

Where Did All the Collaborators Go?

Martin Dean

In the wake of World War II there was a desire to deal quickly with war criminals, collaborators, and traitors so that people could get on with their lives again. In practice, especially in eastern Europe, this task was not so easy, as many had fled with the German occupants or at least had been displaced due to the war, and some were even recruited into those forces fighting against Nazi Germany. Those whom the authorities could lay their hands on were in most cases the smaller fish, or even people who had to some extent been coerced into serving the Germans. As men returned from the Red Army in the late 1940s, there was a renewed wave of trials as the past caught up with some individuals when they returned to their local communities. In the Soviet Union, more than three hundred thousand collaborators were arrested as traitors in the postwar years, nearly all of whom were tried and sentenced; but the vast majority of these trials took place in closed session before military tribunals in a deliberate attempt to play down the massive scale of collaboration for both domestic and foreign consumption. At the same time, detailed information was also collected on the activities of those who had fled abroad, but this information was only rarely used to prepare a formal extradition request, much being held in reserve, probably for blackmail or espionage purposes.¹

Therefore, as the evidence presented by Jeffrey Jones amply illustrates, the issue of wartime collaboration with the Germans was handled with caution by the Soviet authorities, especially in the first months and years following the liberation. Just as the Germans had been forced to rely on some specialist workers to run the local occupation administration, regardless of previous political affiliation, so too under Soviet rule there was necessarily some continuity of personnel, as the western Allies also experienced when they occupied Germany. The detailed work of weeding out collaborators was a complex process that also opened the door to denunciations and favoritism. Jones argues convincingly that some administrators may have preferred to keep subordinates against which there was compromising material, as this could be exploited to ensure their personal loyalty.

The opinions stated in this paper are those of the author alone and do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum or of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council.

1. See my recent article, "Soviet War Crimes Lists and Their Role in the Investigation of Nazi War Criminals in the West, 1987–2000," in Alfred Gottwaldt, Norbert Kampe, and Peter Klein, eds., *NS-Gewaltherrschaft: Beiträge zur historischen Forschung und juristischen Aufarbeitung* (Berlin, 2005), 456–70. The figure of some 320,000 individuals arrested as "collaborators" in the Soviet Union after the war was published recently on the web site of the Federal'naia sluzhba bezopasnosti (FSB, the successor organization in Russia of the KGB). See O. B. Mozokhin, "Statistika repressivnoi deiatel'nosti organov bezopasnosti SSSR na period s 1921 po 1953 gg.," at <http://www.fsb.ru/new/mozohin.html> (last consulted 1 July 2005). See also the accompanying paper of Tanja Pentter regarding Soviet trials.

Slavic Review 64, no. 4 (Winter 2005)

In his essay, Jones develops three quite different types of sources to present a careful analysis of how the postwar discourse on collaboration in the Rostov region operated at different levels. While the internal party discussions reflected concerns about the considerable degree of collaboration even within the party ranks, there were clearly attempts to play down its extent publicly for pragmatic reasons, even as many collaborators were tried or dismissed from their posts. The image presented in the press was generally one of relentless abhorrence for any such traitorous actions, while between the lines one can read at least some acknowledgement of the different shades of gray that survival under German occupation might have demanded. The fragmentary evidence of what people on the street actually experienced and thought goes even further in the direction of viewing collaboration as a sliding scale on which almost everyone was bound to figure somewhere, as the moral choices involved were usually not black and white.

Tanja Penter draws our attention to the absence in Jones's analysis of evidence concerning the number of people that were tried for collaboration and what the discourse of these trials might tell us about the branding of collaborators as practiced by the state. Notable features of the Soviet war crimes program were its unremitting nature, the harsh penalties applied on a massive scale, and the focus on specific acts of disloyalty to the Soviet Union.² The first public trial of local collaborators held at Krasnodar in Russia in the fall of 1943 certainly set a high standard in terms of the invective directed against the "traitors, fascist hirelings, and boot-lickers" who found themselves in the dock. But the judicial procedures and quality of the evidence were unable to match this rhetoric, relying mainly on what were clearly forced confessions from individuals whose "collaboration" was not in doubt, but whose direct participation in specific crimes was not always clear from the other evidence presented.³ The focus on trying individuals for the fact of collaboration rather than for personal participation in specific "war crimes" meant that "guilt" was easy to prove. Yet the interrogations of local witnesses in many of the secret proceedings held before the numerous military tribunals also contain a wealth of material on specific local attitudes toward collaboration, as well as the gray areas and double dealing that Jones highlights in his paper.

