

## PARTISAN WARFARE, 1942–44

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The level of civilian casualties suffered in Belorussia and Ukraine during the Second World War was amongst the highest in Europe. Official estimates indicate that the Belorussian Soviet Republic lost approximately one-third of its total population. This was a demographic catastrophe of the first order, comparable in historical terms only with events such as the 'Black Death' or the Thirty Years War. Much of this figure can probably be accounted for by the effects of Soviet deportations, the murder of the Jews, Red Army losses, German deportations and post-war emigration. Nevertheless, a residue of civilian casualties remains, in the realm of several hundred thousand people.<sup>1</sup>

A considerable proportion of the non-Jewish civilian losses were violent deaths, resulting from the intense partisan warfare, which raged especially in Belorussia and the northern parts of Ukraine. The greatest destruction was undoubtedly wrought in the large-scale anti-partisan sweeps by units of the German Army, *Waffen SS* and police, which aimed to render large areas uninhabited. Literally hundreds of villages were razed to the ground never to be rebuilt, as there were virtually no survivors. In some areas rival partisan groups also fought each other or attacked civilians of other ethnic groups, shifting alliances as the overall political situation developed.

In their initial assessment of the partisan situation, the Germans were victims of their own ideology. Their reports in 1941 generally overstated the level of partisan activity amongst a population which remained passive, if not well-disposed towards their new masters. In part the German officials were looking for an excuse to justify their own unprovoked mass murders against a Jewish population which, at that time, had barely started to organize armed resistance.<sup>2</sup> For the majority of the local inhabitants, it was the combination of economic exploitation and political repression, seen most clearly in the treatment of PoWs and the deportations for work in Germany, which served to turn them against the German occupiers.

Under these conditions, continued fierce Soviet resistance at the Front and skilful propaganda provided fertile ground for the Soviet partisan movement in many areas. By the summer of 1942 a small cadre of former Red Army soldiers and Soviet partisan leaders had begun to mobilize and exploit the growing will to resist.<sup>3</sup> The vicious reprisals exacted on whole communities by the German police in turn escalated the partisan conflict, embroiling almost the entire population. By the end of 1943 vast areas of countryside were no longer under German control; their influence was restricted in many areas to the towns and the main lines of communication.<sup>4</sup>

him. He was fortunate not to be in his own house when a group of Germans and local police came to arrest him. He did not have time to retrieve the arms he had obtained the previous day, but managed to escape over the roof. He recalls that: 'thanks to the fact that we had been warned by the child, we managed to escape the clutches of the Nazi thugs and despite the heavy fire they soon opened on us, we reached the Alba woods about 2km away'.<sup>9</sup> Thus he became a partisan after narrowly escaping arrest.

In May 1942 an order was issued that all former Soviet soldiers were to report to Mir to be re-registered. Our informant in Berezhno recalls:

The five former Soviet soldiers in Berezhno decided not to go so we issued them with weapons and they fled to the forest. I suppose it could be said that at this time some form of partisan movement had started. Myself and my fellow activists left in Berezhno stayed and helped on our parents' farms as there was still much work to be done. We ourselves did not flee into the forests until July or August 1942 once the work had been completed.<sup>10</sup>

In other areas, such as Brest, a similar chronology can be observed. An initial nucleus of border guards and former Red Army men went into hiding in 1941 and received passive support from elements of the local population. Then in the summer of 1942 they went over to the offensive against the Germans. For example, on 21 June 1942 a German convoy was attacked on the Brest highway. According to the partisan report four trucks and one car were destroyed, causing considerable German casualties.<sup>11</sup> German loss reports also record the killing of two Gendarmes in the area in late June.<sup>12</sup> Post-war investigative records indicate that severe reprisals were instigated shortly afterwards:

In the summer of 1942, after the destruction of the German car on the highway, the Germans punished the villages nearby; they shot several people in Zbunin and burned their homes. then they destroyed Smolyarnya, near Dubitsa station, and then they went on to the village of Leplevka; many people had already fled, but they managed to catch about 10 people and shoot them and they burned about 50 houses.<sup>13</sup>

In September the *HSSPF*, Hans-Adolf Prützmann, issued instructions for officers of the Order Police in Ukraine to avoid unnecessary trips by car due to the recent losses suffered from partisan attacks.<sup>14</sup>

In *Weißruthenien* units of the *Waffen SS* involved in the on-going ghetto 'liquidations' around Vileyka noted in May 1942 that the 'alarming reports about partisans were proving mostly to be exaggerated and were often only a false alarm'.<sup>15</sup> It was a common feature of partisan tactics at this time to spread rumours exaggerating their own strength in order to intimidate their opponents and facilitate their own operations. Shalom Cholawski recalls:

of these rumours. The posters also included exhortations to join partisan units and threats against those collaborating with the German authorities.<sup>24</sup> Many of the initial attacks were directed against village elders and policemen in the more isolated villages. This in turn made it harder for the Germans to recruit replacements if they were shown to be unable to protect them from the partisans.

It is important to stress the largely spontaneous nature of much initial partisan activity. Former communists and Red Army men hiding in the forests and living off the land provided the impetus for resistance, but many of them were not in contact with Moscow at this time. Likewise in the Minsk ghetto, the initial resistance organization grew up without any orders from 'above'.<sup>25</sup> It was the harsh policies of the Germans which drove even teenagers into active resistance. In Berezchno our former partisan recalls:

In the forests there were other organized groups from villages such as Sinyavsky Sloboda, Pogorelka and Lyadki. We were based in the Naliboki forest. The first group was called the 'Komsomolsky'. It was called this because the majority of its members were very young. We numbered 56 people. We immediately started ambushes in areas such as Yeremichi and Turets. We cut telephone wires. Other groups would attack railway lines with mines.<sup>26</sup>

The partisans also established a network of contacts within each village to give them warning about police activities. In a village near Derechin, Slonim district, the wife of a partisan (who herself acted as a courier) recalls that:

The police could walk freely around the village during the day and obtain food from the villagers, they often visited their relatives in the village. The partisans could only come at night. But they could not be certain that the police had left the village. It might happen that a partisan came into a house and a policeman was staying the night there. So, I would go to a house to find out if there were any policemen there or the house was safe.<sup>27</sup>

Partisan agents within the population were also employed to smuggle weapons and ammunition from the police to the partisans.<sup>28</sup> Some policemen may have played a double game deliberately, as a form of insurance in case the wrong side should win the war. It was not uncommon for former policemen to claim during post-war interrogations that they regularly supplied the partisans with ammunition and information.<sup>29</sup> However, the risk in the event of being detected could mean death not only for the policeman, but also for his family. Children were frequently employed by the partisans as couriers and for the transportation of weapons. Members of the *Komsomol* might be employed for these essentially grown-up tasks.<sup>30</sup>

I discovered from him filled me with horror. He said that the day before the Nesvizh police had murdered all the Jews who had been left alive after the first slaughter and in a whisper immediately went on to say: 'I have sheltered 17 people who came to my place during the night in the barn.' He asked me to take them with me because the police could be there at any minute and kill them together with his family. I quickly consulted my entire group and, having obtained their consent, took them with me... Of those seventeen three subsequently died. The others survived the war.<sup>37</sup>

Another survivor, who escaped from the 'liquidation' of the Lesnaya camp in March 1943, was also 'fortunate to meet up with good people' who showed her some sympathy. when she knocked on their door in the forest with her child. They provided her with food and clothing before she set out again on her chosen path.<sup>38</sup> In the Novogrudok ghetto it was known that a poor Gentile family who lived about 4km outside town, the Hicles (dogcatchers), would take in escaped Jews and assist them in making contact with the Bielski Jewish partisan group. Jack Kagan recounts that:

Every Jew who managed to escape from the ghetto and reach the Hicles was hidden for a day or two and supplied with food for the journey ahead. The Hicles kept in touch with the Bielski partisans, and they would tell runaway Jews where they might be found. When the Germans later found out about the activities of the Hicles, they killed them and burned their property.<sup>39</sup>

Another group which was known to treat the Jews sympathetically were the Baptists. Shalom Cholawski reports the selfless help he received from this Christian sect:

Our meetings with the Baptists were reminders of kindness and admiration. They were a religious sect devoted to the Holy Bible and to the messianic mission of the Jewish people. They lived in a different spiritual world from others in the area, and their lives seemed separated from the hatred and murder that surrounded them. The partisans usually aroused respect in the local population, respect for their strength and their weapons. But with the Baptists, it was different. For them, the human being came first. They showed respect toward Jews and our ideals, and they made us feel that it was a privilege for them to be our hosts. Their compassion aroused deep feelings among the Jewish fighters. They provided a refuge and sanctuary for human values.<sup>40</sup>

This was, however, very much the exception to the rule. Most Jewish fugitives had no one to turn to. As one Jew from the Miory area explained to a local peasant: 'it was not only the Germans who wanted to kill us; most of the

home to visit their families in the countryside. They were interrogated and killed after confessing to having participated in the murder of Jews.<sup>46</sup> In another operation motivated by revenge, a group of Jewish partisans under the command of Dr Atlas in the Slonim district took a leading part in an attack with Soviet partisans on the Derechin garrison in August 1942. A number of local policemen were killed.<sup>47</sup>

Detailed reports from the Mir *rayon* reflect a further increase in partisan activity in the autumn of 1942. Many of the attacks were raids upon outlying economic facilities such as mills and estates, which were only weakly defended by the Germans. The partisans' aim was mainly to obtain supplies for themselves or deny agricultural produce to the Germans. Not untypical was a raid on the village of Simakovo near Mir on 10 November 1942. The partisans burned down the *Schutzmannschaft* outpost building, which had recently been abandoned, 14 houses with their outbuildings, seven barns full of produce, the village hall, the school and the church. One calf, six pigs and 13 sheep died in their stalls. Those inhabitants who co-operated with the Germans were beaten and threatened with being shot.<sup>48</sup>

As the partisan units increased their strength, equipment and discipline they went over to direct attacks against German patrols and outposts. German reprisals were then concentrated against villages believed to be partisan strongholds. A series of brutal actions was conducted by units of German Police Regiment 15 in the Brest region in the autumn of 1942: for instance, at the end of September an action was conducted by one company against the village of Zablotype near Brest. According to the German report 289 people were shot dead, 151 farmsteads were burned down and 700 cattle, 400 pigs, 400 sheep and 70 horses were seized. In addition considerable amounts of corn and agricultural equipment were removed. Only five of the local families were released following interrogation.<sup>49</sup> German correspondence from this area shows that even the Security Police had doubts about the humanity of the methods employed by the Order Police.<sup>50</sup>

Subsequent actions in October and November by the same police regiment revealed a variety of pretexts given for destroying villages or murdering families. The Security Police leader in Brest proposed 'clearing' remaining *khutors* (farmsteads) in one area, as the locals had failed to report any partisans, although it was well-known that partisans were active there.<sup>51</sup> On another occasion it was decided to shoot those families who had members absent, as it was assumed that these persons had left to join the partisans.<sup>52</sup> Another group which was singled out for 'special treatment' (execution) in the Brest area were all persons who had arrived from the east following the Soviet occupation in 1939.<sup>53</sup> In a village near Mokransy a list of persons aiding the partisans was prepared, presumably with the help of local informers, who must have known the likely results of this denunciation.<sup>54</sup>

