Mapping the Massacres:

Einsatzkommando-3 in Lithuania

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Of all tragic episodes in human history, the Nazi Holocaust during the Second World War provides scholars with an exceptionally well documented instance of state-sponsored murder as ideological policy. Holocaust research is paramount to our understanding of how and why such organized massacre was allowed to develop, and to prevent it from ever happening again. While the body of Holocaust studies research is vast both in its breadth and depth of analysis, few have applied the tools of geographic analysis to this historical phenomenon. This allows us to approach the development of the Holocaust through an entirely different lens; one that highlights the importance of spatial and temporal data in understanding genocide.

We chose to focus on the actions of the *Einsatzgruppen* in Eastern Europe, during the early days of Operation Barbarossa. As the *Wehrmacht* advanced into Soviet territory the *Einsatzgruppen* were tasked with subduing and cleansing the newly conquered areas of undesirable populations.

For our particular project, we examined the spatiotemporal movement of *Einsatzkommando*-3 (EK 3), a sub-*kommando* of *Einsatzgruppe* A, one of four sub-units of the Einsatzgruppen (Appendix 1). Comprised of 141 individuals from different units of the German army and Nazi establishment, EK-3 constituted the mobile arm of the German extermination machine (Edeiken). Their initial task was to exterminate potential political opponents. Before long, however, the mass murder of Jews and other groups deemed racially inferior became their primary function (Einsatzgruppen Reports, ii).

Led by Karl Jäger, commander of the Security police and Sicherheitsdienst (SD) in Lithuania from the fall of 1941 through the fall of 1943, EK-3 were to accompany the German Army in their eastward drive through Lithuania, parts of Latvia and Belarus

towards Leningrad (Headland, 154-155). The availability of geographic data both spatio-temporally extensive and numerically detailed rendered EK-3 exceptionally well qualified for further study. We found the required combination of features in the Jäger report, which extensively detailed their extermination activities providing 113 data points over a period of 148 days. His meticulous attention to detail chronicles the massacres of 137,346 people from 4 July 1941 to 1 December 1941 noting gender, ethnicity, religious affiliation, and nationality. Unable to locate any comprehensive existing scholarship which visually reflects the movement and activity of EK-3, we took it upon ourselves to create an animated map using Adobe Flash CS3 to help better contextualize and analyze their geographical distribution over space and time, especially in the context of the ongoing development of Nazi extermination policy.

Our research sought to answer the following fundamental questions: one, how did the activity of EK-3 develop over space and time? Two, how does this information add to our understanding of their operational strategy? We anticipated finding a logical linear geographic and temporal pattern of EK-3 movement throughout the Baltic States based on our basic familiarity with ordered Nazi methodology. We assumed that the general pattern of massacres would follow the generally linear eastward progress of Operation Barbarossa. With regards to EK-3 operational strategy, we expected to observe a two-phase extermination process, beginning with a sweep of political opponents and then shifting their efforts to the complete liquidation of the Lithuanian Jewish population.

The historical significance of the study extends well beyond the borders of the *Einsatzgruppen*, including the development and implementation of Nazi policy itself. Our study shows how geographical perspectives can provide historians with a new angle on such events. Our results contribute to Holocaust study, in certain cases filling research gaps, while in others circumstances, presenting an entirely original interpretation of the genocide. In one sense, we are adding a brick to the wall of *Einsatzgruppen* research. The map offers a concise, visual representation of EK-3 movement allowing for a more complete analysis beyond that available from the tabular data or the textual reports. Examining the EK-3 from a geographic perspective allows us to apply the tools of geographic analysis to shed a wider light on this inherently spatial phenomenon. Especially through a multi-scale analysis, we were able to reveal new dynamics in the *Einsatzkommando*'s spatial logic (or lack thereof). While only barely touched upon in this

project due to lack of time and expertise, we have clearly demonstrated that geographical analysis has much to offer scholars of the Holocaust, particularly those interested in its spatial components.

Research Methodology

1.1 - Data Collection

Our research project was designed into three parts: (1) background research and data collection, (2) data organization and map creation, and finally (3) data interpretation and further questions that spawned from our analysis. In order to track our progress, we regularly updated a written journal documenting our procedure, metadata, interaction with other Holocaust scholars, data problems and other research complications, as well as questions and ideas for future study that arose throughout.