Another important set of sources not mentioned by Jones is the work of the Soviet Extraordinary State Commissions.⁴ The official summary re-

2. See the essay of Tanja Penter in this volume and also her essay, "Die lokale Gesellschaft im Donbass unter deutscher Okkupation 1941–43," in *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Nationalsozialismus*, vol. 19, *Kooperation und Verbrechen: Formen der "Kollaboration" im östlichen Europa 1939–1945* (Göttingen, 2003), 183–223.

3. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) holds a video documentary on the Krasnodar trial, including some footage from the court proceedings, prepared by Irmgard and Bengt von zur Mühlen in the late 1980s, "Krasnodar: The Trial of Krasnodar, 1943" (Waltham, Mass., 199-?). I am grateful also to Ilya Bourzman for making available to me his unpublished paper, "'The People's Verdict!' The Soviet Military Tribunal in Krasnodar in 1943" (paper, presented to the Faculty and Graduate Seminar in the Department of History, Johns Hopkins University, 2004).

4. For the reports on the city of Rostov, see Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii, Moscow (GARF), f. 7021, op. 40, d. 1, 10, 14, 778, 779, 780, 781, 782 and 844. Copies

ports contain excessive rhetoric similar to that found in the Krasnodar trial, but the witness statements included with some reports often mention the role played by local collaborators as well as Germans, reflecting the fact that for local inhabitants the collaborators whom they knew personally often generated more hatred than German officials they were unable to name. Jones also captures the intensity of neighborly sentiments of betrayal from an oral history, which depicts the collaborationist “*politsai*” as acting “worse than the Germans” (a familiar refrain encountered in trials of Belarusian collaborators, and especially among Jewish survivors).

Yet despite the self-acknowledged limitations of his sources, which consist of “representations and reflections of reality, but not reality itself,” Jones’s essay is also quite revealing on several aspects of wartime collaboration that can be hard to get at even using more conventional sources, such as surviving German documentation, wartime newspapers, or oral testimonies. For example, his comments on the role of housing administrators in revealing Jews and communists to the Germans and also redistributing a scarce resource among the local population draw attention to a key sector of the local administration under German occupation that has been largely overlooked in most regional studies.

In his article, Jones captures well some of the postwar tension that inevitably developed between people that lived through the German occupation and those who experienced the war only from the Soviet side of the front. As his evidence confirms, not all of those returning from forced labor in Germany were necessarily deported to Siberia, but most still faced considerable obstacles in their careers and lingering suspicion from the party.⁵ With regard to the allegations of collaboration made against cossacks found in Jones’s sources, these were based in part on real evidence, such as the party cards found among German documents, or their known participation in German units. The evidence he cites, however, reveals a reticence by the regional Soviet authorities to turn the cossacks into an outlaw group at this sensitive time.

Another key feature of Jones’s analysis that rings true is the constructed nature of personal wartime histories. It is not by chance that during the last days of the German occupation of Belarus the ranks of the partisans swelled considerably, including a number of people who had previously collaborated with the Germans. In the Belarusian trials I have examined, the most common line of defense by local policemen is that they were secretly smuggling information and weapons to the partisans. In only a few cases were police members able to give this story added credi-

of these files are also available at USHMM, RG 22.022M, reel 10. A short article on the Holocaust in Rostov, where no ghetto was formed, can be found in Ilya Ehrenburg and Vasily Grossman, eds., *The Complete Black Book of Russian Jewry*, trans. and ed. David Patterson; foreword, Irving Louis Horowitz; introduction, Helen Segall (New Brunswick, N.J., 2002), 214–16; see also Andrej Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord: Die Einsatzgruppe D in der südlichen Sowjetunion 1941–1943* (Hamburg, 2003), 560–65.

