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Book Author(s): Witold Wojciech Mędykowski

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## CHAPTER 1

# The War against Poland and the Beginning of German Economic Policy in the Occupied Territory

## THE OBJECTIVES OF THE WAR

One Germany's objectives during the Second World War was economic expansion in the new territories, which was generally referred to as *Lebensraum*. However, this concept represented much more than merely territory. It was, first of all, "living space for the German economy," bringing with it, apart from territory, a labor force, raw materials, and agricultural production. On May 10, 1939, the chief commander of the armed forces sent a letter to various OKW departments that was signed by Hitler. Attached to the letter were the "Instructions for the conduct of war and the economic security of their own."<sup>1</sup> Thus, parallel to the preparations for the military, were preparations for sustainability in economic terms. A conference in the Reich's Chancellery was held on May 23, 1939 to summarize preparations in economic terms. The report from this meeting was called the "Schmundt protocol."<sup>2</sup> During his speech, Hitler recalled again the validity of *Lebensraum* and said that the war was not really because of Gdańsk and the Corridor, but its objective was extension of living space in the east.<sup>3</sup> Also in other occasion, during a meeting with Mussolini in

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1 IMT, *Red Series* (C-120), vol. 1, 692.

2 IMT, *Red Series* (L-79), vol. 1, 693.

3 IMT, *Red Series* (C-120), vol. 1, 693.

August 1939, Hitler said: “For economic reasons also, Germany needed the foodstuffs and timber from these eastern regions.”<sup>4</sup>

In addition to the planned use of resources from the conquered territories, the exploitation of vast numbers of foreign workers was planned even before Germany went to war and was an integral part of the plan for waging an aggressive war. On May 23, 1939, a meeting was held in Hitler’s study at the Reich’s Chancellery. Hermann Göring, Erich Raeder, and Wilhelm Keitel were present. According to the minutes of this meeting, Hitler stated: “. . . the possession of extensive areas in the east will be advantageous. We shall be able to rely upon record harvests, even less in time of war than in peace. The population of non-Germans will perform no military service and will be available as a source of labor.”<sup>5</sup>

Hitler did not think too highly of the Polish army; however, he feared that the delivery of arms from Western countries might weaken German supremacy. He was also speaking about the ethnic composition of Poland, which according to him, was composed of 14.5 million people belonging to various minorities like Germans, Byelorussians, Lithuanians, Jews, and Ukrainians. Not all Poles were, according to him, “fanatics.” He believed that such a large proportion of non-Poles significantly reduced the fighting strength of Poland. Therefore Poland could be “struck to the ground” in a very short time.<sup>6</sup> In conclusion, the fundamental objectives of the war against Poland were winning of war and the occupation of the Polish “living space.” Detailed instructions on how to conduct the war and the management of the new living space had been issued in August, September, and October 1939.

Hitler’s speech at a meeting of senior commanders of the Wehrmacht, which took place in Hitler’s residence in Obersalzberg on August 22, 1939,<sup>7</sup> produced one of the most important documents relating to the conduct of the war in Poland. At this time, all preparations for war had been completed. Before making a final decision concerning the attack on Poland, Hitler rejected proposals of peaceful solution, blaming Poland for rejecting German demands. Speaking to senior commanders, Hitler said: “Destruction of Poland is in the foreground. The aim is elimination of living forces, not the arrival at a certain line. Even if war should break out in the west, the destruction of Poland shall be

4 IMT, *Red Series* (TC-77), vol. 1, 697.

5 IMT, *Red Series* (L-79), vol. 1, 875–76.

6 IMT, *Red Series* (TC-77), vol. 1, 696.

7 The Obersalzberg Speech. On August 22, 1939, Hitler addressed his commanders-in-chief at Obersalzberg, in IMT, *Red Series* (1014-PS), vol. 1, 702.

the primary objective.<sup>8</sup> Hitler pointed out that the decision to attack Poland had been taken already in the spring.<sup>9</sup> Hitler explicitly said that the causes for the attack would be presented, regardless whether it was true or not. “When starting and leading a war, not justice but victory counts.”<sup>10</sup> Hitler also spoke about economic aspects of the war. “We need not be afraid of a blockade. The east will supply us with grain, cattle, coal, lead and zinc. It is a big arm, which demands great efforts.”<sup>11</sup> Given this, it was in a signed agreement with the Soviet Union that he said “They [Edouard Daladier and Neville Chamberlain] will not go beyond a blockade. Against that we have our autarchy and the Russian raw materials.”<sup>12</sup>

