

Frauen: 3.933

Kinder: 1.238

insgesamt 5.503

Sie werden ersucht, auf Grund dieses Standes Zucker
fuer den Monat Maerz anzuliefern. Sollten sich die obigen Daten
im Laufe dieses Monats aendern, werden Sie noch nachtraeglich
verstaendigt werden.

Letter of February 16, 1942, showing the Semlin Judenlager population at 5,503

the poor quality of food delivered.²⁴ Finally, the new commandant, Herbert Andorfer, noting that the food ordered represented the absolute minimum required rations, threatened that no bills would be authorized until all orders were filled.²⁵ The Belgrade municipal government warned its Department of Social Welfare that the Germans were ready to prosecute those responsible for unfilled orders for urgently needed supplies.²⁶ Up to this point, at least, the German commandants were not behaving as if they knew that their prisoners were soon to be murdered.

The Camp Command

Shortly after the Semlin camp opened in December 1941, a major reorganization of the German police in Serbia occurred. The new head of the Sipo-SD, who would be directly in charge of the Semlin camp and its Jewish prisoners, was SS-*Standartenführer* Emanuel Schäfer.

Born in 1900 the son of a hotel proprietor, Schäfer was raised in the German border area of Upper Silesia.²⁷ Upon completion of his gymnasium studies he was drafted into the army in the summer of 1918, joined an artillery regiment in Berlin, but did not see frontline service. He returned home and immediately took up with various German para-military formations battling Poles in Upper Silesia. His home town, Rybnik, went to Poland in the partition, but he renounced Polish citizenship and began university studies at Breslau, attaining his doctorate in jurisprudence in 1925. He joined the *Stahlhelm*,

²⁴ V.I.I., Nedic archive; 36-25/1-3 (Enge report of January 16, 1942); 36-27/1-2 (Enge to Belgrade municipal government, January 20, 1942).

²⁵ V.I.I., Nedic archive, 36-30/1-5, Andorfer to Belgrade municipal government, February 1, 1942.

²⁶ V.I.I., Nedic archive, document number unclear, Belgrade municipal government to Department of Social Welfare, February 3, 1942.

²⁷ BDC, Schäfer SS-file; Schäfer process, II, pp. 185-191.

the nationalist veterans' organization, in the same year and began a career in the police, first in Postdam and then in Breslau, where he headed the homicide division from 1928 to 1933. He left the organization in 1928 because he had the impression that "the *Stahlhelm* was atrophying"²⁸ (*in Absterben begriffen war*). Three years later, impressed by the Nazi's "vitality" but contemptuous of "party book officials," Schäfer became a "supporting member" of the SS but not a party member of the NSDAP.

Within weeks of the Nazi assumption of power, Schäfer was made head of the political police in Breslau. He applied to the NSDAP in May 1933, only to find out more than a year later that his application had been rejected, presumably due to a grudge in connection with the sodomy proceedings he had lodged against the erstwhile *Gauleiter* Brückner. Schäfer's position was made even more difficult when SA-*Obergruppenführer* Edmund Heines, one of the most notorious members of Röhm's homosexual clique of SA leaders, took over the Breslau police and had Schäfer enrolled in the SA. "More drawn" to the SS, Schäfer became an agent for its intelligence network, the SD, reporting on the corruption of various party officials, especially Heines, who was subsequently shot in the Blood Purge of June 30, 1934. A promotion recommendation in Schäfer's file noted his performance: "After the seizure of power, as head of the State Police in Breslau, which was subordinate to Edmund Heines at that time, he [Schäfer] cooperated with the SD-RFSS and rendered valuable service despite the great danger to himself."²⁹

In May 1934 Schäfer was named chief of the State Police Agency (*Staatspolizeistelle*) in Oppeln, where he continued his SD work as well. His belated transfer from the SA to the SS in September 1936 was quickly compensated with three promotions in 26 months. Heydrich's implicit trust in his long-time SD agent was demonstrated

²⁸ Schäfer process, III, p. 627.

²⁹ BDC, Schäfer SS-file.

in the summer of 1939. On August 10 Schäfer received a telephone call to meet Heydrich at the airport. Heydrich informed him that the Führer “needs a pretext for war” (*braucht einen Kriegsgrund*) and had Schäfer guide him to several border points as possible locations to stage border attacks on German territory. A week later both Himmler and Heydrich visited, and this time, again guided by Schäfer, surveyed the border from the air. A customs house was decided upon, and on the night of August 31, following an earlier last-minute postponement, a fake attack upon the customs house was staged (independent of the Gleiwitz incident).³⁰ In the same month Schäfer was named head of *Einsatzgruppe* II for the Polish campaign, which distinguished itself by the comparatively high number of executions reported.³¹

At the end of the Polish campaign, the *Einsatzgruppen* were dissolved and Schäfer was made chief of the *Staatspolizeistelle* in Katowitz, from which 2,000 Jews were deported to Eichmann's Nisko camp in late October.³² Schäfer was transferred to the *Staatspolizeistelle* in Köln in October 1940 and oversaw the first

³⁰ IfZ, Zs 573.

³¹ Helmut Krausnick, “Die Einsatzgruppen vom Anschluss Österreichs bis zum Feldzug gegen die Sowjetunion. Entwicklung und Verhältnis zum Wehrmacht,” *Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges*, p. 47.

³² H.G. Adler, *Der Verwaltete Mensch: Studien zur Deportation der Juden aus Deutschland*, Tübingen, 1974, pp. 129-133; Seev Goshen, “Eichmann und die Nisko-Aktion im Oktober 1939,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* (hereafter — *VfZ*), No. 29/1, 1981, pp. 74-96. This renders preposterous Schäfer's subsequent claim that he was accused by the Higher SS and Police Leader Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski of making Upper Silesia an “El Dorado” for Jews and Poles and therefore demoted to the Köln *Staatspolizeistelle* with a much smaller staff (100 instead of 400 personnel). Von dem Bach-Zelewski denied any role in Schäfer's transfer and offered the more plausible explanation that it might have resulted from the fact that the Silesian *Gauleiter*, Joseph Wagner, a protégé of Göring, was staffing “his” newly-incorporated territories with his own men, while Schäfer was clearly a Heydrich loyalist. Schäfer process, I, pp. 190-193, and II, pp. 266-267.

three deportations of Jews from that city the following year — 2,000 to Lodz on October 21 and 28 and another 1,000 to Riga on December 6, 1941.³³ In January 1942 Schäfer was summoned to Berlin to meet with Heydrich, who appointed him commander of the Sipo-SD in Belgrade, allegedly because his earlier experiences in the post-World War I Polish border struggles made him especially suited for anti-partisan fighting. According to Schäfer, Heydrich said nothing about the Jewish question in Serbia at this meeting.³⁴

