

CONFLICTING SIGNALS: BRITISH INTELLIGENCE ON THE “FINAL SOLUTION” THROUGH RADIO INTERCEPTS AND OTHER SOURCES, 1941–1942

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During World War II, Allied intelligence services mounted an unprecedented campaign to gather information concerning the strategic and operational intentions of Nazi Germany and the conditions under German occupation.¹ In this endeavor they were assisted by a wide variety of sources. For the British intelligence services, the greatest source of all was signals’ intelligence gathered through the interception and decryption of German radio messages at the Government Communications and Cypher School at Bletchley Park. The value of “Ultra” — as this signals’ intelligence was codenamed — to Allied military operations was immense. The “Ultra secret” was so tightly held that the first publicity concerning Bletchley Park did not emerge until the early 1970s.²

- 1 This article was originally presented at the conference “The Gentiles’ Attitudes Towards the Persecution of Jews and Jewish Actions and Reactions” held at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Budapest in November 2002, which was organized as part of the European Science Foundation project “The Impact of National-Socialist and Fascist Occupation of Europe.” I would like to thank the conference organizers, as well as Dr. Daniel Blatman, Dr. Renée Poznanski, and Dr. John P. Fox for their encouragement, comments, and criticisms concerning this article.
- 2 F. W. Wintherbotham, *The Ultra Secret* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1974).

In the second volume of the official British history of intelligence operations published in 1981, F. H. Hinsley revealed that Bletchley Park had not just decrypted German military signals but had also succeeded in breaking the codes of the German Order Police.³ Unlike the German military, the Order Police did not use the so-called Enigma encoding machine until late 1944, but instead relied on hand ciphers (an old encoding method based on code tables). Not only were these comparatively easy to break, there were sound technical reasons to do so. As the German military used hand ciphers both as a backup and for so-called medium-grade communications, the police signals provided an excellent training opportunity. By the summer of 1944, the Police Section employed over 500 interceptors, cryptographers, and analysts.⁴

Hinsley's main revelation concerning the Police Section, however, was that Bletchley Park had intercepted messages detailing the activities of the Order Police behind the eastern front during 1941, as well as prisoner return figures sent by radio from concentration camps, including Auschwitz, during 1942.⁵ As this revelation became public shortly after the publication of three pioneering books on Allied knowledge of the Nazi "Final Solution," the news that British intelligence had possessed information on the mass execution of Jews in 1941 caused many historians to demand the release of the surviving records of the Police Section.⁶ In 1996, copies of the Police Decodes given to U.S. war crimes' investigators in the 1980s by the British

3 F. H. Hinsley, *British Intelligence in the Second World War*, Vol. II (London: HMSO 1981), pp. 669–673.

4 See the memoirs of Noel Curren-Briggs, "Army Ultra's Poor Relations," in F. H. Hinsley and Alan Stripp, eds., *Codebreakers: The Inside Story of Bletchley Park* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1993), pp. 209–218.

5 Hinsley, *British Intelligence*, Vol. II, pp. 671–673.

6 Bernard Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939–1945* (London: Clarendon Press, 1979); Walter Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret: The Suppression of the Truth about Hitler's 'Final Solution'* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1980); Martin Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies* (London: Michael Joseph, 1981).

government were declassified and deposited in the U.S. National Archives; in 1997, the British government released the original files to the Public Record Office in London.⁷

The Police Decodes have since provided historians with much new evidence concerning the activities of the Order Police and of the SS. They have, for example, been used to annotate Himmler's appointments diary for 1941 and 1942, found in the Moscow archives and now published in a critical edition.⁸

In this article British intelligence on the "Final Solution" in 1941–42 will be reexamined in light of the evidence provided by the Police Decodes and the summary analyses written on the basis of these intercepts. The article calls into question many — though not all — of the conclusions reached by Richard Breitman in his 1998 book *Official Secrets*. This was the first work to analyze the Police Decodes for both their information on German policy as well as regarding Allied knowledge of the "Final Solution."⁹ It is my contention that the Police Decodes of 1941 and 1942 did not in and of themselves provide British intelligence with *prima facie* evidence of the "Final Solution." Indeed, the evidence was sufficiently contradictory that it actually may have contributed to a British misunderstanding of German intentions toward European Jews in the first part of 1942. This argument is also based on other contemporary sources of information that were available to the British government.