One of the most important passages is located at the point where Hitler stopped the discussions about the war was to address the behavior of German soldiers on the battlefield and his plans for population of conquered Poland. Hitler said: “Our strength lies in our quickness and brutality [. . .]. I have given the command and I shall shoot everyone who utters one word of criticism [. . .] and so for the present, only in the east have I put my death-head formations in place with the command relentlessly and without compassion to send into death many women and children of Polish origin and language. Only thus can we gain the living space (*Lebensraum*) that we need.”<sup>13</sup> Then Hitler continued: “For you, gentlemen, fame and honor are beginning as they have not for centuries. Be hard; be without mercy; act more quickly and brutally than the others. The citizens of western Europe must tremble with horror. That is the most human way of conducting a war. For it scares the others off.”<sup>14</sup>

Those words uttered to senior commanders leave no doubt as to the intentions of Hitler concerning the behavior of his troops and the conduct of war. It was to be brutal, involving the physical destruction of the enemy, which involved not only combatants, but civilians as well. Commanding violent behavior suggests that it will not be punished—quite the contrary. Therefore, the instructions for the conduct of war were released and passed on to the

8 Ibid.; IMT, *Red Series* (798–PS).

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 IMT, *Red Series* (1014-PS), vol. 1, 702; IMT, *Red Series* (798-PS); E. L. Woodward and Rohan Riffle, eds., *From Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919–1939*, 3rd series (London: HMSO, 1954), vol. 7, 258–60.

14 IMT, *Red Series* (1014-PS), vol. 1, 702; Woodward and Riffle, *From Documents*, vol. 7, 258–60.

soldiers. Of course, Hitler fulfilled his promises regarding both the reward of the soldiers and their impunity. At the beginning of October 1939, amnesty was announced for crimes committed by German soldiers during the campaign in Poland.<sup>15</sup>

When the war broke out, Hitler spoke in the Reichstag, where he explained the reasons for this war, charging Poland with complete responsibility. His statement, quoted below, is a denial of what he said at a secret meeting with senior commanders in Obersalzberg. On September 1, 1939 he said:

... I will not wage war against women and children. I have ordered my air force to restrict itself to attacks on military objectives. If, however, the enemy thinks he can draw from that *carte blanche* on his side to fight by the other methods he will receive an answer that will deprive him of hearing and sight.<sup>16</sup>

Hitler continued:

... and from now on, bombs will be met with bombs. Whoever fights with poison gas will be fought with poison gas. Whoever departs from the rules of humane warfare can only expect that we shall do the same. I will continue this struggle, no matter against whom, until the safety of the Reich and its rights are secured.<sup>17</sup>

On the same day, September 1, 1939, Hitler made a speech to the German armed forces, in which he also presented reasons for starting the war. He said:

I can see no other way but from now onwards to meet force with force. The German Armed Forces, with firm determination, will take up the struggle for the honor and the fundamental rights of the German people. I expect every soldier to be conscious of the high tradition of the eternal German soldierly qualities and to do his duty to the end. 'emember always and in any circumstances that you are the representatives of the National Socialist Greater Germany. Long live our people and the Reich.<sup>18</sup>

15 "Decree of Amnesty of the Führer and Chancellor of the Reich, of October 4, 1939," in Szymon Datner, *Crimes Committed by the Wehrmacht during the September Campaign and the Period of Military Government* (Poznań: Instytut Zachodni, 1962), 44.

16 *Speech by Hitler in Reichstag*, September 1, 1939.

17 *Ibid.*

18 IMT, *Red Series* (TC-54), vol. 1, 721.

In the speeches of August 22 and September 1, 1939, Hitler did not mention the Jews, but his attitude on this issue was obvious to all. On January 30, 1939, in his speech, Hitler told the Reichstag:

The Jewish race was created by God only for the purpose of being in a certain percentage of a parasite living body on the productive and the work of other nations. The Jewish race will have to adapt itself to sound constructive activity as other nations do, or sooner or later it will succumb to a crisis of an inconceivable magnitude. [. . .] Today I will once more be a prophet: If the international Jewish financiers in and outside Europe should succeed in plunging the nations once more into a world war, then the result will not be the Bolshevization of the earth, and thus the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe!<sup>19</sup>

## BEGINNING OF THE WAR

The war began on September 1, 1939, at 4:45 a.m., with a cannonade from the cruiser Schleswig-Holstein on Westerplatte.<sup>20</sup> The German aviation began bombing cities and military facilities. The German army crossed the Polish border, attacking from three directions simultaneously: from the north: from west Pomerania and east Prussia, from the west, and in the south from the territory of Slovakia.<sup>21</sup> Before the attack, the Germans prepared a series of actions of sabotage and instigated hostile ethnic groups, for example Ukrainians.<sup>22</sup> On the same day, Hitler spoke to the Reichstag assembly, explaining objectives of the war. He presented them as follows:

I am determined: first, resolve the question of Danzig, second the question of the corridor, and thirdly, to ensure that in relation to Germany there will

19 Yitzhak Arad, Yisrael Gutman et al., eds., *Documents on the Holocaust: Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland and the Soviet Union* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1987), 134–35.