We began our analysis with a general survey of *Einsatzgruppen* literature to determine our area of focus within the hierarchy of various *gruppen* and *kommandos* (Appendix 1) and which of the four *Einsatzgruppen* (EG A, B, C, or D) to study. At the suggestion of scholar Waitman Beorn of UNC, Chapel Hill, we selected EG-B for our study, due to the availability of data and Waitman's ongoing scholarship on the subject. With this focus, we parsed out *Einsatzgruppe* B information from various sources, though primarily the series of progress reports known as the Operational Situation Reports (OSR, as compiled in *The Einsatzgruppen Reports*) from EG officers. Unfortunately, we discovered that the OSR's lacked consistent coverage, not only of EG-B, but of any of the various configurations of sub-units we examined. Short of transcribing, compiling, and coding the entire series of documents, and thus losing any semblance of focus (not to mention feasibility), we sought alternate avenues.

Like a light in the darkness, the discovery of the Jäger Report solved all our existing data issues. Jäger's consistent documentation of EK-3's "progress" provided us with enough raw information of precise locations (Baltic States, specifically Lithuania and Latvia), dates (July 2nd through December 1st, 1941), activities (various massacres large and small), and victim breakdowns (137,346 total) to produce a compelling and informative flash map (Appendix 2). Using the Jäger Report as our base source, we then

began to build and organize the excel database which we would later employ to create the flash map.

1.2 – Data Organization

The initial spreadsheet we created in Excel was a direct capture of previously translated and transcribed copies of the reports, found in digital form (Jewish Virtual Library) and confirmed by the published form (*The Good Old Days*) for completeness and accuracy. After compiling the data into a spreadsheet, we began the troublesome process of geocoding each event using the U.S. GEOnet name server, as well as internet research for those points which failed to resolve during the first round. We then used several internet sources, including the searchable gazetteer created by *Falling Rain Genomics* as well as the wide array of historical data associated with pre-war Jewish communities found at the *JewishGen* archives. Through this process we were able to resolve, with varying degrees of certainty, all but one of the places described in the Jäger Report (*Jahiunai*).

We created our primary map animation using this basic data, identifying each event by space, time (beginning and end date), and the number of victims broken down into four categories. Simplifying the classification used in the Report, we divided the victims into the following categories: Jewish Men (*Jews*), Jewish Women (*Jewesses*), Jewish Children (*Children*) and Other (suspected communists or sympathizers, criminals, gypsies, mentally disabled, or otherwise undesirable). To accompany our initial map depicting the distribution massacres over space and time, we used our spreadsheet-database to create a graph examining the changing composition of EK victims over the time period (Appendix 7).

The database compilation process experienced two major complications. The vast majority of the massacres chronicled in the Jäger Report were recorded as having been completed in a single day (91 out of a total 113)**.** Certain massacres, however, such as the campaign in Daugavpils (*Dunanburg*) stretched 39 days from July 13 to August 21, 1941. To avoid significantly altering our data by assigning the entire 39-day victim total to a single day, subsequently misrepresenting as one immense slaughter what was most likely an ongoing series of smaller massacres over the course of several weeks, we simplified

each prolonged event into a single point with a value equal to the total number of victims, divided by the length of the event (NOTE: it was noticed late in the process that these massacres were mistakenly shortened during our calculating "length of event" using the difference in dates. As such, those massacres which took place over the course of three days, 3 4 5, are shown to have a length of only 5-3 = 2. However, this error should not alter the overall patterns represented by the data). As this technique functions as a temporary solution to fulfill the requirements of our database, further study cross-referencing sources that shed light on specific massacres, such as the campaign at Daugavpils, are necessary to achieve more precise information pertaining to the daily victim totals. Such information would also allow for a more conclusive analysis of the changing operational strategy of the EK-3.

The second complication we encountered was caused by a lack of consistency in victim breakdown figures. While the majority of Jäger's daily reports provided detailed figures describing the composition of the victim populations, several of the larger massacres lack this data entirely. To maintain data continuity, we used a basic averaging technique to fill in the missing values. For events that took place over several days, the average of all other massacres taking place during that period was used. For events that had no duration, or did not last long enough to provide at least 5 points of data, an average of the previous five massacres was used. If five massacres hadn't occurred within the previous five days, massacres occurring after the point in question were added until at least five data points were assembled. With a value for the average percentage breakdown for each category, we multiplied the reported totals (which were consistently provided) by these percentages to obtain an estimated count of victims by category. Clearly, to achieve more conclusive results, one must study these massacres in greater depth in order to determine more accurate victim totals.