Belgrade's new police chief was a valuable Heydrich recruit — a borderland German ultra-nationalist and convinced National Socialist of proven loyalty to the SS but at the same time a well-educated, well-trained, highly experienced police technocrat. Other German officials with whom he came into contact were pleasantly surprised to discover that Schäfer, unlike his predecessor Fuchs or his supervisor Meyszner, was not a "pig-headed SS-man" (*ein stürer SS-Mann*). On the contrary, he made a "thoroughly humane impression." He was "reasonable" and "very accommodating."³⁵ Post-war judicial authorities were equally impressed by his bearing; he was a "correct and honest official" who was "not to be viewed as an evil Gestapo-functionary, rather as an official who — to be sure an enthusiastic National Socialist with early knowledge of the criminal practices — did his duty, but showed humane tendencies and endeavored to remedy the excesses of the regime."³⁶ "Beloved" by his close circle of secretary, driver and adjutant,³⁷ Schäfer presented

³³ *Justiz und NS-Verbrechen*: Sammlung deutscher Strafurteile wegen Nationalsozialistischer Tötungsverbrechen 1945-1966, Amsterdam, 1974, Vol. XII, p. 575. This trial, 24 Ks 3/53 of the Landgericht Köln, followed shortly after Schäfer's trial for crimes in Serbia and involved other defendants as well.

³⁴ Schäfer process, II, p. 191 and p. 331.

³⁵ Schäfer process; II, p. 357 (testimony of Walther U.); III, p. 585 (testimony of Paul Bader); and II, p. 351 (testimony of Dr. Jörg Wilhelm H.).

³⁶ *Justiz und NS-Verbrechen*, XII, p. 595; Schäfer process, I, p. 90 (judgment of the Bielefeld denazification proceedings).

³⁷ Schäfer process: II, 206-8 (testimony of Marianne K.), pp. 247-249. (Ernst M.), and p. 306 (Hans S.).

quite a different face to the slack and frequently corrupt personnel he inherited from Fuchs. To them he was an arrogant, strict, unapproachable superior who imposed "iron discipline" and before whom they made exaggerated bows when he appeared. It was said among Schäfer's men, "for him mankind begins only at the rank of Captain"³⁸ (*Hauptsturmführer*).

To Heydrich, Schäfer's veneer of respectability was no doubt useful but more important was his unblemished record as an utterly reliable agent — successful SD spy against SA rivals, trusted conspirator on the eve of war, ruthless *Einsatzgruppe* commander in Poland, and deporter of Jews from Kattowitz and Köln. That Serbia would be only the second territory of the German empire declared *judenfrei* shortly after Schäfer's arrival was scarcely out of keeping with his past record.

Upon assuming his position in Belgrade, Schäfer took over Fuchs' personnel but reorganized the dissolved *Einsatzgruppe* into divisions paralleling the RSHA-structure in Berlin, ending what he claimed to be the petty rivalry and bickering between Sipo, SD, and Kripo.³⁹ Division IV comprised the Gestapo under *Sturmbannführer* Bruno Sattler. Born in 1898 the son of a civil engineer, Sattler had served two years at the front in World War I. His post-war involvement in the Potsdam *Freikorps* culminated in the Kapp Putsch. Settling down to school, Sattler completed six semesters of university study, when the inflation wiped out his family's property. He had to seek work and eventually entered the criminal police in 1928. He joined the NSDAP in 1931 and the SS in 1936. He served in the Gestapo in Paris before coming to Belgrade.⁴⁰

Within the Gestapo was the Jewish desk or *Judenreferat*, staffed

³⁸ Schäfer process: II, pp. 348-349 (Walter H.), p. 356 (August K.), and III, pp. 654-658 (Bruno M.).

³⁹ Schäfer process, II, pp. 194-198.

⁴⁰ BDC, Sattler SS-file.

by four Germans and four *Volksdeutsche* from the Banat.⁴¹ Two of the Germans served as commandant of the Semlin *Judenlager* and would take part in the gas van operation: *Untersturmführer* Herbert Andorfer and *Scharführer* Edgar Enge. Born out of wedlock in 1911, Andorfer was raised and supported by his mother in Salzburg, Austria. He completed his *Matura* in 1929, with grades adequate for university entrance, but family finances did not permit further study other than vocational training for hotel work. He worked two summers as a hotel secretary in Bad Ischl but was otherwise unemployed, except for a stint as a door-to-door salesman, until he became secretary and eventually business manager of a hotel in Sölden am Ötztal from 1934 to 1938. During his period of unemployment Andorfer joined the NSDAP in October 1931 and the SS in September 1933. He maintained his SS membership during the "illegal" period and smuggled party literature from Germany. Andorfer became *Ortsgruppenleiter* in Sölden immediately following the *Anschluss*, but in May 1938 left for Innsbruck to make his career in the SS rather than in the hotel business. His application for the *Waffen SS* was rejected, but Andorfer was sent to the university in Innsbruck while he worked for the SD on public opinion and blackmarket activities. His university days ended with the outbreak of war, and following a warning for violating party discipline because of derogatory comments about his superiors, Andorfer was transferred first to Salzburg and then to the Sipo-SD training camp in Pretzsch. He took part in the invasion of Yugoslavia, served in various SD outposts, and then joined the Belgrade staff, where he was made commandant of the Semlin *Judenlager* at the end of January 1942.⁴²

The man whom Andorfer succeeded as camp commandant was

⁴¹ V.I.I., German archive, 32-12-3, testimony of Toma Pfeffer.

⁴² BDC: Andorfer SS-file; Andorfer process, II, pp. 8-9, p. 42, and III, p. 305.