20 Andrzej Albert (Wojciech Roszkowski), *Najnowsza historia Polski 1914–1993*, vol. 1 (London: Plus Publications Ltd., 1994); Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Madajczyk, *Polityka III Rzeszy w okupowanej Polsce*.

21 BA-MA, RW5-150, 172/673–172/677.

22 BA-MA, RW5-699, 2–3.

be a reversal of Polish position, which will provide peaceful coexistence and security!<sup>23</sup>

In the meantime, the situation deteriorated, and the Polish armies were in constant retreat. Warsaw became increasingly threatened by attack from the north, which forced the evacuation of the Polish government, state institutions, and the Bank of Poland's gold reserves from Warsaw. On September 6, Chief Commander Marshal Edward Śmigły-Rydz and his staff left the capital and moved to Brest. On the same day Colonel Roman Umiastowski, in a dramatic appeal, asked the young men to leave the capital for the east, where he called for the organization of a new line of defense.<sup>24</sup> Political leaders of party representatives also came to the east. Umiastowski's appeal had far-reaching effect: in addition to thousands of men who went east, whole families went in the same direction, in an atmosphere of fear and panic. The situation on the roads became even more difficult and refugees became an easy prey for the German airmen, who attacked civilian refugee columns. At that time, from September 7 to 9, the Soviet authorities announced mobilization in the European part of USSR.

On September 17, 1939, at 2.00 in the night, the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs called for the Polish Ambassador to give him a notice informing that in the morning the Red Army had begun crossing the Polish border in its entire length in order to "take care of people in western Ukraine and western Belarus." In this situation, Marshal Edward Śmigły-Rydz commanded the Polish troops not to fight the Red Army troops. On the night of September 17 to 18, the Polish commander-in-chief crossed over the Romanian border. The Red Army disarmed Polish troops and captured the soldiers and officers. Only in some places did struggle break out between the Polish and Soviet troops. Some units, mainly from the region of Polesie, returned in the direction of the west intending to support the defense of Warsaw and in order not fall into the hands of the Red Army and be disarmed in the process. However, those units failed to get to Warsaw. In the meantime, as a result of heavy bombing that caused many

23 Doc. 2322-PS, Hitler's address to the Reichstag on the outbreak of war, September 1, 1939; USA-39; Adolf Hitler, *The Essential Hitler: Speeches and Commentary*, ed. Max Domarus and Patrick Romane (Wauconda, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci, 2007).

24 L. Dobroszycki, M.M. Drozdowski, M. Getter, A. Słomczyński, eds., *Cywilna obrona Warszawy we wrześniu 1939, Dokumenty, materiały prasowe i relacje* (Warszawa: PWN, 1964); Marian Porwit, *Obrona Warszawy, Wrzesień 1939: Wspomnienia i fakty* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1959); Mieczysław Ciepiewicz and Eugeniusz Kozłowski, eds., *Obrona Warszawy 1939 we wspomnieniach* (Warsaw: MON, 1984); Mieczysław Ciepiewicz i Eugeniusz Kozłowski, eds., *Wrzesień 1939 w relacjach i wspomnieniach* (Warsaw: MON, 1989).

casualties and large damage, and the lack of food, water, and electricity, on September 26, 1939 it was decided to surrender Warsaw. The act of capitulation was signed on September 28, 1939. Soon, German troops entered the city. In the last days of September sporadic fighting was still going on. On October 5, 1939, Special Operational Group (SGO) “Polesie” under the command of General Franciszek Kleeberg capitulated, which marked the end of the war in Poland.

