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# Instruments of Murder

## Leadership Styles and Compliance in the SS-Einsatzgruppen

### Abstract

The article follows two Einsatzgruppen officers and explores how their leadership styles encouraged rank and file members under their command to participate in mass executions. Reading into post-war testimonies, the study traces the historical, social, and organisational factors that shaped the officers' approaches, and how they manifested during their Einsatzgruppen operations. The inquiry utilises social psychology to distinguish and characterise each leadership style, and to assess how their separate and combined influences prompted followers' apparent willingness to participate in mass murder.

The *Einsatzgruppen* (Deployment Groups) were SS (*Schutzstaffel*, Protection Squadron) and Security Police task forces that followed the Wehrmacht into the Soviet Union and implemented the Third Reich's policies of population reorganisation and extermination.<sup>1</sup> Einsatzgruppen units were not organic but ad hoc battalions (*Kommandos*) whose professional composition mimicked that of the Reich's Security Main Office (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, the administrative umbrella of the SS and Security Police, hereafter RSHA). The units thus included men lumped together from the different institutions under the authority of Heinrich Himmler.<sup>2</sup>

At the top of each Kommando stood senior officers of prominent RSHA positions, while smaller, mobile platoons were headed by junior officers from the SD (the SS intelligence agency) and Security Police branches across the Reich, or cadets in various RSHA officers training programmes. Despite the cumbersome composition of rank-and-file members on the one hand, and the eclectic origins of officers on the other, the Einsatzgruppen squads moved swiftly across urban and rural spaces and soon expanded their massacres to include women and children, becoming the vanguard of "the Holocaust by bullets" by murdering over a million Jewish and non-Jewish civilians.<sup>3</sup> How did *Einsatzgruppen* officers lead their units, so diverse in

- 1 Helmut Krausnick, *Hitlers Einsatzgruppen: Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges 1938–1942* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1981), 121–133; Peter Klein, "Einleitung, Die Einsatzgruppen der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD bis zum Angriff auf die Sowjetunion," in *Die Einsatzgruppen in der besetzten Sowjetunion 1941/42: Die Tätigkeit und Lageberichte der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD*, ed. Peter Klein (Berlin: Hentrich, 1997), 17–25.
- 2 On the professional composition of the Barbarossa Einsatzgruppen, see Hans Buchheim, "Die SS – das Herrschaftsinstrument," in *Anatomie des SS-Staates*, 7th ed. (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 1999), 78. On the cumbersome composition of the Einsatzgruppen Kommandos see Peter Klein, "Einleitung," 20, and Andrej Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord: Die Einsatzgruppe D in der südlichen Sowjetunion 1941–1943* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2003), 386–399.
- 3 On the Einsatzgruppen crimes during their initial phase of operations, see Ralf Ogorreck, *Die Einsatzgruppen und die "Genesis der Endlösung"* (Berlin: Metropol, 1996), 110–160; Christian Gerlach, "Die Einsatzgruppe B," in *Die Einsatzgruppen*, ed. Peter Klein, 44–54; Christoph Dieckman, *Deutsche Besatzungspolitik in Litauen 1941–1944* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2011), 299–301; Andrej Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik Und Massenmord*, 131–138; The term "Holocaust by bullets" was coined by Father Patrick Desbois in his book *The Holocaust by Bullets: A Priest's Journey to Uncover the Truth behind the Murder of One and a Half Million Jews* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); The most reliable source with regards to the estimated total number of vic-

terms of their men's social and professional composition, to murder so many victims over such a short time span?

This inquiry zeroes in on *Sonderkommando* (Special Unit) 7a, a sub-unit of Einsatzgruppe B, whose first leader and his deputy presented two distinct leadership approaches. Although the Einsatzgruppen included twenty-two battalions and hundreds of officers,<sup>4</sup> the plethora of post-war sources pertaining to Sonderkommando 7a contains an especially large number of testimonies discussing the two leaders and their effects on the rank-and-file members under their command. A microhistorical focus on two officers allows for a thorough inquiry and characterisation of the differences between them, and it provides a case study of how leadership styles in the Einsatzgruppen varied. Utilising social psychology, the analysis explains the different ways Einsatzgruppen officers encouraged their followers to comply with murderous orders.

