

I N V E S T I G A T I O N

Testimony of Oberleutnant Erwin BINGEL, 2406004, German prisoner of war; Romilly, France, 17 August 1945.

Major F. W. CARSTENS, 0370381, FA, duly designated and appointed Investigator-Examiner for Headquarters, U.S. War Crimes Branch, United States Army, APO 757, conducted this examination.

Staff Sergeant Dean M. ELDER, 39453926, appeared before the Investigator-Examiner as reporter and was sworn by him in the following manner:

"You swear that you will faithfully perform the duties of reporter to this investigation now being conducted by me, So Help You God."

Tec 4 Otto SLOSS, 38446871, appeared before the Investigator-Examiner as interpreter and was sworn by him in the following manner:

"You swear that you will truly interpret in this investigation now being conducted by me, so Help You God."

Tec 4 Otto Sloss was questioned by the Investigator-Examiner as to his qualifications as interpreter in the following manner:

- Q. State your name, grade, and serial number.
- A. Otto Sloss, Tec 4, 38446871.
- Q. What is your present assignment?
- A. Interpreter for War Crimes Investigating Team Number 6827, War Crimes Branch, U. S. Army.
- Q. What languages do you speak?
- A. German and English.
- Q. What is your native tongue?
- A. German.
- Q. How long have you lived in Germany?
- A. I was born in Austria, which was annexed to Germany in 1938, in 1923 and left there in 1939.
- Q. Where did you learn to speak English?
- A. In the United States. I graduated from the Eudora High School, in Eudora, Arkansas in 1940.
- Q. When did you come to the United States?
- A. I arrived in New York on 11 October 1939.
- Q. When did you come overseas with the Army?
- A. November 1944.
- Q. Prior to your present duty assignment, have you ever served as an interpreter of German into English and English into German?
- A. Yes. I was with Headquarters Third and Seventh Army and served as interpreter for the War Crimes Branch there. That was for a period of about a month.

Q. Any experience prior to this capacity as an interpreter?

A. No.

The testimony of the witness examined in the course of this investigation and which is attached and made a part hereof was secured, after the witness had been sworn by the Investigator-Examiner under the authority of Article of War 114 (Section 1586, Title 10, United States Code) in the following form:

"You swear that the evidence you shall give in this investigation now being conducted by me shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; So Help You God."

Oberleutnant Erwin BINGEL, 2406004, German prisoner of war, appeared before the Investigator-Examiner and testified as follows:

Q. Do you know anything about the mass killing of Jews at WENITZA and UMAN in Poland?

A. Yes.

Q. Were you an eye witness at any of the massacres in the above places?

A. Yes.

Q. Give me an accurate eye-witness account of everything that occurred, including specific details and descriptions of any of the perpetrators whom you can describe, together with a description of how you happened to be in this locality at the time of the massacres.

A. My training unit was the 87th Infantry Regiment, Wiesbaden, 36th Division; and we belonged to the 12th Army Corps. I made the Westfeldzug (military action in the West) in 1940 with this unit. I was wounded on the 14th of June 1940 and was taken to the hospital in Haunau, on the Maine, Germany. I was discharged from the hospital in December 1940; and since my injury did not permit reassignment to an infantry regiment, and a request for discharge was disapproved, I was assigned to the 783rd Landesschutzen Battalion which belonged to the 12th Army Corps. The task of this unit was to guard the prisoners of war taken during the Westfeldzug. At the beginning, this unit accomplished this task exactly according to current regulations.

On the 1st of September 1941, we were relieved and received orders to march to LEMBERG. In the meantime, the battalion was reinforced with Goh AV DU from various units. The new task was to take over a replacement camp. The 3rd Company with Hauptmann BROCKER as their commander and the 4th Company with Oberleutnant RIECKE in command took over the guard. I, myself, was in charge of the 2nd Company until the following incidents.

At first I stayed with my company in Germany and turned over the various camps to the unit following us. The other three companies had already started to move to the East. I arrived on the Polish border on the 7th of September 1941. The direction of our march lead through GALIZIA towards LEMBERG. Unless one had no feeling at all, one had to notice what kind of actions were taken against the Jewish people in this part of Poland.

An example: If several SS men walked on the sidewalk and Jews were coming towards them, it seemed to be on the order that these people were simply robbed of their rights and were beaten up like dogs. Or, if they would forget to lift their hats in time, it happened that they would be lying on the street in the next minute.

These incidents did not help you to hold your head proud as a soldier, but one had to be ashamed to wear this uniform for a land that let things like this happen. Deeply disappointed, we went to our destination.

On the 12th of September 1941, we met the unit which had already taken over the replacement camp at the airport in WENIZA. The 3rd Company, with Hauptmann BECKER as commander, furnished the guard. This company made itself notorious in the camp because of the atrocities which it committed in the various camps. I will give you more detailed descriptions at the end. The persons responsible will also be named at the end of this report.

We arrived in UMAN on the 15th of September. I reported to the town commander and received further orders. My orders were first to put under guard all railways in this territory and to close the airport of UMAN. The next day a special order was issued to close the airport for all traffic including the Wehrmacht.

