

“One Pandora’s box after another”: Jakob Reimer and Eastern European Collaboration with the
Nazis during WWII

Patrick Casey

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Dr. Jonathan Berkey

Introduction

Alzbeta Pick, Ewa Prywes Gringlas, Moshe Prywes, Maksymilian Gertner, Siegfried Rosenberg, Roza Kahan.¹ The names are powerful, but the faces are even more so. Men, women, and children from all across Eastern Europe. Bratislava, Berlin, Warsaw, Lodz, Lublin, Danzig, Piask, some well-known, some forgotten towns that bore witness to the darkest period of human history the world has ever seen. All converged at a small camp outside of Trawniki, Poland that would ultimately be the last place they ever saw. A simple search through the Yad Vashem photo archives reveals thousands of pictures, thousands of faces of those that have since been forgotten. Those whose testimonies will never be heard. One can click on each photo and it says where they were born, where they died, how they died, and how the photo made it into the archive. The photos were usually given to the archive from family members who survived the war and just wanted their loved ones to be remembered. That is why this is important. That is why the decisions of a few thousand Eastern European men who also converged in Trawniki, Poland is important. They too bore witness to the atrocities of the Holocaust, but they bore that witness in a different, darker way.

Fedir Kwoczak, Iwan Mandycz, John Demjanjuk, Josias Kumpf, Nikolaus Schiffer, Jakob Reimer.² The names are powerful, but the faces are even more so. Men that were hardened

¹ Yad Vashem Photo Archives

² 210 F.Supp.2d 638 United States District Court, E.D. Pennsylvania. *UNITED STATES of America, Plaintiff, v. Fedir KWOCZAK, Defendant*. Civil Action No. 97–5632. June 27, 2002.

447 F.3d 951 United States Court of Appeals, Sixth Circuit. *UNITED STATES of America, Plaintiff–Appellee, v. Iwan MANDYCH, Defendant–Appellant*. No. 05–1424. Argued: March 7, 2006. Decided and Filed: May 22, 2006.

367 F.3d 623 United States Court of Appeals, Sixth Circuit. *UNITED STATES of America, Plaintiff–Appellee, v. John DEMJANJUK, Defendant–Appellant*. No. 02–3529. Argued: Dec. 10, 2003. Decided and Filed: April 30, 2004.

438 F.3d 785 United States Court of Appeals, Seventh Circuit. *UNITED STATES of America, Plaintiff–Appellee, v. Josias KUMPF, Defendant–Appellant*. No. 05–2972. Argued Dec. 7, 2005. Decided Feb. 23, 2006.

831 F.Supp. 1166 United States District Court, E.D. Pennsylvania. *UNITED STATES of America, Plaintiff, v. Nikolaus SCHIFFER, Defendant*. Civ. A. No. 91–5644. Aug. 25, 1993. As Corrected Sept. 8, 1993.

by what they had seen and done all across Eastern Europe. Ukraine, Russia, Belorussia, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, some more predisposed to collaboration than others. Without these foot soldiers, the Nazis could not have implemented the horrific policies that brought about the Holocaust. Those whose testimonies would have been forever suppressed if not for the inquiries and subsequent cases brought to court by the Office of Special Investigations.³ The victims' names and faces must be etched in our memory forever to ensure they are honored. But we also must not forget the perpetrators and the collaborators. We must remember them to ensure something like the Holocaust will never happen again. It would be intellectually lazy to not complicate the issue of Eastern European collaboration with the Nazis during WWII. If we complicate the issue, we will better understand it, and if we better understand it, we can more effectively prevent it.

This is where we come to the case of *United States of America v. Jakob Reimer*. Jakob Reimer was a Soviet prisoner of war who was captured by the Nazis. He then volunteered to work for the Nazis at concentration camps and ultimately immigrated to the United States in an attempt to live out a peaceful life after the war.⁴ Like many of the cases of the so-called "Trawniki men," Jakob Reimer was and is a very complicated person to study. His case, along with the cases of other Trawniki men, complicates previous notions of identity, memory, and agency among collaborators during the Holocaust. The Eastern Front and specifically the

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, Plaintiff, v. Jack REIMER, Defendant. No. 92 Civ. 4638(LMM). Sept. 3, 2002. Many of these cases are from the court of appeals. In immigration cases like these, oftentimes the appeals court was where the defendant or plaintiff brought new evidence to the court to supplement what was presented in the trial courts. Most of these cases were initiated in the 1990's after the fall of the Soviet Union and the declassification of KGB files, so the appeals court cases actually have more information on the actions of the men than many of the trial courts do.

³ The Office of Special Investigations was founded in 1964 as a branch of the U.S. Department of Justice. It was formed as a way to detect and investigate individuals who took part in state sponsored acts committed in violation of public international law, such as crimes against humanity. They mainly targeted perpetrators of Nazi war crimes.

⁴ *UNITED STATES v. REIMER*.

Ukraine represented a unique blend of cultural prejudices and what Eric Steinhart calls a multiethnic milieu that became a breeding ground for collaboration.⁵ The only regime that could get close to the cruelty of the Nazis was Josef Stalin's Soviet Union. Throughout the war years, Eastern Europeans found themselves in the middle of what Timothy Snyder dubbed the "bloodlands," stuck between Adolf Hitler and the Nazis and Josef Stalin and the Soviets.⁶ Jakob Reimer grew up in the "bloodlands" and was heavily influenced by the violence that occurred there. In this tragic setting every individual had choices to make that impacted more than just themselves.

Thesis/Argument

The main issue that this paper hopes to address is the issue of agency. When in these men's lives, and specifically in Jakob Reimer's life, did they make a conscious choice to do what they did? What could have been some influences that made them make these decisions? Were there other options? Were they truly forced to do this? Was this true volunteerism? Were they accessories to genocide or simply forced labor? This paper hopes to address all of these questions and also look at the claim that the decision that Jakob Reimer made was an implicit way of saying two things: 1) that he thought Nazi Germany was going to win the war and 2) that he objected to the ideals of the Soviet Union and service in the Red Army by volunteering to work for the Nazis. Self-preservation and survival were factors that cannot be ignored in this analysis. These themes will be taken into account within the paper's argument, saying that Reimer's decisions started as self-preservation and evolved into implicit political statements. Some things that the reader should consider are the problem of memory with the events talked

⁵ Eric C. Steinhart, "The Chameleon of Trawniki: Jack Reimer, Soviet Volksdeutsche, and the Holocaust," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 23, no. 2 (2009): pp. 239-262, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hgs/dcp032>).

⁶ Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (London: Vintage, (2015)).

about in the court case. The case was brought to court about fifty years after the events took place and the ideas of justice towards Nazi war criminals changed from immediately after the war to the present day. They should also consider changing notions of identity by the perpetrators/collaborators of themselves and changing perceptions of identity by the victims/bystanders of the perpetrators/collaborators and the impact of the Cold War on the trials. All of these ideas will be touched on in this paper. Yoram Sheftel, the Israeli defense attorney for Trawniki man John Demjanjuk once said that Demjanjuk's case was like "one Pandora's box after another."⁷ The same can be said for a comprehensive study of Jakob Reimer and any Trawniki man for that matter. There are so many different angles and lenses to look at the Trawniki men through that it can be confusing at times. Each search brings with it a new topic to unpack, each connection, a new story to tell. The goal of this paper is to present to the reader a coherent paper with a compelling story and argument. To start, we must understand the previous scholarship on Jakob Reimer and the Trawniki men, Hiwis, and Askaris.⁸

Historiography

The historiography of the Trawniki men, Hiwis, and Askaris is a difficult field to navigate. The subject of Trawniki men, Hiwis, and Askaris lives on the peripheries of many different fields of study and require a fairly comprehensive overview of different fields of study

⁷ *The Devil Next Door*, Netflix Documentary, directed by Yossi Bloch and Daniel Sivan, Produced by One Man Show and Submarine Deluxe Production in association with Yes Studios, (2019).