To create the maps themselves, we imported the tabular data into ArcGIS (a Geographical Information System software package) and used latitude/longitude data from GeoNET to plot each massacre as a point feature on a map. For symbolization, we used proportional symbols, which allow the true range of values to be grasped, and are ideally suited for animation (as classing distorts changing values, showing gradual changes as discrete jumps in value). To animate the map, we used ArcMap's built-in animation functions to plot the points day by day according to their starting and ending

dates. For events that took place over more than one day, points remain on the map for the entire period, with their size referring to the death *rate* as described above, rather than the grand total as found in the reports. Thus, for accurate interpretation, the viewer must note that such symbols represent a *marginal increase* in victims. In exchange for the ability to represent the features over their time-span, this symbology creates an assumption that the rate of killing was uniform over the span of each event, an assertion that--based on the larger patterns of irregularity in our data--appears grossly unreasonable.

To create final visualizations, we exported (despite earnest resistance on the part of ArcMap) the map as video files with PNG compression (a given animation was exported in two segments and combined using QuickTime Pro™ due to limitations of ArcMap's animation engine). These video files were then imported into Adobe Photoshop CS3 as a layered animation, and saved as a Photoshop PSD file, for consumption by Adobe Flash CS3. The PSD file was brought to its final destination as a flash movie, with each frame of the animation corresponding to a *keyframe* of the Flash movie. The graphs created in Excel were also imported into Flash, and interactive controls were added.

Data Analysis

2.1 Results

The results of our maps reflect the importance of scale in geographical analysis. Our study illustrates how multi-scale analysis provides information hidden in a particular sub-scale. On the low resolution map, the northeastern movement of *Einsatzgruppe* A appears linear both geographically and temporally (Appendix 3). Even higher resolution maps that depict the movements of sub-units fail to show the high variation over both space and time revealed by our animation (Appendix 4). Furthermore, both low scale visual representations imply that EK-3 operates as a single unified group forging its way steadily toward Leningrad, which obscures our interpretation of their operational logic.

When examined in greater spatio-temporal detail, their movement, as indicated by our Flash Map, appears far more scattered and illogical (Appendix 5). The chaotic

distribution of massacres, sometimes even occurring on the same day, suggests that EK-3 must have operated in semi-autonomous units, traveling independently from one another. While readily apparent in a higher scale visual depiction, such a dynamic would otherwise be unclear from the tabular data and textural reports.

When we refined our scale to an even higher geo-temporal degree, we began to discover spatiotemporal patterns in EK-3 movement. For example, when we focused our attention on southeastern Lithuania from late August 1941 through early November, we recognized a sequence of massacres concentrated in the same region all within 100-120 kilometers of each other. The succession of massacres condensed in the southeastern section of the country suggests a campaign strategy to focus on that particular region during this time period (*Appendix 6*). Upon further high scale observation, we noticed several of these massacre patterns in different parts of the country further highlighting the importance of scale in understanding the patterns of EK-3 activity.

Extensive comparative analysis of our victim breakdown graph and historical maps supported our hypothesis that the Nazi extermination policy in the Baltic States functioned as a two-part process. The first phase focused on terrorizing the undesirable population into submission by liquidating their political leaders as evidenced in the comparatively higher proportion of political opponents liquidated in the first two months (July and early August) of EK-3 occupation. This process would continue across Lithuania as EK-3 subdued the communities behind the rapidly advancing German front lines. Once the army's forward progress slowed, they began the second phase, shifting their efforts to the mass extermination of the Lithuanian Jewish population. The shift in death rates by population revealing a sharp increase in women and children coincides with this transition in extermination policy (Appendix 7). The spike in the death totals among Jewish children indicates the total shift in extermination policy for they stand only as a threat Nazi ideology and not the German army.