My company, after being reinforced, marched to the airport on the designated day. One could feel certain restlessness among the men because one could justly presume that something special was about to happen. The singing of Russian songs could be heard from the city, and one could hear the great mass of people coming. One could see the main roads; and huge columns, marching in columns of sixes, arrived at the airport singing. It was very noticeable that not only men but men, women, and children of all ages were among them. No one could figure out the meaning of this mass assembly.

All this became even more mysterious when I was ordered to relieve the guards on the next post. These posts were relieved by a Feldgendarm Oberleutnant Georg BEUER. A description of this man will be found at the end of this report; I pulled all my men, except a few main posts, who remained on the UMAN-KIEV road to a 400 meter distance. The main posts were 200 meters away from the assembly area. In the meantime, it became daylight and one could recognize everything now; but since one could not get any closer, one could only determine what was going on if one watched very carefully.

When the square in front of the airport was filled, some trucks arrived. Several gendarmes got out and were taken to the side immediately. Some tables were taken off a truck and put up. While all this was happening, several cars of Ukrainians, lead by SS officers, arrived. The militia also brought along a truck with tools and a truck with chlorchalk. On this day, long ditches which looked like potato rows were dug in front of the airport. The truck went along these ditches; and in a distance of 15 to 20 meters, six to eight sacks of chlorchalk were unloaded. Several transport planes (Junker 52) had, in the meantime, landed at the airport. Several units of SS soldiers came out of these planes and marched to the position of the Feldgendarmerie Kommando and took their position there.

One could recognize now that both companies were being put under oath. My interpreter who was Jewish, a fact which was known only to me, told me that he had found out that this mass meeting was brought about because of an ordinance which was posted in all streets in UMAN and had been spread around Uman by the Ukrainian militia.

This ordinance read as follows: "To the Jewish population in Uman city and vicinity; ORDER -- in order to find out how many Jews are in the city of Uman and Land; all Jews, regardless of age, will report on the day known to them to their report place. Absence will result in severe punishment."

This ordinance resulted in the presence of all those for whom it was intended. This harmless ordinance could be connected with the preparations which had been made. Therefore, we all were terrified with what we had to view in the following hours. They took a row of Jews and lead them to the tables where they had to stand and take off everything which they wore and had on their person. Many of them still had jewelry pieces which they had to put on the table. After they had been undressed, all of them, regardless of sex, had to stand in front of the ditch; and the Kommandos formed a column behind them in order to accomplish their deeds which are known to the whole world now.

These Kommandos killed the people in the row with machine pistols and 0.8 pistols with such an efficiency that it made one think they had made such activities their life work.

Women who had babies from two to three weeks on their breasts were not spared by this terrible gang. They were also not spared the sight that their children were grabbed by the leg and killed with a hit of the pistol or with a club and then thrown, partly alive, into the ditch. Only after they had viewed the most terrible, they themselves were shot and freed from this sight.

After the first row had been robbed of their lives in this inhuman manner, the next row was assembled. The men who were in the row had to get shovels and put chlorchalk on some of the corpses which were still moving. After that they had to go to the table where they had to undress also. After they had been undressed they followed the foot steps of the others with the difference that the men who did the shooting tried to outdo each other in cruelty so that one would not be left behind in these atrocities. The air was full with the crying of the children. With dull sense, one had to think of the women and children at home who thought they could be proud of their men and fathers whom they presumed were fighting in the columns of the German army for their Fatherland; while, in reality, the so-called "Elite" troops committed the most terrible crime in the honor dress of the soldier.

Two of my men who stood closer than any of the others had already left their post before the prescribed time. Oberfeldweber RENNFR, whose description is at the end of this report, pulled his men back to our line. Besides this, this Feldwebel and another man had to be taken to a hospital in LEMBERG because they had suffered a complete nervous collapse. The whole action lasted from eight in the morning until 1630 in the afternoon. At five o'clock the place was just like a cemetery. Only a few dogs were running around smelling the blood which hung in the air. The echo of the shots was still in our ears. The whole thing would have seemed like a terrible dream had it not been for the graves, which were covered, in front of us.

It is difficult for anyone to understand that a nation would, through its state head and "elite" group, allow such things to happen for which there is no excuse whatsoever. When we returned to our quarters, my men stormed at me and asked me to request a reason for this action from the headquarters. I fulfilled this request by going to the city commander with one of my officers and asked him for an explanation. I was told that a special order signed by Reichsfuehrer SS HIMMLER had been issued. This order was shown to me at my request. Following is this order: "Soldiers of the Waffen-SS -- six of our best officers were found hung in the forest of WENIZA, district KIEV. They were found nude, their legs up in the air, their bodies cut and the intestines hanging out. Since it is certain that this deed was done by Jewish partisans, I have decided to take the following action in this case. I order that 10,000 Jews, regardless of sex or age, shall die for each of these six officers in the district of Kiev. Even the child in the cradle must be stamped out if it is a poisonous snake. Each must remember his oath and accomplish his duty regardless what the order. We live in an iron time in which the sweeping must be done with an iron broom."

