

TERROR AND LOCAL COLLABORATION IN OCCUPIED BELARUS: THE CASE OF THE *SCHUTZMANNSCHAFT* BATTALION 118. I. BACKGROUND

PER ANDERS RUDLING*

This paper is a study of the activities of the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118, a collaborationist formation made up primarily of Ukrainians. Formed in the spring of 1942, it served in Belarus until July 1944. The core of the unit consisted of Ukrainian nationalists from Bukovyna, but the unit also included soldiers of other nationalities. The present study is based upon Soviet Belarusian legal cases and Canadian denaturalization and deportation procedures cases against its former members. The testimonies at these trials give a detailed insight into the dynamics of the battalion and the brutal nature of its punitive actions during the winter and spring of 1943, shedding new light on the implementation of the terror by which the German authorities ruled occupied Belarus.

Keywords: Belarus; WWII; OKH; *Schutzmannschaft* Battalions 115 and 118; *Bukovyns'kyi Kurin'*; German occupation; genocidal policies; collaborators; partisans

Introduction

Generalplan Ost and Genocidal Warfare in Belarus

The commencement of Operation Barbarossa was a watershed in the history of World War II. Whereas the Nazis had regarded the war in the west as an *Europäische Normalkrieg*, a normal European war, Operation Barbarossa was a paradigm shift; the Nazi leadership referred to the war in the east as a *Rassenideologische Vernichtungskrieg*, a racial war of extermination.¹ The Nazi blueprint for the postwar order, the *Generalplan Ost*, did not envision a future for the Belarusian people, 75 percent of which was destined for deportation.² Heinrich Himmler declared in August 1941 that the attack on the Soviet Union would result

* Ernst Moritz Arndt Universität Greifswald, Germany; rudlingp@uni-greifswald.de, prudling@ualberta.ca.

¹ Seppo Mylliniemi, *Die Neuordnung der Baltischen Länder 1941–1945: Zum nationalsozialistischen Inhalt der deutschen Besatzungspolitik* (Helsingfors: Vammalan Kirjapaino OY, 1973), 46.

² On *Generalplan Ost*, see Czesław Madajczyk, ed., *Generalny Plan Wschodni: Zbiór dokumentów* (Warsaw: Główna Komisja Badania Zbrodni Hitlerowskich w Polsce, 1990) and Czesław Madajczyk, “General Plan East: Hitler’s Master Plan for Expansion,” *Polish Western Affairs* 3, no. 2 (1962), accessed online, <http://www.worldfuturefund.org/wffmaster/Reading/GPO/gpoarticle.HTM> (August 28, 2009).

in the extermination of 30 million Slavs.³ The scope of the *Generalplan Ost* was even more ambitious; it foresaw the elimination of some 50 million people. No other region would be more devastated by these genocidal policies than Belarus.⁴

Given the enormous territories under German occupation, the German military personnel were stretching thin. Aware of this shortage, Wilhelm Keitel argued: “Since we cannot watch everybody, we need to rule by fear.” Hitler himself, when learning about Stalin’s call for a partisan movement in the summer of 1941, exclaimed: “That’s only good, it gives us an opportunity to exterminate everybody who challenges our rule.”⁵ On September 16, 1941 Wilhelm Keitel issued an order that every German soldier killed in a partisan attack in the occupied Soviet Union should be avenged by the killing of “50–100 Communists,”⁶ since “life was valueless in these territories.”⁷

The occupiers carried out a great number of punitive measures against the local population. The terror was blind and it mattered little whether innocent bystanders were killed. Most of the people murdered in the anti-partisan operations were women and children.⁸ In the category of enemies, Jews and partisans overlapped.⁹ From mid-1942 onwards, the Nazi authorities responded to the activities of the Belarusian partisans with a series of “pacification” operations.¹⁰ As Yehoshua

³ Dietrich Eichholtz, “‘Generalplan Ost’ zur Versklavung osteuropäischer Völker,” *Utopie kreativ* 167 (September 2005): 801, citing *Der Prozeß gegen die Hauptkriegsverbrecher vor dem Internationalen Militärgerichtshof (IMG)*, vol. 4 (Nürnberg, 1947), 536, Zeugenvernehmung von Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski, 7.1.1946.

⁴ Timothy Snyder, “Holocaust: The Ignored Reality,” *The New York Review of Books* 56, no. 12 (July 16, 2009).

⁵ Ales’ Adamovich, “Zapisnye knizhki raznykh let,” *Nëman: Ezhemesiachnyi literaturno-khudozhestvennyi i obshchestvenno-politicheskii zhurnal*, no. 7 (July 1997): 14.

⁶ I. N. Kuznetsov and V. G. Mazets, eds., *Istoriia Belarusi v dokumentakh i materialakh* (Minsk: Amalfeia, 2000), 542, citing TsGAOR SSSR, f. 7445, op. 2, d. 140, l. 502–504; “Erlaß des Chefs des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht Keitel über Vergeltungsmaßnahmen bei Widerstand gegen die deutsche Besatzungsmacht, vom 16. September 1941,” in *Deutsche Propaganda in Weißrußland 1941–1944: Eine Konfrontation von Propaganda und Wirklichkeit*, ed. Johannes Schlootz (Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, 1996), 13.

⁷ Philip W. Blood, *Hitler’s Bandit Hunters: The SS and the Nazi Occupation of Europe* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2006), 63.

⁸ Christian Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde: Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weißrußland 1941 bis 1944* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1999), 1001.

⁹ Martin Dean, “Microcosm: Collaboration and Resistance During the Holocaust in the Mir Rayon of Belarus, 1941–1944,” in *Collaboration and Resistance During the Holocaust: Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania*, ed. David Gaunt, Paul A. Levine and Laura Palosuo (Bern: Peter Lang, 2004), 234–235, citing English language transcripts of evidence given during the committal proceedings conducted against Simon Serafinowicz at Dorking, Surrey. Interview with Oswald Rufeisen on February 22, 1996. On Rufeisen’s biography, see David Twersky, “The Strange Case of ‘Brother Daniel’,” *Jewish World Review*, August 5, 1998, <http://www.jewishworldreview.com/cols/twersky080598.html> (accessed July 31, 2008).

¹⁰ Andrii Bolianovs’kyi, *Ukraïns’ki viis’kovi formuvannia v zbroinykh sylakh Nimechchyny (1939–1945)* (Lviv: L’vivs’kyi Natsional’nyi Universytet im. Ivana Franka and Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 2003), 148.

Büchler has shown, Heinrich Himmler “saw the *Schutzmannschaften* as an effective and efficient tool for achieving the primary goal: the destruction of the Jews.”¹¹

The destruction of partisans merged with other assignments. Jürgen Matthäus asserts that to “the German participants, the ensuing *Bandenkampf* appeared as a logical extension of the *Aktionen* carried out since summer 1941 against the allegedly deadly “enemies of the Reich.”¹²

Since mid-1942, the German attempts at implementing the “final solution of the Jewish question” in the Soviet Union began to overlap with the fight against the growing partisan movement. As early as the beginning of “Operation Barbarossa,” Jews were equated with Bolsheviks, snipers, and plunderers in order to create a propagandistic haze behind which the mass execution of civilians appeared to be legitimate reprisal against a legitimate enemy.¹³

In late 1942 Hermann Göring ordered that in “partisan-infested areas” “all food was to be confiscated, all able-bodied men and women to be evacuated for use of labor, and children were to be sent to special camps.” At this point it became a standard practice for the Germans and their local collaborators to surround and burn villages suspected of supporting the partisans and to have the residents shot, burnt alive or taken to Germany for forced labor.¹⁴ On November 18, 1942, *SS-Obergruppenführer* Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski, on Himmler’s behalf, issued an order that the local leaders of the SD were to determine whether individual villages should be burnt or its residents deported.¹⁵ The reprisals became more brutal as the partisan resistance increased. In 1942, the German authorities introduced a policy of creating “dead zones,” totally destroying and depopulating entire areas. This policy was greatly expanded during the first half of 1943.¹⁶ In April 1943, the *Führungsgruppe* of the Army Group *Mitte* of the OKH introduced “battle instructions for the counter-partisan activities in the east” that “large forested areas” had to be “totally evacuated and turned into areas forbidden to the civilian population.”¹⁷ Belarusian lands were classified into three categories – “bandit-free areas,” “bandit-suspicious areas,” and “bandit-infested areas.” Only areas with a presence of German military were to be designated as “liberated,” and the other two categories dealt with extremely harshly. In areas “endangered by bandit

¹¹ Yehoshua R. Büchler, “Local Police Force Participation in the Extermination of Jews in Occupied Soviet Territory 1941–1942,” *Shevut* 20 (1996): 85.