Tracing the reasons for the escalation of Einsatzgruppen operations, studies on relevant post-war trials concluded that the Einsatzgruppen leaders received no direct orders to kill Jews indiscriminately but practiced various degrees of autonomy.<sup>5</sup> Less is known, however, on how Einsatzgruppen and Kommando leaders used this leeway to advance their operations.

Practices of leadership in the Third Reich are essential for understanding how Einsatzgruppen officers prompted mass murder. Leaders of military and paramilitary units have been found to play central roles in shaping followers' attitudes and behaviours, regulating levels of brutality in the field, and facilitating immoral deeds by advocating specific ethics, traditions, and working standards.<sup>6</sup> To reconstruct Einsatzgruppen officers' leadership styles, my analysis integrates historical and psychological works to uncover the political, social, and organisational factors that shaped them, how Einsatzgruppen leaders managed or failed to encourage followers to participate in mass shootings, and how the rank-and-files of the Einsatzgruppen perceived their superiors.

The study draws on existing literature on leadership in the context of Holocaust perpetration. Historian Ian Kershaw explained how the Nazi system utilised Hitler's charisma to enhance obedience by committing every German to "work towards the *Führer*".<sup>7</sup> Others have shown how the leadership principal (*Führerprinzip*), which be-

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tims of the Einsatzgruppen are their Operational Situational Reports (Ereignismeldungen), see for example Klaus-Michael Mallmann, Andrej Angrick, Jürgen Matthäus, and Martin Cüppers (Hrsg.), *Die "Ereignismeldungen UdSSR" 1941 Dokumente der Einsatzgruppen in der Soviet Union*, (Darmstadt: WBG Academics, 2011) and Yizhak Arad, Shmuel Krakowski, and Shmuel Spector, eds., *Einsatzgruppen Reports: Selections from the Dispatches of the Nazi Death Squads' Campaign Against the Jews July 1941–January 1943* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1989).

4 Peter Klein, "Einleitung," 9–28; Krausnick, *Hitlers Einsatzgruppen*, 121–128.

5 The literature on the Einsatzgruppen Nuremberg trials (Case 9) and consecutive legal procedures have largely discarded the argument of the head of Einsatzgruppe D, Otto Ohlendorf, of receiving a preliminary "Führer-" or "Tötungsbefehl", a direct order from Adolf Hitler to murder the entirety of Soviet Jewry. Other studies have assessed that the expansion of Einsatzgruppen operations was a bottom-up process which started with the units on the ground and was endorsed by the leadership. See Hilary Earl, *The Nuremberg SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial, 1945–1958* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 54–56; Christopher Browning (with contributions by Jürgen Matthäus), *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939–March 1942* (Jerusalem and Lincoln: Yad Vashem and University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 253–277; Ogorreck, *Die „Genesis der Endlösung*," 47–51; Christopher Osmar, "Vanguard of Genocide: The Einsatzgruppen in the Soviet Union" (Master's Thesis: Ohio University, 2010), 15–16.

6 Peter Northouse, *Leadership, Theory and Practice*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2013), 10; Bernd Horn and Robert E. Walker, *The Military Leadership Handbook* (Ottawa: Dundurn Press, 2008), 31–47.