⁸ **Trawniki men**- Trawniki men were a combination of men, mostly Soviet prisoners of war, that were from varying Eastern European backgrounds. They were all trained at the SS Trawniki Training Camp and sent to different concentration camps and ghettos in Eastern Europe, mostly within the Lublin District of the General Government of Nazi occupied Poland. **Hiwis**- Hiwis stands for *Hilfswillige* which is German for "those willing to serve." Hiwis became a term that was used throughout the Nazi occupied lands of Eastern Europe to refer to Eastern European collaborators. **Askaris**- Askaris was the term used for African auxiliary police units that worked for the German colonial government in Africa. The term was recycled to refer to Eastern European collaborators and local auxiliary police units that were used by the Nazis during the Holocaust. These terms are often overlapping terms and often refer to the same group of people. They are, for the most part, interchangeable terms.

in order to gain a full picture of who these men were and what their role was in this complicated and horrific time in history. It requires a look at German military history to look at Nazi ideology and racial standards, the hierarchy of the Nazi *Schutzstaffel* (SS), and the operational guidelines that were put in place for the Holocaust and for the occupied territories.⁹ It also has us look at the circumstances that created a manpower need for Eastern European volunteers and the conditions of prisoner of war camps that could have led to higher numbers of volunteerism. It requires us to look at Holocaust and genocide studies in order to understand the categorizations of perpetrator, collaborator, bystander, and victim. It also looks at memory in terms of the camps, their conditions, and the victims' perspective of perpetrators. We also have to look at the history of partisan warfare that occurred behind enemy lines on the Eastern Front during WWII.

Researching partisan warfare offers insights into the already prevalent ethnic tensions that existed in Eastern Europe that were manipulated by both the Nazis and the Soviets.¹⁰ We have to look at the way that justice is carried out against Nazi war criminals and how that changed over time. We see this through the way court cases against Nazi war criminals are carried out from the Nuremberg Trials up to the present day. Scholarship on Eastern European involvement in the Holocaust was very slim up until the 1990s. When the Soviet Union fell in 1991 the public was flooded with declassified documents from the KGB, the Soviet secret police. This led to an uptick in cases against Eastern European perpetrators of Nazi war crimes and consequently an

⁹ Robert Kirchubel, *Operation Barbarossa: The German Invasion of Soviet Russia* (Oxford, UK: Long Island City, NY, (2013))

Albert Seaton, *The Russo-German War, 1941-45* (Novato, CA: Presidio, (1993)) These two sources were used extensively to look at the background for the movement of troops and the differences in the way the *Wehrmacht* and the *Schutzstaffel* (SS) operated.

¹⁰ Ben Shepherd and Juliette Pattinson, *War in a Twilight World: Partisan and Anti-Partisan Warfare in Eastern Europe, 1939-45*, (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, (2010))

“Nazi Posters in Wartime Russia - Unique Evidence of How Hitler’s Occupiers Tried to Woo Soviet Populations - Unearthed from the Russian Archives, with a Commentary by John Erickson.” *History Today* 44, no. 9 (September 1, 1994): 14–19. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1299031352/>.

increase in the scholarship produced about them. The seminal works start out very broadly and begin periodically narrowing. While there have not been monographs that are specifically about Trawniki men, Hiwis, or Askaris, there have been articles and chapters of monographs dedicated to the subject. This historiography will try to organize them in order of narrowing focus.

The main scholarly sources researched for this paper began with the conditions of the Eastern Front and the intense conflict that happened there. In Timothy Snyder's *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*, he talks about the gross maltreatment of prisoners of war, civilians, and Jews by both the Nazis and the Soviets. *Bloodlands* is a different type of European history, presenting the mass murders committed by the Nazi and Stalinist regimes as two aspects of a single history, in the time and place where they occurred: between Germany and Russia, when Hitler and Stalin both held power. He calls the time from 1933-1945 the era of mass killing in Eastern Europe that was perpetrated by the Soviets and the Nazis. Civilians were often caught in the middle of this or were forced to make the choice to join one of the official armies in conflict or partisan/resistance groups in the "bloodlands." Snyder posits that no one was left untouched by the war.¹¹ The next monograph to look at is Daniel Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, where Goldhagen mostly focuses on ethnic Germans and Eastern European collaborators that made the Holocaust possible. Goldhagen lays to rest many myths about the Holocaust: that Germans were ignorant of the mass destruction of Jews, that the killers were all SS men, and that those who slaughtered Jews did so reluctantly. *Hitler's Willing Executioners* provides conclusive evidence that the extermination of European Jewry engaged the energies and enthusiasm of tens of thousands of ordinary Germans. Goldhagen reconstructs the climate of "eliminationist anti-Semitism" that made Hitler's pursuit of his genocidal goals

¹¹ Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*

possible and the radical persecution of the Jews during the 1930s popular. He goes into the anti-Semitic leanings and indoctrination that led to ordinary people's complicity, cooperation, and collaboration.¹² With Snyder and Goldhagen's works can be grouped a few other monographs.

First is Tadeusz Piotrowski's *Poland's Holocaust: Ethnic Strife, Collaboration with Occupying Forces and Genocide in the Second Republic, 1918-1947*. This work examines the roles of the ethnic minorities in the collapse of the Republic and in the atrocities that occurred under the occupying troops. It also looks at the Polish government's response to mounting ethnic tensions in the prewar era and its conduct of the war effort. The approach of World War II provided the minorities' leaders a new opportunity in their nationalist movements, and many sided with one or the other of Poland's two enemies—the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany—in hopes of achieving their goals at the expense of Poland and its people.¹³ This adds to Snyder's claim of the “bloodlands” of Eastern Europe being a time and place stuck between Hitler and Stalin. Yitzhak Arad's work *Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka: The Operation Reinhard Death Camps* is another important work to look at. This work tracks the Nazi ideology that led to Operation Reinhard and the creation of the extermination camps at Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka. It focuses on the narratives of perpetrators, collaborators, bystanders, and victims, tracking with the form that is used for Holocaust and genocide studies.¹⁴ Arad also wrote *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*. In this work, he traces the Holocaust in the German-occupied territories of the Soviet Union through three separate periods in which German political and military goals in the

¹² Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (London: Abacus, (2008))

¹³ Tadeusz Piotrowski, *Poland's Holocaust: Ethnic Strife, Collaboration with Occupying Forces and Genocide in the Second Republic, 1918-1947* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, (1998))

¹⁴ Yitzhak Arad, *Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka: The Operation Reinhard Death Camps* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, (1999)) Arad was also the historian that testified at the hearings of John Demjanjuk and is a historian for Yad Vashem.

occupied territories dictated the treatment of the Jews. Arad's examination of the differences between the Holocaust in the Soviet Union compared to other European nations reveals how Nazi ideological attacks on the Soviet Union, which included war on "Judeo-Bolshevism," led to harsher treatment of Jews in the Soviet Union than in most other occupied territories.¹⁵ Then, there is Patrick Albano's dissertation entitled "Helots and Hiwis: Joseph Stalin, Adolph Hitler, and the Employment of Peasants, Partisans, and Anti-Partisan Campaigns in the Great Patriotic War of Liberation, 1941-1945." Albano argues that post-war historians depicted the Red Army alone as winning the war and downplays partisan significance as at least inconsequential and at best auxiliary. He states that even less attention was given by historians to ordinary people within Soviet society. Yet, given the slim margin of victory by the Red Army in many campaigns, partisans and ordinary communities were contributing factors, at times tipping the balance. He also argues that Germany was forced to divert troops to anti-partisan operations, thereby creating shortages in men and materiel. More importantly was that these anti-partisan campaigns became a cloak for systematic annihilation by the Nazis and reprisal by Soviet partisans, creating atrocities on both sides.¹⁶ All of these sources have varying scopes and focuses, but they all mention Trawniki men, Hiwis, or Askaris in some capacity, mostly stressing their importance to Operation Reinhard.