clear, frosty, two policemen arrived. They were drunk, they could hardly stand up and they were cursing, calling us partisan scum. I then crawled on to the stove out of fear, there was another seven-year-old girl there, my cousin's daughter. Before the two policemen burst into the house, another policeman was posted by the entrance. But also before that a woman came to the house and said that they were dealing with partisan families, but for some reason we did not run away. After the policeman was posted at the door, my father sat at the window and saw the two policemen coming to the house. I remember him saying, 'our death is coming.' We were all in the same room... The two policemen ordered my father, mother and two sisters, one had her child with her, to lie down on the floor. They ordered Nina and me to climb down off the stove, but then [policeman] M. fired at my mother, he shot her in the back and her chest exploded. They must have been firing explosive cartridges. Then they shot my sister, they shot off her right arm, then the child, they shot off his left arm. M. was firing. He asked the other policeman why he was not firing. He replied that he was misfiring. Then M. fired at my younger sister and wounded her. The child was crying and he turned and shot the child in the head, and his brains flew all over the stove. My sister told me later that she was lying on the floor, her mouth was full of blood and she thought she was dying, and then she saw the policemen leaving. Nina and I were on the stove at that time. M. saw us and told [his mate] that we also had to be killed, but the latter said we should be left. When [they] were leaving the house they saw Nina's grandmother, but they did not try to kill her because they were afraid the partisans would hear the shots. When the policemen had left I saw my father getting up from the floor. He was covered in the blood of my sister and the child, but he had not been shot and he was not wounded. My elder sister was mortally wounded and was moaning, she died shortly after. The child was dead. My younger sister was wounded in the side, but she survived. They had killed mummy. My father got up and ordered me to hide under the bed, but I was already too big and could not fit, then I climbed up on the stove again. The grandmother took Nina away. Then I saw through the window four policemen coming towards the house. My father and sister lay down on the floor and pretended to be dead. The policemen had come to check if everyone had been killed. It was the first time I had seen these policemen. They glanced in at the house and immediately left.<sup>57</sup>

Another policeman, now living in the West, tells a very similar story to that of the police secretary, especially with regard to the conduct of the action:

I along with another policeman was ordered to guard a house in the village of Lyadki to prevent the occupants leaving. We were not told the reason for this, but I knew Lyadki was a strong partisan village. This was on the

policemen the houses of the partisans' families. One policeman was in the house, another stood at the gate so that the group who was carrying out the shootings saw which houses to go to. The shootings were carried out by a special group of policemen – about 15 Belorussians, who were in a state of intoxication... That night altogether eight families were killed, about 60 people.<sup>60</sup>

It appears that during the action some mistakes were made and the wrong families were killed. Partial looting took place during the action, but one or two days later the police returned to take away the remaining livestock and property of the village.<sup>61</sup> The partisan agent within the police has summed up succinctly the nature of the perpetrators and the purpose of the action within the overall German strategy:

All those who killed people in Lyadki were real enthusiasts of executions, which was manifested by their behaviour, and besides, they never made a secret out of it. I remember that there was an anxiety among the policemen after those families had been shot, for they were afraid of the partisans' village... I think that the action in Lyadki was only a part of the whole strategy of extermination of people, because the Germans, using the police force as their means, tried to impose their power all over. They were strong enough in those cities or other places where they had their garrisons, but if there was a village, for example, that went out of their control they tried to turn it into a dead zone. Subsequently there were other actions against the civilians in the villages of Lyadki, Novoye Selo and Pogorelka.<sup>62</sup>

An estimate of the number of non-Jews killed by the police in the Mir *rayon* during the German occupation lies between 300 and 500 people, many of them women and children.<sup>63</sup>

This detailed account is representative of similar events that occurred throughout Belorussia and Ukraine as the partisan war intensified. The Belorussians have created a memorial to all the villages destroyed during the German occupation at Khatyn to the north of Minsk. On 22 March 1943 the village was burned down and 156 inhabitants killed by the infamous 'Dirlewanger Brigade'. Only three children and one man survived. Official figures state that 209 towns and 9200 Belorussian villages were destroyed. Many of these villages were so completely erased that they were never rebuilt. The official inscription at Khatyn indicates that 2.23 million Soviet citizens were killed on the territory of modern-day Belorussia.<sup>64</sup>

One counter-measure developed by the Germans was to organize large-scale anti-partisan sweeps against areas known to be partisan strongholds. A typical example is 'Operation Hermann', known as the 'great blockade' to the local peasants. This was a large-scale operation conducted in July 1943 not

at this time. He was unlikely to have succeeded in reaching the partisans whilst the Germans were combing the area in such strength.<sup>70</sup>

As police operations became directed not only against the Jews but also the remainder of the local population, the reliability and motivation of the *Schutzmannschaft* began to decline. The *Gendarmerie* District Leader in Brest complained in August 1942 of the reluctance of the *Schutzmannschaft* in Oziaty and Radvanichi to risk their lives in combat with partisans.<sup>71</sup> Policemen found sleeping at their post were likely to be beaten.<sup>72</sup> The *Schutzmänner* were usually garrisoned in barracks and patrolled in large groups, not only for their own safety but to make it harder for them to desert.

One former police conscript claims that he was viewed with mistrust by the Germans. He was apparently conscripted to the police primarily to prevent him from joining the partisans:

In 1943 the Derechin garrison police surrounded our village and conscripted young men into the police. They brought us to the Derechin garrison and left us there. They threatened to shoot our families if we tried to escape. They did not trust us. I was posted to guard duties at the mill, in the canteen and other places. They did not take us on actions. If they did, the partisans would have killed us, as it was, I survived. Once, when I was in the police, 32 policemen went on an action, but only 10 returned, the rest got killed. I was one of those whom the Germans did not trust. they suspected I might run away to join the partisans.<sup>73</sup>

Evidence has been found regarding an incident where a group of policemen refused to participate in the shooting of local partisan families. In December 1943 the Polonka garrison, consisting of about 30 men, went on an anti-partisan operation to the village of Teshevla. According to one member of the police, they spread out and surrounded a farm from all sides:

After a search was carried out an elderly man and woman were brought out of the house, they were the partisan's mother and father. There was no one else on the farm... In the farmyard the police commander gave the order, I do not know to whom, to shoot the man and woman, however those persons refused to carry out the order. Then there was an altercation between the commander and the policemen. [The commander] lost his temper and ordered that only the leaders of the police station would shoot them.<sup>74</sup>

The two elderly people were then shot by the police commander, his deputy and the three section commanders who formed the firing squad.<sup>75</sup> A similar example of disobedience involved a local policeman in the Brest area, who announced to his superiors in the autumn of 1942 that, in the event of an escape by a prisoner, he would not shoot as he was a Baptist. After this announcement he was arrested and sent to Brest. His subsequent fate is unknown.<sup>76</sup>



became common for policemen to move their families inside the main fortified posts. One policeman asked for a transfer from Polonka to Novaya Mysh in June 1943, 'because my father, mother, brother and sister had moved from [the village of] Shpakovtsi to Novaya Mysh for fear of the Soviet partisans'.<sup>85</sup>

The Germans also organized a variety of self-defence units in the towns and villages to assist in resisting partisan attacks: for instance, in Turets, Mir rayon, the *Samookhova* (Home Guard) was recruited in 1943 by conscripting all men over 17 who were not serving in the police. Most of these men were in their thirties and forties.<sup>86</sup> They did not go out on patrol, but remained on guard at night. A particular problem with these improvised self-defence organizations was the shortage of weapons. A member of a village guard unit in Chersk, near Brest, remembered:

once when the deputy village elder came up and asked me how things were. I replied that to be on guard unarmed was a terrifying experience. Then he produced from his pocket two hand grenades and waving them around said: 'You have nothing to be afraid of, we have these to welcome the bandits with!'<sup>87</sup>

The main tactics employed by the police were to conduct patrols and ambushes in an attempt to take the partisans by surprise. Mobile squads, on horseback, bicycle or with motorized transport, known as *Jagdzüge* (hunting groups), were formed to permit rapid response to reports of partisan activity. In particular it was necessary to reinforce posts which came under attack.

The history of the Seilovichi police garrison near Nesvizh in 1943 provides a good example of growing partisan strength. A first attack by the partisans was beaten off in May 1943, but a second attack shortly afterwards proved more successful due to a partisan agent within the police. He managed not only to disable the police weapons, but also planted a mine which exploded inside the police station. He then fled to join the partisans. Two days after this betrayal, his relatives were killed by a police detachment from Nesvizh. A third attack in September 1943 saw a number of policemen captured, with several police conscripts being permitted to join the partisans.<sup>88</sup>

Not all Germans remained blind to the reasons for their declining influence. In a report prepared (in early 1942) for the *RSHA* in Berlin four reasons were given to explain why the initial enthusiasm of the local population towards the Germans had died away. First, there was the disappointment of the Nationalists at their frustrated hopes for independence; second, the notable decline in living standards; third, German setbacks at the Front; and fourth, the entry of America into the war. The effect on the local population was an increased reluctance to work for the Germans, a failure to comply with forced labour regulations and increased support for the partisans, including acts of sabotage.<sup>89</sup>

'actions', all caused men to flee to the partisans. Above all, the poor treatment of the local population was responsible for the development of strong partisan resistance.<sup>93</sup>

As can be seen from such reports, mounting German losses amongst their rear area forces led to increasing demoralization. A senior Gendarme noted in May 1943 that 'of the 500 Gendarmes who arrived with me in the Zhitomir *Generalkommissariat* in November 1941 from Cracov, over 10 per cent have fallen in battle'.<sup>94</sup> The *Schutzmannschaft* also began to suffer heavy losses during the winter of 1942–43. In *Weißruthenien* 268 *Schutzmänner* were killed and 236 wounded between October 1942 and March 1943.<sup>95</sup> Available loss reports prepared by the Commander of the Order Police (*KdO*) in Minsk indicate a marked increase in losses during the summer of 1942 which remained at a high level during the winter of 1942–43, despite German counter-measures, before rising further in the autumn of 1943.<sup>96</sup> By this time the German forces were clearly outnumbered and even outgunned by the Soviet partisan forces.

In this work based primarily on contemporary German and post-war investigative sources it has not been possible to examine the voluminous records of the Soviet partisan organization in detail.<sup>97</sup> In order to understand the development of the Soviet partisan movement, however, it is necessary to look back to the Russian tradition of anarchic peasant uprisings and especially the events of the civil war. During the First World War and revolutionary period partisan groups were frequently formed in the forests by deserters resisting conscription and local peasants opposed to military requisitions. These diffuse partisan groups at times resisted the operations of both Whites and Reds, usually trying to protect local interests against the occupying armies. They survived mainly with the support of local peasants and continued to threaten the security of the revolutionary government in many areas, even after the Whites had been crushed.<sup>98</sup>

Due to these largely anarchic roots, the Soviet authorities were reluctant to plan for partisan resistance in advance; however, they soon recognized its potential importance once the Germans had advanced deep into Soviet territory. In particular, the Communist Party was most concerned to gain central control over all partisan operations. In order to achieve this a Central Partisan Staff was established in Moscow on 30 May 1942.<sup>99</sup> These efforts at organization bore fruit over the following year, as the scattered groups of resistance were gradually brought within a centralized chain of command.<sup>100</sup>

From Moscow's viewpoint, the main aims for the partisan movement were to disrupt enemy lines of communication and gather intelligence about troop locations. This applied especially to the areas immediately behind the Front, where partisan operations were envisaged as acting in direct support of the Red Army. Other long-range objectives were to conduct propaganda work in

with severity and, at times meted out heavy punishment to those who harmed or offended peasants.<sup>107</sup>

Brutal types were present not only in the police but also among the partisans. A Jewish doctor remembers one partisan notable not only for his bravery, but also his savagery and cruelty:

The war turned ordinary people into extraordinary ones; in peacetime their potential stayed hidden but in an atmosphere of violence and danger it erupted with a force impossible to predict. This was what had happened to Zhenka. I listened to his tales about the inhumanity and hunger he had experienced in a German prisoner-of-war camp where man, literally ate man and I understood a little of why his hatred for the Germans was so intense and his desire for revenge so savage.<sup>108</sup>

The enforcement of strict discipline could mean the execution of partisans within the group as a result of plundering or other excesses, including rape. Even within the Bielski partisans there were occasions when disobedience or disloyalty had to be made an example of, if the coherence of the unit was to be maintained.<sup>109</sup>

On account of German patrols, the Soviet partisan units had to remain on constant alert. Each unit set up a watch around its base to give advance warning of attack. Guard duty was divided into shifts, usually four hours on and eight hours off. In order to avoid freezing to death in the winter, partisans would often sleep for only four hours at a time.