7 Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, the Germans and the Final Solution* (New York: Vail-Ballou Press, 2008), 29–48. On charismatic leadership as driven by a belief in the unique and exceptional qualities of a particular individual, see Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947). For a summary on charismatic leadership, see Northouse, *Leadership*, 187–189.

stows absolute power onto leaders, became a leading convention in the Third Reich.<sup>8</sup> The biographies of prominent SS and RSHA leaders reveal that they centralised information, rarely compromised, and conspired against personal and political rivals. They promoted initiative by maintaining their followers' ambiguity and having them compete over status and power,<sup>9</sup> strategies which dominated the paramilitary organisations in which Einsatzgruppen members pursued their careers, and which cascaded to the lower ranks and manifested in the killing fields.<sup>10</sup>

Further works defined the SS and RSHA leaders as members of the "War Youth Generation" (*Kriegsjugendgeneration*). Though they were too young to fight the Great War, the social, political, and economic ruptures that ensued turned many of them away from bourgeois values and the "old-world" order, and into seeking national and personal redemption through fascism and violent action.<sup>11</sup>

The SS and RSHA ethics and mentality were the result of the War Youth Generation's sentiments and goals. The SS referred to politics as a struggle between the German "people's community" (*Volksgemeinschaft*) and its nemesis, Judeo-Bolshevism.<sup>12</sup> It sanctified action and toughness, and demanded that members "protect" the Volk's social and biological "hygiene" at all costs.<sup>13</sup> According to Michael Wildt, the particular social and historical circumstances in which RSHA leaders lived and operated accounted for their uncompromising attitudes towards the running of state and society, authoritarian leadership styles, hierarchical command structures, and the organisation's rigorous implementation of exclusionary, and later murderous, policies.<sup>14</sup>

The historiography of Holocaust perpetrators' motivations has discussed how the impersonal aspects of "desk perpetration" prompted individuals to contribute to

8 Ian Kershaw, *The "Hitler Myth": Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 11–20; Hans Mommsen, "From Cumulative Radicalisation and Progressive Self-Destruction as Structural Determinants of Nazi Dictatorship," in *Stalinism and Nazism: Dictatorships in Comparison*, eds. Ian Kershaw and Moshe Lewin (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 75–87. See also Niels Weibe, "Das Führerprinzip und die Mobilisierung der Massen" (Seminar paper: Johannes-Gutenberg Universität Mainz, 2005), 10–13.

9 These biographies include: Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: A Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010); Peter Longerich, *Heinrich Himmler: Biographie* (München: Siedler, 2008); Robert Gerwarth, *Hitler's Hangman: The Life of Heydrich* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011); Nils Weise, *Eicke: Eine SS-Karriere Zwischen Nervenlinik, KZ-System und Waffen-SS*, (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2013); Ulrich Herbert, *Best: Biographische Studien über Radikalismus, Weltanschauung, und Vernunft, 1903–1989* (Bonn: J.H.W. Dietz Nachfolger, 1996); Lutz Hachmeister, *Der Gegnerforscher: Die Karriere der SS-Führers Franz Alfred Six* (München: C.H. Beck, 1998); David Ceserani, *Becoming Eichmann: Rethinking the Life, Crimes, and Trial of a "Desk Murderer"* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2006).

10 Michael Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation: The Nazi Leadership of the Reich Security Main Office*, trans. Tom Lampert (Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 2009), 279–302. See also Alex J. Kay, *The Making of an SS Killer: The Life of Colonel Alfred Filbert 1905–1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 50–56, 62–70.

11 Michael Wildt, *Generation of the Unbound: The Leadership Corps of the Reich's Security Main Office* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2002), 10–16, 23–29, 41–52, 72–80; Herbert, *Best*, 42–87; Jens Banach, *Heydrichs Elite: Das Führerkorps der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD 1936–1945* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1998), 58–62, 278, 300–302; Christian Ingrao, *Believe and Destroy: Intellectuals in the SS War Machine*, trans. Andrew Brown (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 3–49; Michael H. Kater, "Zur gegenseitigen Verhältnis von SA und SS in der Sozialgeschichte des Nationalsozialismus von 1925 bis 1939," *Vierteljahrsschrift für Sozial und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 62, no. 3 (1975): 339–379.

12 See for example Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda during World War II and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 1–12.