Edgar Enge.⁴³ Enge was born in 1905 in Thuringia but his family soon moved to Leipzig. His father had failed at poultry farming but until the mid-1920's supported the family as a salesman. Enge apprenticed for an office equipment firm in 1923 for two years and found steady work from 1926 to 1930. Then both he and his father were unemployed; in the family only Edgar's brother had a steady job. It was not until 1935 that Enge found steady work again as a tourist guide for the city of Leipzig. In the meantime he had joined the SA in 1933 because "it was expected of all young men to be politically active in some way" and he hoped it would help him find work. He joined the party only in 1938 and was drafted in 1940. Instead of being taken into the army, however, the 35-year-old Enge was sent to a *Schutzpolizei* training camp. After two months training, and by no initiative of his own (so he claimed), Enge was selected by the Sipo and sent for a probationary training period to the Frankfurt Gestapo. He successfully requested transfer to Leipzig, only to be sent to Yugoslavia in the summer of 1941. An employee of the Gestapo but not a member of the SS, he received the SS uniform and rank of *Schaführer* commensurate with his Gestapo rank.⁴⁴ At what point Enge was assigned to the *Judenreferat* is unclear, but he was present at at least one massacre of Jews in the fall of 1941, and confessed to being present at a number of reprisal shootings.⁴⁵ He served as commandant of the Semlin *Judenlager* in December and January, until the higher-ranking Andorfer took over.

The two SS-officers in charge of the Jews in Semlin, Schäfer and Sattler, were thus from upper middle-class backgrounds and had already involved themselves in post-war para-military activities even before personal misfortune struck. (Schäfer's home town was allotted

⁴³ Landgericht Stuttgart, Ks 21/67, Strafverfahren gegen Edgar Enge (hereafter — Enge process): Haftheft, 45-51; Hauptakten, pp. 44-47, p. 183. Andorfer process, I, p. 87.

⁴⁴ The Berlin Document Center contains no SS-officer file for Edgar Enge.

⁴⁵ NOKW-497, Liepe report, October 13, 1941; Enge process, Haftheft, p. 55.

AR
 SAATBRAT DR. TURNER
 - Gruppenführer
 F.P.Nr. 18.739

O.U.

Der. O. Haupt St. ...	Dr. ...
, denschl. App. ...	
A. Nr. AR ...	

- 1) ...
- 2) Chef D. gut kenntnis
- 3) ...

Lieber Kamerad/Wolff!

Nachdem nunmehr die Entscheidung zu meinen Gunsten ergangen ist, möchte ich nicht verfehlen - da ich überzeugt bin, dass das ganz einzig und allein Ihrem Einfluß und Ihrer unermüdlichen Tätigkeit zu verdanken ist - Ihnen meinen kameradschaftlichsten und herzlichsten Dank auf diesem Wege zu übermitteln.

Ich kann auch heute wieder, zumal Sie mich ja gut genug kennen, nur noch einmal wiederholen, es hat sich nicht um meine Person bei der Sache gehandelt - der Betreffende hätte ebenso gut einen anderen Namen haben können - sondern um einen notwendig durchzufechtenden Kampf gegen einseitige Wehrmachtsinteressen, bei denen unausgesprochen letzten Endes der Führer, damit auch die und in weiteren auch die Beamtenschaft getroffen werden sollte.

Der beste Beweis hierfür ist einmal in einem offiziellen Schreiben von WB Südost die hineingewobene Bemerkung " die Einsetzung des Höheren und Polizeiführers, die nicht auf hiesigen Antrag erfolgt ist" oder so ähnlich im Wortlaut, zum anderen die Bemerkung des Chefs des Generalstabes WB Südost nach dem Eingang der für mich günstigen Entscheidung " damit hätte die Wehrmacht eine Schlacht verloren".

Jedenfalls herrscht hier in allen Kreisen selbst der Wehrmacht, die diesen Kampf irgendwie verfolgt haben eitel Freude über diesen Sieg und diese Freude haben Sie al -

Turner's letter to Wolf of April 11, 1942, concerning the use of a "delousing truck"

lein ,wie ich glaube, allen diesen Menschen bereitet .
Dafür meinen Dank !

Darf ich diese Gelegenheit benutzen, um Ihnen anliegend die Abschrift eines Briefes von mir an den Reichsführer vom 15. Januar 1942 zu übersenden, auf den ich bis heute ohne Antwort geblieben bin. Ich möchte nicht erinnern, weil solche Dinge wie ich weiss Zeit brauchen und ich mich nicht für berechtigt halte, den Reichsführer an die Erledigung einer Sache zu erinnern. Immerhin weiss ich, dass Sie für diese Dinge Interesse haben und warum ich Sie jetzt darauf aufmerksam mache, hat einfach seinen Grund darin, dass demnächst diese Frage mehr als akut wird . Schon vor Monaten habe ich alles an Juden im hiesigen Lande greifbare erschossen und sämtliche Judenfrauen und Kinder in einem Lager konzentrieren lassen und zugleich mit Hilfe des SD einen " Entlausungswagen " angeschafft, der nun in etwa 14 Tagen bis 4 Wochen auch die Räumung des Lagers endgültig durchgeführt haben wird, was allerdings seit Eintreffen von Meysner und Übergabe dieser Lagerdinge an ihn, von ihm weitergeführt worden ist. Dann ist der Augenblick gekommen, in dem die unter der Genfer Konvention im Kriegsgefangenenlager bestehenden jüdischen Offisiere nolens volens hinter die nicht mehr vorhandenen Angehörigen kommen und das dürfte immerhin leicht zu Komplikationen führen .

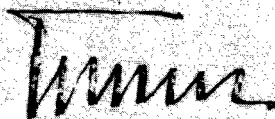
Werden nun die Betreffenden entlassen, so werden sie im Augenblick der Ankunft ihre endgültige Freiheit haben, aber wie ihre Rassegenossen nicht allzulange und damit dürfte dann diese ganze Frage endgültig erledigt sein. Das einzigste Bedenken könnten Rückwirkungen auf unsere Gefangenen in Canada sein, falls herauskommt, dass die Freigelassenen hier nicht frei herumlaufen... ich persönlich teile diese Bedenken nicht.

Mit den besten Wünschen für Ihr persönliches Wohlergehen, besten Grüßen und

H e i l H i t l e r !

bin ich wie stets

Ihr getreuer

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Timm', written in a cursive style.

to Poland, and Sattler's family fortune was wiped out in the inflation). Both pursued a university education and a career in the police before committing themselves to the Nazis in 1931. The two SS-men who would be faced with carrying out the murders in person, Andorfer and Enge, were of lower middle-class background and vocation, and had thrown in their lot with the Nazis while experiencing prolonged unemployment and economic distress. The murder of the Serbian Jews would be carried out by a typical SS division of labor between the well-trained and well-educated organizers and the executioners mobilized from Germany's depressed lower middle-class.