¹² Jürgen Matthäus, “What about the ‘Ordinary Men’?: The German Order Police and the Holocaust in the Occupied Soviet Union,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 10, no. 2 (Fall 1996): 142.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Timothy Mulligan, *The Politics of Illusion and Empire: German Occupation Policy in the Soviet Union, 1942–1943* (New York: Praeger, 1988), 139.

¹⁵ Natsional’nyi Arkhiv Respubliki Belarus’ (hereafter: NARB), f. 845, op. 1, d. 237, l. 45.

¹⁶ Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, 1010–1011.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1028.

activities” the “[m]en are only allowed to work or leave the locality under supervision.” All men encountered alone or in small groups were to be captured or shot. In the areas of the third category, the “bandit-infested areas,” “all men must be deported. Until further notice, men under 50 will be picked up by troops and the economic administration and put to work as labor force. Later, the men in this area will be shot.”¹⁸ The *SS-und-Polizeigebietsführer* for Rechitsa reported that “in general, the orders of the district commissar were based on the following rule ... burnt villages are to be regarded as partisan villages and are not allowed to be rebuilt. Anyone encountered in them will be regarded as a partisan and shot.”¹⁹ Wooded areas were to be deforested: “To the extent possible,” even the forests were to be “destroyed by fire,” which became a common practice, foreshadowing the US tactics of deforestation in Vietnam.²⁰

Partisan resistance in Belarus increased markedly by the summer of 1943.²¹ The Germans responded by stepping up their policy of collective punishment, making little distinction between partisans, Jews, and Gypsies.²² During the occupation, 60 major and 80 smaller “pacification operations” were carried out against the inhabitants of particular villages suspected of assisting the partisans. The pacification campaigns resulted in the leveling of 627 villages and the murder of their inhabitants, often by burning them alive.²³ The extermination of entire Jewish villages was reported as “elimination of partisans.”²⁴ In April 1943, Kurt von Gottberg, Kube’s successor, stressed the necessity to solve the “Jewish question” in Belarus in order to dissolve the partisan movement.²⁵ *Wehrmacht* instructions explicitly stated that “on the basis of a standing regimental order, all Jews were to be regarded as partisans if they were encountered outside their place of residence.”²⁶

¹⁸ Ibid., 1029.

¹⁹ SS-und Polizeigebietsführer Rechitsa, June 21, 1943, ZStA Minsk 658–1–1, bl. 207, cited *ibid.*, 1020.

²⁰ Ibid., 1033.

²¹ Martin C. Dean, “The German Gendarmerie, the Ukrainian *Schutzmannschaft* and the ‘Second Wave’ of Jewish Killings in Occupied Ukraine: German Policing at the Local Level in the Zhitomir Region, 1941–1944,” *German History* 14, no. 2 (1996): 186.

²² Barbara Törnquist-Plewa, “‘Enade vi stod?’ Postsovjjetiska berättelser om andra världskriget i Vitryssland,” *Nordisk Øst-forum* 1, no. 3 (2004): 333.

²³ Eugeniusz Mironowicz, *Bialorus* (Warsaw: Trio, 1999), 156.

²⁴ For instance, the Ukrainian *Schutzmannschaft* Battalions 51 and 52 reported the murder of 90 Jews – women, children and elderly – in the *shetel* of Grozdianka in the Chervan’ region of Belarus in October 1941 as “the elimination of 90 partisans.” Büchler, “Local Police Force Participation,” 95, citing Prague Military Archives, Bericht über die Judenaktion am 2–3.10.1941, V. H.A. Pol. Reg. Mitte 13–75 and “Strafsache gegen ... Karl Dietrich ...” Das Schwurgericht in Detmold. 2 Ks 1/65.

²⁵ Matthäus, “What about the ‘Ordinary Men’?,” 143.

²⁶ Hannes Heer, “Killing Fields: The Wehrmacht and the Holocaust in Belorussia, 1941–1942,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 11, no. 1 (1997): 86.

The Bukovynian Battalion: Historiography and Background

This article is a study of one particular collaborationist formation in occupied Belarus, the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118. The literature on this particular battalion is limited and ideological, does not deal with the internal relations within the unit and offers only marginal information on the dynamics and nature of the crimes committed. Andrii Duda and Volodymyr Staryk's 1995 *The Bukovynian Battalion in Struggle for Ukrainian Statehood: 1918–1941–1944*, published by an OUN(m)-affiliated nationalist organization is openly apologetic and presents the members of the unit as heroes. Andrii Bolianovs'kyi's 2003 monograph *Ukrainian Military Formations in the German Military Forces (1939–1945)*, contains some information on the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118, but does not utilize the legal documents on the unit, most of which were not available at that time. While well-researched, it is a problematic work, not least because of the author's uncritical use of material by American Holocaust deniers.²⁷ Finally, the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118 was also the subject of a Canadian MA thesis in the 1990s.²⁸ This study aims at providing a different perspective, based upon previously untapped sources. Since this article was written, in 2008–2009, some of the primary documents on the Khatyn' massacre, perpetrated by the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118 have appeared, becoming available to scholars. However, the volume offers minimal commentary and interpretation of the documents, and appeared only in a limited edition of 50 copies.²⁹

By comparison, the topic of anti-partisan warfare and atrocities in occupied Belarus is quite well researched. Worth mentioning books in this respect are Christian Gerlach's monumental *Kalkulierte Morde*, Ben Shepherd's *War in the*

²⁷ Andrii Duda and Volodymyr Staryk, *Bukovyns'kyi Kurin' v boiakh za Ukraïns'ku Derzhavnist': 1918–1941–1944* (Chernivtsi: "Ukraïns'kyi Narodnyi Dim v Chernivtsiakh," 1995); Andrii Bolianovs'kyi, *Ukraïns'ki viis'kovi formuvannia*, 10, 14, 152. Bolianovs'kyi relies on *The Journal for Historical Review* and Richard Landwehr, who is closely associated with American Holocaust deniers. On the Institute for Historical Review, see Deborah Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory. With a New Preface by the Author* (New York: Plume, 1994), 137–156.

²⁸ While being critical of the activities of the unit, it does not sufficiently problematize the fact that many of the members volunteered their service to the German authorities. Without offering details on the atrocities of the unit, its author, Natalia Petrouchkevitch, concludes that: "[T]he judgmental attitude that exists in modern historiography towards many collaborators in the former USSR and other European countries should be revised ... The members of the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118 were primarily driven into German servitude by the state of affairs in which they found themselves. Captured by Germans and abandoned by their own government as prisoners of war, these people were driven by the motivation of their very physical survival." Natalia Petrouchkevitch, "Victims and Criminals: *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118 (Belarus, Ukraine)" (MA thesis, Department of History, Wilfrid Laurier University, 1999), 105.

²⁹ V. I. Adamushko, I. A. Valakhanovich, N. E. Kalesnik, N. V. Kirillova, V. D. Selemenev, V. V. Skalaban, eds., *Khatyn': Tragediia i pamiat'. Dokumenty i materialy* (Minsk: NARB, 2009).

Wild East, Martin Dean's *Collaboration in the Holocaust*, and Philip W. Blood's *Hitler's Bandit Hunters*.³⁰

The core of the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118 consisted of Ukrainian nationalists from Bukovyna in Western Ukraine, which had been added to Soviet Ukraine from Romania in 1940, as a result of the Molotov-Ribbentrop treaty. It was linked to the ultra-nationalist Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), to its smaller Melnyk wing, after the OUN split in 1940.