Nevertheless, in the more permanent bases set up in the forest, an almost normal life with plentiful supplies could be established through hard work. Shalom Cholawski recalls:

Partisan life in the forests of Orliki was almost appealing: affairs were organized, our shelters were warm and the food was good. Three times a day we had bread, and sometimes we had meat chunks fried in fat or cereal cooked with fat. The fat shielded us from the cold and illness. There was always tea and fried potato *latkes* ('pancakes').<sup>110</sup>

In some ways the large sweeps conducted by the Germans to clear areas of local inhabitants may have helped the partisans, as when they returned to the depopulated areas shortly afterwards they were able to dig up the potatoes left in the ground unharvested by the farmers.<sup>111</sup>

A particular problem for the partisans were louse plagues and other diseases, as well as treatment for the wounded in the unhygienic conditions prevalent in the forest camps.<sup>112</sup> In this respect Jewish doctors were generally accepted in the partisan units on account of their valuable skills. Some women in the forest camps served as nurses.<sup>113</sup> Medical supplies had to be stolen from the towns or were flown in to concealed airfields, such as one

against a train between Kazatin and Fastov. The train was derailed with nine cars wrecked and the locomotive severely damaged. Five members of the *Wehrmacht* were seriously injured and taken to Kazatin.<sup>121</sup> In addition to the *Gendarmerie* and *Schutzmannschaft*, the Germans also employed further auxiliary police units to guard the railway lines, known in some areas as '*Bahmschutz*' (railway protection) units.<sup>122</sup>

In the second half of 1943 the Soviet partisans operating behind the German Central Front conducted a concerted onslaught against the German railway communications. According to partisan records this resulted in more than 200 000 rails being destroyed on the territory of Belorussia between August 1943 and January 1944. Units encompassing more than 70 000 Belorussian partisans participated in these actions.<sup>123</sup> Jewish partisans played an active role in such attacks against the railways and roads.<sup>124</sup> During the summer offensive in 1944 partisan attacks on communications were again co-ordinated to support the advance of the Red Army.

Typical for the rapid expansion of the partisans during the latter part of the occupation was the development of the Voroshilov detachment, which was formed in February 1943 from small local groups and operated in the Brest district. Its initial personnel consisted partly of local people and partly of former Red Army soldiers who had remained in hiding on German occupied territory. The strength of the detachment had risen to 121 by the end of June 1943 when it was subordinated to the Stalin Brigade. Recruitment continued during the summer, bringing the unit's strength up to 337 by 1 September 1943. The new recruits were mostly locals and deserters from the German garrisons, including a number of Cossacks who had deserted *en masse*.

Partisan operations in this area consisted mostly of battles against the German garrisons and attacks on the railway lines. Initially the smaller outlying garrisons were attacked and forced to withdraw such that the Germans could only collect requisitions from the countryside by sending out large armed expeditions. By the autumn of 1943 large-scale attacks were also being mounted against the main German garrisons. By the time of the liberation in June 1944 further groups had been incorporated and the Voroshilov detachment's strength numbered 588 partisans.<sup>125</sup>

Records are available showing the national composition of a variety of partisan units. Figures for the Stalin Brigade consisting of almost 1000 partisans in the autumn of 1943 in the Brest area reveal, for instance, that Jews made up only 3 per cent, compared with Russians 32 per cent, Belorussians 38 per cent and Ukrainians 10 per cent.<sup>126</sup> Some predominantly Jewish formations in the Naliboki forest contained considerably higher proportions of Jews. Records concerning over 8000 partisans active in the Ivenets-Lida area (Naliboki forest) on 1 September 1943 reveal a Jewish proportion of over 12 per cent.<sup>127</sup> This reflected the success of the Jewish

In the Novaya Mysh *rayon* the local police was heavily infiltrated by the Polish Underground. Several former policemen claimed after the war that they had been recruited to the Belorussian Police on instructions from the Polish Underground. They swore secret oaths of loyalty to General Sikorski and took conspiratorial nicknames. Poles were directed to serve in the *Schutzmannschaft* from 1942 in order to receive military training. The chief of the Novaya Mysh Police, Henryk Zaprucki, was simultaneously a commander in the Polish Underground. Whilst serving with the Germans, Polish policemen attempted to smuggle food, weapons and ammunition to Polish partisan units. During the retreat these *Armija Krajowa* (AK) men became split up and some were killed in a battle against the Germans near Slonim after deserting.<sup>135</sup>

Membership of the Polish Underground did not prevent some policemen from participating in German actions against the Jews. The following scene is recalled by a Polish policeman from Novaya Mysh at the end of 1943:

While we were eating breakfast and drinking vodka the policeman P. came into the house and reported to Zaprucki that the policemen had arrested a Jew and a Jewess. Then Zaprucki said to policeman L., 'Go and deal with them.' L. and P. left the house and we stayed as before. After some time, while we were in the house I heard several single shots, but I did not see who was shooting at whom, but later P. told me and the other policemen that he and ... W. had shot the Jews who had been arrested. After the shots L. returned to the house alone and told Zaprucki that the Jews had been dealt with.<sup>136</sup>