Then, we move to sources that begin to be more focused on specific units and places like Christopher Browning's *Ordinary Men: Reserve Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*. It is the story of Reserve Police Battalion 101 of the German Order Police, which was responsible for mass shootings as well as round-ups of Jewish people for deportation to Nazi

¹⁵ Yitzhak Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, (2009))

¹⁶ Patrick Albano, "Helots and Hiwis: Joseph Stalin, Adolph Hitler, and the Employment of Peasants, Partisans, and Anti-Partisan Campaigns in the Great Patriotic War of Liberation, 1941-1945." (Drew University Dissertation, (2001))

death camps in Poland in 1942. Browning argues that most of the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 were not fanatical Nazis but, rather, ordinary middle-aged, working-class men who committed these atrocities out of a mixture of motives, including the group dynamics of conformity, deference to authority, role adaptation, and the altering of moral norms to justify their actions. Very quickly three groups emerged within the battalion: a core of eager killers, a plurality who carried out their duties reliably but without initiative, and a small minority who evaded participation in the acts of killing without diminishing the murderous efficiency of the battalion whatsoever. Browning's main argument is that most people succumb to the pressures of a group setting and commit actions they would never do of their own volition.¹⁷ Peter Black's "Foot Soldiers of the Final Solution: The Trawniki Training Camp and Operation Reinhard" is another source that begins to narrow its focus towards this paper's topic. Black argues that the SS created in the Trawniki men a ruthless force bound neither to territory nor to nationalist aims, but rather to commanders and missions. He makes the point that the Germans' provision of military benefits, their extension of awards and status, and even the respect they showed their helpers tightened the bond. Nicknamed for the earlier German colonial "askaris" in East Africa, Black says the Trawniki-men were not so much reminiscent of the past as they were enforcers of the Nazi future.¹⁸ Then comes the source that is most pertinent to my case study, Eric Steinhart's "The Chameleon of Trawniki: Jack Reimer, Soviet Volksdeutsche, and the Holocaust." Steinhart makes the argument that Reimer's transformations from repressed farmer to Red Army lieutenant; from Soviet POW in German captivity to senior non-commissioned officer at the SS Training Camp in Trawniki, Poland; and finally from wanted war criminal to upstanding

¹⁷ Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper Perennial, (1998))

¹⁸ Peter Black, "Foot Soldiers of the Final Solution: The Trawniki Training Camp and Operation Reinhard" *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 25, no. 1, 1-99, (2011)

American citizen served as a vehicle for negotiating Eastern Europe's dangerous wartime multiethnic milieu.¹⁹

The work of Peter Black and Charles Sydnor can also not go unnoticed as they were the chief historians that worked with the Office of Special Investigations and provided testimonies, historical background, and case-specific research for several cases. Charles Sydnor was the chief historian that worked on the *U.S. v. Reimer* case.²⁰ These more specific sources usually explain that the men that did the dirty work of the Holocaust were collaborators that had a complicated history but were more or less ordinary men performing unspeakable acts. These sources also look at the degree of volunteerism that was involved with these Eastern European collaborators and looks at the question of whether they truly volunteered or were forced to do what they did. I hope to differentiate myself from these scholars by looking at the agency of Jakob Reimer and the various choices he had in the decisions that he made. Steinhart mainly focuses on Reimer's fluid conception of identity and ability to change his identity in order to thrive in each situation he was put in. I want to assess his options, the choices he made, and what kinds of implicit political statements he was making by making those decisions.

Methodology

To fully understand the character that is Jakob Reimer, one must understand two things. 1) That his upbringing and familial background in the Ukraine left him predisposed to collaboration and 2) the majority of the events discussed about Reimer happen in Poland, a place

¹⁹ Eric Steinhart, "The Chameleon of Trawniki: Jack Reimer, Soviet Volksdeutsche, and the Holocaust," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 23, no. 2, 232-262, (2009)

²⁰ *UNITED STATES v. REIMER*, Expert Report of Dr. Charles W. Sydnor, Jr., Government Exhibit 226

that held little significance to him. These points are pivotal for understanding the Ukrainian Nazi collaborator Jakob Reimer.

In order to understand the life and actions of Jakob Reimer, one must get a clear understanding of the background that Reimer was born into. What was happening around him that may have influenced his decision to collaborate and work for the Nazis? In order to answer this question, this paper will follow the life of Jakob Reimer and, at each major life event, it will expand on the surrounding context. These contextual sections, along with the primary source information on Reimer's life, will paint a full picture of the decisions that Reimer had to make and what may have influenced them. Throughout the paper will be the argument that Reimer had more agency than he claimed in his deposition from the case *United States of America v. Jakob Reimer*.²¹ This paper will also make the case that the decisions that Reimer made, while starting out as a means of self-preservation, became a way to make implicit political statements about who was going to win the war and were political statements against the Soviet regime.²²

Background/Primary Source Analysis

Ukrainian Background

In 1762 Catherine the Great started her reign over the Russian Empire. This is important because in 1763 she issued a manifesto inviting Europeans to settle in the Volga region of Russia.²³ In 1789 Crown Prince Paul signed an agreement allowing Prussian Mennonites to enter into the Ukraine and start engaging in agricultural activities. When Prussia eliminated the

²¹ *UNITED STATES v. REIMER*, Jakob Reimer Deposition, February 24-25 and May 28, 1997, Exhibit 45

²² I would be remiss if I did not mention the influence of Bryan Stevenson's book *Just Mercy* as a major influence on the methodological side of this paper.

²³ Henry C. Smith, *The Story of the Mennonites* 4th ed., rev. and enl. by Cornelius Krahn, (Newton, Kan: Mennonite Publication Office, (1957))

exemption from military service on religious grounds, the remaining Mennonites were eager to leave for the Ukraine.²⁴ This created a large community of ethnic Germans in the Ukraine whose first language was German. These communities gained a reputation for being well advanced socially and agriculturally and lived in relative peace up until World War I. By the time WWI broke out, the exemption from military service for Mennonites in the Ukraine had been eliminated and many Ukrainian Mennonites served during WWI in non-combat roles, such as forestry and hospital units. When the Russian Revolution started, there was a struggle between the White and Red armies, the tsarist and communist forces respectively. Terror spread throughout the Ukraine as an anarchist by the name of Nestor Makhno and his army controlled the region and targeted Mennonites for attacks. The ethnically German Mennonites were thought of as “Kulaks” which was a derogatory term that was used for high-income farmers that refused or were hesitant to support the revolution with their grain stores. The Mennonites, going against their pacifist ideology, established militia units known as *Selbstschutz* to combat Makhno’s forces and protect their communities as they tried to escape the anarchists. These units were effective until Makhno’s forces allied with the Red Army and the *Selbstschutz* units were overwhelmed.²⁵

This is the atmosphere that Jakob Reimer was born into. He was born in 1918 in Friedensdorf in an ethnically German part of the Ukraine. His family, like many Ukrainian Mennonite families owned a large farm and lived a decent life. As the revolution escalated, the Reimer family was targeted by anarchists and the Red Army in pointed de-kulakization

²⁴ Smith, *The Story of the Mennonites*

²⁵ Sean David Patterson, "The Makhnos of Memory: Mennonite and Makhnovist Narratives of the Civil War in Ukraine, 1917-1921." Master's Thesis, (University of Manitoba (Canada), (2013)) <https://ezproxy.lib.davidson.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/1490996827?accountid=10427>. This source applies to the paragraph that precedes the citation.

campaigns.²⁶ In 1930, Josef Stalin declared, “In order to oust the 'kulaks' as a class, the resistance of this class must be smashed in open battle and it must be deprived of the productive sources of its existence and development. That is a turn towards the policy of eliminating the kulaks as a class.”²⁷ Thus began the policies of collectivization, the requisition of grains from wealthy peasants among other things. These policies had an abnormally high effect on Ukrainian Mennonites as they were often wealthy landowners that operated farms. As Eric Steinhart puts it, “Reimer was a child of collectivization.”²⁸ His family farm was confiscated along with their livestock in 1930. His father was sent to a forced labor camp and his brother Heinrich was deported to Siberia. To avoid this happening to her other sons, Reimer’s mother fled with the family to the Caucasus where there was an ethnically German Mennonite community. His brother eventually escaped and lived with the family illegally.²⁹

While in the Caucasus, a few things happened. Reimer seemed to have altogether avoided what was known as the Holodomor³⁰ and the 1937 and 1938 purges of German descendants and German language speakers in the Ukraine,³¹ and he went to a Soviet state school in Pyatigorsk. While studying to be a librarian, he learned Russian.³² The Holodomor and the 1937 and 1938 ethnic purges were likely strong motivators for Reimer to learn Russian so he could have the

²⁶ *UNITED STATES v. REIMER*. De-kulakization involved the collectivization of farms like the Reimer family farm. Oftentimes members of the family, usually the father and any sons he might have, were deported and the grain stores were confiscated in order to be redistributed (even though it was often not redistributed). The goal of de-kulakization was also to ethnically cleanse the Soviet Union and get rid of the ethnic Germans.