5. On the Ostarbeiter and their repatriation, see P. M. Polian, *Zhertvy dnukh diktatur: Ostarbaitery i voennoplennyye v Tre'tem Reikhe i ikh repatriatsiia* (Moscow, 1996).

bility, like Evgenii Brazovskii, who left a bomb behind in the Mir police station that exploded when he deserted to the partisans.⁶

The issue of female collaboration with the Germans is also an important one, as the number of women trapped behind the German lines greatly outnumbered the men. Apart from the highly charged issue of sexual relations with the enemy (“horizontal collaboration”), there were many other ways in which women interacted with the occupiers, ranging from the performance of menial tasks to work as translators or even informants. The work of Karel Berkhoff, for example, demonstrates that some women did not hesitate to show solidarity with Soviet prisoners of war, in spite of the risks.⁷ Jones’s essay contains several examples of personal histories demonstrating that those under German occupation or even working for the Germans still had a range of options available from outright collaboration to passive resistance, or even exploiting the position of translator to mislead the Germans and save lives.⁸

Klaus-Peter Friedrich’s essay, which covers a great deal of ground, puts forward several rather controversial theses that are still likely to prompt a defensive response from many Polish historians. For example, Friedrich argues that many Polish peasants were better off under the German occupation than they had been in the 1930s. While the terms of trade clearly shifted away from the cities back toward the countryside, this claim should remain with the proviso that there was not much that peasants could buy under wartime conditions in return for their produce. Friedrich also demonstrates that the motives behind certain actions are not always clear. Withholding grain supplies from the German occupants, for example, could be seen as an act of self-interest rather than resistance. The same dubious moral standards apply also to those who traded illegally with Jews in the ghetto, as it was usually done at inflated prices that brought a considerable profit. Nevertheless, the dearth of goods in the Polish wartime economy probably meant that economic necessity as much as greed encouraged many Poles to acquire former Jewish property; and as Friedrich notes, it is still not clear to what extent Poles also took over former Jewish enterprises, as these were reserved in the first instance for Germans and ethnic Germans (*Volksdeutsche*).

The main thrust of Friedrich’s article is to question the still somewhat complacent Polish historiography on the issue of collaboration in the Holocaust, even in the wake of the Jedwabne debate. In this respect Friedrich’s article may appear polemical to some (the accusations of wide-

6. See Martin Dean, “Microcosm: Collaboration and Resistance during the Holocaust in the Mir Rayon of Belarus, 1941–44,” in D. Gaunt, P. A. Levine, and L. Palosuo, eds., *Collaboration and Resistance during the Holocaust: Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania* (Bern, 2004), 254.

7. See Karel C. Berkhoff, “The ‘Russian’ Prisoners of War in Nazi-Ruled Ukraine as Victims of Genocidal Massacre,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 15, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 1–32.

8. The most amazing example of a translator acting in this way is the story of Oswald Rufeisen. See Nechama Tec, *In the Lion’s Den: The Life of Oswald Rufeisen* (New York, 1990).

spread Polish anti-Semitism being harder to swallow coming from a German historian), but many of his concerns remain well founded. At a recent conference in Poznań that compared the Soviet and German occupations in three separate regions of Poland (the territories incorporated into the Reich, the General Government, and the eastern provinces [*kresy wschodnie*]),⁹ papers on collaboration were included in all three regional sections. Indeed, the presentations included much abstract discussion about the nature of collaboration, including reference to the concept of a sliding scale of collaboration, in which almost all parts of society were in some way involved. Nonetheless, very few specific examples of collaboration were examined, as if Jedwabne might still have been rather an isolated case. The previous tendency to focus specifically on so-called Jewish collaboration with the Soviets was, however, deflated by the strong empirical findings presented by Dr. Alexander Guryanov. In his paper, Guryanov noted from reliable Soviet data now available that Jews were roughly twice as likely as Poles to be deported from the eastern Polish territories occupied by the Soviets in 1939–41.¹⁰ As Friedrich argues, however, there is still the need for a less mythologized approach to the “heroic role” of Poles during World War II, including a much more realistic assessment of the scale and the nature of both resistance and collaboration as practiced by Poles. Interestingly, Friedrich argues that even the post-war communist governments may have contributed to the “heroic myth” out of a desire to create a more homogenous Polish society after the war, and also by directing allegations of collaboration instrumentally mainly against their political and class enemies.