13 Hans Buchheim, "Befehl und Gehorsam," 216–231; Robert Lewis Koehl, *The Black Corps: The Structure and Power Struggles of the Nazi SS* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), xx–xxiii, 48; Claudia Koonz, *The Nazi Conscience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 222–223.

14 Wildt, *Generation of the Unbound*, 10–16, 23–29, 41–52, 72–80; Wildt, *Uncompromising Generation*, 37–55, 203–210. See also Ingrao, *Believe and Destroy*, 81–90.

Holocaust enterprises.<sup>15</sup> Later, it centred around the debate between the intentionalist approach, which draws a line between Hitler's early writings and speeches and Nazi Germany's exterminatory practices, and the functionalist approach, which views the Holocaust as an evolving process that radicalised alongside Nazi expansion and war.<sup>16</sup> Christopher Browning's study on Reserve Police Battalion 101, which takes the perpetrators' perspective to analyse the progression of mass executions,<sup>17</sup> was a herald in turning the focus towards the "everyday history" (*Alltagsgeschichte*) and motivations of middle and lower rank perpetrators. Further studies which focused on units of face-to-face Holocaust perpetrators and their leaders, concluded their members were usually not coerced to murder but did so thanks to Nazi glorification of militarism and action, indoctrination, and the individual's desire to belong by proving loyal to their comrades and nation.<sup>18</sup>

These studies provide valuable insights into the mindsets of Nazi leaders and on how face-to-face officers inspired followers in the field. Looking at two specific Einsatzgruppen officers, the current study utilises social psychology to uncover how crucial patterns of leadership encouraged escalation and violence among these vanguard face-to-face Holocaust perpetrators.

Over the first weeks of the Barbarossa campaign, Sonderkommando 7a massacred close to a thousand Jewish men and communist functionaries across the border between Lithuania and Belarus.<sup>19</sup> The unit's first leader was Dr. Walter Blume. After earning a doctorate in law, in 1933 Blume joined the Gestapo and the Nazi Party, and a year later he entered the SS and SD. By 1941, he headed a section of the RSHA personnel bureau and was appointed by his superiors to lead Sonderkommando 7a.<sup>20</sup> Blume's deputy, Richard Foltis, was a cadet in the RSHA executive service (*Leitenden Dienst*) training program. After completing a course in the leader-

15 Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1963); Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

16 On the intentionalist approach, see Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, vol. 2, *The Years of Extermination: 1939–1945* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008); Richard Breitman, *The Architect of Genocide: Himmler and the Final Solution* (New York: Knopf, 1991); and Eberhard Jäckel and Jürgen Rohwer, eds., *Der Mord an den Juden im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1985). On the functionalist approach, see Martin Broszat, *The Hitler State: The Foundation and Development of the Internal Structure of the Third Reich* (London: Longman, 1981); Karl Schleunes, *The Twisted Road to Auschwitz: Nazi Policy towards German Jews 1933–1939* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1990); and Hans Mommsen, "Hitler's Reichstag Speech of 30 January 1939," *History and Memory* 9, no. 1 (1997): 147–161. Ian Kershaw presents a moderate structuralist approach in, for example, *Hitler: 1936–1945 Nemesis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), xlvii.

17 Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1998).

18 Thomas Kühne, *Belonging and Genocide: Hitler's Community, 1918–1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 55–94; Michaela Christ, *Die Dynamic des Tötens, Die Ermordung der Juden in Berditschew* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2011), 47–200; Andrej Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*, 386–451; Edward B. Westermann, *Hitler's Police Battalions: Enforcing Racial War in the East* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2005), 5–12, 70–78, 89–93; Martin Cüppers, *Wegbereiter der Shoah: Der Kommando-stab Reichsführer SS und die Judenvernichtung 1939–1945* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2011), 98–124.