## OPERATION TANNENBERG

In 1939 German directions in order to carry out the extermination of the Polish leadership echelon (*Liquidierung der polnischen Führungsschicht*) and intelligentsia got the codename *Unternehmen Tannenberg*. In May 1939, in the Main Office of the SD (*Sicherheitsdienst*), the head of the German Police, Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler, established a special cell called *Zentralstelle II/P (Polen)*, whose task was to draw up proscription lists of Poles (*Sonderfahndungsbuch Polen*)<sup>25</sup> who were considered particularly dangerous to the Third Reich. They were political activists; representatives of the clergy; leaders of political parties; people of science and culture; activists and fighters for the Polish state in disputed territories, from World War I, where plebiscites and armed uprisings (Śląsk/Schlesien, Poznań/Posen, Pomorze/Pommern) took place. On those lists were the names of 61,000 Poles.<sup>26</sup> In July 1939, an agreement was reached between *Oberkommando des Heeres* (OKH) and the head of *Sicherheitspolizei* and SD Reinhard Heydrich. Under the agreement, each of the five armies prepared to attack Poland was to obtain *Einsatzgruppe*, consisting of a Gestapo, Kripo (*Kriminalpolizei*), and SD men. After the outbreak of war in the first half of September, a further three sub-groups of about 2,700 people operating similarly were added.

At a conference held on September 21, 1939, referring to the ongoing operation *Tannenberg*, convened by the *Einsatzgruppen*, Heydrich said:

Solving of the Polish question—as has been repeatedly indicated—is to be varied: one way in relation to the leadership (Polish intelligentsia), another in relation to the workers and the lower layers of the Polish population. There are still no more than 3% of political leaders in the occupied territories.

25 *Sonderfahndungsbuch Polen* (Berlin: Reichskriminalpolizeiamt Berlin C2, Wederscher Mark 5/6, 1939).

26 Ryszard Majewski, *Waffen SS: Mity i rzeczywistość* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1977), 53.



And these 3% must be neutralized and sent to concentration camps. The *Einsatzgruppen* should draw up a list, on which they should place outstanding leaders and also lists containing the average layer of the Polish society: teachers, clergy, nobility, legionnaires, returning officers, and so forth. They must be arrested and deported to the remaining district (*Restraum*).<sup>27</sup>

Heydrich clearly expressed his murderous intentions. Interesting is the fact that in spite of obtaining the proxies for the elimination of elements deemed undesirable, he continued his provocative actions in order to cause difficulties and even paralyzing court actions. At the conference on September 21, 1939, he ordered:

Executions should be used only in case of necessary self-defense or in cases of attempts of escape. All other matters should be transferred to the martial courts. You should load military courts with so many applications, that they could not manage to deal with this C [Chef, i.e., Reinhard Heydrich] wants him to submit all the judgments of the military courts, ending with no conviction to death penalty.<sup>28</sup>

The *Einsatzgruppen* operating in Poland, in addition to the tasks relating to the liquidation of Polish activists, intellectuals and leaders also had duties concerning the Jews.<sup>29</sup> One of their obligations was causing forced migration of Jews to the Soviet zone in the first weeks of war, when the demarcation line between the German and Soviet occupation zone was not yet determined. Forcing resettlement on Jews took place by issuing specific instructions to leave the immediate locality. Particularly cruel to the Jews was the *Einsatzgruppe* under the command of Udo von Woyrsch, who committed numerous crimes, including in the vicinity of Przemyśl.<sup>30</sup> “Already in 1939, soon after the entry into Przemyśl, Germans gave an example of their methods of bandits slaughtering five hundred Jews, mostly from the intelligentsia.”<sup>31</sup>

27 Document from the Conference in Security Police Office of September 21, 1939, *BŻIH* 49 (1964): 68–73.

28 Ibid.

29 Jochen Böehler, “Nazi Anti-Jewish Policy during the Polish Campaign: The Case of the *Einsatzgruppe* von Woyrsch,” *German Studies Review* 24 (2001): 35–54; Alexander B. Rossino, *Hitler Strikes Poland: Blitzkrieg, Ideology and Atrocity* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 88–120.