The OUN in Bukovyna claimed to have close to 2,000 members, of which 900 marched towards eastern Ukraine as members of the *Bukovyns'kyi Kurin*, or the Bukovynian Battalion, a paramilitary formation organized by the OUN(m).³¹ The aim was to assist the German invaders with the hope of attaining Ukrainian statehood in the form of a puppet or fascist satellite, similar to that of Tiso's Slovakia or Pavelić's Croatia. It appears to have started out unarmed. In Horodentsi, on August 13 it was merged with OUN formations from Carpathian Ukraine into one paramilitary unit of 1,500–1,700 men.³²

The Germans captured Kyiv on September 19, 1941. There is some confusion regarding the *Bukovyns'kyi Kurin*'s arrival in Kyiv. Most accounts maintain that they arrived simultaneously with the German front troops or a few days later.³³ In a 2007 article, Kyiv scholar Vitalii Nakhmanovych argues that the unit arrived in Kyiv only in late October, or even early November, something that would exclude their participation in the September 29–30 shootings, the single largest massacre of the Holocaust, during which the SS, supported by German units, local collaborators and Ukrainian police formations shot 33,771 Jewish civilians.³⁴ This interpretation is

³⁰ Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, cited in note 8; Ben Shepherd, *War in the Wild East: The German Army and Soviet Partisans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Martin Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941–44* (New York: St. Martin's Press in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2000); Blood, *Hitler's Bandit Hunters*, cited in note 7.

³¹ Duda and Saryk, *Bukovyns'kyi Kurin*, 71. However, the list of members of the *Bukovyns'kyi Kurin* provided by Duda and Saryk (*ibid.*, 103–116) only contains 298 names. See also "The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration (applicant) v. Vladimir Katriuk (respondent) (T-2408-96), Federal Court of Canada Trial Division, Nadon, J., January 29, 1999," *Federal Trial Reports*, vol. 156 (Fredricton, NB: Maritime Law Book Ltd, 1999), 179 (hereafter: "Minister vs. Katriuk").

³² Duda and Saryk, *Bukovyns'kyi Kurin*, 75, 84.

³³ Karel C. Berkhoff, "Dina Pronicheva's Story of Surviving the Babi Yar Massacre: German, Jewish, Soviet, Russian, and Ukrainian Records," in *The Shoah in Ukraine: History, Testimony, Memorialization*, ed. Ray Brandon and Wendy Lower (Bloomington: Indiana University Press in Association with the United States Holocaust Museum, 2008), 303; Orest Bilak, "Z istorii odnoho kurinia," the Archives of the Ukrainian Narodnyi Dim in Chernivtsi (hereafter: Arkhiv UNDCh), f. O. Bilaka, ark. 10; Manfred Messerschmidt, cited in "Minister vs. Katriuk," 179; Duda and Saryk, *Bukovyns'kyi Kurin*, 84.

³⁴ Vitalii Nakhmanovych dates the *Bukovyns'kyi Kurin*'s arrival in Kyiv to October 29 or even the first half of November. Vitalii Nakhmanovych, "Bukovyns'kyi Kurin' i masovi rozstrily ievreiv

contested.³⁵ The participation of the *Bukovyns'kyi Kurin* in massacres in Babyn Yar cannot be ruled out, as executions in Babyn Yar continued every Tuesday and Friday for the next 103 weeks, during which between 50 and 60 thousand people were murdered.³⁶ After reinforcement by volunteers from Galicia and other parts of Ukraine, the *Bukovyns'kyi Kurin* had a total number of 1,500–1,700 soldiers by early November.³⁷ This number included people recruited among Soviet POWs in Zhytomyr, which came to be included in the *Kurin' Kyiv*.³⁸

The *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118

The Germans were not interested in making concessions to the OUN. They had executed Banderites already in September 1941, and executed Melnykites for the first time in November. More executions of Melnykites were carried out in February 1942. We do not know the method or location of the executions, but the bodies probably ended up in Babyn Yar.³⁹ The *Bukovyns'kyi Kurin* was dissolved, but many of its members and officers were reorganized as *Schutzmannschaft* Battalions 115 and 118, generally without difficulties.⁴⁰

Kyieva voseny 1941 r.," *Ukrains'kyi istorychnyi zhurnal*, no. 3 (474) (May–June 2007): 76–83. On Babyn Yar, see Wendy Lower, "From Berlin to Babi Yar: The Nazi War Against the Jews, 1941–1944," *Journal of Religion and Society* 9 (2007): 3.

³⁵ For instance, Aleksandr Burakovskiy describes Nakhmanovych's study as "Sherlock Holmes-like," speculative, and impossible to be accepted as "objective scholarship." Aleksandr Burakovskiy, "Memorialization of the Jewish Tragedy at Babi Yar: History and Present" (paper presented at the Association for Jewish Studies Conference, Washington, DC, December 22, 2008); Idem, *Evrei i Ukraintsy, 1986–2006: istoriia i analiz evreisko-ukrainskikh otmoshenii* (New York: IRSA, 2007), 234. Karel Berkhoff, who has spent many years specializing in the Babyn Yar massacre, believes that Nakhmanovych's findings indicate that a second group of Bukovynians arrived in October. Karl Berkhoff, personal correspondence, November 6, 2008.

³⁶ Aleksandr Shlaen and Alla Malitskaia, eds., *Naveki v pamiaty: Martirolog zhertv natsistskogo genotsida v Babom Iaru* (Kyiv: Abris, 1995), 3.

³⁷ Duda and Saryk, *Bukovyns'kyi Kurin*, 84.

³⁸ Nakhmanovych, "Bukovyns'kyi Kurin," 77.

³⁹ Karel C. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine under Nazi Rule* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 52. While there is no evidence thereof, in nationalist writing one often encounters the assertion that the Germans shot OUN supporters in Babyn Yar, just because they were Ukrainians.

⁴⁰ "Minister vs. Katriuk," 181, citing Professor Manfred Messerschmidt's reports on the *Schutzmannschaft*. Assessments of Western historians differ from Ukrainian Nationalist interpretations. Duda and Saryk claim that the "Gestapo murdered almost all officers and non-commissioned officers of the *Kurin* that came from Western Ukraine, all that were suspected of conducting underground nationalist activities." While some of the men from the *Bukovyns'kyi Kurin* were absorbed into the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 109, most were reorganized as *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 115. Duda and Saryk, *Bukovyns'kyi Kurin*, 92, 119. Other Ukrainian collaborationist formations, such as the *Nachtigal* Battalion, consisting of OUN activists serving within the Wehrmacht, mainly of its more radical Bandera wing, the OUN(b), were reorganized as *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 201 at roughly the same time.

In court, former *Schutzmann* Hryhoryi Spivak gave the following account:

I was in a camp of POWs in Kyiv. In the fall, when it was already cold, they began choosing people for work. Then came the nationalists, who for some reason were already equipped, and began to organize the auxiliary battalion. I was given a rifle, either a Latvian or an Estonian one; they dressed me in a green German uniform. I ended up in the 118th Battalion, where Vasiura became the leader of the staff. The commander of my platoon was Pasechnik, Vinnitskii, a former officer, the commander of my company. Standing at attention we took an oath to serve the Germans. In Belarus we knew that they would send us to fight the partisans. We took part in round-ups and in various operations.⁴¹

Among the people incorporated into the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalions 115 and 118 were Ukrainian participants in the September 29 Babyn Yar massacre.⁴² The volunteers were told that they would be serving in Ukraine, to defend the Kyiv Cave Monastery, railroad connections, banks, and storage facilities.⁴³ The *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118 was formed in the spring of 1942 in the Kyiv oblast. It was based upon Battalion 115, but included Soviet POWs, mostly Ukrainians.⁴⁴ It originally wore Lithuanian uniforms, but its composition was initially almost exclusively Ukrainian.⁴⁵ The third company of Battalion 115, consisting of about 100 men, was transformed into the first company of Battalion 118, while Soviet POWs, primarily from eastern Ukraine, constituted its second and third companies.⁴⁶ All in all, the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118 came to include about 500 men, divided into three companies, each comprising three platoons. Each platoon consisted of 10 to 13 men.⁴⁷ The battalion

⁴¹ V. Roshchin, "Neizvestnaia Khatyn': Tol'ko seichas my mozhem rasskazat': vmeste s fashistami etu belarusskuiu derevnia vyzhigali i banderovtsy," *Rabochaia tribuna*, November 19, 1990, 3.

⁴² Orest Bilak, "Z istorii odnogo kurinia," Arkhiv UNDC, f. O. Bilaka, ark. 10.