19 Ogorreck, *Genesis der Endlösung*, 110, 113–114; Krausnick, *Hitlers Einsatzgruppen*, 156; "Ereignismeldungen UdSSR" [hereafter EM], 23 June 1941–30 March 1942, Bundesarchiv Ludwigsburg [hereafter BArch] B162/433-446, no. 13, 5 July 1941; EM no. 17, 7 July 1941; Interrogation Calus Hueser, 15 December 1977, BArch B162/7580, fol. 168; Interrogation Karl Radl, 2 September 1977, BArch B162/7580, fol. 157a; "Anklageschrift Meyer, Heuser, Stanke," 2 November 1965, BArch B162/3615, fol. 5296, 5300, 5302; "Walter Blume, direktes Verhör," 31 October 1947, Institut für Zeitgeschichte [hereafter IFZ] M895/3/0796, fol. 1828.

20 "Rasse und Siedlung Fragebogen, Foltis Richard," "Lebenslauf," Bundesarchiv Berlin Lichterfelde [hereafter BArch], R 9361-III-45751, fol.1; "Vernehmung Walter Blume," Nuremberg item NO-1502, 29 June 1947, IFZ, 7487/87, ZS-2389, fol. 1–3; Wildt, *Uncompromising Generation*, 104–107; Mark Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece: The Experience of Occupation, 1941–44* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 222, 224–225, 231–232. On the recruitment system of Einsatzgruppen officers by Heinrich Himmler and Reinhard Heydrich, see Wildt, *Uncompromising Generation*, 272–273.

ship school (*Führerschule*) in Berlin-Charlottenburg, in May 1941 Foltis was assigned, like thirty to thirty-five members of his cohort, as a junior officer in the Einsatzgruppen.<sup>21</sup> Though Blume was the senior officer, he was thirty-five years old at the outbreak of Barbarossa and only seven years older than Foltis. As both were members of the War Youth Generation, the differences between them, which already emerged during the unit's initial phase of operation, were the product of personal tendencies rather than generational gaps.

According to post-war testimonies of his former followers, Blume organised mass shootings and taught these underlings how to shoot victims. However, he himself mostly shied away from the executions, and when he was present, he placed himself in the back, expressed discomfort, and even vomited at the sight of corpses and blood. All the while, it was Foltis, not Blume, who relayed the orders, enthusiastically led and expanded the executions, and shot victims himself.<sup>22</sup> A previous study on Wehrmacht officers argues that a perpetrator's distance or proximity to the actual killing process at the pit provided important clues about their attitudes towards the atrocities, their presumed degree of participation, and the way they processed their emotions during and after the events.<sup>23</sup> And, indeed, Blume soon asked to rotate back to Berlin and left the unit after only eight weeks, while Foltis stayed and worked under the unit's successive leader.<sup>24</sup>

According to testimonies, the two officers also differed in how they related to their followers. Blume was a "humane" and "comradely" leader who cared about the men's personal lives and accommodated their wishes.<sup>25</sup> Though he refrained from executions, Blume kept the unit under strict order and frowned upon alcohol abuse, even publicly dismissing his administration officer for showing up to work utterly drunk of alcohol.<sup>26</sup> Blume's stance against alcohol was antithetical to the usual binge drinking that characterised the operations of face-to-face Holocaust perpetrators, as large quantities of alcohol were distributed in Himmler's system to trigger more violent behaviour during executions, reward shooters for doing the "dirty work," and relieve them of the impressions of their crimes.<sup>27</sup> Blume's disinclination suggests he preferred the men to be sober and aware of their actions over brutality and disorder, and

21 On the RSHA officers training programmes, see Hans-Cristian Harten, "Die Weltanschauliche Schulung der Sicherheitspolizei und Sicherheitsdienstes," in *Die Weltanschauliche Schulung der Polizei im Nationalsozialismus* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2018), 41–75; Franz Albert Heinen, *Ordensburg Vogelsang: Die Geschichte der NS-Kaderschmiede in der Eifel* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2014), 6–8, 92–107; Ingrao, *Believe and Destroy*, 98–101. On the training and assigning to the Einsatzgruppen of junior officers, see the testimony of Rudolf Hotzel, leader of the RSHA referent Ib (*Erziehung und Ausbildung*) under the personnel department (Amt I), in Interrogation Rudolf Hotzel, 24 January 1964, BArch B162/1153, fol. 1920–1928.