²⁷ Joseph Stalin. "Concerning the Policy of Eliminating the Kulaks as a Class," *Krasnaya Zvezda*, January 21, 1930, *Collected Works*, Vol. 12, p. 189

²⁸ Steinhart, “The Chameleon of Trawniki”

²⁹ *UNITED STATES v. REIMER*, Jakob Reimer CIC Investigation File, Government Exhibit 4

³⁰ Snyder, *Bloodlands*. The Holodomor was a man-made famine enacted by the Soviets on the Ukraine that actively targeted German speakers in 1932 and 1933. It is estimated that somewhere between seven and ten million people perished during the Holodomor. Soviet authorities insisted they were not responsible, but, after the Soviet Union fell, it was officially recognized as a genocide by the United Nations.

³¹ Robert W. Thurston, *Life and Terror in Stalin’s Russia: 1934-1941* (New Haven: Yale University Press, (1998))

³² Direct Examination of Jack Reimer by his Attorney, Ramsey Clark, August 1998

option of claiming multiple identities. There seemed to have been a point where Reimer realized that being the son of de-kulakalized parents and the brother to a man that was being sought after by the Soviet Secret Police (NKVD) there would not be much of a chance to climb the ladder in any profession. This seems to be the point that he decided to join the Soviet Red Army in 1940.³³ Reimer was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Red Army in January of 1941.³⁴ Shortly thereafter, in June of 1941 Operation Barbarossa began.

Nazi Germany Invades

Operation Barbarossa was an immense undertaking by the German military. On June 22, 1941, Nazi Germany broke a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union and invaded the Soviet Union. Using *blitzkrieg* tactics, the Nazis tore across Eastern Europe at an unprecedented pace.³⁵ By October of 1941, German forces were at the footsteps of Moscow.³⁶ Jakob Reimer's unit, the 447th Infantry Regiment was quickly pushed onto the frontlines when the Nazis invaded.³⁷ Reimer and his unit were stationed near Minsk in Belarus during the initial offensive. Minsk was quickly overrun, and the city fell by June 27th. Many of the Soviet forces created concentrated pockets of resistance or were ordered to blend into the civilian population and report on German

³³ In Steinhart's work it seems to be a point of contention whether Reimer volunteered for service or was drafted. In the statement of facts in *U.S. v. Reimer* it states that he was drafted into service. Steinhart calls that into question because of his rapid rise from de-kulakalized ethnic German to Red Army officer in less than a year and a half. He speculates that, in the time between his schooling and his entrance into the Red Army, Reimer did something to demonstrate his loyalty to the Soviet regime. Plausible conclusions that Steinhart gives are that Reimer joined the Komsomol and perhaps the Communist Party. This directly contradicts Reimer's claim from his Trawniki personnel file from 1941 that says he made a declaration that he had not been a member of the Communist Party or of the Communist Youth Organization, but he was of Aryan origin. That declaration is a good example of his decision being one of self-preservation, but his later decisions were not the same. This decision was one where the two options were to sign the declaration or die, but his later decisions were not the same.

³⁴ *UNITED STATES v. REIMER*, Jakob Reimer CIC Investigation File, Government Exhibit 4

³⁵ *Blitzkrieg* literally means "lightning war" in German and was a tactic used by the Germans to quickly overwhelm an enemy force and take them by surprise. It involved German armored units (*Panzer* divisions) and the air force (*Luftwaffe*) going ahead of the main infantry units to overwhelm the enemy, cut off enemy supply lines, cause chaos, and let the infantry mop up any stragglers.

³⁶ Kirchubel, *Operation Barbarossa*

³⁷ Direct Examination of Jack Reimer by his Attorney, Ramsey Clark, August 1998

troop movements from behind enemy lines.³⁸ Reimer did the latter, as it was reported that he was a reconnaissance officer. The main resistance forces around Minsk were captured by Nazi forces on July 2nd, but Reimer was not captured until July 6th when the German military forces rounded up all local males that were of military age on the suspicion that they were disguised Soviet military troops. Reimer was discovered and sent to a prisoner of war camp at Biala-Podlaska in Poland.³⁹ He remained interned there until about September 6th, 1941, a period of about two months. Reimer was subject to particularly grisly conditions. Frank Ellis in his piece entitled “Dulag-205: The German Army’s Death Camp for Soviet Prisoners at Stalingrad” detailed the conditions that many Soviet prisoners of war would face at the hands of the Nazis. He likened the stalags and dulags that prisoners of war were interned in to death camps. They embodied a similar operation to concentration camps throughout Eastern Europe. Prisoners of war were particularly vulnerable to death by exposure, starvation, beatings, and forced labor. In some cases, before the gas chambers were put in place for the systematic extermination of the Jews in Eastern Europe, carbon monoxide poisoning and Zyklon-B poisoning was tested on Soviet prisoners of war in what was known as gas vans. In other cases, due to the overpopulation of many dulags and stalags, prisoners were simply shot without a second thought.⁴⁰ The hatred between communist and fascist forces was a hatred that ran deep. Eric Steinhart supposed that Reimer was a political officer, meaning he was more likely to be targeted as a communist and killed immediately. Prisoners in Reimer’s position had less than a twenty percent chance of living.⁴¹

³⁸ Seaton, *The Russo-German War, 1941-45*

³⁹ *UNITED STATES v. REIMER*, Jakob Reimer CIC Investigation File, Government Exhibit 4. He was imprisoned at Stalag 307 in Biala-Podlaska.

⁴⁰ Frank Ellis, “Dulag-205: The German Army’s Death Camp for Soviet Prisoners at Stalingrad,” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 19, no. 1 (April 1, 2006): pp. 123-148, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13518040500544600>

⁴¹ Steinhart, “The Chameleon of Trawniki”

Manpower Shortage

While the *Wehrmacht* blazed ahead on the frontlines of Nazi Germany's bold offensive into the Soviet Union, Hitler's personal army, the *Schutzstaffel* (SS), filled in behind the lines and formed the rear guard. The SS were Hitler's main enforcers of the Nazi race policies that had already been put in place in Germany and its occupied territories, including parts of Poland.⁴² With victory seemingly at hand on the Eastern Front, SS officials held a meeting on January 20th, 1942 in a suburb of Berlin called Wannsee. The Wannsee Conference was where Nazis SS officials devised what became known as "Operation Reinhard," named after the director of the Reich Main Security Office SS-*Obergruppenführer* Reinhard Heydrich.⁴³ SS officials ordered General Odilo Globocnik, the SS leader of the Lublin district in the General Government of Poland territory, to immediately start the construction of killing centers for Jews, political prisoners, and others deemed by the Nazis as undesirable.⁴⁴ This is where we come to the camp that was created at Trawniki, just outside of Lublin. Trawniki was a training camp created under Operation Reinhard that trained SS soldiers to be guards in ghettos like those in Warsaw, Lublin, and Majdanek and in concentration camps like those in Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka.⁴⁵

⁴² Kirchubel, *Operation Barbarossa*

⁴³ Peter Black, "Foot Soldiers of the Final Solution: The Trawniki Training Camp and Operation Reinhard," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 25, no. 1 (January 2011): pp. 1-99, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hgs/dcr004>.

⁴⁴ Odilo Globocnik. N.d. Declassified under the Nazi War Crimes Disclosure Act. CIA Document Number: 519a6b24993294098d510c83

⁴⁵ This is in reference to multiple United States court cases where defendants were implicated in atrocities at different camps and ghettos.