A full account of British reactions to the news of the persecution of European Jews during World War II lies outside the scope of this article. Thus, it will focus on the development of the British

7 On the release of the documentation, see Gerhard L. Weinberg, "The Allies and the Holocaust," in Michael Berenbaum and Abraham J. Peck, eds., *The Holocaust and History: The Known, the Unknown, the Disputed, and the Reexamined* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1998), pp. 487ff.; Richard Breitman, *Official Secrets. What the Nazis Planned, What the British and Americans Knew* (London: Penguin 1998), pp. 235–246.

8 Peter Witte, et al., eds., *Der Dienstkalender Heinrich Himmlers 1941/42* (Hamburg: Christians, 1999).

9 Breitman, *Official Secrets*.

comprehension of Nazi intentions toward the Jews during the “fateful months” of 1941 and 1942, on the basis of the intelligence available to it. The question is at what point did the British government understand that Nazi policy toward European Jews amounted to a policy of wholesale extermination?

The article is divided into two parts. The first concerns British knowledge and understanding of the activities of the Order Police battalions under the control of the Higher SS- and Police Leaders (*Höhere SS- und Polizeiführer*; hereafter, HSSPFs) in Russia during 1941 and 1942. The second addresses the question of British knowledge and interpretation as derived from the Police Decodes and other sources on the deportations of German and West European Jews to Poland and Russia in 1941–1942. It examines this question on the basis of certain newly released documentation concerning the information that was available to British intelligence in 1942 regarding the Auschwitz concentration camp.

“ACCOUNTS OF WHOLESALÉ EXECUTIONS”: THE POLICE BATTALIONS IN RUSSIA

The participation of Order Police battalions in the genocide of Polish and Russian Jews by means of mass executions has by now become the subject of a considerable historiography.¹⁰ However, the police battalions were not originally instituted in order to perpetrate genocide, but as the primary internal security force available to the civilian authorities of the National-Socialist regime. Heinrich Himmler, as *Reichsführer-SS* and chief of the German Police, and his subordinate Kurt Daluege, as chief of the Order Police, both expended considerable efforts, between 1936 and 1939, to preserve the Order Police as an independent paramilitary

10 Heiner Lichtenstein, *Himmlers grüne Helfer. Die Schutz- und Ordnungspolizei im Dritten Reich* (Köln: Bund Verlag, 1990); Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men. Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992); Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners. Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1996).

force alongside the German armed forces.¹¹ In September 1939, the Army High Command specifically requested that police battalions be attached to the invading armies as security forces.¹² These police battalions then operated alongside the Einsatzkommandos of the SD and the Totenkopf units under Theodor Eicke, the inspector of concentration camps. This tripartite division between the SD, the police, and the Waffen-SS would be reprised, in 1941, for "Operation Barbarossa."¹³

The British had been reading the police signals since before the beginning of World War II, and continued to do so through the winter of 1939/40. Between February and June 1940, the interception and decryption operation was moved to the Marne, where the British and French intelligence services cooperated in decoding the signals.¹⁴ With the fall of France, many of the original files were lost, but it is clear from later references that, even in 1939, the British had a clear picture of police activities in the Polish campaign, including the fact that executions were part of these activities. Commenting, in the summer of 1941, on the reappearance of the term "special tasks," British analysts remarked "this phrase last appeared in our decodes after the cleaning-up of Poland, when participants were told to strictly hold their tongues as to what the besondere Aufgaben had been."¹⁵

As the German occupation of Poland stabilized, the Order Police increasingly used telephone communications, so, in the second half of 1940, very few signals were intercepted and the summary reports

11 Philip Blood, *Bandenbekämpfung: Nazi Occupation Security in Eastern Europe and Soviet Russia, 1942–1945*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Cranfield, 2002.

12 Hans Umbreit, *Deutsche Militärverwaltungen 1938/39. Die militärische Besetzung der Tschechoslowakei und Polens* (Stuttgart: Deutsche-Verlags-Anstalt, 1971); Franz Halder, *Kriegstagebuch, Band. I* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1962), p. 44 (August 29, 1939).

13 On SS activities in the Polish campaign, see Edward B. Westermann, " 'Friend and Helper': German Uniformed Police Operations in Poland and the General Government, 1939–1941," *Journal of Military History*, 8 (1994), pp.643–661.