⁴³ Interview with Evgenii Nikolaevich Dalidovich, senior criminal investigator of the UKGB in the Hrodnia oblast, *Obshenatsional'noe Televidenie* (ONT), June 20, 2008. "Dokumental'nyi detektiv: Kto szheg Khatyn'?" Transcript available online, <http://www.ont.by/programs/programs/doc/0028833/> (accessed August 29, 2008).

⁴⁴ S. G. Chuev, *Spetssluzhby Tret'ego Reikha*, vol. 2 (St. Petersburg, 2003), 124 and Duda and Stryk, *Bukovyns'kyi Kurin'*, 144, maintain that the battalion was formed in July 1942. However, former members of the battalion testify that they began serving in the battalion already in the spring of 1942. Nakhmanovych, "Bukovyns'kyi Kurin'," 96, citing Derzhavnyi Arkhiv Sluzhba Bezpeki Ukrainy (DA SBU), f. 5, Spr. 65390, T. 1, Ark. 9.

⁴⁵ Duda and Stryk, *Bukovyns'kyi Kurin'*, 120.

⁴⁶ "Minister vs. Katriuk," 165; Mikhail Pilipenko and Valerii Ogarok, "K 65-i godovshchine v Khatyn'i: Pozornye tainy," *Krasnaia Zvezda*, March 22, 2008, http://www.redstar.ru/2008/03/22_03/3_02.html (accessed August 29, 2008). Battalion 115 continued its activities, but under Russian officers, rather than Bukovynian and Galician, promoting Red Army POWs and, as the captain of the third company of Battalion 115, Nekrasov, a former captain of the tsarist army. Duda and Stryk, *Bukovyns'kyi Kurin'*, 123.

⁴⁷ "Minister vs. Katriuk," 165. Duda and Stryk (*Bukovyns'kyi Kurin'*, 177–185) list 518 named members of the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalions 115, 118, 62 and 63 as well as the 2nd Ukrainian *Kurin'*, named after Shevchenko. The personnel in these formations overlapped. Nevertheless, some articles

arrived in Minsk in November 1942, and was almost immediately transferred to the village Pleshchenitsy.⁴⁸ At this point, its membership was not exclusively Ukrainian, as it contained many Russians and Belarusians.⁴⁹ The battalion was commanded by the German major Erich Körner, who had his own staff of Germans, commanded by Emil Zass. He had a substitute, Konstantin Smowski, an ethnic Pole and former Petliurite.⁵⁰

While Major Erich Körner was the battalion's nominal commander, he was 56 years old and in poor health. In practice, the day-to-day operations of the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118 were ordered by a bright and well-educated 27-year old Ukrainian, Hryhoryi Vasiura.⁵¹ Put on trial 44 years later, Vasiura recalled that:

Altogether, there were three companies of riflemen, mortar and domestic (*khoziastvennyi vzvod*) platoons and two sets of 45-millimeter canons. Every company consisted of three platoons, each platoon of departments. The total number was 270 men. The commander of the battalion, major Erich Körner, had his own staff of Germans, commanded by Emil Zass. The substitute commander was Konstantin Smowski, a Pole, a former Petliurite. He also had his own staff, which was, however, also subordinated to Körner. Also the leadership of the companies and platoons had their German substitutes. For instance, the first company was commanded by Hans Woellke (who was later shot by the partisans) and Vinnitskii, the second by Herman (unclear whether this was his first or last name) and Franchuk, the third by Müller and Narad'ko. Altogether about 40 Germans served in the battalion.⁵²

It appears that the first company was the most active part of the battalion, and consisted mostly of nationalists from Western Ukraine.⁵³ Within the first company, the first platoon, led by Volodymyr Katriuk, constituted the elite of the

provide different numbers. Dalidovich gives the number 300, "Kto szheg Khatyn'?" (see note 43); Pilipenko and Ogarok ("K 65-i godovshchine v Khatyn'i"), 270. Most *Schutzmannschaft* battalions had around 300 members, generally divided into three companies. During the *Aktion Cottbus*, in June 1943, Schuma 115 had 537 members, Schuma 118, 397; Blood, *Hitler's Bandit Hunters*, 181.

⁴⁸ "Kto szheg Khatyn'?" (see note 43).

⁴⁹ The majority was, however, Ukrainian, such as Vasiura, Cheba, Efimenko, Skripka, and Kachan. Others were Russians, such as Varlamov, Khrenov, Egorov, and Subbotin. Other nationalities were represented as well, such as the Ossetian Iskanderov and the Armenian Khachaturian. Evgenii Horelik, "Ubienie Khatyn'i: palachi i podruchnye. Neizvestnyie podrobnosti izvestnykh sobytii," *Belorusskaia Delovaia Gazeta*, no. 3 (14), March 2003, 21.

⁵⁰ Sergei Krapivin, "Khatyn': 'Format tragedii'," *Ekspres Novosti: informatsionno-analyticheskii ezhenedel'nik*, March 22, 2007, <http://www.expressnews.by/2254.html> (accessed August 16, 2008); Duda and Staryk, *Bukovyns'kyi Kurin'*, 123.

⁵¹ Vasiliï Vladimirovich Zdaniuk, *Ia shturmoval dvorets Amiina: Armiia bez grifa "sekretno"* (Minsk: Belarus, 1992), 135; Tatstsiana Padaliak, "Znak zveria: U zradnikau-zlachyntsau niama natsyianal'nastsi. Interv'iu sa starshynei vaennaha trybunala 1986 h. Viktaram Hlaskovym," *Zviyazda*, no. 56 (26169), March 25, 2008, <http://www.zvyazda.minsk.by/ru/archive/article.php?id=10187> (accessed September 16, 2008).

⁵² Vasiura's testimony, cited in Horelik, "Ubienie Khatyn'i," 20.

⁵³ H. V. Spivak's testimony, cited by Nikolai Zen'kovich, *Tainy ushedshego veka: Granitsy, spory, obidy. Dos'e. Knizhnaia pola N. Zen'kovicha* (Moscow: Olma-Press, 2005), 318.

battalion.⁵⁴ Most of the accounts from the processes against Meleshko, Vasiura, and Katriuk emphasize the role of the first and third companies as active, whereas there is little mentioning of the second company, which appeared to have been assigned primarily logistical tasks.⁵⁵

The *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118 participated in a number of the most brutal pacification operations in occupied Belarus. Between March and August 1943, it took part in Operations *Hornung*, *Draufgänger*, *Cottbus*, *Hermann* and *Wandsbeck*.⁵⁶ It collaborated with Battalions 115, 102, the Ukrainian-Belarusian Battalion 101, the Russian ROA, Baltic, Hungarian and Belarusian formations, but also with the infamous *SS-Sonderkommando Dirlwanger*.⁵⁷ It also fought the Polish underground.⁵⁸

The *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 115 was formed on the basis of the *Bukovyns'kyi Kurin*, and had 350 men by July 1942.⁵⁹ The primary purpose of both battalions was to be used to maintain security and for “anti-partisan warfare in the occupied regions.”⁶⁰ They were joined by eastern Ukrainians, recruited among Soviet POWs, people who had gone over to the Germans, and ordinary criminals.⁶¹ The *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 115 participated, together with local Belarusian police, the SS and German police, and military formations in large scale anti-partisan *Aktionen* in Lypychans'kaia forest in December 1942,⁶² in Operation *Hermann* in July–August 1943 against partisans in the Ivanetsk-Naliboki forest,⁶³ around Slonim in February 1944, and in the massive Operations *Regenschauer* and *Frühlingsfest* in the Polotsk-Lepel' area.⁶⁴

⁵⁴ “[Katriuk] was a Group Leader [*Gruppenführer*] in Platoon 1 [1. *Zug*] of Company 1 [1. *Kompanie*]. The company consisted primarily, or almost completely of Western Ukrainians. It was the best armed and can be described as the elite of the battalion. In his Group [*Gruppe*], [Katriuk] was in charge of 10–12 men.” “Minister vs. Katriuk,” 183.

⁵⁵ N. A. Franchuk, p.d. 30.7.73, Tsentral'nyi arkhiv, Komitet gosudarstvenoi bezopasnosti, Republic of Belarus (hereafter: TsA KGB RB), Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 2, l.d. 153–154.

⁵⁶ “Minister vs. Katriuk,” 183.