22 Interrogation Eduard Sauer, 2 May 1962, BArch B162/3598, fol. 1422; Interrogation Maximilian Kölz, 22 February 1962, BArch B162/3575, fol. 1264.

23 Waitman Wade Beorn, with Anne Kelly Knowles, "Killing on the Ground and in the Mind: The Spatialities of Genocide in the East," in *Geographies of the Holocaust*, eds. Anne Kelly Knowles, Tim Cole, and Albert Giordano (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2014), 89–120.

24 Interrogation Karl Sonntag, 24 January 1962, BArch B162/3575, fol. 1022; Interrogation Werner Stoll, 4 January 1962, BArch B162/3576, fol. 1139; Ingrao, *Believe and Destroy*, 217–219, 226; Ogorreck, *Genesis der Endlösung*, 110, 116; Krausnick, *Hitlers Einsatzgruppen*, 156.

25 Interrogation Werner Stoll, 4 January 1962, BArch B162/3576, fol. 1138, 1139; Interrogation Maximilian Kölz, 26 January 1960, BArch B162/3575, fol. 1060; Interrogation Erich Haubach, 10 April 1962, BArch B162/3576, fol. 1384; Interrogation Heinrich Eichenseher, 21 December 1961, BArch B162/3575, fol. 974; Interrogation Werner Stoll, 4 January 1962, BArch B162/3576, fol. 1139; Interrogation Walter Pape, 30 May 1961, BArch B162/3573, fol. 421.

26 Interrogation Heinz Krückemeyer, 28 February 1961, BArch, B162/3574, fol. 432–433; Interrogation Heinz Krückemeyer, 10 October 1961, BArch B162/3574, fol. 657–662.

27 Eduard B. Westermann, *Drunk on Genocide: Alcohol and Mass Murder in Nazi Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021); Idem, "Stone-Cold Killers or Drunk with Murder? Alcohol and Atrocity during the Holocaust," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 30 no.1 (Spring 2016): 1–19.

he generated cohesion via empathy and comradely conduct. In contrast, unit members described Foltis as “arrogant,” “blood thirsty,” and a “150% Nazi”. They testified that he forced men to participate in executions and labelled those who hesitated as “weaklings”.<sup>28</sup>

Surprisingly, despite the discrepancy between them, the two officers still produced increasingly high numbers of victims.<sup>29</sup> Let us take a closer look at how the two leaders and their approaches interacted to encourage followers’ compliance. Psychological theories explain how the interaction between leaders and followers inspire groups’ efficiency. Management studies place leaders’ behaviours on two attitudinal dimensions, concern for production (or a “task-oriented” leadership style) and concern for people (a “relationship” or “people-oriented” style).<sup>30</sup> “Transactional leadership” occurs when leaders incentivise followers via a system of rewards and punishments, and this has been found to be most effective when integrated with “transformational leadership”, which includes intellectual stimulation, individual consideration, and communicating ideas that empower followers and increase their self-esteem.<sup>31</sup>

Along these lines, Blume’s high consideration for his men but low engagement in executions characterise him as a “people-oriented” leader. Blume also practiced transformational leadership: in banning alcohol abuse, he advocated specific ideals, and by hearing and caring for his men, he showed personal consideration, which inspired their trust and empowered them. In his study on Reserve Police Battalion 101, Christopher Browning discussed the attentive approach of its leader, Major Trapp. When ordered to murder the Jewish population of the Polish town of Józefów, Trapp offered his men to refrain from shooting and did not sanction those who stepped back. Still, most battalion members chose to shoot, or participated in other ways, in the murder of hundreds of Jews.<sup>32</sup> Browning explains the policemen’s motivations using psychological theories of conformity to authority, habituation, and peer pressure.<sup>33</sup> However, both Trapp and Blume practiced “people-oriented” leadership styles, but produced high levels of brutality, and that suggests that both played a central role in encouraging their followers’ participation in massacres.