14 Hinsley, *British Intelligence*, p. 669; Breitman, *Official Secrets*, p. 90.

15 Summary of German Police Decodes, July 3–August 14, 1941, ZIP/MSG 27, August 21, 1941, p. 4, Public Record Office (PRO) HW 16/6pt1; also HW 14/18.

that were written up were extremely skimpy. The British did note the involvement of the Order Police in the resettlement of Poles and of Baltic Germans, which would have confirmed information flowing from the Polish underground and government-in-exile concerning the effects of the ethnic reordering of Poland. Through the police decodes, British intelligence also became aware of Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov's visit to Germany in November 1940.

Mysteriously, for the first six months of 1941, no summary analyses seem to have been written.¹⁶ From the police decodes and other sources, British intelligence was able to draw up a reasonably accurate order of battle by some 158 police battalions across Germany and occupied Europe in early 1941. The British noted their absence from the initial phase of the May 1940 western campaign but located the subsequent arrival of police units in Holland and Norway.¹⁷

The planning of the involvement of police battalions and units of the Waffen-SS in the Russian campaign is now the subject of detailed literature, and those findings need not be repeated exhaustively here.¹⁸ Negotiations between the Army High Command and the SS leadership resulted, by the end of May 1941, in a Himmler order concerning the employment of three

16 See summaries MSGP 18, October 3, 1940; MSGP 21, November 15, 1940; MSGP 23, November 17, 1940, PRO HW 16/6 pt.1. Detailed evidence of the resettlement of Poles was presented in the joint diplomatic note of the eight governments-in-exile in July 1942, and, undoubtedly, on earlier occasions as well; *Situation dans les pays occupés par l'ennemi, Juillet 1942*, p. 19ff, PRO FO 371/30917.

17 Location List of German Police Battalions, n.d. (early 1941), PRO HW16/1.

18 Breitman, *Official Secrets*, pp. 27–42; *Dienstkalender Himmler*, pp. 101–177; Andrej Angrick et al., “‘Da hätte man schon ein Tagebuch führen müssen’. Das Polizeibataillon 322 und die Judenmorde im Bereich der Heeresgruppe Mitte während des Sommers und Herbstes 1941,” in Helga Grabitz et al., eds., *Die Normalität des Verbrechens. Festschrift für Wolfgang Scheffler* (Berlin: Edition Hentrich, 1994), especially pp. 327–329; Christian Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde. Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weissrussland 1941 bis 1944* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1999), pp. 81–91.

Higher SS- and Police Leaders, one with each of the three invading army groups assigned to "Operation Barbarossa," to command and control the mixed force of police battalions and Waffen-SS units that would be deployed for the Russian campaign. In effect, the order foresaw a form of dual control for the HSSPFs and their subordinate units: while their primary task in the eyes of the SS was the fulfilment of the "special commission of the *Führer*," the commanders of the army group rear areas had the full right to issue binding orders to the HSSPFs.¹⁹ This dual control would be a source of confusion to British analysts in assessing the goals of the HSSPFs on the basis of their actions.

The Actions of HSSPF Russia-Center, August-September 1941. The start of "Operation Barbarossa" caused a quantum leap in the volume of police radio traffic that could be intercepted and decoded. The Order Police introduced new codes for use in the Russian campaign both by the police battalions and by the HSSPF staffs, and this posed initial difficulties that were not fully overcome until August 1941.²⁰ British knowledge of the initial activities of the police battalions in the first few weeks was thus exceedingly limited.²¹ The involvement of police battalions in the early mass executions of Polish Jews in Białystok and Brest (Brześć) remained unknown to them.

In Białystok, a mass execution, in early July 1941, involved Police Battalions 316 and 322, both subordinated to Police

19 *Der Reichsführer-SS, Sonderauftrag des Führers*, May 21, 1941, Nuremberg Document NOKW-2079.

20 Breitman, *Official Secrets*, pp. 91–92.

21 On the activities of the Order Police in the Russian campaign, see Edward Westermann, "Himmler's Uniformed Police on the Eastern Front: The Reich's Secret Soldiers, 1941–1942," *War in History* 3/3, 1996; Jürgen Matthäus, "What about the 'Ordinary Men'?" *The German Order Police and the Holocaust in the Occupied Soviet Union*, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 11 (1996), pp. 134–150; Klaus-Michel Mallmann, "Vom Fussvolk der 'Endlösung'. Ordnungspolizei, Ostkrieg und Judenmord," *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte*, XXVI (1997), pp.355–392.