Similar anti-Semitism has been recorded among certain Polish partisan groups.<sup>137</sup> The Polish Underground in their reports stressed the indisciplined plundering by so-called 'Jewish-peasant gangs'.<sup>138</sup> At the same time, in areas such as Volhynia, the Poles were more prominent than the Ukrainians in rescue efforts for the Jews.<sup>139</sup>

Some Polish groups actively resisted the Germans, especially following the arrest and murder of members of the Polish 'intelligentsia' in the summer of 1942.<sup>140</sup> However, the Poles also showed great mistrust towards the Soviet partisans, as well as Belorussian, Ukrainian and Lithuanian nationalist forces.<sup>141</sup> In areas such as the Naliboki forest, the Polish Underground formed their own partisan units and there was sporadic co-operation with Soviet partisan forces. In response to German deportations in June 1943 about 40 Poles left their homes in villages near Derevna to join the detachment known as the 'Polish Legion' in the forest.<sup>142</sup> During the course of 'Operation Hermann' in the summer of 1943 the Germans reported that a number of Polish partisans were destroyed, captured or driven westwards into a pocket.<sup>143</sup> At this time the Poles began to complain of being betrayed by their Soviet comrades in arms.<sup>144</sup> Equally, Jewish partisans under Soviet leadership reported being attacked by

these various organizations resulted in frequent fights between rival partisan groups, as well as attacks against the German occupying forces. One reason for the reluctance of Ukrainian units to declare open war on the Germans remained a fear of the consequences for the local Ukrainian population.<sup>155</sup>

Like the Poles, the Ukrainian nationalists also adopted a policy of infiltrating the German police and administration with the aim of gaining weapons and local influence. Subsequently many deserted to the UPA (Ukrainian Resistance Army) in the forest; for instance, in March 1943 some 6000 Ukrainian policemen deserted with their equipment following a call from the nationalist leadership.<sup>156</sup>

At the beginning of 1943 detachments of the UPA also began to attack Polish villages, massacring the unarmed population. The situation in Volhynia was described in the Polish Underground press in May 1943 as follows:

Volhynia is the scene of the insane, savage massacre of the Poles. It surpasses all conception. According to information which is not exaggerated, in the three districts of Sarny, Kostopol and Rovno, where the gangs prevail, about 2000 Poles have been killed. Entire Polish villages which did not manage to defend themselves or to flee, have perished. Whole gangs of Ukrainians, sometimes numbering up to several hundred persons, composed mainly of people from the surrounding villages, often led by the militia, surround a village and murder everyone, they burn the buildings, looting what there is. The most gruesome are the squads of 'axe-men', by which the bodies of innocent victims are butchered.<sup>157</sup>

According to a contemporary German report, in May 1943 Ukrainian 'bandits' murdered the Polish population in the village of Horodets, near Sarny, to the last man.<sup>158</sup> The *Generalkommissar* in Volhynia-Podolia noted in June 1943 that:

Many Polish families were wiped out and whole Polish villages burned down during the reporting period. It should be stressed that the greater part of the Ukrainian population take part in this. Fighting against these partisans is made considerably harder as during the day they play the role of peaceful peasants.<sup>159</sup>

In response the Polish Underground formed self-defence squads in Polish villages. Poles from isolated villages fled to the larger Polish settlements, enjoying German protection in some places.<sup>160</sup>

Subsequently the pattern of massacres gradually spread further to the west, encompassing Galicia by late 1943.<sup>161</sup> Soviet partisan units appeared in Volhynia at this time. These squads were also hostile towards the Polish Underground, attacking detachments of Polish partisans and murdering their commanders. Efforts by the Poles to establish contact and co-operate with the Soviets came to nothing.<sup>162</sup> In the second half of 1943 the Ukrainians,

women and children takes on another quality insofar as they were killing close neighbours, relatives and even former friends. In these actions the dominant role was played by the police volunteers, who had committed themselves to the Germans and received rewards and promotions for their loyalty. These men were clearly the most active, together with a minority of the conscripts who acted from motives of personal revenge.

In general German collective reprisal actions did more to alienate the local population than the more selective attacks of the partisans. This was combined with effective Soviet propaganda campaigns, which appealed to national patriotism as against the destructive self-interest characteristic of German policies. As one Soviet appeal directed towards Nazi collaborators explained: 'The German fights against culture, against progress, he burns our villages, he destroys the weak and old as well defenceless women and children. The question is: why do you serve the German?'<sup>168</sup>

Leon Berk, a Jewish partisan doctor, forcefully rebuts any simple attempt to make a direct comparison between Soviet partisan violence and the aggressive destruction unleashed by the German invasion:

Under no circumstances can I equate the excesses committed by the partisans with the crimes against humanity committed by Nazi Germany. The killings, however appalling they were, which took place in the forest, were an instinctive defence reaction which, with time, evolved into an orgy of vengeance exacted by free, courageous people against a vicious invader who, in the name of spurious racial superiority, intended the deliberate and systematic destruction of a great nation.<sup>169</sup>

Partisan attacks in the occupied territories increased commensurately with German setbacks at the Front. Forced recruitment into the *Schutzmannschaft* and mutual reprisals against families on both sides intensified the violent struggle, in which innocent civilians often bore the brunt of the casualties. In Belorussia and Ukraine hundreds of villages were razed to the ground.