30 Böehler, “Nazi Anti-Jewish Policy.”

31 YVA, M.49.E/1938, 1, testimony of Marian Bień.

## IDEOLOGICAL ATTITUDE OF GERMAN SOLDIERS TOWARDS THE JEWS

The beginning of the war ushered in a sharp change in the life of the Jewish population in Poland. Persecution of Jews in Germany and the territories occupied by Germany after 1938 now threatened Polish Jews, who were much more numerous than the Jewish communities of Germany, Austria, and the Protectorate. Polish Jews were also different from their brethren in the above-mentioned countries, where not all Jews were traditional and not all of them differentiated themselves from the rest of the country's population, even though the Jews who lived traditionally made up a fairly large faction of the Jewish community. For Polish Jews, the Germans invented a special term: *Ostjuden*—Eastern Jews, which indicated geographic area inhabited by those Jews, but also evoked a specific cultural meaning. It conjured up a different type of Jew: traditional in terms of clothing, appearance, including beards and side locks, but also traditional in terms of language and behavioral education. For a casual viewer, in many cases, the difference was enormous. While German Jews were not often distinguished by their appearance, in Poland the situation was completely different. Elements such as the appearance and behavior of traditional Jews were used in German propaganda for years. Especially since Hitler seized power, the anti-Semitic propaganda increased. Books, newspapers, and posters with cartoons where stylized images of Jews were portrayed were printed in millions of copies. Some features and characteristics of the Jewish body were much exaggerated: the propaganda materials showed great curved noses, odd-looking faces, beards and side locks. Often, such propaganda items were presented next to idealized drawings of the Aryan type: tall, athletic, with simple features and light hair, and neatly dressed. It was not only drawings and photos in newspapers and books that launched this type of the German man. There were also other means of propaganda everywhere—in film, painting, and sculpture. The work of Arno Breker is one of the best examples.<sup>32</sup>

The propaganda and the political climate of Germany from the years 1933–1939 affected the consciousness of the young generation of Germans. After the elimination of pre-Hitler youth organizations and the establishment of Hitler Youth and related organizations such as BDM and *Jungvolk*, the majority of adolescents came under Hitler's influence for a longer or shorter

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32 Jürgen Trimborn, *Arno Breker—Der Künstler und die Macht: die Biographie* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2011); B. John Zavrel, *Arno Breker—His Art and Life* (New York: Amherst, 1985); Peter Adam, *The Art of the Third Reich* (London: Harry N. Abrams Inc, 1992).

period of time. Germans born in 1919, for example, who reached the age of 20 in 1939, spent a greater part of their youth in the above-mentioned organizations. These organizations not only dealt with sporting activities, developed interests, organized trips outside the city and summer camps, but also educated the German youth in the spirit of Nazism. In 1930s, the German youths spent the greater part of their time in school and in the Hitler Youth organizations in order to reduce the impact of the family. This educational activity was intentionally propagated by the Nazi leadership. The official propaganda and youth organizations exerted very strong influence on young people. Their activities had a great effect on the generation, which grew up in 1930s and became soldiers during the war of 1939, and supposedly caused generational differences in the prevailing mood of the Wehrmacht.<sup>33</sup>

A generation of young Germans educated in an atmosphere of anti-Semitic propaganda and convinced of its superiority was mobilized and sent to war against Poland. In the period preceding the war, German propaganda against Poland was very intense<sup>34</sup> and focused not only on the Free City of Gdańsk and the “Corridor.” It also alleged the persecution of Germans in Poland. Poland had been presented as a country that persistently acted unreasonably. Moreover, Poland had never enjoyed a positive evaluation from the Germans. Above all, Germany, irrespective of the reigning system and the ruling government, never reconciled with the loss of the lands, which belonged to Germany prior to the World War I, in favor of Poland. Therefore, slogans such as *Lebensraum*, used by Hitler, gained social acceptance quite easily. The Polish economy was regarded as primitive; the common term “Polish economy” (*polnische Wirtschaft*) meant mismanagement, mess, and laziness.<sup>35</sup> In German eyes, Poland was a hostile country that wanted to prevent the development of Germany. These two important elements of consciousness—anti-Semitism and the hatred of Poland—accompanied the German forces that invaded Poland in September 1939.

The Jews were depicted in German propaganda as parasites who profited from the hard work of others. They did not do the work themselves but

33 Jochen Böhrer, *Zbrodnie Wehrmachtu w Polsce: Wrzesień 1939: Wojna totalna* (Kraków: Znak, 2009), 37–41.

34 *Ibid.*, 41–45.

35 Eugeniusz Cezary Król, *Polska i Polacy w propagandzie narodowego socjalizmu w Niemczech 1919–1945* (Warsaw: ISP PAN-Collegium Civitas-Rytm, 2010); Götz Aly and Susanne Heim, “The Holocaust and Population Policy: Remarks on the Decision on the Final Solution,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 24 (1994): 48–55.

gathered the fruits of hard labor done by other people. Their exploitation of others did not apply solely to economic benefits, but also to political and social ones. The actions of Jews in culture and the arts were considered as causing constant disgrace. Therefore, according to the propaganda, it was necessary to root out the Jews and get rid of them in order to protect the German people, the German culture, the economy, education, the administration, and so forth. In turn, the Poles were depicted as rough and thriftless people who should also learn from the German work ethic.