Regiment Center and thus to the HSSPF Russia-Center, and took the lives of between 1,000 and 4,000 Jewish men. The massacre at Brest, between July 6 and 7, involved the remaining battalion of Police Regiment Center, Police Battalion 307. According to the subsequent SD report, 4,435 “persons” were liquidated, almost all military-age Jewish males.²²

The *first* indication received by the British that “pacification” involved mass executions came from the daily report of HSSPF Russia-Center on July 18, which included the information that during “yesterday’s cleansing action in Slonim 1153 Jewish plunderers were liquidated by Pol. Regt. Centre.”²³ This was also the *only* reference to the execution of Jews in *all* of the police decodes in July 1941. The British almost never intercepted operational reports dispatched by HSSPF Russia-North, and, until well into *late* August, reports sent out by HSSPF Russia-South only described troop movements.²⁴

Up to late August 1941, it was, therefore, the operations of HSSPF Russia-Center directed by *SS-Gruppenführer* Erich von dem Bach²⁵ that grabbed the attention of the British analysts. The

22 Ereignismeldung No. 32, July 24, 1941, National Archives microfilm (hereafter, NA), T175/233/2721638; Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, pp. 542–544.

23 *HSSPF Mitte an RFSS und Chef Orpo*, July 18, 1941, GPD 292, item 15, PRO HW16/45. The SD report confirmed the number and police involvement: Ereignismeldung No. 32, July 24, 1941, NA T175/233/2721637–8.

24 Summary of German Police Decodes, July 3–August 14, 1941, ZIP/MSG 27, August 8, 1941, p. 6, PRO HW 16/6 pt1.

25 Bach legally changed his name from Bach-Zelewski to von dem Bach in 1935. Both within the SS and outside, he was known in all correspondence, orders, and reports, including the Police Decodes as von dem Bach, the name by which he was known to Bletchley Park. While being interrogated prior to the Nuremberg Trial of 1945–46, he changed his name back to Bach-Zelewski and stressed his Polish ancestry in order to place himself in a better light. In British captivity immediately after the end of the war, Maximilian Herff, head of the SS Personnel Office, exclaimed to Udo von Woyrsch, “Bach was a swine and a liar. I always said the man’s real name was Zelewski and not Bach at all.” CSDIC, Report on Information from Senior Officer PW, May 23, 1945, SRG 1259, PRO W208/4170. On von dem Bach’s name changes, see Blood, *Bandenbekämpfung*, pp. 199–200.

British learned of the commitment of the SS Cavalry Brigade to the central sector under the control of von dem Bach in the last week of July 1941.²⁶ Until August 4, no further indications of mass executions were received; on this date, the British learned that the SS Cavalry Brigade had executed first ninety "Bolsheviks and Jews," then "3274 partisans and Jewish bolsheviks," while Police Battalion 306 had executed 260 "francs tireurs" (sharpshooters). As the British analysts wrote:

The situation reports of the 5th and 6th were unfortunately not taken, but we have an interesting addendum to the latter, sent on the 7th. This reports an important engagement between Pol Batl 316 and a Russian force 1,800 strong under the leadership of a General. The outcome is missed (part unreadable) but the message concludes thus:

"since the population of Pazyc shot at the returning 1 Coy Pol Batl 316 from houses, I ordered the entire male population of the place to be evacuated by this coy. The operations of the SS Reit-Brigade continue. Up to today midday a further 3,600 have been executed, so that the total of executions carried out by the Reit-Brigade up to now amounts to 7,819. Thus the figure of executions in my area now exceeds the 30,000 mark." The tone of this message suggests that the word has gone out that a definite decrease in the total population of Russia would be welcomed in high quarters and that the leaders of the three sectors stand somewhat in competition with each other as to their "scores."²⁷

26 On the "action" of the SS Cavalry Brigade, see Yehoshua Büchler, "Kommandostab Reichsführer-SS. Himmler's Personal Murder Brigades in 1941," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, I/1, 1986, pp. 11–25; Ruth Bettina Birn, "Two Kinds of Reality? Case Studies on Anti-Partisan Warfare during the Eastern Campaign," in Bernd Wegner, ed., *From Peace to War: Germany, Soviet Russia and the World, 1939–1941* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1997), pp. 277–292; Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, pp. 555–561.