Even before the German retreat, effective control had been lost over much of the countryside in the 'occupied' east. The most serious consequence of this for the Germans was its effect on morale in the rear areas, which also undermined their ability to resist the Soviet advance. Like the aerial bombardment of Germany, it is impossible to measure precisely the contribution of partisan resistance in the east to Allied victory. Some Soviet historians, like the partisan commanders in their own reports, have tended to inflate the practical significance of the Soviet partisan contribution. Nevertheless, it probably deserves more credit than it has received from many western historians hitherto.<sup>170</sup> When the Red Army drove German forces out of Belorussia and northern Ukraine in 1944, it was with considerable practical and psychological support from their own Soviet partisan forces.<sup>171</sup>

20. See Chapter 4 above.
21. Brest Archive 995-1-4, p. 169 *Gendarmerie* post Mir report, 23 July 1942. For further details on this incident see INRW SWKsz 43.
22. SARF 7021-148-365, p. 8 *KdG Weißruthenien* order, 6 July 1942.
23. USHMMA RG 53.002M, reel 5 (BNAM) 658-1-2, p. 65 *KdG Zhitomir* Order 3/42, 5 May 1942.
24. PAAA Inl. Hg/431, 226721-42 Activity and Situation Report No. 10, 1–28 February 1942.
25. S. Spector, *The Holocaust of Volhynian Jews*, p. 277; H. Smolar, *The Minsk Ghetto*, p. 35.
26. WCU D9145.
27. WCU D719A.
28. UKGB Minsk Archive File No. 2018, Criminal Case 35371. In post-war trials many of the accused claimed to have assisted the partisans in this way; often it proved difficult to verify these claims on the basis of witnesses and partisan records.
29. See for example UKGB Minsk Archive File No. 902, Criminal Case 35930 and Archive File No. 1631, Criminal Case 35994.
30. B. Chiari, 'Deutsche Herrschaft', p. 202.
31. See for example BA NS 19/2715 Experience and evacuation report of v. Gottberg, 31 August 1944; BA-MA RW 30/27, p. 52 Armaments Commando Minsk Partisan Report for period 13 May–24 June 1942; W. Wilenchik, 'Die Partisanenbewegung in Weißrußland', p. 253 n. 533.
32. W. Wilenchik, 'Die Partisanenbewegung in Weißrußland', p. 250; S. Spector, *The Holocaust of Volhynian Jews*, pp. 288–9 and 352.
33. S. Spector, *The Holocaust of Volhynian Jews*, p. 256.
34. USHMMA RG 53.002M, reel 4 (BNAM) 389-1-5, p. 4 *Gendarmerie* post Starzyna report on 2 February 1944 mentions a camp of about 700 Jews with families which had only about 70 weapons; S. Spector, *The Holocaust of Volhynian Jews*, pp. 284–5.
35. L. Eckmann and C. Lazar, *The Jewish Resistance*, pp. 151–2; see also S. Cholawski, *Soldiers from the Ghetto*, p. 143.
36. L. Eckman and C. Lazar, *The Jewish Resistance*, p. 234.
37. SAL IV K 79/64, pp. 146–52 Josef Marchwinski, 'The criminals came from the West'.
38. T. Richmond, *Konin: A Quest*, p. 308.
39. J. Kagan and D. Cohen, *Surviving the Holocaust*, p. 58.
40. S. Cholawski, *Soldiers from the Ghetto*, p. 166. On the role of the Baptists as rescuers in Volhynia, see S. Spector, *The Holocaust of Volhynian Jews*, pp. 243–4.
41. I. Aron, *Fallen Leaves*, p. 79; on the anti-Semitism of the peasantry in this area see also *Memorial Book of Glebokie*, p. 69.
42. N. Tec, *Defiance*, pp. 45 and 90–1; on Jewish civilian camps see also S. Spector, *The Holocaust of Volhynian Jews*, pp. 278–82 and 327–38 and L. Smilovitsky, 'Righteous Gentiles, the Partisans, and Jewish Survival', p. 317.
43. S. Cholawski, *Soldiers from the Ghetto*, p. 137. Some 200 Jews managed to break out during the Novaya Sverzhen escape. Shortly afterwards the remaining Jews in Stolpce were shot: see USHMMA RG 53.002M, reel 4 (BNAM) 389-1-4, pp. 22–4 *Gendarmerie* post Stolpce reports on 30 January 1943 and 5 February 1943. On the escape see also YV 03/3876 Testimony of M. Jalowsky and 016/168 Testimony of Bert Manta: it is clear that not all Jews were ready to escape and many feared the consequences.



70. J. Kagan and D. Cohen. *Surviving the Holocaust*, p. 174.
71. SARF 7021-148-2, pp. 57-8 *Gendarmerie* District Leader Brest report, 22 August 1942.
72. INRW SWB 272, pp. 17-22 F. M. on 15 August 1957.
73. WCU D720.
74. INRW SWB 253, pp. 54-9.
75. *Ibid.*, pp. 63-6.
76. *UKGB* Brest Archive File No. 6258, Criminal Case 1230, pp. 19-23 N.S.K. on 13 April 1945.
77. *UKGB* Minsk Archive File No. 5324, Criminal Case 35496, pp. 57-62 M.S.R. on 17 May 1949.
78. INRW SWB 254, p. 374 S.M. on 9 July 1965.
79. *UKGB* Brest Archive File No. 3977, Criminal Case 18, pp. 30-4 P.V.T. on 26 February 1947.
80. *UKGB* Minsk Archive File No. 2018, Criminal Case 35371, evidence of P.A.M. at own trial on 3 February 1949.
81. INRW SWKsz 73, pp. 322-6 D.F.M. on 12 January 1969.
82. See, for example, INRW SWB 256, p. 128 J.C. on 11 May 1962.
83. WCU D719A.
84. USHMMA RG 53.002M, reel 4 (BNAM) 389-1-3, p. 124 *KdO Weißruthenien* order on the creation of fortified police posts, 11 November 1942. An aerial photograph of Mir taken in 1944 shows clearly the earth-work fortifications constructed during the latter part of the occupation.
85. WCU D4355.
86. *UKGB* Grodno Archive File No. 20394, Criminal Case 1030, pp. 114-22 A.V.K. on 21 July 1949.
87. *UKGB* Brest Criminal Case 3632, pp. 41-4 I.V.L. on 19 July 1948.
88. *UKGB* Minsk Archive File No. 1631, Criminal Case 35994.
89. PAAA Inl. IIg/431 Activity and situation report No. 10, 28 February 1942.
90. B. Chiari, 'Deutsche Herrschaft', p. 58.
91. BA R 6/15, pp. 108-21 Letter of Hans von Homeyer to *Reichsminister* Rosenberg, 15 October 1943. On the better treatment received from the *Wehrmacht* in comparison to the police and civil administration see also A. Dallin, *German Rule in Russia*, p. 73, n. 1.
92. BA R 6/354, p. 144 Letter of *Reich Minister* for the Occupied eastern Territories to *Reichskommissar* Koch, 6 March 1944.
93. BA NS 19/2715 Experience and evacuation report of v. Gottberg, 31 August 1944.
94. BA Dahlwitz-Hoppegarten ZB 984 Complaint about lack of promotion, 24 May 1943. See also USHMMA (ZA) roll 3 1151-1-138 which indicates the high losses among the *Gendarmerie* in *Generalkommissariat* Zhitomir during the winter of 1942-43.
95. BNAM 370-1-1262, pp. 147-58 Colonel Klepsch lecture on the *Schutzmannschaft*, 10 April 1943.
96. This is the impression gained from the losses of the *Schutzmannschaft* recorded in the daily orders of *KdO* Minsk from the summer of 1942 to autumn 1943. USHMMA RG 53.002M, reel 3 (BNAM) 389-1-1.
97. The opening of the former Soviet archives, especially the vast collections of partisan documents previously held mostly in the former Party archives, will doubtless lead to a considerable re-evaluation of Soviet partisan warfare on the basis of a more critical reading of these sources. I have examined only a tiny sample of this material in connection with investigations into events in specific areas.