The spatiotemporal dynamics depicted in the historical map in Appendix 8 further reinforces the theory of a two-part extermination procedure. The rapid movement of the German army across the entirety of Lithuania and Latvia during the first weeks in July, as represented by the dashed line, considered in conjunction with low extermination totals and proportionally high death rates of political adversaries, implies that EK-3 lacked the time necessary to implement a full-scale killing operation. However, with the

little time available, their actions concentrated on decapitating the command hierarchy of the targeted populations, thereby minimizing the likelihood of an organized uprising. Once the army began to slow, as seen by the comparatively meager advancement of the German frontline over the following two months and far greater extermination totals, the full-fledged extermination phase, or "mopping up" according to Jäger, was initiated (Appendix 7).

We discovered evidence of the two-part operational strategy under higher scale analysis as well, especially in locations that the EK-3 reported massacres on repeated occasions such as the city of Panevezys. During the first two EK-3 visits to Panevezys on August 4 and August 11, 422 and 500 people were killed respectively. Those murdered were comprised primarily of Jewish males and political opponents. Less than two weeks later on August 23, the EK-3 returned for the mass killing of 7,523 Jews (1,312 Jews, 4,602 Jewesses, 1,609 Jewish children) with their efforts clearly directed at the extermination of the city's entire Jewish population including females and children.

The graphs also helped up visualize and understand the pace at which EK-3 performed major versus minor exterminations. We define major exterminations as massacres resulting in more than 2,000 deaths. The spikes on the graph reveal that major killings occur at fairly regular intervals, once every ten to fourteen days (Appendix 7). We hypothesized that the comparatively low killing rates between major massacres were due to the time and effort required to organize a mass killing. Most major massacres were preceded by one or more small massacres at the site of the imminent major extermination or nearby (within forty kilometers), which we used to indicate the arrival of troops. We hypothesize that some EK-3 members prepared the infrastructure for a major massacre. Others were dispatched as semi-autonomous units to liquidate nearby villages.

The series of massacres at Panevezys support our hypothesis. Following the minor massacres on August 4 and 11 and preceding the major massacre on August 23, we observe minor (250-500 deaths) massacres occurring in towns within a 60 kilometer radius of Panevezys including Raseiniai, Rokiskis, and Ukmerge (Appendix 9).

2.2 – Complications

Our study of *Einsatzkommando*-3 encountered three notable complications. The first variable we were unable to avoid was the undocumented participation of Lithuanian partisans or militia. During the course of our investigation, our sources, including the Jäger Report itself, indicated that in certain cases Lithuanian partisans were active in concentrating Jews into ghettos and performing killing operations, sometimes even before the arrival of the *Einsatzkommandos*. This is evidenced in Operational Situation Report USSR Number 88 on September 19, 1941 which reads "Operations were carried out the *Sonderkommando* of the EK-3 in conjunction with the Lithuanian commando…these executions bring the number of persons liquidated by EK-3, together with Lithuanian partisans, to 46,692" (*Einsatzgruppen* Reports, 138).

In certain cases, the Jäger Report clarifies that specific executions were carried out exclusively by Lithuanian partisans operating under EK-3 command. However, it is unclear how accurately Jäger is able to document, or is concerned with documenting, the activity of the partisans prior to the arrival of the *kommandos*. At the end of his account, Jäger reports an estimated 4,000 Jews liquidated by pogroms and executions (including partisans), prior to EK-3 taking over security police duties (Jewish Virtual Library). The potential for undocumented extermination activity complicates our analysis. To address this dilemma, one must delve deeper into understanding specific massacres by examining survivor accounts, comparing census data, and cross-referencing historical resources.

Furthermore, in the cases of the massacres that did not indicate exclusively Lithuanian executioners, it is likely that some were performed by both EK-3 and Lithuanian partisans together. Thus we were forced to alter our definition of the *Einsatzkommando* to an amorphous entity consisting of a core group of Nazi officers coordinating the activity of killing squads comprised of EK troops and Lithuanian partisans.

The second obstacle that must be noted was the inherent complexity involved with inferring EK-3 movement strictly based on massacre dates and locations. We can be certain that at least some EKs had to be present on the dates of the massacres, but outside of those dates, tracking their day-to-day movements becomes far more intricate. This was particularly true since several dates required that certain groups within EK-3 operate independently of one another. None of the sources we came across gave any

comprehensive explanation of the movement patterns of these sub-units. Questions arise regarding the time and number of *kommandos* required to prepare, carry out, and conceal a massacre, as well as the methods of travel between each. These questions compel us to further analyze the relationship between the size of a massacre, the timeframe under which it was carried out, and manpower it required. Again, to tackle these issues and create a more complete portrayal of EK-3 movement and activity, more massacre-specific data must be assembled.