27 Summary of German Police Decodes, July 3–August 14, 1941, ZIP/MSG 27, August 21, 1941, pp. 3–4, PRO HW 16/6pt1; also HW 14/18. "Pazyc" was in fact Jazyl: cf. the entry in Tagebuch von dem Bach, August 8, 1941, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde (BA) R20/45b, p. 7, which begins identically to the daily report, but omits the concluding boast of 30,000 executions.

Only the signal of August 4 had mentioned “partisans and Jewish bolsheviks”; the even larger figures intercepted on August 7 were of “executions.” Nevertheless, the British reaction was astonishingly swift. The Police Section dispatched messages of special interest to the War Office and to MI6 as so-called PRIT reports.²⁸ The director of MI6, Sir Stewart Menzies, usually known as “C,”²⁹ regularly dispatched critical “Ultra” intelligence directly to the prime minister. Though copies of “Ultra” messages received by Winston Churchill were released to the British archives in the 1990s, few survive from before late August 1941. It is not certain, therefore, when Churchill received the news of Bach’s reports. On August 24, however, he broadcast a speech in which he made a direct reference to the actions of the Order Police:

The aggressor is surprised, startled, staggered. For the first time in his experience mass murder has become unprofitable. He retaliates by the most frightful cruelties. As his armies advance, whole districts are being exterminated. Scores of thousands – literally scores of thousands – of executions in cold blood are being perpetrated by the German police-troops upon the Russian patriots who defend their native soil. Since the Mongol invasions of Europe in the sixteenth century there has never been methodical, merciless butchery on such a scale, or approaching such a scale...We are in the presence of a crime without a name.³⁰

The figure of “30,000 executions” almost certainly led the British analysts and Churchill mistakenly to conclude that *some* of the executed were Jews, but that the majority were not. Had news of the earlier massacres at Brest and Białystok been intercepted and

28 These are now filed in PRO HW 16/53; The abbreviation PRIT could not be deciphered.

29 Reinhard Heydrich adopted the affectation of calling himself “C” based on the MI6 director’s example. Heinz Höhne, *The Order of the Death’s Head: The Story of the SS* (London: Pan Books, 1966), pp. 197–198.

30 Cited from Martin Gilbert, *The Holocaust. The Jewish Tragedy* (London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1986), p. 186.

the identity of the victims been clear, a different conclusion may have been drawn.

A further source of confusion came from the reports sent out after August 7, 1941. These detailed a very intensive mopping-up campaign by the police battalions and the SS Cavalry Brigade against Red Army stragglers and partisan detachments. Some intercepts revealed mass executions; for example, on August 30, when Police Regiment Center executed 244 Russian soldiers.³¹ The Police Decodes also revealed much evidence that von dem Bach's forces had been commandeered by the German army to counter the growing partisan menace. Two battalions of Police Regiment Center were detached to the Second Army in the last week of August in order to participate in a systematic anti-partisan drive.³² The same regiment was then committed to a further anti-partisan drive in mid-September 1941, alongside two army regiments.³³

Hardly any daily reports from HSSPF Russia-Center, after the first week of August 1941, in fact mentioned the execution of Jews. The report of August 25 noted that the SS Cavalry Brigade had shot 150 Jews while continuing the "Pripyat action"; a report on August 30 told of the execution of eighty-two Jews by Police Regiment Center.³⁴ Also, those daily reports that did record the execution of Jews were unfortunately not decoded by the British. The report of September 1, for example, which recorded the participation of Police Battalion 322 in the execution of "1171 Jews and 8

31 HSSPF Russland Mitte an RFSS, Chef Orpo, KdoStab RFSS, August 30, 1941, GPD 342 add, item 4, PRO HW 16/45.

32 HSSPF Russland Mitte an RFSS, Chef Orpo, Kdostab RFSS, August 21, 1941, GPD 337, item 12, PRO HW 16/32. Cf. Korück 580 an Kdr d. Polizei-Rgt. Mitte, August 23, 1941, NA T312/1128/116.

33 Summary of German Police Decodes, August 15–31, 1941, ZIP/MSGP 28, September 12, 1941, p. 2, PRO HW 16/6 pt.2; cf. Pol.Regt Mitte Ia, Bericht über den Einsatz des Pol.Regts Mitte vom 10–12.9.1941 im Raume nordwestl der Strasse Bobruisk-Mohilew zwischen Drut und Olsa, August 13, 41, NA T501/1/56–58.