As a corrective to this apologetic tradition, Friedrich explores several examples of direct Polish collaboration with the Germans in anti-Jewish measures. He mentions specifically the role of the Blue Police and also the Polish Labor Service (*Baudienst*) units in mass “Aktionen” against the Jews in Częstochowa and Tarnów respectively. In addition, the common ground some extreme right-wing Polish nationalist groups shared with the Germans in anti-Semitism led a few to assist the enemy by handing Jews directly over to them in a show of informal cooperation on this issue. Certainly the accounts of Jewish survivors often stress their personal bitterness at betrayal by Polish neighbors, as only one bad apple might cost them their lives. From inside the ghettos, however, it was difficult for Jews to gauge accurately the degree of collaboration within Polish society, as direct contacts had largely been severed. Nevertheless, the accounts of Jewish survivors who passed as Poles reveal that quite different treatment was

9. The conference entitled “German and Soviet Occupation in Poland, 1939–1945” was held in Poznań, 24–26 February 2005, and hosted jointly by the Instytut Pamięci Narodowej and the German Historical Institute, Warsaw. Papers from the conference are scheduled to be published in 2006.

10. Alexander Guryanov, “Soviet Repressions in Eastern Poland, 1939–41” (paper, conference on “German and Soviet Occupation in Poland, 1939–1945,” Poznań, 25 February 2005). Dr. Guryanov works for the Memorial organization in Moscow.

given to people believed to be working for the Polish Underground as opposed to fugitive Jews.¹¹

A key point raised by Friedrich is the chronological aspect to assessing collaboration. By the end of the occupation, continued collaboration was clearly foolish, except for those already implicated in Nazi crimes, most of whom fled with the occupiers. But at the start of the occupation there were clearly a number of people who envisaged the German presence remaining for some time and arranged themselves in different ways with the occupying authorities. This demonstrates the need to see cooperation or collaboration as an interactive process constantly subject to renegotiation as circumstances changed. On the other hand, the strategy of the Polish resistance, based mainly on organizing secretly in preparation for a full-blown uprising as the Soviet forces approached, reflected their own divided priorities, geared as much to forestalling the Soviets as defeating the Germans. As Friedrich's figures for death rates in the Polish countryside indicate, the intensity of partisan warfare in Poland was considerably below that experienced in Belarus.¹²

Another topic on which Friedrich challenges Polish historians to be more critical is the role played by leaders of the Catholic Church. He points to several examples of bishops and priests assisting the Germans in a variety of ways, some of them apparently motivated in part by their own strongly anticommunist sentiments. This is a very sensitive and complex topic that still awaits an authoritative analysis based on the church's own archival material. Unfortunately, we must still wait for the opening of the relevant church archives, most notably those in the Vatican, to help unravel the church's role in the intertwined dialectic of resistance and collaboration in Poland.

In terms of the public discourse issues examined by Jones, the most interesting examples from Poland come from the wartime underground press, which published some general guidelines on what behavior was acceptable during the occupation. Nevertheless, unraveling Polish collaboration will remain a complex task, even once the layer of postwar encrusted mythology has been removed. Alongside the massive participation of Poles in the German administration at the lower levels, including the running of key economic organizations, such as the agrarian cooperatives, there was also widespread penetration by the resistance, with many individuals playing a double game. This was especially prevalent among the Blue Police and also in the railway service. As my own research on the *Schutzmannschaft* (local police) in the occupied eastern territories has shown, some Poles were apparently urged to join the collaborationist police by underground groups, while others did so out of more opportunistic motives. But members of both categories appear to have been among the several hundred Poles serving in *Schutzmannschaft* units who were

11. Lala Fishman and Steven Weingartner, *Lala's Story: A Memoir of the Holocaust* (Evanston, 1997), 193–97.

12. On the scale of partisan warfare in Belarus, see Christian Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde: Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weissrussland 1941 bis 1944* (Hamburg, 1999).

tried and punished for their police service, including many who actively participated in the German-organized liquidation actions against Jewish ghettos.¹³

In summary, the titles of both papers reflect a previous tendency in both the Soviet and the Polish case to sweep the issue of collaboration under the carpet and avoid an overly painful confrontation with the history of the occupation. Dismissing collaborators as only a few black sheep was common to the approach of both communists and nationalists in much of the former Soviet Union, if for diametrically opposed reasons. But the figures cited above of some three hundred thousand people tried for “betraying the Motherland” in the Soviet Union confirm that in many regions it was far from a marginal phenomenon, as these figures do not include a possibly larger number who managed to flee.