⁵⁷ Duda and Saryk, *Bukovyns'kyi Kurin*, 145–146. Erich Körner's report for the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118 to the SS- und Polizeiführer Barissow in Pleschtschenize, April 12, 1943, NARB, f. 391, vop. 1, d. 67, l. 5. On Schuma 118's destruction of the Belarusian village of Khatyn' together with *SS-Sonderkommando Dirlwanger*, see Adamushko et al., *Khatyn*, cited in note 29; Per A. Rudling, “The Khatyn Massacre: A Historical Controversy Revisited,” *Holocaust and Genocide Research* (forthcoming, December 2011). On the Dirlwanger unit, see French MacLean, *The Cruel Hunters: SS-Sonderkommando Dirlwanger, Hitler's Most Notorious Anti-Partisan Unit* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Military History, 1998).

⁵⁸ Duda and Saryk, *Bukovyns'kyi Kurin*, 147.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 123; Pilipenko and Ogarok, “K 65-i godovshchine v Khatyn'i.”

⁶⁰ “Minister vs. Katriuk,” 180.

⁶¹ Interview with Evgenii Nikolaieich Dalidovich, “Kto szheg Khatyn'?” (see note 43).

⁶² Duda and Saryk, *Bukovyns'kyi Kurin*, 131, 136.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 140–141.

The casualties of these operations give us an idea of their nature. Operation *Cottbus* was one of the most infamous of all punitive actions of the war. Under “enemy losses” the German Combat Report of June 28, 1943 lists 6,087 people “killed in action,” 3,709 executed, and 4,997 male and 1,056 female “laborers seized,” on the one hand, and, on the other, only 5 German officers, 83 NCOs and soldiers, and 40 non-Germans killed and 152 wounded. In the entire operation, 13,000 enemies were killed, but only 950 rifles were captured. The General Commissar for White Ruthenia laconically stated: “This ratio between enemy dead and weapons shows that 90% of the enemy dead were unarmed.” The German figures for Operation *Hermann* are similar, listing 4,280 enemy dead and 654 prisoners captured.⁶⁵

In addition to these operations, Battalion 118 or parts thereof participated in numerous patrols and security missions because the immediate vicinity of Pleshchenitse and the surrounding areas were insecure. The available documents mention at least 17 such operations in which Battalion 118 participated with forces of varying strength ... In evaluating the operations of the Schuma battalions one has to consider that ... they were involved in a ruthless scenario of terror. This included the compulsory use of specific language. They had to speak of ‘gangs’ [*Banden*]. Annihilation operations were called ‘pacification’ or ‘re-establishment of security and order.’⁶⁶

The battalion served in Belarus until July 1944, when it followed the retreating Germans into Polish territory.⁶⁷ In East Prussia, the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalions 115 and 118 were merged into one newly created battalion, the Ukrainian *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 63, which, according to Katriuk, had 500 to 600 men. It was reorganized into the Waffen-SS Grenadier Division 30, intended to fight in France.⁶⁸ Close to 50 people deserted the Battalion 115 during the winter 1942–1943, and dozens of the members of Battalion 118 joined the UPA in Volhynia.⁶⁹ In the UPA, the former *Schutzmänner* made good use of their experience. “The fleeing militia brought their German-supplied arms and brutal tactics learned in the mass executions,” writes Kate Brown.⁷⁰ The UPA’s

⁶⁵ “Minister vs. Katriuk,” 184. Similar statistics appear in the command record of SS-*Obergruppenführer* Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski. For Operation *Hermann*, Bach-Zelewski reports on August 11, 1943 4,199 dead “bandits,” 2,329 “POWs,” and “5,500” people taken into forced labor. *Tagesbuch von dem Bach* (TVDB) 72–117, Bundesarchiw R20–45b, cited in Blood, *Hitler’s Bandit Hunters*, 201.

⁶⁶ “Minister vs. Katriuk,” 184.

⁶⁷ “Kto szzeg Khatyn’?” (see note 43).

⁶⁸ “Minister vs. Katriuk,” 163, 166–167, 187. A list of the members of *Schutzmannschaft* Battalions 115 and 118 (1942–1944), and Battalions 62 and 63 (1944), as well as the 2nd Taras Shevchenko *Kurin*’ of the French resistance, based upon the information of veterans Orest Bilak and Andrii Mykytenka listing 518 names appears in Duda and Staryk, *Bukovyns’kyi Kurin*’, 177–185.

⁶⁹ Duda and Staryk, *Bukovyns’kyi Kurin*’, 132, 152.

⁷⁰ Kate Brown, *A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 221.

destruction of Polish villages in Volhynia resembled Schuma *Aktionen* of 1942–1943: villages were burnt to the ground, livestock confiscated, and civilians were massacred by the thousands when trying to flee from the territories in which in many cases their families had been living for generations.⁷¹

A study of the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118, this paper is based upon legal cases against veterans of the unit tried in the BSSR and Canada in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s. Corroborated by Canadian legal documents from the deportation procedure concerning one of the battalion's NCOs, these previously unavailable Soviet legal records, mainly from the Gorbachev era, provide a detailed insight into the execution of a number of punitive *Aktionen* during the winter and spring of 1943.

The Vasiura Case

In early 1971, the leadership of the KGB in Hrodnia oblast received an inquiry from Moscow, requesting information on the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118 and its activities. The KGB began scanning their archives in the BSSR, the BSSR state archives as well as the provincial archives of Hrodnia, Brest, Lviv and Kyiv oblasts.⁷² Several members of the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalions 115 and 118 were sentenced in cases in the BSSR. In the early 1970s the *Schutzmänner* Knap and Lazinski were arrested. Both were sentenced to death, but the verdicts were changed to 15 years in jail by the presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the BSSR.⁷³ These trials were followed in 1974–1975 by a process against Vasiliï Andreevich Meleshko, the commander of the first company of the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118.⁷⁴ Meleshko, born in 1917, trained as an agronomist. Before the war, he had been a lieutenant in the Kyiv infantry academy. In the first weeks of the war, Meleshko commanded the 140th Machine Gun Battalion of the Red Army. After being taken prisoner by the Germans, he joined the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118 in the fall of 1942, following the release from a German POW camp.⁷⁵ Trained in a special school in Germany, he served as platoon leader in the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118 and later as *Untersturmführer* of the SS. His first punitive action as a commanding officer was the Chmelevichi *Aktion* in January 1943. Thereafter Meleshko led several other punitive actions, among which those in Khatyn', Selishche and Zarech'e.⁷⁶ He retreated with the Germans, and in an unsuccessful attempt to avoid repatriation he

⁷¹ Ibid., 222.

⁷² "Kto szheg Khatyn'?" (see note 43).

⁷³ Padaliak, "Znak zveria." Ales Adamovich cites parts of the transcripts from the 1974 process against G. G. Lakusta and I. V. Spivak in his novel, *Khatyn'*. *The Punitive Squads: The Joy of the Knife, or The Hyperboreans and How They Live* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1988), 295.

⁷⁴ Zdaniuk, *Ia shturmoval dvorets Amiina*, 134.

⁷⁵ Adamovich's notes from Meleshko's trial, February 14, 1974, Adamovich, "Zapisnye knizhki raznykh let," 24.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 24; Rudling, "The Khatyn Massacre."

volunteered in the French Foreign Legion and fought in Northern Africa. After being repatriated to Kyiv from a *Sonderlager* in Germany in 1949 he was sent to prison for his collaboration with the Nazis, but released in 1955 as part of a general amnesty. In 1974, Meleshko's activities as commanding officer in the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118 were revealed, and he was sentenced to death and executed for the murder of dozens of civilians.⁷⁷

The investigation took an unexpected turn when a certain Hryhoryi Nikytych Vasiura was called as a witness. Initially, Vasiura presented himself as a victim of the Nazis.⁷⁸ Yet, soon Meleshko testified that he had only carried out the brutal orders issued by Vasiura.⁷⁹

A Ukrainian from Cherkasy oblast, born in 1915, Vasiura had served as senior lieutenant in the Red Army, before being captured by the Germans in 1942.⁸⁰ In February 1942 he voluntarily entered a propaganda school in the village of Wustrau, Germany, where Alfred Rosenberg's *Ostministerium* trained former Soviet POWs to assist the Germans in occupied Ukraine. After graduating in October 1942 he joined the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118 and was sent to serve in the German police in Kyiv. In November he arrived in Kyiv, where he partook in executions at Babyn Yar along with his battalion.⁸¹ Vasiura advanced quickly, from platoon leader to the leader of the staff of the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118. He was appointed adjutant of the battalion and acted as the leader for the battalions' Ukrainian staff, a position he obtained in late December 1942.⁸² That month, as the battalion was sent to Belarus to carry out counter-insurgency operations, Vasiura was promoted to lieutenant. His German superiors were satisfied with his service, and decorated Vasiura with two German medals, one silver, and one bronze.⁸³

⁷⁷ Zdaniuk, *Ia shturmoval dvorets Amiina*, 134. The first company of the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118 was considered the most ruthless, and was used for the bloodiest operations. He was decorated for his annihilation of partisans. "Dokumental'nyi detektiv: Po kom zvonit kolokol," Interview with Mikhail Shimanskyi, *Obshchenational'noe televidenie* (ONT), March 25, 2008. Transcript available online, <http://www.ont.by/programs/programs/kontyry/arhiv/0025403/> (accessed September 10, 2008).