34 HSSPF Russland Mitte an RFSS, Chef Orpo, Kdostab RFSS, August 25, 1941, GPD 334 add, item 9, PRO HW 16/45.

communists” near Minsk and the execution of 189 partisans and 224 Jews by the remainder of Police Regiment Center in the vicinity of Mogilev, was simply not intercepted.³⁵

“Actions according to the Usage of War” in HSSPF Russia-South, August 1941. If the police signals intercepted from the central sector became more and more confusing in the late summer of 1941, the intelligence picture from the southern sector was almost totally blank until the last nine days of August. On August 14, Kurt Daluege sent an order to all three HSSPFs to send daily reports according to the following model: (1) locations; (2) activity; (3) “successes”; (4) losses. These were to be sent to (1) the *Reichsführer-SS*; (2) the chief of Order Police; and (3) the Kommandostab RFSS.

This order was intercepted by the British.³⁶ Consequently, British intelligence finally gained a feel for the activities of HSSPF Russia-South. As the second British summary analysis report of September 12 noted, “a series of situation reports makes it clear that fighting, of which there was curiously little evidence before, is going on in this sector too. The first report is that of 23.8.41.”³⁷

These reports gave the British their clearest glimpse yet of the mass murder being perpetrated behind the eastern front. The troops of HSSPF Russia-South under Friedrich Jeckeln had been augmented in late July by the First SS Infantry Brigade, which operated along the southern edge of the Pripyat marshes parallel to the actions taken by the SS Cavalry Brigade along the northern

35 HSSPF Russland Mitte an RFSS, Chef Orpo, Kdostab RFSS, September 1, 1941, BA R70 SU/27, p. 13.

36 Kdostab RFSS/Chef Orpo an HSSPF Russland Süd, Mitte, Nord, August 14, 1941, GPD 321, items 6 and 15, PRO HW 16/32; cf. *Dienstkalender Himmler*, August 13, 1941, p. 191 (meeting with *Brigadeführer* Knoblauch of the Kommandostab RFSS “über das Meldewesen der Auswärtigen Brigaden”). HSSPF Russia-Center was sent the order simply for informational purposes.

37 Summary of German Police Decodes, August 15–31, 1941, ZIP/MSGP 28, September 12, 1941, PRO HW 16/6 pt.1.

edges.³⁸ On August 12, Jeckeln visited Himmler and presumably was given new orders for the "actions" that were to follow.³⁹ Thereafter, all daily reports sent by HSSPF Russia-South were sent to "Chef Sipo" — Heydrich — as well.⁴⁰

It is undeniable that there was a quickening of the pace of the murder. According to Einsatzgruppe C, 44,125 "persons, mostly Jews" were shot by the formations of HSSPF Russia-South in August.⁴¹ Between August 23 and 31, the British succeeded in intercepting seven out of nine daily reports sent by HSSPF Russia-South. Unlike the reports from the central sector, the "successes" reported by Jeckeln's men hardly mentioned any "partisans" but consistently mentioned the execution of Jews in "actions according to the usages of war." The British summary analysis of September 12, 1941, found this striking enough to extract all such executions and to tabulate them:

23.8.41	Pol Btl 314	367
	Pol Batl 314	294
	1. SS Brig	64
24.8.41	Pol Regt South	70
	Pol Squadron	113
	Pol Batl 45	61
25.8.41	1. SS Brig	65
	1 SS Brig	284
	Pol Regt Sth	1342
26.8.41	HSSPF staff	546
	1 SS Brig	82

38 On the parallel actions, see Gerlach, *Kalkuierte Morde*, pp. 555–556; Bernd Boll, "Aktionen nach Kriegsbrauch. Wehrmacht und 1. SS-Infanteriebrigade 1941," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 48, 2000, pp. 775–788.

39 *Dienstkalender Himmler*, August 12, 1941, p. 191.

40 For example: HSSPF Süd an RFSS, Chef Orpo, Chef Sipo, KdoStab RFSS, August 24, 41, GPD 333, item 1, PRO HW 16/45. The British analysts never commented on this.