28 Interrogation Max Kölz, 26 January 1962, BArch B162/3575, fol. 1061–1062; Interrogation Max Kölz, 22 February 1962, BArch B162/3575, fol. 1262–1264; Interrogation Heinrich Eichenseher, 17 January 1962, BArch B162/3575, fol. 1006; Interrogation Willi Rickert, 29 November 1962, BArch B162/6300, fol. 2059–2065; Interrogation Eduard Sauer, 2 May 1962, BArch B162/3598, fol. 1422; Interrogation Max Kölz, 26 January 1962, BArch B162/3575, fol. 1061–1062; Interrogation Emil Willbrand, 4 August 1961, BArch B162/3575, fol. 701; Interrogation Leo Amend, 13 December 1961, BArch B162/3575, fol. 924.

29 Longerich, *Politik der Vernichtung: Eine Gesamtdarstellung der nationalsozialistischen Judenverfolgung* (München: Piper, 1998), 334; Gerlach, “Die Einsatzgruppe B,” 58–59; EM no. 13, 5 July 1941; EM no. 17, 7 July 1941; EM no. 73, 20 August 1941.

30 Robert Blake and Jane Mouton, *The Managerial Grid: The Key to Leadership Excellence* (Houston: Gulf Publishing Co., 1964), 17–35. For a comprehensive summary of theories concerning “people”- versus “task-oriented” leadership styles, see Northouse, *Leadership*, 75–82.

31 Kimberly Breevaart et al., “Uncovering the Underlying Relationship between Transformational Leaders and Followers’ Task Performance,” *Journal of Personnel Psychology* 13, no. 4 (2014): 194–203; Barbara B. Brown, “Employees’ Organizational Commitment and their Perception of Supervisors’ Relations-Oriented and Task-Oriented Leadership Behaviors” (PhD Dissertation: Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 2003); Kurt Lewin and Ronald Lippitt, “An Experimental Approach to the Study of Autocracy and Democracy: A Preliminary Note,” *Journal of Social Psychology* 10 (1938): 271–301; Timothy A. Judge and Ronald F. Picollo, “Transformational and Transactional Leadership: A Meta-Analytic Test of Their Relative Validity,” *Journal of Applied Psychology* 89, no. 5 (2004) 755–768; Ronit Kark, Boas Shamir, and Gilad Chen, “Two Faces of Transformational Leadership: Empowerment and Dependency,” *Journal of Applied Psychology* 88, no. 2 (2003): 246–255.

32 Browning, *Ordinary Men*, 55–63, 65–68.

33 *Ibid.*, 71–77, 159–190.

Analysing Foltis, his focus on pace and “production”, while patronising and insulting rank-and-file members, places him on the “task-oriented” end of the grid. Calling the men “weaklings”, Foltis practiced a particular type of transactional leadership which used their status and belonging to the group to reward or punish them. He defined those who shot as strong enough to stomach the psychological and visual horrors of the shootings and thus worthy of being accepted. Making refusal or hesitation a cause for members’ social – and at times, physical – expulsion, Foltis provided the members with powerful incentives to contribute rather than stay back.<sup>34</sup> Foltis’s aggressive yet effective style resembles that of prominent Nazi and SS leaders, of which Himmler, head of the SS and RSHA, is a good example. Himmler had clear ideological and political visions, rarely compromised, and leveraged the weaknesses of his political rivals for his own benefit. He provided his patronage to and promoted those who proved themselves while banishing those who did not. These tactics helped Himmler to establish a circle of loyalists who advanced his agendas and radicalised his policies.<sup>35</sup> The similarity between Foltis’ and Himmler’s tendencies to reward their followers for taking initiative indicates that this was a dominant leadership strategy in the SS and RSHA systems, which guided the highest and lowest of ranks.