The Gas Van at Semlin

The circumstances surrounding the actual decision to send a gas van to Belgrade are unclear, due to conflicting accounts. On April 11, 1942, Harald Turner wrote to Karl Wolff, Himmler's adjutant:

Already some months ago I had all the available Jews shot and all Jewish women and children concentrated in a camp and at the same time, with the help of the SD, procured a 'delousing truck' that will finally clear the camp in some 14 days to 4 weeks, which in any case since the arrival of Meysner [sic] and the transfer of this camp business to him, has been carried on by him.⁴⁶

Turner's claim in April 1942 to have initiated the sending of the gas van is suspect on two counts. First, the preceding reports of Turner that have survived in SS files indicate no such initiative apart from a boastful reference to his clearing Belgrade of Jews and their placement in a concentration camp.⁴⁷ Secondly, Turner's reports to Berlin were often inaccurate and very self-serving. He was fighting desperately to protect himself from the threats to his position posed both by the military, which was trying to downgrade the position of the Chief of the Military Administration, and from Himmler, who

⁴⁶ BDC, Turner SS-file, Turner to Wolff, April 11, 1942.

⁴⁷ BA, NS 19/1730: Turner's monthly political report of December 3, 1941, and Turner's *Gesamtsituationbericht* to the Reichsführer-SS, February 15, 1942.

was establishing a Higher SS and Police Leader with jurisdiction over many areas formerly allotted to Turner, especially the police. Thus Turner made many exaggerated and in some cases totally false claims about his role in Jewish affairs, among others, in a desperate but unsuccessful attempt to impress Himmler.⁴⁸

After the war Schäfer emphatically insisted that he had not discussed the Jewish question in Serbia with Heydrich prior to his departure for Belgrade, and that neither his agency nor any other in Serbia had instigated the sending of the gas van. On the other hand, he admitted to having heard of the gas van being used to kill the mentally ill very shortly after the outbreak of the war. (The *Sonderkommando* led by Herbert Lange were headquartered in Posen and used gas vans to carry out euthanasia operations in the incorporated territories while Schäfer was in Kattowitz). He claimed not to have known yet of the *Einsatzgruppen* operations in Russia (since this admission would have made him accessory to murder for the deportation of Köln Jews to Riga). Schäfer did admit that, upon hearing shortly after his arrival in Belgrade of the massacre of the male Jews

⁴⁸ For example, in his report of February 15, 1942, Turner claims that the Belgrade garrison had refused to shoot Jews, and “exclusively” on his order the *Einsatzgruppe* and police battalion then under his command shot all the male Jews and Gypsies in Belgrade and removed the women and children. In fact, the first order to shoot Jews came from the Military Commander Böhme to Turner (NOKW-192 of October 4, 1941); these executions were carried out mostly by military troops (army records credit Turner’s men with shooting 3,616 of the 11,164 recorded cases — roughly one-third — though army statistics did not include the army shooting of Jews in Sabac (NOKW-474, Aktennotiz of December 20, 1941); the Belgrade garrison was among the troops carrying out mass executions of Jews (NOKW-905, Walther report of November 4, 1941), and Turner himself briefly delayed turning over Jews to army firing squads (ADAP, XIII, Part 2, 570-2, Rademacher report on his trip to Belgrade, October 25, 1941; and Browning, *The Final Solution and the German Foreign Office*, pp. 56-67). In short, Turner’s reports to Berlin did not reflect the real course of events in Berlin but rather how Turner wanted Berlin to perceive these events to the benefit of his own endangered position.

the previous fall, he was convinced the destruction of the European Jews had been decided in Berlin. Thus, he knew immediately the meaning of the telegram of SS-*Obergruppenführer* Heinrich Müller, the chief of the Gestapo in Berlin, reading (as best as Schäfer could recall): Subject: Jewish operation in Serbia. Commando with special Saurer truck under way with special assignment. Schäfer, who usually tried to spread responsibility as widely as possible, explicitly stated that the telegram came directly from Berlin to him, and that neither Meyszner, the military, nor any other German agency in Serbia was involved, though Meyszner was kept informed.⁴⁹

If the contradictory accounts of Turner and Schäfer cannot be relied upon fully, some facts are not in dispute. The Foreign Office Plenipotentiary, Felix Benzler, as mentioned already, had urged the deportation of all the Jews the previous August. When the male Jews were shot, it was agreed in a late October meeting attended by one of Eichmann's representatives from Berlin, Friedrich Suhr, that the women and children would be interned and deported to a "reception camp in the east" as soon as this was technically possible. In December Benzler reiterated his plea that the Jews be deported as soon as possible, and the prospect of the following spring at the earliest was held out.⁵⁰ After Schäfer's arrival, Benzler urged the deportation of the Semlin Jews to Rumania upon him as well. For both Schäfer and Benzler the Jewish camp with its complicated procedures — located on Croatian territory, provisioned by the Serbs, guarded by the *Ordnungspolizei* on the outside and administered by the Sipo on the inside — was "extraordinarily burdensome."⁵¹ None of the German occupation authorities were anxious to see the existence of the

⁴⁹ Schäfer process, II, 199-204. 331-4, 342-4; Landgericht Hannover, 2 Ks 2/65, Strafverfahren gegen Pradel und Wentritt (hereafter — Pradel process), VIII, 55-7; and XII, pp. 238-239.

⁵⁰ ADAP, XIII, Part 2, pp. 570-572 and 805 (Luther Vermerk of December 9, 1941).

⁵¹ Pradel process, VIII, pp. 55-57.

Judenlager prolonged. At the Wannsee Conference on January 20, 1942, Heydrich announced his intention to carry out deportations from west to east. This meant Serbia would not be relieved of its Jews through deportation in the near future, and Heydrich could anticipate further complaint over this new delay. At the same time gas vans, produced for the explicit purpose of gassing Jewish women and children whose execution by shooting was proving too burdensome, were being completed in Heydrich's Sipo garage.⁵²

Given these facts it does not seem wildly hypothetical to speculate that the decision practically made itself. Local authorities in Belgrade wanted to get rid of their relatively small number of Jewish women and children, whom, unlike the men, the army would not shoot, and had been led to believe this would occur in the spring. Heydrich, however, was not planning deportations in the area for the coming year, but he happened to have the gas vans which were designed to kill precisely these categories of Jews. If Belgrade wanted to be rid of

⁵² After receiving complaints from the *Einsatzgruppen* about the psychological burden of killing women and children, the RSHA developed a gas-van prototype using exhaust gas instead of bottled carbon monoxide as in the euthanasia program. On the advice of chemists in the Criminal Police (Kripo) laboratory, Walter Rauff of the technical affairs division (II D) of the RSHA procured a truck chassis and had the Security Police automotive section (II D 3 a) contract out the construction of an airtight compartment and then convert the exhaust system in its own garage. After "successful" testing was done on Russian prisoners in Sachsenhausen in October 1941, 30 gas vans were ordered. Twenty were produced by the following spring and came in two models: the larger used a Saurer truck chassis and the smaller a Diamond or Opel-Blitz. Two of the Chelmo gas vans were of a third type, using a Dodge truck chassis. The gas vans, however, were very unpopular with the *Einsatzgruppen*, because the trucks were not suited to the Russian terrain and bad roads, and the unloading operation was even more repulsive to the perpetrators than shooting. For detailed information on the gas van: 501-PS, in IMT, XXVI, 102-110; Bundesarchiv Koblenz, NS 19/2576 and R 58/871; the records of the gas van trial in Hannover (Pradel process) and Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm, "Die Einsatzgruppe A Sicherheitspolizei und des SD 1941/42, *Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges*, Stuttgart, 1981, pp. 540-552.

its Jews, Heydrich would provide them with the equipment to do the job themselves.