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As the war raged on in the East and the Soviet Red Army got over the initial shock of the surprise attack from the Nazis, it became clear that the war was going to drag on into the winter, which favored the Russians. The Germans were not prepared for a war in the winter and the Russians began to push them out of Moscow and back across the Eastern Front. As the struggle in the East escalated, more and more rear-guard soldiers were pressed into combat on the German frontlines. This led to a massive shortage of manpower in the rear, especially at the newly formed concentration camps across Poland. At this point in the war, command of the Trawniki camp had passed from General Odilo Globocnik to Major Karl Streibel.⁴⁷ With the large deficit in manpower for the Nazi's Operation Reinhard killing machines, Streibel went about recruiting potential volunteers from towns, dulags, and stalags all over occupied Eastern

⁴⁶ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Trawniki," Holocaust Encyclopedia, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/trawniki>

⁴⁷ USHMM, "Trawniki"

Europe.⁴⁸ These volunteers became known as *hilfswillige*, or Hiwis. They were also sometimes referred to as “Trawniki men.” It is important to note that these men did not meet the rigid ethnic standards of the SS, but they were trained at an SS facility, sworn in as SS members, and given rifles, pay, and were even allowed to request leave.⁴⁹ While most of these “Trawniki men” were trained to serve as armed guards at ghettos and concentration camps across Poland, some were chosen to join the SS *Einsatzgruppen*, which were the Nazi death squads that performed mass killings all across Eastern Europe.⁵⁰

Jakob Reimer, when he realized that his identity as an ethnic German and German speaker could benefit him and increase his chances of survival, revealed that he knew both German and Russian and could be potentially useful for the Germans. Reimer explained that he initially hid his ethnicity, saying, “I quite frankly was afraid they would shoot me because [I had been] a German...in the war against Germany.”⁵¹ It must be stated very specifically that Reimer did not reveal his identity until September of 1941 when he learned that the Germans were recruiting Soviet ethnic Germans to serve as translators. When he learned this, he immediately volunteered himself for service. Shortly thereafter, on September 7th, 1941, he was transferred to Trawniki Training Camp to be trained as an armed guard.⁵² Before Reimer was captured, he had disposed of his military papers, which could have revealed that he was a Communist political officer in the Red Army. When Reimer arrived at Trawniki, he made a declaration that he had

⁴⁸ “Nazi Posters in Wartime Russia - Unique Evidence of How Hitler’s Occupiers Tried to Woo Soviet Populations - Unearthed from the Russian Archives, with a Commentary by John Erickson.” *History Today* 44, no. 9 (September 1, 1994): 14–19. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1299031352/>.

⁴⁹ *UNITED STATES v. REIMER*, Expert Report of Dr. Charles W. Sydnor, Jr., Government Exhibit 226 This evidence is also corroborated by the previously mentioned Trawniki men cases.

⁵⁰ Yitzhak Arad et al., *The Einsatzgruppen Reports: Selections from the Dispatches of the Nazi Death Squads Campaign against the Jews July 1941-January 1943* (New York, NY: Holocaust Library, 1989).

⁵¹ *UNITED STATES v. REIMER*, Jakob Reimer CIC Investigation File, Government Exhibit 4

⁵² *UNITED STATES v. REIMER*, Statements of Fact from the Court

never been a member of the Communist Party or the Communist Youth Organization and that he was from Aryan descent.⁵³ It is important to note here that many of the early decisions that Reimer had to make were a matter of survival. The choices were between allying himself with the Nazis or likely dying in a *dulag* or *stalag*. His decision effectively severed any chance of Reimer to maintain political affiliation to the Soviet Union and the Communist Party. Then, Reimer was trained at Trawniki and became a noncommissioned officer for the SS. He was then put in charge of training future Trawniki ethnic German recruits and translating orders from German to Russian for the Trawniki men units that were employed by the Nazis.⁵⁴ To be fair, Reimer and many other Trawniki men were unaware of what their roles would be when they were first transferred from the prisoner of war camps to Trawniki, but, when they found out what the nature of their work was, many of them continued to help the Nazis because they did not want to go back to the conditions of the *dulags* or *stalags*.

Analysis of Pre-War and Initial Involvement at Trawniki

Eric Steinhart stated about Reimer that,

Reimer himself not only trained hundreds of Holocaust perpetrators, but—according to the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of Special Investigations (OSI)—he also had been an active mid-level leader entrusted by the Nazi regime to carry out the Final Solution in Poland. Between the spring 1942 and early 1943 Reimer took part in the deportation of Jews living in the Lublin ghetto to the Belzec death camp, led the deportation of Jews housed in the Czestochowa ghetto, and helped in the suppression of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Although many of Reimer’s assignments involved loading Jews onto trains to supposedly clandestine destinations, even Reimer admitted that the true fate of Jewish “deportees” remained “an open secret” at Trawniki.⁵⁵

⁵³ *UNITED STATES v. REIMER*, Jakob Reimer Trawniki Personnel File, Government Exhibit 2. Reimer’s declaration at Trawniki was likely not true, but if he had not made that declaration, he likely could not have served as a Trawniki man and would have been killed.

⁵⁴ *UNITED STATES v. REIMER*, Interrogation of Mikhail J. Korzhikov, September 9, 1964, Government Exhibit 90

⁵⁵ Steinhart, “The Chameleon of Trawniki” The timelines of other court cases involving Trawniki-trained guards suggest that Reimer was likely responsible for the training of men like John Demjanjuk, Fedir Kwoczak, Nikolaus Schiffer, Iwan Mandycz, and Josias Kumpf that went on to work at concentration camps across Poland.

Steinhart argues in his piece “The Chameleon of Trawniki: Jack Reimer, Soviet Volksdeutsche, and the Holocaust” that Reimer had a shapeshifting conception of identity and his involvement in the Holocaust was his way of navigating “Eastern Europe’s dangerous wartime multiethnic milieu.”⁵⁶ While this may be true, this paper aims to argue that, in addition to navigating this “multiethnic milieu,” Reimer also had a certain degree of agency in the decisions that he made and that, while his early decisions were decisions in the interest of self-preservation, his later decisions were implicit political statements.

With all of the events that were happening in the Ukraine leading up to the outbreak of the war with Nazi Germany, it is interesting that Reimer decided to learn Russian and join the Red Army. Working under Steinhart’s suspicion that his quick rise to an officer in the Red Army was due to a demonstration of loyalty, such as becoming a member of the Communist Party, one has to ask the question why? Why would Reimer join the Red Army after what had happened to his family and his home country of Ukraine under the Soviet regime and Red Army? Reimer was effectively swearing allegiance to the faction that imprisoned his father in a labor camp, deported his brother to Siberia, and forced his family to move from the Ukraine to the Caucasus. Why would he join an organization that terrorized his community in the Ukraine? Reimer seems to have made an implicit statement that he thought the Red Army and the Soviet regime was the best way to advance himself, so he chose to support them as a military and political entity with his act of volunteering for service. Reimer presumably could have lived in peace in the Caucasus in his Ukrainian Mennonite community after fleeing the Ukraine. He would not have needed to learn Russian because the main language of the ethnically German Ukrainian Mennonite community was German, but he decided to go to school and learn Russian anyway. All this is to

⁵⁶ Ibid.

say that he had options, the route that he chose was not the only route available to him. It has been stated that because of all the violence that Ukrainian communities endured under the Soviet regime, many of them welcomed the Nazi offensive on the Eastern Front as a liberation instead of an invasion. Upon hearing about Ukrainian communities welcoming the Nazi invasion, Reimer stated, “When I saw Russian people welcoming the enemy...it was unbelievable to me,” effectively doubling down on his support for the Soviets.⁵⁷

The swift Nazi offensive of Operation Barbarossa seems to have changed his mind regarding his political associations and his opportunities for upward mobility. Reimer was clearly sold on his dedication to the Soviet regime and demonstrated that allegiance once again by blending into the civilian population and performing reconnaissance on Nazi forces for the Soviets after the fall of Minsk. Most common foot soldiers would not have done something like this. Although they were ordered to blend into the population and perform reconnaissance, the majority of Reimer’s unit surrendered, but Reimer made the decision to attempt to avoid capture. While this also could have been an implicit political statement, Reimer likely understood the conditions that he would be subject to as a prisoner of war with the Nazis and made the decision as one of self-preservation.