The beginning of the war also established the confrontation between propaganda and reality. It was an eye-to-eye meeting with the population in Poland and encounter with the Jews, who represented about 10% of the population. However, in cities and towns their percentage was significantly higher and amounted to several dozen percent. Therefore, the German newcomers were under the impression that there was a massive concentration of Jews in Poland. Many German soldiers met traditional Jews, whom so far they had only seen in the form of propaganda, for the first time in their lives.

Another important element accompanying the invasion of Poland (and later, the other countries of Central and Eastern Europe), was the contrast between what Germany wanted to achieve—to get rid of the Jews, to remove them from German society—and between what they actually found. As German control was established on new territories, the number of Jews under German rule did not reduce: on the contrary, the invaders only found more Jews.

After a period of fighting, German troops came in contact with many civilians. This encounter displayed an entire range of attitudes. The expression of these opinions was discovered in letters written to the soldiers' families in Germany. Large collections of correspondence have survived in archives.<sup>36</sup> A great number of German soldiers adopted the objectives of the war and considered it just and fair, designed to protect ethnic Germans. In relation to the local population—Poles and Jews—they felt contempt and hatred. Together with all the nation, they felt good and worthy to rule others, sure that their mission was to spread “civilization” in the east.<sup>37</sup>

36 O. Buchbender and R. Sterz, eds., *Das andere Gesicht des Krieges: Deutsch Feldpostbriefe 1939–1945* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1982); Alexander Rossino, “Destructive Impulses: German Soldiers and the Conquest of Poland,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 11, no. 3 (Winter 1997): 351–65.

37 Rossino, “Destructive Impulses,” 353.

## VIOLENCE AGAINST THE JEWS

In order to collect weapons and ammunition in the occupied areas of the Poland, on September 12, 1939, the chief commander of the German armed forces, Walther von Brauchitsch, issued regulations to the civilians, calling for an immediate delivery of all weapons and ammunition to the nearest military and police posts. According to the regulation, storage of weapons and ammunition would be punished by death. Similarly, any acts of violence towards German soldiers were to be punished by death. Judgment, and its execution by the court, would take place immediately.<sup>38</sup>

Thereafter, an addendum was issued to the regulation of the Decree of September 12, 1939.<sup>39</sup> Regulations to ban the possession of weapons had become the basis for the search for hidden arms and ammunition by German soldiers. The sweep for the arms was conducted in public buildings as well as in private homes. In practice, it gave the Germans unlimited permission to enter homes and private residence and to take stock. During the search for weapons, robbery of private property was commonplace. German soldiers “preferred” Jewish homes where everything of value was robbed.

[. . .] looting took place in the city of [Warsaw] after the victory. The opportunity to take—and take more—is carried out gradually in the city in search of weapons inspections. These revisions, in some cases are carried out quite decently; in others, they are used for mass looting. This is the rule in Jewish neighborhoods—but not only there.<sup>40</sup>

Provocations and pretexts were employed in relation to the possession of weapons or taking part in armed resistance. Reinhard Heydrich wrote in a well-known *Schnellbrief* of September 21, 1939, inter alia: “As a justification for the concentration of Jews in cities should be administered, according to authoritative information, they took part in the partisan attacks and robbery.”<sup>41</sup>

38 The regulation on the possession of weapons on the September 12, 1939, issued by the supreme commander of Armed Forces von Brauchitsch.

39 Ordinance to supplement the Ordinance on the possession of weapons on September 21, 1939 (*Verordnungsblatt für die besetzten Gebiete in Polen*, 9); Second Order of the supreme commander of the Armed Forces to supplement the Ordinance on the possession of weapons on October 6, 1939 (*Verordnungsblatt für die besetzten Gebiete in Polen*, 32).

40 Ludwik Landau, *Kronika lat wojny i okupacji*, vol. 1, *Wrzesień 1939–listopad 1940* (Warsaw: PWN, 1962), 25.

41 “Instructions by Heydrich on Policy and Operations Concerning Jews in the Occupied Territories, September 21, 1939,” in Arad and Gutman, *Documents on the Holocaust*, 173–78;

The method of searching for weapons is reflected in many testimonies of Jewish witnesses, who described the brutality with which the searches were carried out. German soldiers did not even care to justify their behavior in order to search for weapons. In practice, the searches were merely a common form of looting.