Such an interpretation is consistent with events elsewhere at this time, when the Germans had decided to kill the European Jews but did not yet have the means to do it. When the authorities in Lodz complained about additional shipments of German Jews to their overcrowded ghetto, suddenly Lange's *Sonderkommando* of gas vans was transferred from Posen to Chelmno and began reducing the Lodz ghetto. When Hans Frank, who had long pressed for the Jews of the General Government to be shipped elsewhere, sent his state secretary, Bühler, to Berlin in December 1941, he learned that Berlin was no longer planning to deport Polish Jews. Frank and his men would have to kill the Jews themselves, though Berlin would show them how.⁵³ Belgrade too had pestered Berlin to deport its Jews; now Berlin sent a gas van instead.

Martin Broszat has suggested that the Final Solution emerged from a series of uncoordinated and spontaneous local murder actions. From above, the Nazi leadership constantly pressed for a solution to the Jewish question in the form of deportation to Russia. However, the military campaign stalled, deportations backed up, and local authorities took the initiative to relieve the pressure through murdering some of their own Jews. As the massacres became more widespread and systematic, the conception of the Final Solution emerged after the fact, and not from some comprehensive order from above.⁵⁴ My interpretation, if correct, would indicate a chain of causation in the opposite direction. The Nazi leadership had decided

⁵³ Werner Praeg and Wolfgang Jacobmeyer, ed., *Das Diensttagebuch des deutschen Generalgouverneurs in Polen 1939-1945*, Stuttgart, 1975, p. 457.

⁵⁴ Martin Broszat, "Hitler und die Genesis der 'Endlösung'. Aus Anlass der Thesen von David Irving," *VfZ*, No. 25, 1977, pp. 739-775. The English version of Broszat's article is found in *Yad Vashem Studies*, XIII, 1979, pp. 73-125. For my critique of Broszat's thesis, see: "Ein Antwort auf Martin Broszat's Thesen zur Genesis der Endlösung," *VfZ*, No. 29, 1981, pp. 97-109.

upon the physical extermination of the Jews but did not immediately possess the means to accomplish this. Berlin did not always have to sit idly by when local authorities complained about lack of help in dealing with their Jews, however. When feasible, those who complained could be sent gas vans to do the "dirty work" themselves. In short, it was not pressure for deportation from above that caused local leaders to kill; rather it was pressure from below over deportation that caused the central authorities to provide the means to kill locally, at least until the death camps were ready.

Upon receiving the telegram from Müller, Schäfer informed Sattler of its contents, instructed him to do what was necessary, and awaited the arrival of the van. When the two drivers, SS-*Scharführer* Götz and Meyer, were shown in to Schäfer, they explained to him their assignment to kill the Jews in the Semlin camp, which came as no surprise. Schäfer sent them to Sattler, in whose hands allegedly he thereafter left the entire operation. He did, however, bestir himself sufficiently to witness the gas van operation once.⁵⁵

In early March the *Judenlager* commandant, Herbert Andorfer, was summoned, whether by Schäfer or Sattler, to whom he reported once every eight or ten days, he was not sure. The Jews, he was told, were about to be "resettled" in a "special truck" from Germany in which they would be "put to sleep" (*eingeschläfert*). Andorfer was to accompany the gas van to assure secrecy of the operation. To ensure against any search of the van when it crossed the Sava River from Croatian to Serbian territory, he was provided with special papers. A detachment of police would guard against intruders during the unloading and burial.⁵⁶

Andorfer was upset at the prospect of returning to face those who were soon to die. As camp commandant he had worked for more

⁵⁵ Schäfer process: II, pp. 331-334; III, p. 624 and p. 690.

⁵⁶ For Andorfer's account, see: Andorfer process, II, pp. 12-16, pp. 41-46 and III, pp. 3-31; Enge process, Hauptakten, pp. 83-88, 99-103, 162-163.

than a month with the camp's "self-administration" and become personally acquainted with about 50 of the prisoners. By his own account he had even drunk coffee and played cards with some of the prisoners in the camp administration after they had learned not to fear him. He had previously dodged answering questions on the whereabouts of their husbands and, concerning their future, had routinely said that eventually they were all to be sent to Rumania. When he now told them that first they would be resettled in another transit camp in Yugoslavia, they pressed him for details about the new camp. Andorfer typed up a fictitious set of camp regulations to end this questioning, which he found so disconcerting.

When the *Aktion* began, the gas van parked outside the camp entrance for loading, while a second, open truck entered the camp to pick up the baggage of those being resettled. One of the drivers of the gas van strolled about the camp, collected the children around him, and passed out candy.⁵⁷ A Jewish doctor or nurse was selected to accompany each transport. The deception was complete, and initially there was no shortage of volunteers. It was arranged among the prisoners that messages were to be written on the baggage truck, giving news of the new camp, but no messages were ever found in the predetermined locations. Eventually, the supply of volunteers dried up, lists were then compiled by the Germans, and the deportees were summoned day by day. Even then the Jewish prisoners had no inkling of their imminent fate.⁵⁸

Once loaded the truck drove to the Sava bridge just several hundred meters from the camp entrance, where Andorfer waited in a car

⁵⁷ All attempts to trace the drivers, Götz and Meyer, have been unsuccessful. The few gas van drivers who have been identified were full-time Sipo-SD drivers subsequently assigned to gas van duty. Pradel process, XV, pp. 49-56. If the RSHA could draw upon its own chemists and mechanics, it is not surprising it should draw upon its own pool of experienced drivers. With over 4,000 vehicles, there could have been no shortage.

