

# The Holocaust in Ukraine

The Holocaust in Ukraine was the systematic mass murder of Jews in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, the General Government, the Crimean General Government and some areas which were located to the East of Reichskommissariat Ukraine (all of those areas were under the military control of Nazi Germany), in the Transnistria Governorate and Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina and the Hertsa region (all of those areas were then part of Romania, with the latter three areas being reannexed) and Carpathian Ruthenia (then part of Hungary) during World War II. The listed areas are currently parts of Ukraine (except modern-day Transnistria). [9][a]

Between 1941 and 1945, between  $850,000^{\frac{10}{11}}$  -1,600,000 Jews were killed in Ukraine, which included assistance of local collaborators.  $\frac{7}{8}$ 

According to Yale historian <u>Timothy D. Snyder</u>, "the Holocaust is integrally and organically connected to the <u>Vernichtungskrieg</u>, the war in 1941, and it is organically and integrally connected to the attempt to conquer Ukraine. ... Had Hitler not had the colonial idea to fight a war in Eastern Europe to control Ukraine, had there not been that idea, there could not have been a Holocaust." According to <u>Wendy Lower</u>, the <u>genocide</u> of the <u>Ukrainian Jews</u> was closely linked to German plans to exploit and colonize Ukraine. [15]

## **Death squads (1941–1943)**

Total civilian losses during the war and the German occupation of Ukraine are estimated to

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SS paramilitaries murder Jewish civilians, including a mother and her child, in 1942, in <u>Ivanhorod</u>, Ukraine.

**Location** Ukrainian SSR

**Date** 22 June 1941 to 1944

Incident type Imprisonment, mass shootings,

concentration camps, ghettos, forced labor, starvation, torture,

mass kidnapping

**Perpetrators** Erich Koch, Friedrich Jeckeln, Otto

Ohlendorf, Paul Blobel and many

others.

Various <u>local Nazi collaborators</u>, including <u>Ukrainian Auxiliary</u>
<u>Police</u>, [1] and the <u>Organization of</u>
Ukrainian Nationalists [2][3][4][1]

Organizations Einsatzgruppen, Order Police

<u>battalions</u>, <u>Axis</u> occupation forces (Hungarians, Romanians), [5] and

local collaborators

**Victims** 850,000<sup>[6]</sup> –1,600,000 Ukrainian

Jews<sup>[7][8]</sup>

**Memorials** In various places in the country

number four million, including up to a million Jews who were murdered by <u>Einsatzgruppen</u> units, <u>Order Police battalions</u>, <u>Wehrmacht</u> troops and local Nazi collaborators. <u>Einsatzgruppe C</u> (<u>Otto Rasch</u>) was assigned to north and central Ukraine, and <u>Einsatzgruppe D</u> (Otto Ohlendorf) to Moldavia, south Ukraine,

the <u>Crimea</u>, and, during 1942, the north <u>Caucasus</u>. According to Ohlendorf's testimony at the <u>Einsatzgruppen Trial</u>, "the *Einsatzgruppen* had the mission to protect the rear of the troops by killing the Jews, Romani, Communist functionaries, active Communists, uncooperative Slavs, and all persons who would endanger the security." In practice, their victims were nearly all Jewish civilians (not a single *Einsatzgruppe* member was killed in action during these operations). The <u>United States Holocaust Memorial Museum</u> tells the story of one survivor of the Einsatzgruppen in <u>Piryatin</u>, <u>Ukraine</u>, when they killed 1,600 Jews on 6 April 1942, the second day of <u>Passover</u>:

I saw them do the killing. At 5:00 p.m. they gave the command, "Fill in the pits." Screams and groans were coming from the pits. Suddenly I saw my neighbor Ruderman rise from under the soil ... His eyes were bloody and he was screaming: "Finish me off!" ... A murdered woman lay at my feet. A boy of five years crawled out from under her body and began to scream desperately. "Mommy!" That was all I saw, since I fell unconscious. [16]

From 16 to 30 September 1941 the <u>Nikolaev massacre</u> in and around the city of <u>Mykolaiv</u> resulted in the deaths of 35,782 Soviet citizens, most of whom were Jews, as was reported to Hitler. [17]

The most notorious massacre of Jews in Ukraine was at the <u>Babi</u> <u>Yar</u> ravine outside <u>Kyiv</u>, where 33,771 Jews were killed in a single operation on 29–30 September 1941; some 100,000–150,000 Ukrainian and other Soviet citizens were also killed in the following weeks. The mass killing was approved by the military governor Major-General <u>Kurt Eberhard</u>, the Police Commander for Army Group South (SS-*Obergruppenführer* <u>Friedrich Jeckeln</u>), and the *Einsatzgruppe* C Commander <u>Otto Rasch</u>. It was carried out by a mixture of SS, SD, and Security Police. On Monday the 29th, the Jews of Kiev gathered by the cemetery, expecting to be loaded onto trains. The crowd was large enough that most of the men, women, and children could not have known what was happening until it was too late: by the time they heard the machine-gun fire, there was no chance to escape. All were driven down a corridor of soldiers, in groups of ten. A truck driver described the scene:

[O]ne after the other, they had to remove their luggage, then their coats, shoes, and overgarments and also underwear ... Once undressed, they were led into the ravine which was



A map of the Holocaust in Ukraine



The Last Jew in Vinnitsa, the 1942 photograph showing a Jewish man near the town of Vinnytsia about to be shot dead by a member of Einsatzgruppe D. Also present are members of the German Army and the German Labor Service. [16]

Jews of the city of Kiev and vicinity! On Monday, September 29, you are to appear by 08:00 a.m. with your possessions, money, documents, valuables, and warm clothing Dorogozhitskaya Street, next to the Jewish cemetery. Failure appear to punishable by death.

about 150 meters long and 30 meters wide and a good 15 meters deep ... When they reached the bottom of the ravine they were seized by members of the <u>Schutzmannschaft</u> and made to lie down on top of Jews who had already been shot ... The corpses were literally in layers. A police marksman came along and shot each Jew in the neck with a submachine gun ... I saw these marksmen stand on layers of corpses and shoot one after the other ... The marksman would walk across the bodies of the executed Jews to the next Jew, who had meanwhile lain down, and shoot him. [18]

— Order posted in Kiev in Russian and Ukrainian on or around September 26, 1941. [18]

## **Collaboration in Ukraine**

Ukrainians who collaborated with the Nazi Germany did so in various ways including participating in the local administration, in German-supervised auxiliary police, <u>Schutzmannschaft</u>, in the German military, and serving as <u>concentration camp</u> guards. The *National Geographic* reported:

A number of Ukrainians had collaborated: According to German historian <u>Dieter Pohl</u>, around 100,000 joined police units that provided key assistance to the Nazis. Many others staffed the local bureaucracies or lent a helping hand mass shootings of Jews. Ukrainians, such as the infamous <u>Ivan the Terrible</u> of <u>Treblinka</u>, were also among the guards who manned the German Nazi death camps. [19]



Jews digging their own graves. Storow, 4 July 1941

Timothy Snyder notes that "the majority, probably the vast majority of people who collaborated with the German occupation were not politically motivated. They were collaborating with an occupation that was there, and which is a German historical responsibility." [20]

Widespread coordination between the Third Reich and Ukrainian nationalists, Ukrainian militia and rank-and-file pogromists occurred. Prior to the German invasion of Ukraine, the two active OUN factions coordinated directly from their headquarters in <u>Berlin</u> and <u>Krakow</u>. The headquarters decided to create marching companies ("pohidni groopi") to accompany the German invasion of Ukraine, recruiting new members into their ranks. The OUN supported Nazi antisemitic policies. In 1941, when German official <u>Reinhard Heydrich</u> requested "self-cleansing actions" in June of that year the OUN organized militias who killed several thousand Jews in western Ukraine soon afterward that year. The <u>Ukrainian People's Militia</u> under the OUN's command led pogroms that resulted in the massacre of 6,000 Jews in Lviv soon after that city's fall to German forces. [23][24][25] OUN members spread propaganda urging people to engage in pogroms. A slogan put forth by the <u>Bandera</u> group and <u>recorded in the 16 July 1941 Einsatzgruppen</u> report stated: "Long live Ukraine without Jews, Poles and Germans; Poles behind the river San, Germans to Berlin, and Jews to the gallows". [27][28] In instructions to its members concerning how the OUN should behave during the war, it declared that "in times of chaos... one can

allow oneself to liquidate Polish, Russian and Jewish figures, particularly the servants of Bolshevik-Muscovite imperialism" and further, when speaking of Russians, Poles, and Jews, to "destroy in struggle, particularly those opposing the regime, by means of: deporting them to their own lands, eradicating their intelligentsia, which is not to be admitted to any governmental positions, and overall preventing any creation of this intelligentsia (e.g. access to education etc.)... Jews are to be isolated, removed from governmental positions in order to prevent sabotage... Those who are deemed necessary may only work under strict supervision and removed from their positions for slightest misconduct... Jewish assimilation is not possible." [29]