So, why did he decide to collaborate with the Nazis? It seems that Reimer may have recognized the incredible force that the Nazi German forces display in the opening months of Operation Barbarossa, tearing across Eastern Europe all the way to Moscow. This may have led him to reconsider his allegiances. When he realized the benefits of speaking German while in Stalag 307 in Biala-Podlaska, he saw the chance to volunteer and join a force that he thought was

⁵⁷ Direct Examination of Jack Reimer by his Attorney, Ramsey Clark, August 1998

going to win the war. He could have been making an implicit political statement in support of Nazi Germany and its military might, but, in this early stage in his collaboration, it was more likely that it was a decision of self-preservation and survival.

Service at Trawniki

Reimer's service at Trawniki and at various camps and ghettos can be tracked by roster records and transfer records that were kept by the Nazis and signed by Karl Streibel, the SS commandant of the Trawniki Training and Labor Camps. Reimer's main job was to train Trawniki men and translate orders from German to Russian from his superiors to the Trawniki men.⁵⁸ While some transfer documents describe him as an accountant, being in charge of pay roll, or tracking the number of Jews being deported, it is supposed that, as a translator, there must have been instances of him giving direct orders to Trawniki men in liquidations of ghettos. He also would have been involved on the ground. As a Trawniki man it is important to note that Reimer was trained, uniformed, paid, given leave, had the chance for promotion, and was armed (probably with a pistol or a rifle supplied by the SS).⁵⁹ His Trawniki personnel file stated that he was transferred on September 19th, 1942 to the Czestochowa ghetto and remained there until November 6th, 1942.⁶⁰ During the time of his assignment there, the SS organized the clearing of the ghetto and sent roughly 40,000 Jews to Treblinka for extermination.⁶¹ Reimer attempted to testify that while in Czestochowa he was only in charge of arranging food supplies and payroll for his company. This contradicts with one of his previous statements plus Dr. Charles Sydnor, the historian that testified at Reimer's case, said it was highly unlikely that Reimer was not

⁵⁸ *UNITED STATES v. REIMER*, Statements of Fact from the Curt

⁵⁹ *UNITED STATES v. REIMER*, Expert Report of Dr. Charles W. Sydnor, Jr., Government Exhibit 226.

⁶⁰ *UNITED STATES v. REIMER*, Jakob Reimer Trawniki Personnel File, Government Exhibit 2

⁶¹ *UNITED STATES v. REIMER*, Expert Report of Dr. Charles W. Sydnor, Jr., Government Exhibit 226.

involved in the liquidation of the ghetto because of the extreme shortage of manpower that German forces were facing at the time.⁶² It must be admitted that many Trawniki men upon their initial arrival at Trawniki were not aware of the true work they would be doing in concentration camps and ghettos across Eastern Europe, but, when they found out the true nature of their work, the men generally complied and did their jobs because anything was better than the prisoner of war camps.⁶³

After being stationed in Czestochowa, Reimer was sent to the Warsaw Detachment of Trawniki men on April 19th, 1943 and assisted with the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto. He was also involved in the suppression of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in January of 1943. After the uprising the remaining Jewish population in Warsaw was sent directly to Treblinka to be eradicated by the Nazi killing machine. Again, Reimer claimed that he was in charge of food and payroll for his unit, but, because of his involvement as a translator and a noncommissioned officer in the SS, he was likely heavily implicated in the deportation of the Jews to the Treblinka death camp.⁶⁴ Reimer also testified to having been involved in a mass shooting in an earlier event in Lublin. According to other Trawniki men, Reimer, along with several ethnically German noncommissioned officers and twenty or thirty Trawniki men, rounded up Jews that were missed by the preliminary sweeps of the Lublin ghetto by the SS. They took somewhere between 200 and 300 Jewish into the forest about fifteen kilometers outside of Lublin where a large pit was waiting and clubbed them into the pit and massacred them with submachine guns.⁶⁵

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Black, "Foot Soldiers of the Final Solution"

⁶⁴ *UNITED STATES v. REIMER*, Expert Report of Dr. Charles W. Sydnor, Jr., Government Exhibit 226.

⁶⁵ *UNITED STATES v. REIMER*. Government Exhibits 24, 90, 91, 92, 93, and 94 reflect transcripts from three former Trawniki personnel of interrogations by the Soviet KGB. The three men were Mikhail Korzhikov with multiple interrogations on April 21st, 1947, September 9th, 1964, and April 9th, 1947, Nikolej Leont'ev on June 30th and August 17th, 1964, and Petr Brovtsev on August 25th, 1964. These interrogations were looked at by the courts but were awarded little weight in litigation because of the way that the KGB performed their interrogations. It was

On November 3rd, 1943, Jews at the labor camps around Lublin in Majdanek, Poniatowa, and Trawniki were ordered to dig anti-tank pits in anticipation of the coming Soviet offensive. Little did they know they were digging their own graves. The SS, Police Battalion 101, and scattered detachments of Trawniki men lined up the Jewish labor forces outside of the pits and shot them in what was known as Operation Harvest Festival. It was the single most devastating day during the Holocaust with about 43,000 Jews being killed simultaneously at Majdanek, Poniatowa, and Trawniki.⁽⁶⁶⁾⁽⁶⁷⁾ It seems that Reimer was heavily implicated in several liquidations of ghettos around the Lublin and Warsaw areas.⁶⁸ He was also implicated in several mass shootings.⁶⁹ It cannot go without stating that Reimer was also very successful in his work with the SS. In contrast to most of the ethnically German volunteers at Trawniki, Reimer was able to increase his rank from *Oberwachmann* (Guard Private First Class) to *Gruppenwachman* (Guard Sergeant) and ultimately to *SS Oberzugwachmann* (Guard First Sergeant). He even received a decoration in the form of the War Meritorious Medal, a decoration designated for non-

not uncommon for the NKVD, an earlier iteration of the KGB, to perform interrogations of concentration camp personnel, record their testimony, and immediately have them sent to a firing squad. These brutal tactics for interrogation do not carry a lot of weight in the American courts. Leont'ev was interviewed again by the Department of Justice on January 5th, 1998 and this testimony was considered legitimate. His corroborating testimony as a witness to the massacre at Lublin was instrumental in the prosecution of Jakob Reimer.

⁶⁶ Browning, *Ordinary Men*

⁶⁷ Reimer claimed that on this specific day the Trawniki men were replaced by SS personnel and they were directed to stay indoors and not look out the windows. The SS personnel that he is talking about was likely Police Battalion 101. Although it is difficult to say that Reimer is completely wrong in his testimony about the Trawniki men on November 3rd, 1943, it seems highly unlikely that the Trawniki men were not involved in the mass killing as they had been a part of mass shootings in the past and had proved themselves as valuable in that capacity to their German superiors.

⁶⁸ *UNITED STATES v. KWOCZAK*, If the timelines are correct, Fedir Kwoczak was also a part of the Warsaw Detachment of Trawniki men. His case suggests that he was highly implicated in the liquidation and killing of Jews there. Reimer, whether he was directly involved in the killings at Warsaw, was charged with translating orders that resulted in the killing of Jews by Trawniki men in Warsaw.

⁶⁹ It would not be out of the question to assume that Reimer was as involved in the shootings of November 3rd as he was in shootings around the Lublin and Warsaw areas. Although it is contrary to what he testified to, historian Charles Sydnor seems to believe that Trawniki men were more implicated than Reimer suggests. The court, unfortunately, does not weigh the testimony of a historian as heavily as Reimer's testimony.

Germans in the service of German occupation administrations.⁷⁰ This makes it difficult to believe Reimer when he explains that he was forced to do everything that he did during the war. His quick rise in the ranks of the Trawniki men seems to be in direct contradiction with Reimer's statement that he was, in essence, a prisoner of war, subject to being shot by the SS for small reasons.⁷¹ This is also corroborated by the case of *UNITED STATES of America v. Nikolaus SCHIFFER*. Historian Dr. Charles Sydnor also testified at his case, saying that there was no evidence that guards would be killed for refusing to perform guard duties at concentration camps. If someone refused duty as a concentration camp guard, they would be transferred, likely to a labor unit.⁷² This again seems to suggest the possibility of choice and agency among the Trawniki men and Jakob Reimer.