⁵⁸ Schäfer process, III, pp. 727-741 (Schönfein testimony).

so as not to have to witness the loading. The bridge had been damaged and only one span was open; thus traffic alternated directions. The departure was timed, however, so that the gas van would never have to wait for oncoming traffic to stop before crossing. The police license plates insured that no attempt would be made to inspect the truck, and Andorfer never needed to show the special papers. On the far side of the bridge, the gas van stopped and one of the drivers climbed out and worked underneath the truck, connecting the exhaust to the sealed compartment. The baggage truck turned off, while the gas van and the commandant's car drove through the center of Belgrade to reach a shooting range at Avala (Avelar in the German documents) ten kilometers to the southeast of the city.

At the Avala shooting range a grave had already been dug and a guard detachment from the 64th Police Battalion of the *Ordnungspolizei* was waiting. This Battalion (later renamed the 1st Battalion of the 5th SS-Police Regiment) had been involved in anti-partisan activities and reprisal shootings since the previous summer. It had also had additional watch duties: for instance teams of 25 policemen alternated as guards outside the Semlin camp. In early March Karl W., a veteran of the *Schutzpolizei* since 1935 and stationed in Yugoslavia since the previous summer, was summoned to report with three other men to the Sipo headquarters in Belgrade; he chose his friend, Paul S., and then asked the two men who happened to be in the next room, Leo L. and Karl L.⁵⁹ At police headquarters they were warned of the top secrecy of their coming assignment and told to report to the Belgrade jail the following morning.

Upon reporting for duty they were instructed to guard a detachment of seven Serbian prisoners. A police truck, driven by a man in

⁵⁹ For the testimony of Karl W., see: Pradel process, XII, pp. 223-232, and XIV, p. 125; Enge process, Hauptakten, pp. 104-107; and Andorfer process, I, pp. 149-152, and III, pp. 43-48. For the testimony of Leo L., see: Pradel process, XIII, pp. 47-50; Enge process, Hauptakten, pp. 3-6, 25-30; Andorfer process, I, pp. 153-154 and III, pp. 48-51.

an SD uniform, took all to the Avala shooting range, where they met up with the vehicles from Semlin. As a large moving-van type truck backed up to the grave, Andorfer explained to Karl W. that it was a gas van carrying Jews from the Semlin camp. W. was to position his men to guard both the entrance and the prisoners, who were to unload the corpses from the van into the grave. When the doors were opened, many of the bodies pressing against them fell out. The Serbian prisoners completed their gruesome task in under an hour, and W. was told to return again the next morning.

Andorfer had already approached his fellow-Austrian, Hans Rexeisen, head of Division III of the Belgrade Sipo-SD, about a transfer to other duties. Rexeisen had told him he would get him assigned to an anti-Chetnik unit, but nothing came of it. Now, after witnessing the first unloading of the gas van, Andorfer made a written request to Schäfer for military duty with the *Waffen-SS*. His job, he said, could be handled by someone not fit for combat duty. No transfer was forthcoming, but Edgar Enge, his predecessor as commandant at Semlin, was now assigned to share the job. At first they drove together, but later alternated. Enge made no attempt to be transferred. As the work was so unattractive, he was only surprised that the participants in the operation received no bonus or reward for their services.⁶⁰ The four policemen talked among themselves and concluded they had been badly used. But they feared to approach their superior with a request for transfer, because they had been sworn to secrecy and the request might be reported to the SD. They too, therefore, carried on.⁶¹

Thus the same people — Andorfer and Enge, the gas van drivers Götz and Meyer, the four policemen and the seven Serbian prisoners

⁶⁰ "However odd it may sound, I would also like to mention here that no bonuses or rewards were given to the participants in this action by the leadership." For Enge's account, see: Enge process, *Haftheft* pp. 56-62, and *Hauptakten*, pp. 183-186; Andorfer process, III, pp. 55-61.

⁶¹ Pradel process, XII, p. 708; and Andorfer process, I, p. 154.

— repeated the horrifying procedure over and over again for two months. Every morning, except Sundays and holidays, and usually two or three afternoons a week as well, the gas van travelled from Semlin to Avala. The large Saurer van, able to carry 50 male adults, was often loaded with 100 women and children for each trip.⁶² On May 10, 1942, the van, accompanied by Enge, made its last deadly trip, taking the Jewish camp administration. After the final unloading, the Serbian prisoners, who had earlier been told that they would be sent to work in Norway, were shot.⁶³ Because of a damaged rear axle, the gas van and its drivers returned to Berlin by train.⁶⁴ The four policemen got their annual three weeks' leave, and an extra week of special leave (which one of them told a friend was "squarely deserved" [*redlich verdient*]), and a private train compartment, courtesy of the Sipo-SD, for the ride back to Germany.⁶⁵ The *Judenreferat* having become superfluous, Andorfer was now granted his request for anti-partisan combat duty and transferred to the Sipo-SD outpost in Novi Pazar. Schäfer, Sattler and Enge remained in Belgrade, and the Semlin camp was immediately filled with other prisoners.

The Semlin camp had not been selected for the inaccessibility or secrecy of its location. One side of it lay alongside the highway that ran between the Sava River bridge and the suburb of Zemun, where

⁶² Schönfein, the Swiss Protestant wife of a Jewish doctor, testified that one hundred per trip was regular. Karl W. and Leo L. initially estimated 100 per truck, but subsequently reduced that to 50. At eight trips per week for nine weeks, it would have required an average load of 87 to gas 6,280 persons.

⁶³ Schönfein confirms that Andorfer was in camp on the last morning. Leo L. gives the only consistent and credible testimony on the shootings of the Serbian prisoners. He had returned from his position guarding the entrance when Enge announced to the prisoners that they were to be shot. He then returned to his post and heard machine-pistol fire from more than one gun. Not surprisingly, the testimony of Enge and Karl W. is inconsistent, implausible, and hopelessly self-serving on this incident.

⁶⁴ IMT, XXVI, p. 109: 501-PS, Schäfer to Pradel, June 8, 1942.