This was the order which had been issued to the murder kommando and had been accomplished by them in a most gruesome manner. It was proved that 24,000 had been shot on this day. This number had been determined by my men and was later confirmed by official newspaper report which said that 62,000 had been shot. This number, as well as all other numbers which I state in this report, have been confirmed at that time by the Free Ukrainian press. I was notified the next day that two of my men had been arrested because they had taken pictures of this incident; and when the film was developed, they had been arrested by the Feldgendarmerie. Some of these pictures are still in the possession of these people, and I will make a special mark after their names at the end of this report. Both of these men were sentenced to a year of prison and taken to the military prison in GERNERSHEIM. The only thing I could do for them was to take some of their things, and among those were also some pictures of the above incident. I took it upon myself to get these things back to their wives, so it is certain that these pictures can be found at any time.

Later on we were ordered back to WENIZA where we were taking care of the airport and the territory around it. On the 19th of September 1941, I had to send twenty percent of my men on furlough because they were not able to do any work because of what they had seen. On the 22nd of September 1941, we became witnesses to an action which in no way was outdone by the one which happened in UHMAN with the only difference that we were in reserve this time and the whole thing took place near our quarters; and we had the chance to take two films in order to have a certain proof for this second deed, so that I could show it to the world when the time came. These pictures can be looked at at any time. Twenty-eight thousand (28,000) Jews were the victims of this action and this number was also confirmed by the Free Ukrainian Press. Those 6,000 who are still missing from the number of 62,000 were made up in an action against the Jews. Details of this killing and murdering will follow. The responsible persons will also be found at the end of this report.

(Continuation of Testimony of Erwin Bingsel, 17 Aug 45.)

Another action was begun after the two already described mass killings in Wenzel and Uman and they were committed in the following manner.

Since it was likely presumed in the high official offices that this action will very probably mean a loss of prestige for the German war leaders, or that it could bring about such a loss of prestige because the so-called elite troops had been ordered to accomplish these terrible murders, the following manner was taken:

Ukrainian militia trained by the SS was put up in Uman and the command was again taken by some SS officers and SS noncoms. By doing this it looked as if it was a national matter. This was taken care of as much as possible because the so-called free Ukrainian press made a report about it. The headlines were: "Proper Justice for the People." "A Nation judges!" Following that was a report which did not leave out any details. I must make it clear that the truth of the incident was not described. Six thousand humans were the victims of this action. This number was confirmed officially. I have to remark in advance that I, or my men, who are named as witnesses in this report, saw only part of this action.

At 10:15 in the morning a terrible shouting and shooting began and it was impossible to figure out what it all meant. When I went to the window which overlooked the city park, I and my men, who had assembled in the meantime, saw the following sight:

Ukrainian militia armed with pistols, rifles, and whips rode like wild men around the city park. It was recognizable that they were chasing people in front of them. These people were men, women, and children. A rain of bullets was fired at these people and the ones who never got hit by the bullets were knocked down by the whips. This wild post was led by SS officers and innocent children, mothers, and old people were killed, who had not committed any crime whatsoever except that they had escaped the mass killings. Here they were killed like animals. The Ukrainian press put out in the headlines, "A land gets rid of its torturers." We saw the following sight in the next few hours:

A cistern is located in the city park of Wenzel. The corpses had been gathered and put up in front of there. These were part of the Jews who were victims in this case. These corpses were put in the above-named cistern and chloroform was spread over them. There were two hundred-thirteen people. After this had been done the opening was closed up. The last stone might have hidden this bloody deed, but it was not forgotten for a long time. We did everything to be able to have a proof later. Pictures were taken, reports by witnesses and signatures were made in order to be able to have all the proof we needed. How right our doing was is proved by the following incident:

I had left WENZEL to take over the guard on the Wenzel and Uman railway. I had to take care of an urgent matter at LEMBERG one day. I took a car and went there. Riding through Wenzel, my driver stopped suddenly in front of a paper stand and my interpreter borrowed a paper. I read such a remarkable report which surprised me so much that I decided to find out the truth of the whole matter. The report in the paper stated that 213 corpses had been found in the city park of Wenzel, and it continued saying that these people had all probably been killed by the Russian GPU. The manner of the killing was indicated to be the reason for this assumption. Medical officers were named at the end of this report for confirming the paper's assumption. These doctors

came from the Baltic States and from Poland, Belgium, Holland, and Norway. All these men, under the leadership of some German personality, wanted and did with certainty indicate that they knew the methods of the Russian GPU and also their various manners of killing people. The following proves how ridiculous the whole thing was. Since my interest had been aroused in this case, I wanted to do something about it. I went to our former quarters so I could see the matter myself. I saw the following:

In front of the above named cistern lay the corpses in long rows. They were put there so that the population of the town could look at them. These corpses were the same corpses which had been buried in the cistern two months ago. I had no doubt whatsoever. Deeply aroused as to how own killings were blamed on to somebody else, we left the town. It was my job now to find proof for these unproven suspicions which had been thrown at another State institute. The proof consists of a statement which I have written myself and which has been signed by eye witnesses.