⁷⁰ *UNITED STATES v. REIMER*, Statements of Fact from the Court. It must also be noted that in the other court cases of Trawniki men that are cited, all of them speak to the ability to receive pay, leave, and promotions.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *UNITED STATES v. SCHIFFER*, This comes under the subsection of historical background.

Streibel Battalion and Post-War Activity

Reimer became a very trustworthy employee of the Nazi killing machine. It was mentioned earlier that Trawniki men were able to request leave at times. Reimer's Trawniki personnel file reveals that he was awarded a two-week furlough to return to his hometown of Friedensdorf, Ukraine to visit his sister twice during his service at Trawniki, once in 1942 and once in 1943.⁷⁴ The visit in 1943 is particularly interesting because of the timing. In February of 1943, the Soviet Red Army handed the Germans their biggest loss of the entire war on the Eastern Front at Stalingrad. The Soviets killed or captured over one million German soldiers and effectively eliminated the German Sixth Army along with one of Hitler's best generals, Field Marshall Friedrich Paulus.⁷⁵ This was widely considered the turning point in the war on the Eastern Front. After this defeat, it was not uncommon to see Trawniki men abandon their posts and either blend into the civilian population or take up arms against the Nazis. Shortly after news of the Nazis defeat at Stalingrad, a group of Trawniki men at Belzec performed a mutiny.⁷⁶ Twelve men departed from the camp with their rifles, ammunition, and hand grenades, and spent

⁷³ Jürgen Stroop, *The Stroop Report: the Jewish Quarter of Warsaw Is No More!* (New York: Pantheon Books, (1979)) The original caption from the Stroop Report in 1943 was "Askaris used during the operation." The caption from the USHMM was "Askari or Trawniki guards peer into a doorway past the bodies of Jews killed during the suppression of the Warsaw ghetto uprising." Reimer would have been tasked with translating the orders given to these men and/or participating in the suppression of the uprising.

⁷⁴ Direct Examination of Jack Reimer by his Attorney, Ramsey Clark, August 1998

⁷⁵ Seaton, *The Russo-German War, 1941-45*

⁷⁶ David Alan Rich, "The Third Reich Enlists the New Soviet Man: Eastern Auxiliary Guards at Auschwitz-Birkenau in Spring 1943," *Russian History* 41, no. 2 (2014): 269-82. www.jstor.org/stable/24667175. One German commander in Lublin tried to characterize the Trawniki men, saying, "As soon as there is a favorable opportunity, they would mutiny without hesitation. Service involving guarding prisoners or escort duties, as well as garrison labor duty, are too boring for Ukrainians...The enthusiasm for serving under German command authority completely disappeared at the moment when the evacuation of the ghettos (Warsaw, Czestochowa, Radom, and many other cities) was over and they were transferred to ordinary guard service."

the rest of the war fighting the Nazis.⁷⁷ One guard who was part of the plot to desert, but ultimately did not desert, was interrogated by the Nazis at Belzec and subsequently shot.⁷⁸ After that, about 40-50 other Trawniki men were deemed unreliable and transferred back to Trawniki. Reimer was a man who prided himself on being informed. He knew about the German defeat at Stalingrad and knew about the incoming Soviet troops.⁷⁹ He was often displayed as an accountant that was in charge of pay roll on Trawniki personnel files and transfer documents, so he must have heard from the 40-50 men that were transferred back to Trawniki about what had happened in Belzec.⁸⁰ This is very important because all of these events occurred leading up to his 1943 two-week furlough to Friedensdorf, which happened on July 11th, 1943. Reimer had to have known that desertion at that point was a legitimate option. This was also a time when the frontlines were rapidly approaching Friedensdorf. Reimer was faced with a choice. Instead of considering desertion or escaping with his sister, Reimer again doubled down on his allegiance to the Nazis and returned to Trawniki after his two-week furlough.

In 1943, Hitler made it possible for all ethnic Germans in the service of the Nazis to gain German citizenship.⁸¹ In February of 1944, Reimer applied for and was granted German citizenship.⁸² An SS interviewer that handled Reimer's citizenship interview had concluded that he was "100 percent of German ancestry and totally immersed" in Germanness.⁸³ With Reimer's reputation for political fluidity, it was interesting that he decided to honor his German

⁷⁷ *UNITED STATES v. REIMER*, Interrogation of Mikhail J. Korzhikov, September 9, 1964, Government Exhibit 90

⁷⁸ *UNITED STATES v. REIMER*, Interrogation of Nikolaj S. Leont'ev, August 17, 1964, Government Exhibit 93

⁷⁹ Direct Examination of Jack Reimer by his Attorney, Ramsey Clark, August 1998

⁸⁰ *UNITED STATES v. REIMER*, Jakob Reimer Trawniki Personnel File, Government Exhibit 2

⁸¹ Steinhart, "The Chameleon of Trawniki"

⁸² *UNITED STATES v. REIMER*, Sworn Statement of Jack Reimer, May 1, 1992, Government Exhibit 118. After the war, Reimer insisted that his application to gain German citizenship was forced by the Nazis, but, given the fact that only a small portion of the ethnic Germans at Trawniki applied for citizenship, it sheds light on the voluntary nature of applying for German citizenship.

⁸³ *UNITED STATES v. REIMER*, Expert Report of Dr. Charles W. Sydnor, Jr., Government Exhibit 226

allegiances when the war started to turn and the Red Army was closing in on Trawniki. When asked about this Reimer said, “According to the Russians, I was a deserter. I couldn’t go back into Russia. No way.”⁸⁴ In July 1944, Soviet forces captured and liberated Trawniki. By this time, Reimer and the rest of the Trawniki men, with their commandant Karl Streibel, formed what was called SS Battalion Streibel.⁸⁵ With SS Battalion Streibel, Reimer fled across Eastern Europe, stopping at Pinzow and Czestochowa in Poland. During their evacuation, Reimer started a relationship with a cook that was with the unit named Ludmila Davidovicz.⁸⁶ When they got to Czestochowa, they saw that Soviet forces were about to take the city. Reimer later remembered his experience, saying, “I looked out the window and I saw Russian tanks. I told Ludmila, ‘Grab your coat’ and we dropped everything. When we crossed the main street there was a tank burning that had been hit by an SS bazooka. Luckily, we got on the last train out.”⁸⁷ From Czestochowa, SS Battalion Streibel fled to Dresden and then to Czechoslovakia, avoiding the Soviet Red Army’s advances. Throughout the battalion’s retreat, Trawniki men would leave the battalion and, by the time they got to Czechoslovakia, Streibel only had about 700 Trawniki men under his command.⁸⁸ At one point, Reimer and Davidovicz were separated from the battalion and Reimer, seeking to return to his unit, went to rejoin the battalion at Dresden.⁸⁹

The battalion finally disbanded in Czechoslovakia and was ordered to blend into the civilian population.⁹⁰ After the armistice was signed, Reimer went to a German discharge camp

⁸⁴ *UNITED STATES v. REIMER*, Deposition of Jack Reimer, February 24-25 and May 28, 1997, Government Exhibit 45

⁸⁵ *UNITED STATES v. REIMER*, Expert Report of Dr. Charles W. Sydnor, Jr., Government Exhibit 226

⁸⁶ *UNITED STATES v. REIMER*, U.S. Department of Justice/Memorandum/Interview of Ludmila Proc, nee Davidovicz, June 19, 1997, Defense Exhibit AAA

⁸⁷ *UNITED STATES v. REIMER*, Deposition of Jack Reimer, February 24-25 and May 28, 1997, Government Exhibit 45

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *UNITED STATES v. REIMER*, Statements of Fact from the Court

with some other members of Streibel Battalion and attempted to be officially discharged from the German military. He was told that he was a civilian and therefore did not need to be discharged.⁹¹ Reimer then settled with Davidovicz in Regensburg with Reimer's German passport and he worked for the U.S. Army's 26th Station Hospital.⁹² Afterwards, Reimer and Davidovicz sought to leave Germany and applied for displaced persons status and immigrated to the United States.