⁶⁵ Andorfer process, I, p. 60 (testimony of Kurt S.).

the airport, German radio station and headquarters of Neuhausen's agency were located. It was a highway well-travelled by the German occupiers. Another side of the camp was the Sava River itself, across from which rose the heights of Belgrade. From the higher parts of the city anyone could look across the river and down into the camp. In 1941 this did not trouble the Germans, who had come to the Balkans as the new *Herrenvolk* confident of victory and relatively unconcerned about the public exposure of their atrocities. It was only in late 1943, when the tide of war had clearly changed and a belated attempt was being made to put a more "humane" face on German occupation policies, that anyone seemed concerned. The new German ambassador, Herman Neubacher, requested that the Semlin camp be moved because its continuing existence "before the eyes of the people of Belgrade was politically intolerable for reasons of public feelings."⁶⁶ Neubacher's request was ignored and ultimately some 47,000 people perished there.⁶⁷

The perpetrators of the Final Solution in Serbia wasted no time in making their achievement known to higher authorities both in Berlin and in the Balkans. In an overview of measures against Jews in occupied territories, the Foreign Office Jewish expert Franz Rademacher noted on May 29, 1942, that: "The Jewish question in Serbia is no longer acute. Now it is only a matter of settling the legal questions concerning property."⁶⁸ Ten days later, on June 8, 1942, Schäfer informed a gathering of Wehrmacht officers, including the commanding general in Serbia, Paul Bader, and the Military Commander Southeast visiting from his headquarters in Greece, Walter Kuntze, that there was no longer a Jewish question in Serbia.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ NOKW-1421: Felber to Meyszner, December 24, 1943.

⁶⁷ IfZ, Eichmann document 1119, report of A. Alexander.

⁶⁸ PA, Pol. IV 348, Rademacher memorandum, May 29, 1942.

⁶⁹ NOKW-926, Report on the trip of the Military Commander Southeast to Serbia, June 7-14, 1942.

The gassing of the Jews, Semlin's first victims, was no secret among the Germans there. In Schäfer's agency it was of course immediately known — an "open secret."⁷⁰ The van, after all, was parked in the courtyard of the police headquarters and cleaned out by its drivers after every operation.⁷¹ As both this courtyard and the Semlin camp in addition to the burial site were guarded by men from the 64th Police Battalion, word soon circulated among them as well.⁷² Schäfer himself conceded that it was impossible to prevent talk about the gas van, though he himself was one of the greatest offenders against secrecy not only to his own staff but to an army medical doctor to whom he remarked "with pride" that "Belgrade was the only great city of Europe that was free of Jews."⁷³ The judicial expert on Turner's staff was asked in the spring of 1942 by his *Volksdeutsche* cleaning women if he knew "that the Jewish women were being destroyed in a gas van."⁷⁴ A German soldier with friends in the Sipo-SD who had already heard much of the firing squad executions of Jews and Serbs the previous fall — details of the executions were the frequent topic of mealtime conversation — now learned of the gas van as well.⁷⁵ Indeed, even German soldiers without SS connections learned of it.⁷⁶

Rumors of the gas van also spread among the nearby Croatian Jews, who had not yet been interned, and even as far as the Serbian

⁷⁰ Pradel process, XIV, p. 127 (Enge testimony).

⁷¹ Enge process, Hauptakten, p. 58; and Andorfer process, III, p. 58 (Enge testimony).

⁷² Pradel process, XII, p. 8 (Karl W. testimony); and Andorfer process, I, p. 59 (testimony of Kurt S.).

⁷³ Andorfer process, III, p. 42; Schäfer process: II, p. 416; III, p. 497 (testimony of Fritz M.) and p. 598 (testimony of Ernst W.); II, p. 353 (testimony of Dr. R.).

⁷⁴ Pradel process, I, p. 213 (testimony of Dr. Walter U.).

⁷⁵ Schäfer process, III, p. 647, pp. 654-658 (testimony of Bruno M.).

⁷⁶ Landgericht Kassel, 3 Js 11/66, Ermittlungsverfahren gegen Walter Liepe, 30 (testimony of Karl B.) and 44 (testimony of Anton S.).

Jewish refugees who had escaped to Hungary.⁷⁷ Clearly, if the Germans could drive a gas van through downtown Belgrade day after day while its passengers screamed and pounded against the back door in their death agony, secrecy was not the highest priority at the time, except in regard to the unsuspecting victims still in camp. Later, however, traces of the mass murder had to be erased. In December 1943, Paul Blobel's *Kommando* 1005, charged with digging up and burning the bodies from the mass graves left behind by the *Einsatzgruppen* in Russia, arrived in Yugoslavia, and liquidated the mass graves near Avala among others.⁷⁸

Concluding Thoughts

In terms of numbers of victims, the murder of some 7,500 Jews in Semlin was a minor episode in the Holocaust. Yet in terms of personnel and timing, it is instructive. Many of the personnel of the death camps in Poland came either from the Death's Head units, with experience in the German concentration camp system, or from the euthanasia program. Even if one disregards the supporting cast of diplomats, bureaucrats and military officers involved in German Jewish policy in Serbia and concentrates solely on the SS, the personnel involved in the Semlin gassings were not veterans hardened by their experience in euthanasia or the concentration camp system. Yugoslavia was a marginal theater compared with the momentous military operations and occupation policies under way in the east. Just as Yugoslavia received second-rate military units for the most part, so the SS personnel, with the exception of Schäfer, were men with relatively nondescript and unspectacular SS careers. In Semlin, however, the lack of special training or experience did not prove to be a barrier to mass murder.

⁷⁷ JIM 24-2-2/4 (testimony of Dr. Lev Brandeis); Schäfer process II, pp. 387-388 and Pradel process, I, p. 210 (testimony of Alexander F.).

⁷⁸ Nürnberg Staatsarchiv, Rep. 502, VI, T 4, affidavit of Wilhelm Gustav Tempel.

Much has been written of the SS as an ideologically indoctrinated and highly disciplined, loyal and obedient elite, primed to carry out Hitler's most radical policies. While these aspects are important, they have perhaps overshadowed other essential factors. The SS was a multifaceted organization, a reservoir of manpower that provided many skills and specialties. Specialization and division of labor, keys to man's productivity, were also keys to the SS's capacity to wreak destruction. Organizers and technicians were as important as executioners, the scope of specific skills as important as discipline and ideological commitment.

Division of labor and specialization were important not only for potential efficiency in the organization of mass murder. They also routinized and compartmentalized the role of the lower-echelon perpetrators, greatly improving their capacity to continue acting on a "business as usual" basis. The members of the *Einsatzgruppen* confronted the murderous reality of their actions every day, and both the inefficiency and psychological burden of the killing method were soon apparent to the organizers. In contrast, the development of the gas van and its use to murder the Semlin Jews presaged the efficiency and routinized detachment of the death camps. Guards continued to guard, whether it was a bridge, a concentration camp, or a mass burial site. Drivers drove, whether it was a chauffeured limousine or gas van. Chemists worked in their crime laboratory, whether to solve murders or facilitate them. Mechanics worked on all vehicles in their garage, whatever their function, and motor-pool supervisors procured and dispatched them. Camp commandants kept order in their camps, whether it required threatening Serbs to have them deliver the minimal food supplies to keep their prisoners alive one month or inventing fictitious regulations of a bogus transit camp to send the same prisoners unsuspecting to their death the next.