One of the methods aimed at protecting the German forces against the attacks by “partisans”<sup>42</sup> or hidden soldiers was taking hostages who were chosen from well-known personalities in occupied cities or representatives of municipalities. Among the hostages were also prominent Jews. The German troops announced that in case of attacks they would shoot the hostages. The arrest of hostages, in practice, served not only security exigencies, but often was used as an instrument of pressure on the local society, especially in order to force the local society or community to pay contributions or provide other material benefits. One of witnesses said: “On September 5, 1939 the German army entered Strzemieszyce. They began the persecution of Jews; they took hostages, tortured and beat them in order to get as much gold as possible.”<sup>43</sup>

Imposition of contributions on the civilian population of the occupied land was a legitimate act of the occupation forces in accordance with international law.<sup>44</sup> Contributions, however, were designed to meet the needs of occupying troops. According to the international norms, requests for contributions should be issued in writing by a general commander of the troops. They should be distributed proportionally, according to the most recent taxation. In World War II, contributions were often imposed on the Jewish community which did not take into account a balanced contribution of the population of a specific area of the occupied country. Such a way of collecting contributions can be considered collective responsibility. International law prohibited the use of collective responsibility in the form of fines.<sup>45</sup> Levying contributions was

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T. Berenstein, A. Eisenbach, A. Rutkowski, ed., *Eksterminacja Żydów na ziemiach polskich w okresie okupacji hitlerowskiej: Zbiór dokumentów* (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Wydawniczy, 1957), 27.

42 Böhler, *Zbrodnie Wehrmachtu*, 135–78.

43 YVA, M.49.E/1553, 2, testimony of Jerychem Frajman.

44 Marian Flemming, “Traktowanie ludności cywilnej i jeńców podczas działań wojennych w świetle norm prawa międzynarodowego,” *BGKBZHP XXII* (1987): 67; Convention (IV) Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land, Signed at Hague, 18 October 1907, Art. 51, in *The Laws of Armed Conflicts: A Collection of Conventions, Resolutions and Other Documents*, ed. Dietrich Schindler and Jiří Toman (Geneva: Henri Dunant Institute, 1988), 90.

45 Flemming, “Traktowanie ludności cywilnej”; Convention (IV) Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land, Signed at Hague, 18 October 1907, Art. 50, in Schindler and Toman, *The Laws of Armed Conflicts*, 89–90.

a prevalent phenomenon in September 1939, as illustrated by testimonies of many witnesses from different regions of the country. Usually, the specified amount of time given to the population to collect and deliver the contribution did not exceed more than a few days. Contributions were imposed on the population of Lublin, Strzemieszyce,<sup>46</sup> Jaworzno, Kraśnik, and Izbica, as well as many other cities. In Jaworzno, in accordance with the accepted principles of imposing contributions, the following order was given by the military commander of the city:

During this time, the military commander of the city announced imposing contribution on the Jews; at the same time they detained eight people as hostages, who were important among the Jewish community, including me among them. After the payment of the contribution we were released.<sup>47</sup>

The following are excerpts from testimonies pertaining to a number of cities: “Germans laid upon the Jews a contribution of 500,000 zł. The *Judenrat* had to collect this sum and at an indicated date the contribution had been paid.”<sup>48</sup> The same was true in Kraśnik:

In September 1939, Germans entered Kraśnik. Then in our city there were about 8,000 Jews. Mostly craftsmen, merchants and workers, there were also many belonging to intelligentsia. Germans asked for contribution for the next few days. Then we had to give them silver and brass.<sup>49</sup>

In some towns, the contribution was only a first step towards the systematic looting of Jewish property. This is illustrated by an example from Izbica:

The Germans who came first to Izbica were motorcycle patrols; one of their first steps was a pogrom. On the first day of the occupation several Jews were killed. Two days later they imposed contribution on us. Jews had to pay it and a few days later the Germans issued a decree that Jews

46 YVA, M.49.E/1553, 2, testimony of Jerychem Frajman.

47 YVA, M.49.E/3424, 1, testimony of Paulina Klein.

48 YVA, M.49.E/1295, 2, testimony of Franciszek Mandelbaum, Lublin

49 YVA, M.49.E/1516, 1, testimony of Abraham Olender.



had to deliver all the gold they had. After that they ordered the Jews to deliver their goods and valuable papers. After finishing that action they gave three more days for delivering all these items and announced that if they find gold, any goods or valuable papers by somebody, he will be killed on the spot. After a few days they began to conduct mass searches in Jewish homes. If they found even the smallest piece of a material, they shot and no excuse helped.<sup>50</sup>