According to political scientist <u>Ivan Katchanovski</u>, the agreement between Ukrainian nationalists and the occupying authorities in the region was not limited to ideology, as 63% of UPA commanders by early 1944 were represented by former commanders of police formations created by Nazi Germany during the initial stage of the occupation of Ukraine. Police units and civil militia established by the Nazi authorities played the role of collaborators of the Nazis, participating not only in the genocide of the Jewish population but also in the killing of Soviet prisoners, as well as in the murder of Ukrainian civilians, such as the killing of 3,000 people in the village of Kortelitsa in September 1942. [32][30]

Ukrainian police auxiliaries "had been involved at least in preparations for the Babi Yar massacre." [33]

According to the Israeli Holocaust historian <u>Yitzhak Arad</u>, "In January 1942 a company of Tatar volunteers was established in Simferopol under the command of <u>Einsatzgruppe 11</u>. This company participated in anti-Jewish manhunts and murder actions in the rural regions." [34]

According to <u>The Simon Wiesenthal Center</u> (in January 2011), "Ukraine has, to the best of our knowledge, never conducted a single investigation of a local Nazi war criminal, let alone prosecuted a Holocaust perpetrator." There had been many prosecutions in the past, but all of these trials were conducted by Soviet military and <u>Ukrainian SSR</u> courts, and never by Ukraine after the collapse of the Soviet Union. [35][36]

### **Victims**

According to <u>Timothy D. Snyder</u>, at least 1.7 million Soviet Jews were killed by Germans and their collaborators by the end of 1942, "and the Soviet Jewish populations under their control had ceased to exist." <u>[37]</u> Until the <u>fall of the Soviet Union</u>, it was believed that about 900,000 Jews were murdered as part of the Holocaust in Ukraine. This estimate is found in renowned and respected works as <u>The Destruction of the European Jews</u> by <u>Raul Hilberg</u>. In the late 1990s, access to Soviet archives increased the estimates of the prewar population of Jews and as a result, the estimates of the death



In the Prison on Łącki Street courtyard

toll have been increasing. In the 1990s, <u>Dieter Pohl</u> estimated that 1.2 million Jews were murdered, and more recent estimates of the death toll have been as high as 1.6 million. Some of those Jews whose names have been added to the death toll attempted to find refuge in the forest, but later on, during the German retreat, they were killed by members of the <u>Ukrainian Insurgent Army</u>, members of some nationalist units of the Home Army, or members of other partisan groups. According to American historian <u>Wendy Lower</u>,

"there were many perpetrators, albeit with different political agendas, who killed Jews and suppressed this history". [38] However, <u>Yad Vashem</u> research maintains that between 1 and 1.1 million Soviet Jews were murdered during the Holocaust, of them around 225,000 were from Belarus. [39]

### **Execution units**

- Einsatzgruppen C & D (Einsatzkommando)
- Order Police battalions
- Abwehr/Brandemburg special saboteur unit Nachtigall Battalion
- Freiwilligen-Stamm-Regiment 3 & 4 (Russians & Ukrainians)
- Ukrainian auxiliary units<sup>[40]</sup> Schutzmannschaft as well as Ukrainische Hilfspolizei

#### **Notable survivors**

- Roald Hoffmann
- Mordechai Rokeach
- Mina Rosner
- Adam Daniel Rotfeld
- Shevah Weiss
- Simon Wiesenthal

#### Rescuers

Ukraine rates fourth in the number of people recognized as "Righteous Among the Nations" for saving Jews during the Holocaust, with 2,515 individuals recognized as of January 2015. [41]

The <u>Shtundists</u>, an <u>evangelical</u> Protestant denomination which emerged in late 19th century Ukraine, helped hide Jews. [42]

#### **Massacres**

- 1941 Bila Tserkva massacre
- 1941 Odessa massacre
- Artemivsk massacre
- Babi Yar
- Dnipropetrovsk
- Drobytsky Yar
- Feodosiya
- Ivano-Frankovsk
- Kamenets-Podolskiy massacre
- Klevan
- Lviv pogroms (1941)
- Massacre of Lwów professors

- Mezhirichi
- Mizoch
- Nikolaev massacre
- Olyka
- Pliskov
- Sarny massacre
- Terebovl
- Zhytomyr

#### See also

- Gas van
- German war crimes
- History of the Jews in the Soviet Union
- History of the Jews in Ukraine
- The Holocaust in the Soviet Union
- World War II casualties of the Soviet Union
- Hegewald, a short-lived German Colony near Zhytomyr
- No Place on Earth, a 2012 documentary film about a group of Ukrainian Jews who survived the Holocaust by hiding in the Verteba and Priest's Grotto caves

#### **Notes**

a. Given the overlapping geographical scopes, see also <u>The Holocaust in Poland</u> (west), <u>The Holocaust in Romania</u> (southwest), <u>The Holocaust in Belarus</u> (north) and <u>The Holocaust in Russia</u> (east).

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