130. O. A. Zarubinsky. 'The "Red" Partisan Movement in Ukraine', pp. 404-13, gives figures for 12 286 'Red' partisans operating in five units within Ukraine. Of these Jews were only 1.6 per cent, Russians 37 per cent and Ukrainians 46 per cent: see also J. A. Armstrong. *Ukrainian Nationalism*, pp. 94-102.
131. W. Wilenchik. 'Die Partisanenbewegung in Weißrußland', pp. 224-8.
132. UKGB Brest Criminal Case 23552, pp. 39-42 M.Y.N. on 3 November 1945.
133. B. Chiari. 'Deutsche Herrschaft', pp. 290-1; S. Spector. *The Holocaust of Volhynian Jews*, p. 257.
134. B. Chiari. 'Deutsche Herrschaft', pp. 282-6.
135. INRW SWSz 77, pp. 1697-1713 W.W. in January 1971, pp. 1736-71 J.R. court evidence in January 1971 and pp. 1840-4 B.L. on 24 March 1971.
136. INRW SWSz 69, pp. 96-7 B.B. on 24 November 1962.
137. See, for example, H. Werner, *Fighting Back*, p. 155; YV E/459 Testimony of Jacob and Bella Grynshteyn; B. Chiari. 'Deutsche Herrschaft', p. 293 n. 1309; S. Spector, *The Holocaust of Volhynian Jews*, pp. 260-8 notes that in Volhynia while some Jews were protected by or served in the Polish Underground, others were killed by Polish partisans.
138. PUST Bulletin for Ministry of Interior, 26 August-10 October 1942.
139. On Polish rescue efforts in Volhynia see Spector, *The Holocaust of Volhynian Jews*, pp. 248-51.
140. PUST Account of Stefan Janski who served ten years in Soviet labour camps after the war.
141. On Polish resistance to Lithuanian actions against the Polish majority in the Vilnius area see B. Chiari. 'Deutsche Herrschaft', p. 292.
142. USHMMA RG 53.002M, reel 4 (BNAM) 389-1-4, p. 52 *Gendarmerie* post Stolpce report on 11 June 1943.
143. BNAM 370-1-1880 Operational Order for 'Operation Hermann' on 7 July 1943 and Combat Report on 20 August 1943.
144. PUST Account of Jaroslaw Gasiewski.
145. S. Cholowski. *Soldiers from the Ghetto*, p. 162; B. Chiari, 'Deutsche Herrschaft', pp. 293 and 299-303; INRW SWZG 20 - 6. Vol. V, p. 958 Indictment against Zdzislaw Nurkiewicz, commander of the 'Polish Legion'. The AK adopted an increasingly hostile stance to the Soviets after the death of General Sikorski in the summer of 1943; S. Spector, *The Holocaust of Volhynian Jews*, p. 261.
146. USHMMA RG 53.002M, reel 4 (BNAM) 389-1-5, p. 4 *Gendamerie* post Starzyna report on 2 February 1944 relates the story of Jan Haschtjla, a Polish partisan who was twice captured by the Soviets and managed to escape.
147. B. Chiari. 'Deutsche Herrschaft', p. 294.
148. INRW SWB 231, p. 66 J. J. on 28 August 1946.
149. PUST Account of Jaroslaw Gasiewski; YV E/459 Testimony of Jacob and Bella Grynshteyn; WCU D8675; B. Chiari, 'Deutsche Herrschaft', pp. 293-4. On the conflict between the Polish Underground and the Soviet forces, especially the 'incorporation' of Polish units into the Red Army on 'liberation', see also K. Sword. *Deportation and Exile*, pp. 143-51.
150. BA R 6/369 Report of *Gebietskommissar Wilna-Land*, 18 January 1944. On alliances with the Germans see also B. Chiari, 'Deutsche Herrschaft', pp. 299 and 304-5; W. Wilenchik, 'Die Partisanenbewegung in Weißrußland', pp. 260-1.
151. PUST Account of Stefan Janski; B. Chiari, 'Deutsche Herrschaft', p. 297; on Lithuanian excesses see BA R 6/356 *Reichskommissariat Ostland* report, 11 May 1944.
152. PUST No. 2792 Memoirs of Lieutenant Mikolaj Balysz (Zagloba), the former AK commandant in Kovel.