In Poland the expulsion of many so-called Volksdeutsche after the war contributed to the myth of “heroic resistance” by the rest of the population that remained. Yet, as the work of Doris Bergen and others has shown, the notion of “ethnic Germans” even as interpreted by the SS was largely constructed and included many Poles who sought material benefits from a favorable classification by the German authorities.¹⁴ A surprising source regarding the extent of “Polish collaboration” is provided by the records of the “Free Polish Army” held by the Public Record Office in London. Of some three hundred thousand members who had joined by the end of the war, reportedly more than fifty thousand had served previously in some organized unit on the German side. Included were some “Volksdeutsche,” who became subject to conscription, but also many others, including of course ethnic Belarusians, Ukrainians, and Lithuanians, as well as many ethnic Poles, who served in German Police, Wehrmacht, and even SS forces, as is openly reported in many of their “Anders Army” personnel files.¹⁵

13. See Martin Dean, “Polen in der einheimischen Hilfspolizei: Ein Aspekt der Besatzungsrealität in den deutsch besetzten ostpolnischen Gebieten,” in Bernhard Chiari, ed., *Die polnische Heimatarmee: Geschichte und Mythos der Armia Krajowa seit dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Munich, 2003), 355–68. An English translation is forthcoming: “Poles Serving in the German Local Police in the Eastern Districts of Poland and Their Role in the Holocaust,” in *Polin* 18 (2005).

14. Doris L. Bergen, “The Nazi Concept of ‘Volksdeutsche’ and the Exacerbation of Anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe, 1939–45,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 29, no. 4 (1994): 569–82. On the competition between ideological and pragmatic interpretations of racial purity in the implementation of the *Volksliste* in the Incorporated Territories (western Poland), see, for example, Isabel Heinemann, “‘Ethnic Resettlement’ and Inter-Agency Cooperation in the Occupied Eastern Territories,” in Gerald Feldman and Wolfgang Seibel, eds., *Networks of Nazi Persecution: Business, Bureaucracy, and the Organization of the Holocaust* (Oxford, 2005), 223–27.

15. During the 1990s the personnel files of the former “Anders Army” were held at a storage location of the Public Records Office in a former aircraft hanger at Hayes, Middlesex. I was able to examine several hundred such files, including many that referred specifically to previous service with the Germans, as part of my research at that time for the Metropolitan Police War Crimes Unit based in New Scotland Yard. Regarding the some fifty thousand members of the “Anders Army” who had fought previously with the Axis, see Sir Thomas Hetherington and William Chalmers, *War Crimes: Report of the War Crimes Inquiry* (London, 1989).

The full history of wartime collaboration in much of eastern Europe remains to be written. This is a history not only of organizations, groups, policies, and decrees but also the personal life histories of hundreds of thousands of individuals who had to take far-reaching decisions under swiftly changing circumstances. The insights revealed from Jones's internal and published Soviet sources and the new interpretations put forward from Friedrich's more wide-ranging study will both help to reconstruct "collaboration" in its full scope, ranging from passive cooperation to involvement in atrocities. But this history also involved western Europe and the wider world, as many collaborators fled to countries such as Germany, Britain, and France, as well as Australia and the Americas. In order to tell this story, access has to be gained to a number of archives still largely shrouded in secrecy, such as those of the KGB, the Vatican, or even the Public Record Office. Partly due to the shadows cast by the Cold War and political expediency, as well as simple national pride, the postwar public discourse on collaboration in eastern Europe remains incomplete and unsatisfactory. Examining collaboration, however, also requires the identification of the collaborators and the deconstruction of the more comfortable personal histories they may have preferred to live with—a painful process indeed, which perhaps can only be successfully undertaken when they are unable to argue back. But that time is now fast approaching.