⁷⁸ "Kto szheg Khatyn'?" (see note 43).

⁷⁹ Zdaniuk, *Ia shturmoval dvorets Amiina*, 134.

⁸⁰ Ibid.; *Nasha Respublika*, no. 28 (54), June 16, 1993; Marina Zagorskaia, "Poslednii protsess: i spustia shestdesiat let my znaem ne vsiu pravdu o tragedii v Khatyn'," *Belorusskaia delovaia gazeta*, no. 42 (1324), March 25, 2003, 14, http://bdg.press.net.by/2003/03/2003_03_25.1324/index.htm (accessed September 3, 2008).

⁸¹ Interrogation of Vasiura, April 17, 1986, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746, Judge Viktor Vasil'evich Glazkov's legal notes, summary of the Vasiura and Meleshko cases (hereafter cited as Glazkov notes), p. 4; Zdaniuk *Ia shturmoval dvorets Amiina*, 135; *Sovetskaia Belarussia*, March 22, 2008, citing the legal protocols from the interrogation of Vasiura from April 17, 1986.

⁸² Interrogation of Vasiura, May 15, 1986, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746; Glazkov notes, p. 3.

⁸³ "Kto szheg Khatyn'?" (see note 43); *Sovetskaia Belarussia*, March 22, 2008, citing the legal protocol of the interrogation of Vasiura from April 17, 1986; Zdaniuk, *Ia shturmoval dvorets Amiina*,

At the end of the war, Vasiura and his wife returned to his native village, claiming to have been in German prison during the war. While he admitted to having served the Germans, he denied any involvement in shootings or atrocities. Vasiura's involvement with the Germans brought him a 10-year prison sentence in 1952, but he was rehabilitated in the amnesty of 1955.⁸⁴ Following the release, Vasiura advanced to deputy director of the *sovkhos* "Velikodymerskii" in the Brovarskii raion of the Kyiv oblast, built himself a large house and received several awards for his hard work from the Soviet authorities. Like many other collaborators, Vasiura passed himself off as a Soviet patriot who had fought the Germans as a connection officer at the front. As a veteran and supposed war hero, he even instructed young Soviet pioneers in patriotism.⁸⁵ Yet, according to his co-workers, he never participated in the celebration of Victory Day. Instead, he usually gathered with six other collaborators who lived in the same village.⁸⁶

In November–December 1986, Vasiura was put on trial for mass murder and war crimes committed in Belarus during the war, the Khatyn' massacre being the most infamous. Vasiura's case covers 14 volumes of material, listing many of the details of what transpired in that Belarusian village on March 23, 1943.⁸⁷ It was a significant operation. The Belarusian military district provided two cars and several investigators, who traveled across the republic, interviewing witnesses, victims as well as perpetrators. All testimonies were double-checked by the war division (*voennoi kollegiei*) of the Supreme Court of the USSR. During the investigation of the Vasiura case, 26 former *Schutzmäänner* were interrogated. For the trial, Knap

134–135; Padaliak, "Znak zveria." "Vasiura was decorated twice by the German command: The first time he was decorated in the summer of 1943 after the operation in the Naliboki forest, and he wore a green ribbon on his chest. The second decoration was an oval medal, depicting a wreath of oak leaves and a dagger in the middle. Vasiura received it in the period when the staff was located in Lida and that decoration he wore on his chest." S. A. Khrenov, p.d. 26.7.85, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746, t. 6, d. 129, t. 4, 2–23, t. 6. 139–142, 146–250, t. 11, 1–8, t. 12, 1–11; Glazkov notes, p. 1. "Vasiura served the fascists dedicatedly and jealously. He was strict and demanding of his subordinates. He had decorations from fascist Germany, which he wore on his tunic, and which I saw personally. On the tab of his uniform Vasiura wore a special ribbon which the fascists handed out for dedication and special services." Spivak, p.d. 16.8.85, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746, t. 6, l.d. 192; Glazkov notes, p. 1. See also P. S. Vus, p.d. 24.6.86, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746, t. 6, 191–192, t. 11, 261–267, t. 12, 111–120 and the Meleshko case, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 7, l.d. 98; Glazkov notes, p. 1. This medal was most likely the *Tapferkeits- und Verdienst-Auszeichnung für Angehörige der Ostvölker*, a military order, introduced by the *Führer* on July 14, 1942. Petras Stankeras, *Litovskie politseiskie batal'ony 1941–1945* (Moscow: Veche, 2009), 197, citing *Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Litvy* (TsGAL), f. R–1018, o. 1, d. 93, ll. 27–29.

⁸⁴ Padaliak, "Znak zveria"; Zagorskaia, "Poslednii protsess," 14.

⁸⁵ Zdaniuk, *Ia shturmoval dvorets Amiina*, 134; Padaliak, "Znak zveria."

⁸⁶ Zagorskaia, "Poslednii protsess," 14.

⁸⁷ Vasiura case, March 27 – September 3, 1986, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746. The Vasiura case is also available in the Holovnyi Derzhavnyi Arkhiv Sluzhby Bezpeky Ukrainy (HDA SBU), fund 68, no. 10, case 555.

and Lazinski were brought to Minsk to testify from their prison camp in Komi ASSR, where they were serving their sentence.⁸⁸ The 1986 trial established the involvement of the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118 not only in the well-known Khatyn' massacre, but also in the destruction of the villages Chmelevichi, Koteli, Zarech'e, Bobrovo, Osovy, Makov'e and Ubor'e.⁸⁹

Vasiura participated in at least six punitive *Aktionen*, in which over 340 people were killed. He personally tortured and shot people, often in front of his men, as to set an example.⁹⁰ According to the soldiers under his command, Vasiura was a harsh man who maintained an iron discipline in his battalion by the use of excessive violence, not only against the civilian population, but also against his inferiors. His men remembered how Vasiura shot Jews who had been hiding in the forests, and how he shot a teenage boy at the railroad station in Novoel'nia for a minor offense, possibly pick-pocketing.⁹¹

Having learnt that some of the members of his battalion were about to switch sides and join the partisans, with whom they had already established contacts, Vasiura personally, and in front of his men beat them and shot the suspected turncoats. Two veterans of the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118, P. F. Dzeba and Hryhoryi Spivak, recounted an episode from the raid into a Belarusian village, during which the soldiers got drunk, feasting on lard and moonshine, which they had stolen from the Belarusian peasants. Vasiura lost his temper, knocked the soldiers' teeth out with his pistol, after which he forced them to lick the blood from the floor.⁹² During his trial, Meleshko complained, "Vasiura stood out by his harshness. He was difficult to approach. Even Vinnitskii, our company commander, feared him. He used violence against his subordinates."⁹³ On the other hand, Vasiura had little good to say about the people with whom he served in the battalion:

⁸⁸ "Po kom zvonit kolokol" (see note 77).

⁸⁹ Zdaniuk, *Ia shturmoval dvorets Amiina*, 134.

⁹⁰ The 1986 trial brought up numerous examples of Vasiura's crimes. "During the interrogation of two youngsters, Vasiura and Lukovich, the translator of the battalion, beat them horrendously, tortured them by breaking their fingers in a door, then forced them to dig a hole in the garden and shot them." Legal protocol from the Vasiura trial, cited in *Sovetskaia Belorussia*, March 22, 2008.