41 Ereignismeldung NO. 94, September 25, 1941, NA T175/234/2722740.

	Pol Rgt South	549
	Pol Batl 314	69
27.8.41	1 SS Brig	16
	Pol Rgt Sth	914
	Pol Batl 320	42
30.8.41	Pol Regt South	45
31.8.41	Pol Regt South	911
	Pol Batl 320	2200
Total	12, 361 (Underlined) ⁴²	

However, the British analysts refused to draw the necessary conclusion:

The execution of “Jews” is so recurrent a feature of these reports that the figures have been omitted from the situation reports and brought under one heading (3d). Whether all those executed as “Jews” are indeed such is of course doubtful, but the figures are no less conclusive as evidence of a policy of savage intimidation if not of ultimate extermination... Many, no doubt, were not Jews; but the fact that this heading invariably produces the biggest figures shows that this is the ground for killing most acceptable to the Higher Authorities.

In hindsight, this conclusion seems strange; given the information actually available to the British analysts in August and September 1941, it is perhaps less so. Apart from the intercepted seven daily reports from the south, the British had intercepted only two reports from the central sector regarding executions of Jews before August 23. Only two other reports arrived from the central sector at the same time as those from the south; most referred instead to the killing of partisans and Red Army soldiers “in battle.” Had Jeckeln’s staff signalled reports similar to those sent by von dem

42 Summary of German Police Decodes, August 15–31, 1941, ZIP/MSGP 28, September 12, 1941, PRO HW 16/6 pt1. The total included the 234 Jews known by the British to have been shot by HSSPF Russia-Center during the same time period.

Bach prior to mid-August 1941, and had Bach's reports shown a parallel "qualitative leap" in late August 1941, the Police Section might have concluded differently. But based on a grand total of under fifteen reports of executions of Jews, the Bletchley Park analysts did not.

It would appear, however, that MI6 drew a different conclusion from the same raw decrypts. From August 1941, "C" forwarded several Police Decodes to Churchill, most of which referred specifically to actions carried out by HSSPF Russia-South. These arrived well after his speech of August 24; nonetheless, they were clearly of great interest to the British prime minister, as the totals of executed Jews reported were circled in red pencil. On September 11, "C" forwarded the following remark in the daily bundle of "Ultra" decrypts to Churchill: "the fact that the Police are killing all Jews that fall into their hands should now be sufficiently well appreciated. It is not therefore proposed to continue reporting these butcheries specifically, unless so requested."⁴³

Around the same time, Bletchley Park intercepted the last two signals from the southern sector that clearly indicated the mass execution of Jews. A report of September 6, recorded the execution of 350 Jews by the First SS Brigade and 144 by Police Regiment South; the report of September 11 recorded the execution of 1,548 Jews by Police Regiment South.⁴⁴ On September 13, Daluge signalled the following order to all three HSSPFs in Russia:

The danger of decoding of radio messages is great. Therefore only such matters should be transmitted by radio that are classified as

43 C to PM, C7436, August 28, 1941, PRO HW1/30 for daily report of August 23, 1941; C to PM, C7456, August 3, 1941, PRO HW1/35, for daily report of August 30, 1941, from the central sector (mentioning 150 Jews and ninety-two Red Army men) and for reports of August 24–25, 1941, from the southern sector. Cf. Breitman, *Official Secrets*, p. 94. September 11 message: C to PM, September 11, 1941, PRO HW1/62.

44 HSSPF Russland-Süd an RFSS, Chef Orpo, Chef Sipo, KdoStab RFSS, September 6, 1941, GPD 351, item 2; 11.9.41, GPD 353, item 1, PRO HW 16/45.

open, confidential or secret, not however such reports that require special preservation of secrecy as secret state matters (*geheime Reichssache*). Among these are more precise statistics on executions. These matters are to be transmitted by couriers.⁴⁵

Simultaneously, the Order Police switched over to a new hand cipher system. The paradoxical result was that whereas, up to September 12, only three keys used by the police were successfully broken by Bletchley Park, after this date, only one key was not broken. Nevertheless, British analysts were keenly aware that the changeover had come about in all likelihood because of Churchill's speech of August 24. Before presenting the September 13 secrecy order, they commented that "General Daluge, alarmed perhaps by our evident awareness of the unspeakable activities of his police in Russia, sent the following radio message..."⁴⁶

In November 1941, "C" was thoughtful enough to forward the decoded order to Churchill: the prime minister drew yet another line in the margin in red pencil next to the cited order, as if to tick himself off for blowing the intelligence source.⁴⁷