Auswandererlager Funkkaserne München-Freimann 58/12/8
Meldeschein Nr. 2248 s. Free.
 EC.Nr. 537 136 GBS
 Name: **REIMER Jakob** geb. am: **6.11.18** in: **Friedensdorf/Bez. USSR**
 Fam.-Stand: **gesch.** Rel.: **ev** Fam.-Mitgl.:
 Beruf: **kfm. Angestellter** Volksguppe: **V4**
 Kennkarte-Nr.: **B II 7336** Anstellungsort: **Regensburg**
 Wohnung: **44a** Reg.-Bezirk: **Opt.** Straße: **Arnulfplatz 3** Land: **Bayern**
 Kreis: **44a** Reg.-Bezirk: **Opt.** Land: **Bayern**
 Kriegsfolgeempfänger: = Zeilen: = Einkommen/Wöchentl.: = monatl.: **260,-**
 Freiheitsort: **Regensburg (selbst)**
 v. Wohnort: v. Wohnort: v. Wohnort:
 zurück: zurück: zurück:
 Kontr.-Nr.: Zeichen: Kontr.-Nr.: Zeichen: Kontr.-Nr.: Zeichen:
 Sichtvermerk:

Abteilung:	Anmeldung		1. Abmeldung		2. Anmeldung		2. Abmeldung	
	Dat.	Zeichen	Dat.	Zeichen	Dat.	Zeichen	Dat.	Zeichen
1. Registr. Stelle	5. 4. 52	15 4 44	15 4 44		2. 5. 52		2. 5. 52	
2. Wohnungseinzwehung	5. April 1952		16. April 1952		2. 5. 52		2. 5. 52	
3. Verpfl.-Strichliste	5. April 1952		16. April 1952		3. Mai 1952		5. Mai 1952	
4. Karteistelle	5. 4. 52		16. 4. 52					
5. Leitstelle								

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Final Analysis

We see in several examples here that Reimer had agency in the decisions he made, despite his later claims of being forced to do everything he did. There were particular points of agency that were intriguing, most of all are the moments when he volunteered for service at

⁹¹ *UNITED STATES v. REIMER*, Jakob Reimer CIC Investigation File, Government Exhibit 4

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ DP-2 Card Jakob Reimer, April 5, 1952, ITS Digital Collection, DP2 Card File, 3.1.1.1, 68767757, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Trawniki, when he went on furlough to Friedensdorf in 1943, when he applied for German citizenship, and when SS Battalion Streibel was retreating across Eastern Europe.

His initial volunteer service at Trawniki seems to make the most sense. The conditions of *dulags* and *stalags* that Soviet prisoners of war were interned at offered slim chances for survival and, given the probability that Reimer did not know what the nature of his work was going to be, this decision makes the most sense. His initial decision to collaborate was a decision of self-preservation, a decision between collaboration and a high probability of death by exposure or starvation at a *dulag* or *stalag*. He likely thought he was strictly going to be doing translation and clerical work. Once he found out the true nature of his work is where one would think he would start to look for ways to get out, but instead he looked for ways to advance. By the time he had his two-week furlough at Friedensdorf in 1943, Reimer was well established in the Trawniki Training Camp system and had already been involved in the liquidations of several ghettos in and around the Lublin District. He was also involved in a massacre in the forest outside of Lublin, so it was clear that he was aware of what was going on in the concentration camps and what kind of work he was doing. When he left for Friedensdorf, he would have known that there was a precedent for successful desertion, but he decided to return anyway. While Eric Steinhart argues that Reimer's actions were a reflection of his way of navigating a dangerous wartime multiethnic milieu, this paper argues that his actions were a political statement against the Soviet Union. His allegiance to Nazi Germany was a form of resistance against the Soviet Union. The history of the Soviet Union's atrocities against the Ukraine make his actions understandable. Understandable, but not excusable. When Reimer decided to voluntarily attain German citizenship, he further affirmed this political statement. When he elected to stay with SS Battalion Streibel, he yet again made a choice to stay with the Nazi German forces despite being

knowledgeable about alternative choices. Other Trawniki men abandoned SS Streibel Battalion, the precedent was set, but Reimer made his choice. He then affirmed his allegiance to Germany in his attempt to be officially discharged from the military when it was clearly not necessary. Reimer was making a political statement, essentially saying that anything was better than being subject to the Soviet Union.

Conclusion

In 1992, Jakob Reimer was quoted saying, “I always in my life tried to do my best to please everybody, so I had no problems with the jobs they were giving me. I guess I did well.”⁹⁴ And Reimer did do well. He did well as an officer in the Red Army. He did well as a Wise Potato Chip salesman in the United States. But the problem is that he also did well as a perpetrator of the Holocaust. He did well at persecuting the Jews.

Calel Perochodnik was a Jewish ghetto policeman in Warsaw. While he was there, he wrote a memoir entitled *Am I a Murderer? Testament of a Jewish Ghetto Policeman*. In the preface Calel explained the purpose of his memoir, saying,

To be exact, this is a confession about my lifetime, a sincere and true confession. Alas, I don't believe in divine absolution, and as far as others are concerned, only my wife could—although she shouldn't—absolve me. However, she is no longer among the living. She was killed as a result of German barbarity, and, to a considerable extent, on account of my recklessness. Please consider this memoir to be my deathbed confession.

I harbor no illusions. I know that sooner or later I will share the fate of all the Jews of Poland. A day will come when they will take me into a field, command me to dig a grave—for me alone—order me to remove my clothing and lie there on the bottom, and kill me quickly with a pistol shot to my head. The earth will be made even, and a farmer will plough it and sow rye or wheat. I have seen so many executions that I can just close my eyes and see my own death in detail.

⁹⁴ *UNITED STATES v. REIMER*, Deposition of Jack Reimer, February 24-25 and May 28, 1997, Government Exhibit 45

I don't ask to be absolved. If I believed in God, in heaven or hell, in some reward or punishment after death, I wouldn't have written this at all. It would be enough for me to know that all Germans will roast in hell after they die. Regrettably, I don't know how to pray, and as for faith, I have none.⁹⁵

The reason this paper is so important is because Jakob Reimer did his job, did it well, and had no remorse. The ghetto policemen had similar responsibilities to the Trawniki men, but people like Calel pondered questions about humanity that Reimer did not even think about. While Reimer was worried about self-preservation and political allegiances, people like Calel were struggling to comprehend the horrid situation that they were in. This paper highlights the gray areas of victimhood and perpetration in the "bloodlands" of Eastern Europe. Reimer was a victim of some of the worst atrocities of the Soviet Union, but, when his political affiliations flipped, he became a perpetrator of some of the worst atrocities the world had ever seen in the Holocaust. One can admire Reimer's knack for survival in one of the bloodiest conflicts the world had ever seen, but his actions were ultimately deplorable, and his lack of remorse is the most disturbing element of his story.

⁹⁵ Calel Perehodnik and Frank Fox, *Am I a Murderer?: Testament of a Jewish Ghetto Policeman*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, (1996))

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Jakob Reimer Deposition, February 24-25 and May 28, 1997, Exhibit 45

Jakob Reimer CIC Investigation File, Government Exhibit 4

Statements of Fact from the Court

Jakob Reimer Trawniki Personnel File, Government Exhibit 2

Interrogation of Mikhail J. Korzhikov, September 9, 1964, Government Exhibit 90

Interrogation of Nikolaj S. Leont’ev, August 17, 1964, Government Exhibit 93

Government Exhibits 24, 90, 91, 92, 93, and 94 reflect transcripts from three former Trawniki personnel of interrogations by the Soviet KGB. The three men were Mikhail Korzhikov with multiple interrogations on April 21st, 1947, September 9th, 1964, and April 9th, 1947, Nikolej Leont’ev on June 30th and August 17th, 1964, and Petr Brovtsev on August 25th, 1964

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