⁹¹ "I personally saw how Vasiura grabbed a young boy, about 17 years old, by his collar, and shot him with his pistol. As far as I remember, the boy tried to get something out of the bag, which belonged to a woman on the platform. Vasiura pushed him in front of himself. After a moment I heard a gun shot ... I did not see who fired." I. T. Kachan, p.d. 22.5.86, TsA KGB RB; Glazkov notes, p. 51. "I heard noise and a gun shot on the platform. When I looked there, nearby, approximately three or four railroad cars away, I saw the killed boy and Vasiura, the leader of the staff of our battalion, standing behind his body with a pistol in his hand." S. A. Khrenov, p.d. 19.5.86, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746; Glazkov notes, p. 51. Zdaniuk, *Ia shturmoval dvorets Amiina*, 135; "Kto szheg Khatyn'?" (see note 43).

⁹² Padaliak, "Znak zveria"; Zdaniuk, *Ia shturmoval dvorets Amiina*, 135.

⁹³ Meleshko, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 7, l.d. 98; Glazkov notes, p. 1.

It was a gang of bandits, for whom the most important thing was to steal and drink. Take the platoon commander Meleshko – a regular Soviet officer and downright sadist who literally went crazy over the smell of blood. The cook Myshak was longing for all operations where he would be able to abuse and steal. The squad commander Lakusta and the clerk Filippov had no inhibitions whatsoever. The translator Lukovich tortured people during the interrogations, and raped women. They were all the scum of scum. I hated them.⁹⁴

Vasiura was found guilty on all counts, sentenced to death and executed in 1987.⁹⁵

Many *Schutzmänner* were long able to go undetected by legal authorities, in the Soviet Union as well as in the west. After retreating with the German army, over 30 percent remained in the west after the war.⁹⁶ Western countries have yet to try a single *Schutzmann* for war crimes.⁹⁷ Between 100 and 120 members of Battalion 115/118, mainly Soviet Ukrainians, were repatriated to the USSR, most of them by force.⁹⁸ In the chaos at the end of the war, many of the returnees were able to hide their wartime records from the Soviet authorities. Still, like other Soviet POWs, they were collectively punished and sent to camps until the amnesty of 1955, after which many *Schutzmänner* resumed more or less normal lives, some even pursued new careers in the post-war Soviet Union.

As part of the investigation of the Meleshko trial, many veterans of the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118 were tracked down, and their war-time activities uncovered. After former *Schutzmann* Stepan Sakhno, who worked in a weapon factory in Kuibyshev was arrested, he listed many of the men of the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118: Ostap Knap, Timofei Tonchii, Ivan Petrichuk, Ivan Kozynchenko and Stepan Lukovich.⁹⁹

Called as a witness in the 1986 Vasiura case, *Schutzmann* Kozynchenko infuriated the prosecution by showing up in court covered by Brezhnev-era medals and decorations, awarded to him for his supposed contributions to the victory over fascism. Kozynchenko's case was far from unique – oversights by the Soviet bureaucracy following the amnesty of 1955 cleared many collaborators of wrongdoing.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁴ Horelik, "Ubienie Khatyn'i," 20; "Kto szheg Khatyn'?" (see note 43).

⁹⁵ Zagorskaia, "Poslednii protsess," 14.

⁹⁶ Martin C. Dean, "Der Historiker als Detektiv: Fluchtweiger der einheimischen Schutzmannschaften und anderer deutschen Polizeieinheiten aus der besetzten Sowjetunion, 1943–1944," <http://www.fantom-online.de/seiten/scienc2.htm> (accessed November 7, 2007).

⁹⁷ Richard Breitman, "Himmler's Police Auxiliaries in the Occupied Soviet Territories," *Simon Wiesenthal Center Annual* 7 (1997): 33.

⁹⁸ "Minister vs. Katriuk," 163, 166–167, 187.

⁹⁹ Pilipenko and Ogarok, "K 65-i godovshchine v Khatyn'i."

¹⁰⁰ Horelik, "Ubienie Khatyn'i," 21.

The Katriuk Case

During the investigation of the Vasiura case, the Soviet prosecutors began interesting themselves in Volodymyr Katriuk, an NCO of the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118. Katriuk was born in the village of Luzhany, Bukovyna, in 1921.¹⁰¹ In the fall of 1941 he joined the *Bukovyns'kyi Kurin'* and marched with them to Kyiv, claiming that he had arrived in Kyiv in November or December 1941.¹⁰² After its men were reorganized as a *Schutzmannschaft*, Katriuk voluntarily served in the third company of the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 115, then in the first company of Battalion 118. In Battalion 118, Katriuk was a sergeant (*Gruppenführer*) in Platoon 1 of the Company 1. Company 1 was the best armed, and consisted almost completely of Western Ukrainian volunteers. Katriuk was in charge of 10–12 men.¹⁰³ After the war, Katriuk spent years in the French Foreign Legion, before immigrating to Canada in 1951 under an assumed identity, misrepresenting his war-time activities, which would have disqualified him for Canadian residency.¹⁰⁴

In the early 1980s, Katriuk's sisters and brothers in Ukraine were visited by officers from the KGB, who behaved rudely and threateningly, demanding a picture of their brother. The KGB visited again the Katriuks in the Gorbachev era, this time behaving much more respectfully, again requesting information about their brother's whereabouts and asking for his photo.¹⁰⁵ Through the Soviet Foreign Ministry the Minsk procurator requested to have Katriuk extradited to stand trial in the BSSR, providing the Canadian authorities with detailed information on Katriuk's address in Canada, supplemented by photos of Katriuk working in his garden, provided to them by Soviet intelligence. The Canadian authorities responded coldly, denying that such person lived at that address.¹⁰⁶ The Canadian reluctance to interact with the Soviet legal authorities may have to do with their experience of Soviet exploitation of allegations of war criminals in Canada.¹⁰⁷ The

¹⁰¹ Andrij Kudla Wynnyckyj, "Canadian Courts Rule on Two Cases of Denaturalization and Deportation," *The Ukrainian Weekly*, no. 7, vol. 67, February 14, 1999, <http://www.ukrweekly.com/old/archive/1999/079901.shtml> (accessed August 23, 2008).

¹⁰² "Minister vs. Katriuk," 182.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 190–191.

¹⁰⁵ "Critique by Will Zuzak, November 1999 of Judge Marc Nadon Denaturalization Verdict re Vladimir Katriuk, Date: 19990129; Docket T-2409-96" (*sic!* – should be T-2408-96), <http://www.fortunecity.com/meltingpot/pakistan/83/katriuk/katriuk991130.html> (accessed August 23, 2008).

¹⁰⁶ Padaliak, "Znak zveria"; Zdaniuk, *Ia shturmoval dvorets Amiina*, 138.

¹⁰⁷ During the 1980s, the Soviet authorities attempted to exploit the topic of war criminality for political purposes, and published a number of books on this subject, intended to discredit Ukrainian émigrés and the western countries in which they resided. See, for example, G. I. Changuli and V. N. Denisov, eds., *Nazi Crimes in Ukraine 1941–1944: Documents and Materials* (Kyiv: Naukova Dumka Publishers, 1987); *Ukrainian People Accuse ...* (Lviv: Kamenyar Publishers, 1987); Olexiy Kartunov, *Yellow-Blue Anti-Semitism: A Documental Story about the Anti-Semitic Activity of the Ukrainian Nationalist (1900–1980)* (Odesa: "Mayak," 1981); V. Strykul, *The SS Werewolves* (Lviv:

Katriuk case opened only after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Katriuk's name topped the 1998 report on "ongoing procedures" of the Deschênes commission on alleged war criminals and has been given considerable attention.¹⁰⁸ On August 15, 1996, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration gave Katriuk notice that it had requested the revocation of his Canadian citizenship for his "collaboration with and service to the German authorities in Ukraine and Belorussia, and [his] participation in the commission of atrocities against the members of the civilian population in Belorussia, while a member of the Ukrainian *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118."¹⁰⁹

In Canadian court, Katriuk denied that his company ever participated in any major operation. Katriuk was stationed in Pleshchenitsy, then transferred with the battalion to the ethnically Polish village of Evey [Yewa] in the spring of 1943. He remained there until the Soviet advance in the spring of 1944.¹¹⁰ Katriuk gave the following description of the battalion's assignments:

[T]o protect villagers and their livestock and their resources from a threatening array of partisan forces, such being right-wing Polish partisans, and left-wing Polish partisans, and Belarussian partisans, and Soviet partisans, all of which partisan groups had one need and activity in common, namely, raiding villages to secure foodstuffs in order for their own survival and continued activity.¹¹¹

Even though Katriuk was awarded military decorations for his service to Nazi Germany, he denied having opened fire during the time he was stationed in Pleshchenitsy and Evey.¹¹² This claim was contradicted by *Schutzmann* Khrenov, who served with Katriuk in the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118 in Belarus in 1943. "When asked in cross-examination whether his company had been involved in military action while in Pleshchenitsi, Mr. Khrenov answered 'of course'."¹¹³ Under oath, Khrenov testified to the Canadian authorities that Katriuk had been present at the burning of other Belarussian villages, such as Chmelevichi, and identified the latter as "an active participant" in fighting partisans in Belarus.¹¹⁴

Kamenyar Publishers, 1982), and Tomáš Řezáč and Valentin Tsurkan, *Wanted ...* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1988) in English, aimed for a general audience, and Pavlo Koval'chuk, *Antisemits'ka diial'nist' ukrains'kykh natsionalistiv* (Kyiv: Tovarystvo kul'turnykh zv'iazkiv z Ukraintsiami za kordonom, USSR, 1965).

¹⁰⁸ *War Criminals, the Deschênes Commission* (Ottawa: Library of Parliament, Research Branch, 1998), Section E, Ongoing Procedures; "World War Two Related Cases in Canada, Ongoing: Wasył Odynsky & Vladimir Katriuk," Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies, http://www.fswc.ca/nazi_war.aspx (accessed August 23, 2008).

¹⁰⁹ "Minister vs. Katriuk," 163.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 166.

¹¹² According to Khrenov, "about seventy percent (70%), no less than seventy percent (70%) of the people in the first company got awards sometime in the spring of 1944," among them being Katriuk. Cross-examination of Savaliy Antonovich Khrenov, Nizhnyi Novgorod, Russia, March 30, 1998, "Minister vs Katriuk," 185, 186.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 185.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 185–186.

Well, for instance, there was an incident when he brought a partisan to the battalion where – to the place where the battalion was deployed. Then, they formed up the company in one line. And this partisan walked along the line to recognize faces of certain people. And he recognized two (2) people, who had wanted to make contact with the partisans. And the man that Katriuk brought recognized two (2) individuals. And then, those two (2) individuals were taken away.¹¹⁵

Khrenov's story is consistent with testimonies of other *Schutzmäänner* who, during the 1974 Meleshko trial, recalled how Katriuk together with Lakusta carried out executions of battalion members suspected of establishing contact with the partisans.

On Vasiura's order, one morning the company was placed in formation, unarmed, by the barracks. The company was organized in two ranks at an interval of three steps between each other. From the residence of the staff, in which Vasiura and Smowski worked, two gendarmes led out one young man in civilian clothes and handled him over to Vasiura, next to whom stood the translator Lukovich. Vasiura said something to the man in civilian clothes. Together with him and one German they walked around our unit. He identified Vinogradov and another policeman from my platoon, whose name I cannot remember. All four of them, whom the man in civilian clothes pointed out, Vasiura brought out of the lines of policemen and made them get down on their knees, then ordered Kmit, Lakusta and Katriuk to get their weapons from the barracks and arrest those four policemen. At that moment Major Körner and Smowski walked up to our formation. Vasiura consulted him about something, after which he ordered the arrested policemen to remove their coats, and then gave some form of order to Kmit, Lakusta and Katriuk. Kmit prepared his rifle and led Vinogradov behind the staff building, where there were some old trenches. Lakusta and Katriuk then led the three remaining policemen to the guardhouse. Shots rang out from behind the staff building and Kmit returned, carrying in his hands Vinogradov's boots, pants and the service jacket. On the next day Lakusta and Katriuk shot another of the arrested policemen. On the third day, Klimenko was released for some reason and appointed assistant in Bylik's platoon. What they did to the fourth arrested, I do not know. The civilian, after which he told the policemen, the gendarmes took somewhere from the disposition (*s rozpolozheniia*) and I do not know anything about what happened to him."¹¹⁶

In 1974, Khrenov identified the two executed men as Kniazhskii and Karataev of the first company. They were brought from Pleshchenitsy by Lakusta and Katriuk and were interrogated for two or three days in the battalion staff, where they endured heavy beatings during the interrogation at the hands of Vasiura and Lukovich in the presence of Smowski.¹¹⁷

In his ruling Judge J. Nadon emphasized that the German supervisory officers [*Aufsichtsoffiziere*] "were fully satisfied with the performance and attitude

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 186.

¹¹⁶ N. A. Franchuk, p.d. 1.06.74, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 5, l.d. 28–29, 40–50, t. 5, l. 1–11, 12–26; Glazkov notes, p. 7.

¹¹⁷ S. A. Khrenov, Meleshko case, p.d. 18.5.74, t. 4, l.d. 52–53; I. I. Kozynchenko, Meleshko case, p.d. 4.4.74, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 3, l.d. d.8–18, 19–29, 30–40, 41–64; Vasiura case, I. I. Kozynchenko, p.d. 13.8.85, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746, t. 6, 163–167; p.d. 6.6.86, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746, t. 11, l. 168–180; Glazkov notes, p. 8, 9.

of their Ukrainian comrades,¹¹⁸ concluding that Katriuk voluntarily joined the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118, adding that he had not been “entirely candid in relating his participation in Battalion 118. He clearly was not prepared to answer fully the questions put to him regarding his participation in Battalion 118, and, more particularly, in company 1 of that battalion.”¹¹⁹ In the verdict of January 29, 1999, Judge Nadon wrote that:

I find it difficult, if not impossible, to accept the respondent’s evidence that he did not participate in any important military operation while his battalion was in Byelorussia. That is simply not plausible. I find that the respondent must have participated in at least some of the operations in which his battalion was involved between 1942 and 1944. The respondent was an active member of the battalion and was in charge of one unit of platoon number 1 of company 1. Mr. Khrenov remembers him as an “active participant.” I can only conclude that the respondent, as a member of Battalion 118, took part in the operations in which his company was involved and, as a result, was certainly engaged in fighting enemy partisans. Although I have no difficulty concluding that the respondent participated in the operations in which his company was involved, I am not prepared, on the evidence before me, to conclude that he participated in the commission of atrocities against the civilian population of Byelorussia. Not enough is known to reach a conclusion ... It would be unthinkable, in my view, to conclude, on the basis of Dr. Messerschmidt’s evidence only, that the respondent committed war crimes. I therefore find the Minister has not proved, on a balance of probabilities, that the respondent participated in the commission of war crimes or that he committed such crimes. The Minister did not call any witnesses who could link the respondent to the atrocities committed against the civilian population.¹²⁰

While the court concluded that Katriuk “obtained his Canadian citizenship by false representation, or fraud or by concealing material circumstances contrary to the citizenship act,” the Canadian authorities summarily informed Katriuk, in May 2007, of their decision not to revoke his citizenship. They did not provide any explanation. The decision is currently challenged by B’nai B’rith.¹²¹ In his old age, Katriuk has continued to work as a beekeeper in Ormstown, outside Montreal. He is an active member of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada, and a donor to its consistory funds.¹²² He was also one of the donors to a memorial to the *Bukovyns’kyi Kurin’* in Chernivtsi, of which he is an honorary citizen.¹²³

¹¹⁸ “Minister vs. Katriuk,” 183.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 187, 190.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 187.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 222. The Canadian authorities’ decision to not revoke Katriuk’s citizenship is available online. See Will Zuzak’s website <http://www.telusplanet.net/public/mozuz/katriuk/katriuk20070518.jpg> (accessed December 17, 2009); “World War Two Related Cases in Canada.”

¹²² *Visnyk: Ukraïns’ka pravoslavna tserkva v Kanadi*, no. 5–6, LXXXIV, Arch 1/15 (2007): 8.

¹²³ Aleksandr Shlaen cited in Vladimir Tol’ts, “Raznitsa vo vremeni: 60 let posle Bab’ego iara,” *Radio Liberty*, September 23, 2001, <http://www.svoboda.org/programs/TD/2001/TD.092301.asp> (accessed August 16, 2008).