The third confounding factor influencing our analysis was the nature of Jäger's bias. The discrepancies between Jäger's death toll numbers and other records, including the All-Lithuania Database recording personal accounts of survivors and bystanders, forces us to reconsider the accuracy of his report. The tendency of Jäger's death tolls to be higher than those in the All-Lithuania Database, compels us to ask whether the disparity was due to human error or his personal desire to appeal to the eyes of his Nazi superior's. While we were unable to find any conclusive evidence to resolve the difference, given the proud tone of Jäger's report, it seems more likely he would inflate his death totals. "The thoroughness that characterized this destruction of human life was seen in the fact that over one hundred separate liquidation operations were included in the report" (Headland 156). Content with his progress, Jäger confidently concludes his report saying *Today I can confirm that our objective, to solve the Jewish problem for Lithuania, has been achieved by EK-3. In Lithuania there are no more Jews, apart from Jewish workers and their families*.

In his essay, *Einsatzgruppen: The Question of their Initial Operations*, Roland Headland further explains the need for skepticism: "Given the obvious sham, of the descriptive methodology of the reporters we cannot assume that the Jews were always communist officials." Oftentimes, EG officials demonized the Jews labeling them as communists or similarly menacing titles in order to justify their massacre. As the vast majority of the killings were Jews, we know that Jäger certainly has no qualms recording their deaths. However, the significant decline in the number of communists killed suggests that later in his campaign he may have tried to include them as Jews to artificially inflate the level of Ek-3's *progress* answering the "Jewish question". We must assume similar uncertainty for the massacre totals of women and children, who, according to the report, were only massacred on a large scale following the first month of

the campaign. Given that we could ensure the accuracy of Jäger's Report, we were forced to question the conclusions we drew from the proportional data in our graphs.

Future study

Throughout the process of answering our research question, we discovered a wealth of potential questions for further inquiry: What was the nature of the relationship between front line movement and *Einsatzgruppen* activity? How did this relationship differ between the various *Einsatzgruppen?* Why? Was this difference due to the nature of the front-lines or the *Einsatzgruppen* themselves?

Throughout our study, we came upon the following quotation which raised additional questions:

> *"The actions of Himmler's troops in the first phase...were determined by the speed of German conquests, the problems associated with numerous victims, and the large number of Soviet POWs.* **With the exception of Einsatzgruppe A, which operated in the Baltic States**, *the rest of the Einsatzgruppen moved so quickly through other parts of Russia that they often left large Jewish and other targeted populations behind. The second phase... was much more clinical and designed to 'cleanse' the recently conquered areas of all unwanted Jews, Roma, and the handicapped. This second wave... would involve far more troops and would also include clearing the ghettos in Poland and the occupied parts of the Soviet Union." (Crowe 204, emphasis added)*

How and why was EG-A different? How does this inform our interpretation of this study's data vis-à-vis the greater *Einsatzgruppen* picture? Did they act as a source of inspiration for the second phase activities of other *Einsatzgruppen*? Or were they merely a product of shared circumstances, which happened to manifest earlier due to uneven progress along the Eastern Front?

Finally, and most intriguingly, if—as we suspect—EK-3's activity foreshadowed the *Final Solution*, how directly connected were they to development of such ideology and policy? The Wannsee Conference occurred on January 20, 1942, a month and a half

after the Jäger report was recorded.[1] Did EK-3 activity influence the creation of the procedural framework for mass murder of the European Jewish population?

Conclusion

The introduction of geography thinking provides a fresh approach to Holocaust study by offering scholars a means of re-evaluate old questions as well as providing a spatiotemporal framework for bold new inquiry. Our study of the Einsatzkommando-3 accomplished both, reforming our previous understanding of EK-3 movements in their relation to scale and time as well as revealing the value of reframing future investigation to consider a spatial component.

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[1] The purpose of the conference was to inform heads of German Government Departments that had responsibility for various policies relating to Jews, of Reinhard Heydrich's appointment as the sole executor of the "Final solution to the Jewish question", and to obtain their agreement to subordinate their policies to him.

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