Unfortunately, the scope of this study does not allow us to trace the specific motivations that stood at the basis of the two officers’ approaches. Nor does it allow us to map the myriad of motivations which prompted rank-and-file members to shoot but which were unrelated to their officers. Also, we cannot know for sure if either Blume or Foltis pushed more followers to kill, or to do so more fervidly. The most accurate, and in most cases, only measure of members’ compliance are the Einsatzgruppen operational situational reports (*Ereignismeldungen*) in which the units themselves counted victim figures and reported them to Berlin.<sup>36</sup> Notably, the report dated 20 August 1941 indicates that Sonderkommando 7a had by then murdered the highest number of civilians compared to the other units under Einsatzgruppe B.<sup>37</sup> This suggests that the combination between Blume’s comradely style and Foltis’s aggressive approach increased their followers’ apparent willingness to mass shoot victims.

Blume, who cared for the men’s physical and mental well-being, inspired their identification with himself and with the unit, which spiked their motivations to contribute to its goals and operations. Foltis’s aggressive style complemented Blume’s by pushing the men to greater brutality and cultivating a shame culture that prompted compliance by threatening to expose, disgrace, and exclude members who were “too

34 Studies about conformity to group norms aid in explaining Foltis’ strategy and its effects on his followers’ apparent willingness to participate in crimes to ensure their social and physical belonging. See the classical experiment of Solomon Asch, “Studies of Independence and Conformity: A Minority of One against a Unanimous Majority”, *Psychological Monographs: General and Applied* 70, no. 9 (1956): 1–70; Emanuel Castano, Bernard Leidner, and Patrycja Slawuta, “Social Identification, Group Dynamics, and the Behavior of Combatants,” *International Review of the Red Cross*, 90 (2008): 1–14; and Susanne Täber and Kai Sassenberg, “How Self-Construal Affects the Alignment of Cognition and Behavior with Group Goals in Novel Groups,” *Social Psychology* 43, no. 3 (2012): 138–147. Sociologist Stefan Köhl asserted that members of dictatorial organisations, especially newcomers, tend to fall into an “indifference zone”, in which they forsake previously held morals and adopt new ones to please their superiors and peers. Stefan Köhl, *Ganz Normale Organisationen: Zur Soziologie des Holocaust*, (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2014), 91–93, 98–111, 118, 123, 126–128.

35 Mark Rosemann, “The Lives of Others – amid the Death of Others: Biographical Approaches to Nazi Perpetrators,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 15, no. 4 (2013): 443–461; Longerich, *Himmler*, 265–270, 309–311; Weise, *Eicke*, 106–108, 319–343; Shlomo Aronson, *Reinhard Heydrich und die Frühgeschichte von Gestapo und SD* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlag-Anstalt, 1971), 134–137.

36 For more information on the Einsatzgruppen operational situation reports see footnote 3.

37 EM no. 73. August 20, 1941.

weak” to shoot. Combined, these two strategies increased members’ obedience and secrecy about the crimes, while hampering their will to defy orders.<sup>38</sup>

The specific case of Sonderkommando 7a shows how the Third Reich’s eliminatory ideologies interacted with historical conditions and social characteristics to forge ideal images and practices of leadership, which determined how Einsatzgruppen leaders acted in the killing fields. Tracing two specific officers who operated together reveals that they could differ in how they related to their missions and men but still complement each other in spiking motivations to murder. Though the study focuses on two out of hundreds of Einsatzgruppen leaders, it illuminates significant forces that shaped the Einsatzgruppen officers’ leadership styles, the differences and similarities between them, and how they encouraged followers to perpetrate mass executions. By clarifying the dynamics of face-to-face murder as it developed in the Nazi-occupied Soviet Union, it renders this chapter in German history as an opportunity to understand past and current cases of genocide and mass violence and to alleviate or prevent future ones.

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<sup>38</sup> For an elaboration on shame culture in the units of Holocaust perpetrators, see Kühne, *Belonging and Genocide*, 28–31.

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