International law forbade looting of private property belonging to the civilian population and it could not be confiscated. Nevertheless, the law allowed confiscation of goods for the occupying army. However, such confiscation should be tailored to the resources of the country.<sup>51</sup> Still, in the case of requisition, the army that was carrying it out was obliged to give receipts or payment for the confiscated property. In many cases during World War II, requisitions took the form of looting, which made it difficult to distinguish between lawful and unlawful seizure of property. There also was a progressive deterioration of the German soldiers' moral standards in relation to the Jewish civilians. This is illustrated by the case of Łańcut: "On September 9, 1939, the Germans entered to Łańcut. Initially, it was the Wehrmacht. Soldiers went to the Jewish shops and took things paying the minimum price."<sup>52</sup> In the above-quoted testimony, the German soldiers initially paid for the goods, although they preferred low prices. Therefore, this case can be treated as a sale; however, the merchants were forced to sell goods for prices much lower than the actual value of the goods. Nevertheless, merciless looting soon began. "A few days later, civilian authorities and the Gestapo came [to Łańcut]. Afterwards began the inspection of Jewish homes, taking valuables, furniture, clothing, bedding, etc."<sup>53</sup> In this case we have to admit that the sales were carried out by soldiers, while the looting was performed by the policemen, but, when taken together with other evidence, it also confirms the progressive deterioration of moral standards.

50 YVA, M.49.E/1518, 1, testimony of Hejnoch Nobel.

51 Flemming, "Traktowanie ludności cywilnej"; Convention (IV) Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land, Signed at Hague, 18 October 1907., Art. 46, in Schindler and Toman, *The Laws of Armed Conflicts*, 89.

52 YVA, M.49.E/1501, 1, testimony of Diana Grinabaum.

53 Ibid.



Ludwik Landau also wrote about the looting in his journal:

Searches for weapons and radios were (and still are) in the Jewish neighborhoods and in the form, associated, more or less, with open robbery: the things taken are, as a rule, furs and often other valuable items. Even in non-Jewish districts, people often talk about questions posed [by the German soldiers]: *Sind Sie Jude* or *Sind Sie Pole*? Depending on the response, the variety of things seized changes. I do not think that the soldiers doing that were fanatic supporters of Hitler or sophisticated robbers: they simply belonged to a common—maybe the most widespread in most of societies—type of man, not particularly firm in his beliefs, weak, giving rise to prevailing currents, and acted under these conditions [of the war and occupation]. They were demoralized and unable to resist the temptation of an easy win of such desirable valuables in their daily struggle for existence.<sup>54</sup>

Ludwig observed that:

[b]oth this looting and harassment of the people were certainly not ordered by their commanders; however, without a doubt, this situation in so many instances occurred with the approval of their officers, and in any case, they were not prosecuted with any particular severity. In individual cases, it happened to obtain effective intervention of an officer—apparently a general policy trend of the occupiers—was rather looking at these abuses through spread fingers—unless it had already exceeded the extent possible.<sup>55</sup>

Apart from the above-described individual killings of Jews, in some towns, mass killings also took place shortly after the entry of the German troops.<sup>56</sup> A well-known case of violence against the Jews during the September campaign was the case of Końskie.<sup>57</sup> Another one, the massacre in Częstochowa, on

54 Landau, *Kronika lat wojny i okupacji*, 27–28.

55 *Ibid.*, 26.

56 Jochen Böehler, *Auftrakt zum Vernichtungskrieg: Die Wehrmacht in Polen 1939* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2006), 194–97.

57 Jochen Böehler, ed., *Grösste Härte. . . : Verbrechen der Wehrmacht in Polen, September-Oktober 1939* (Osnabrück: Deutsches Historisches Institut, 2005), 121–23.

September 4, 1939 was so fierce that it was later known as “Bloody Monday.”<sup>58</sup> One of the victims described it in the following manner:

The Germans [...] gathered the entire male population of the city in the Old Market and from there they were scurried into a so-called cathedral. When we were entering the church, they began to shoot us with machine guns and rifles. Some hundreds of us were killed then on the spot. There were about 400 injured. I got a bullet in the right side; the wound was luckily not serious, since the bullet passed through my body.<sup>59</sup>

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58 Liber Brenner, *Widerstand un Umekum in Tschenstochover Geto* (Warsaw: Yidisher Historisher Institut in Pojlin, 1950), 6.

59 YVA, M.49.E/1567, 1, testimony of Henoch Diamant.