For Andorfer, who had come to know some of the Semlin Jews as individual human beings, the mass murder admittedly caused distress. But compartmentalization of functions provided solace. He

was responsible for keeping order among the living in the camp, and for keeping secrecy over the dead. The intervening killing operation was not his job. He waited by the bridge for the van in the morning; after lunch, he visited the camp in the afternoon. He was no murderer, he claimed. He did not design the gas van or send it from Berlin, he did not load the prisoners, he did not connect the pipe or drive the truck. "The murderer was my government! . . . It was a desk murder" in which the organizers made use of "the little people."⁷⁹ For the rest, excepting the driver who chose to gather the Jewish children around him and pass out candy, the direct and intimate realization of their participation in murder was avoidable. The victims could remain a dehumanized abstraction, their own actions just a small incident in a long career.

For a few in higher position, like Schäfer, it was a chance to win further recognition in their highly successful careers. A terse telegram announcing the arrival of a special truck conveyed without specifics all that was expected by Schäfer's superiors, and he did not disappoint them. But for most it was not initiative and resourcefulness, merely the psychological detachment to continue their usual jobs in unusual circumstances, that made possible the mass murder.

The trail of complicity is long — from the mechanic, motor-pool boss, chemist and chief of technical affairs in Berlin to the guards, drivers, camp commandants and police chief in Belgrade. All were part of the SS police network, and more had a police career background prior to being absorbed into the SS than a SS background that gained them entry into the police. Clearly no quantitative judgments can be drawn from a limited case study, but it

⁷⁹ Andorfer process, III, pp. 3-31, pp. 65-70 (Andorfer's court testimony). On compartmentalization and routinization, see also: George Kren and Leon Rappoport, *The Holocaust and the Crisis of Human Behavior*, New York, 1980, pp. 140-141.

does suggest that the institutional features and personnel of the German police deserve as much attention as the ideology and discipline of the SS.

The question of timing in Serbia is also important. The period from the spring of 1941, with the formation of the *Einsatzgruppen*, to the spring of 1942, with the opening of the death camp at Belzec in mid-March, is a confused time-span in the history of German Jewish policy. The decision-making process at the highest level of Nazi leadership is not revealed in documentation. Thus a wide variety of interpretations has flourished: Hitler knew from the beginning of his political career or from the mid-1920's that he was going to kill the Jews;⁸⁰ Hitler knew before or at the beginning of the war;⁸¹ Hitler decided in the spring of 1941;⁸² Hitler made not one but two decisions — first in the spring of 1941 to kill the Russian Jews and subsequently in the summer of 1941 to kill the European Jews, though this latter decision could not be immediately implemented;⁸³ Hitler decided to kill the Russian Jews in the summer⁸⁴ and the European Jews in the fall of 1941;⁸⁵ Hitler made no decision and issued no comprehensive order but exerted the pressure that led to a gradual or incremental evolution toward the Final Solution;⁸⁶ Hitler

⁸⁰ Lucy Dawidowicz, *The War against the Jews*, New York, 1975, and Eberhard Jäckel, *Hitler's Weltanschauung*, Middletown, Conn., 1972, respectively.

⁸¹ This is at least implied by Gerald Reitlinger in his dismissal of the Madagascar Plan as a seriously-intended stage of German Jewish policy. Other proponents of this interpretation focus on *Kristallnacht*, Hitler's "prophecy" of January 30, 1939, and Heydrich's *Endziel* memorandum of September 21, 1939.

⁸² Helmut Krausnick, "The Persecution of the Jews," *Anatomy of the SS State*, New York, 1965.

⁸³ Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*; Christopher R. Browning, "Ein Antwort auf Martin Broszat's Thesen zur Genesis der 'Endlösung,'" *VfZ*, No. 29, 1981, pp. 97-109.

⁸⁴ Christian Streit, *Keine Kameraden*, Stuttgart, 1978.

⁸⁵ Uwe Dietrich Adam, *Judenpolitik im Dritten Reich*, Düsseldorf, 1972.

⁸⁶ Martin Broszat, "Hitler und die Genesis der 'Endlösung,'" *Aus Anlass der Thesen von David Irving*, "VfZ", No. 25, 1977, pp. 739-775.

made no decision and was unaware of the Final Solution being perpetrated by his underlings.⁸⁷ Because of the lack of definitive documentation at the highest level, the attempt must be made to reconstruct the decision-making process through its reflection at lower levels.

A study of the Serbian case alone will not resolve this question. However, it does indicate that a fundamental shift took place in German Jewish policy in Serbia between the fall of 1941 and the spring of 1942. The killing of the male Jews emerged primarily out of local factors related to the partisan war and the army's reprisal policy. The male Jews were a convenient and expendable pool of victims, whose executions would satisfy the required reprisal quotas without producing undesired political repercussions aggravating the anti-partisan struggle. Berlin sent SS and Foreign Office representatives to Belgrade to urge a "local solution" to the Jewish question. They discovered upon arrival that their pressure was unnecessary, for a local solution was already under way. The fall murders were not a conscious part of a European-wide Final Solution to the Jewish question, but it would appear that such a plan was already conceived, if not yet ready to be implemented, at this time. The Belgrade authorities and Berlin representatives agreed that the Jewish women, children and elderly would be placed in a concentration camp and sent to a "reception camp in the east" (clearly no labor camp was meant for this category of Jews!) as soon as this was technically feasible. No such "reception camp" as yet existed nor, it turned out, was deportation to one possible as soon as Belgrade wished. Another solution proved more feasible — to send a gas van to Belgrade. This was not a spontaneous local massacre, merely encouraged and abetted by Berlin, but the consummation in Serbia of a wider plan to destroy the European Jews. The pride with which Schäfer boasted of his accomplishment — "Belgrade was the only great city of Europe

⁸⁷ David Irving, *Hitler's War*, London, 1977.

that was free of Jews” and his Sipo-SD *Dienststelle* only the second outside Germany to report its territory *judenfrei*⁸⁸ — and the zeal with which Turner sought to gain a share of the credit, indicate that both were fully aware of how Berlin perceived these events.

⁸⁸ Schäfer process: I, p. 26 (testimony of Frederick K.), and II, p. 353 (testimony of Dr. R.).