The Window Closes. In essence, British intelligence had a window of between one and two months in which it *might* have been able to deduce that a policy of total extermination of Jews was being implemented in the Soviet Union. Daluge's order of August 14, to report daily in detail the "successes" of the police formations was counteracted by his order of September 13, not to report these successes if they concerned executions. However, because Jeckeln's staff continued to use the phrase *Aktion nach Kriegsbrauch*, British analysts were able to deduce that mass executions were continuing. For example, thanks to signals other

45 Chef Orpo an HSSPF Russland Nord, Mitte, Süd, September 13, 1941, GPD 379 add, item 12, PRO HW 16/45.

46 Summary of German Police Decodes, September 1–30, 1941, ZIP/MSGP 29, October 22, 1941, pp.1–2, PRO HW 16/6 pt. 1.

47 C to PM, C7786, November 12, 1941, PRO HW 1/135.

than the daily reports, they were able to determine that an action took place at Kremenchug at the end of October 1941.⁴⁸

Yet despite this occasional sharpness of observation, one must note two elements of confusion. Firstly, hardly any hints of the major "actions" conducted in either sector were forthcoming from signals' messages sent after mid-September 1941. Kremenchug was in effect the exception that proved the rule. This was in part caused by the second element of confusion; namely, the reportage of anti-partisan warfare from the central sector from mid-September to mid-December 1941.

The daily reports continued to provide considerable evidence of killing, even though these reports now excluded any mention of executions of Jews. British analysts followed the move in late September of the SS Cavalry Brigade from Bobruisk to Toropets with much fascination and similarly observed the redeployment of Police Regiment Center from Mogilev to Smolensk in October. When these were joined by the reassigned First SS Infantry Brigade, the analysts were more or less hopelessly hooked. The reports were being broken on an almost daily basis, and the Police Section dutifully totted up the sporadic reported casualties of partisan detachments and Red Army stragglers. In October and November 1941, the British calculated the following "successes":⁴⁹

	Killed	captured
Police Regiment Center	358 + 42	2927
SS Cavalry Brigade	10	231
1st SS Brigade	141	20

Adding to the British fascination with the central sector was the personality of the SS commander in the region, Erich von dem

48 Summary of German Police Decodes, October 1–November 14, 1941, ZIP/MSGP 30, n.d, p.6, PRO HW 16/6 pt 1.

49 Ibid., pp. 3–4.

Bach. They dutifully recorded his promotion to *SS-Obergruppenführer* and observed that “he is a sick man, and made a special appeal to General Daluge to allow a certain medicinal water to be sent to him by Courier-plane, since in the meantime he was forced to relieve his pain by opium-injections.”⁵⁰

This fascination undoubtedly stemmed from the comparative garrulousness of Bach’s reports, which had always been far more detailed than Jeckeln’s in the southern sector, and remained so through to the end of 1942.

Could the Police Decodes Be Confirmed From Other Sources? The intercepts of police signals from Bletchley Park were not the only source of information on the actions of the SS and Police in occupied Russia. They were, however, the only source of signals’ intelligence. Contrary to the assertion made by Walter Laqueur in 1980, prior to the publication of Hinsley’s official history in 1981, there is *no* indication that the British ever broke the Enigma signals traffic of the RSHA or Gestapo.⁵¹ A list of Enigma keys in use during September 1941, indicates that the British knew of a SS key codenamed “Orange,” which was “occasionally” broken. According to Hinsley, this was a “general administrative” key. More mysteriously, a further key known only by its Berlin call-sign — TGD — was listed. In September 1941, the best guess of British cryptographers was that this key was in use by the SA. Later TGD came to be regarded as the key of the Gestapo. It was never broken at any point during the war “and came to be regarded as one of the great mysteries of Hut 6.”⁵²

Initially, British intelligence on the role played by the RSHA in

50 Summary of German Police Decodes, October 1–November 11, 1941, ZIP/MSGP 31, n.d., p. 2, PRO HW 16/6 pt1.

51 Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret*, p. 85; Breitman, *Official Secrets*, pp. 190, 298 n. 59.

52 Director of Military Intelligence, Most Secret, September 10, 1941, PRO HW 14/19; Hinsley, *British Intelligence*, vol. II, pp. 668–669.

occupied Russia was exceedingly poor. In its first summary analysis after the start of the Russian campaign, the Police Section seemed to be quite unaware of the difference between the SD and the SHD, the German air-raid protection service. For this it was soundly chastised by MI6.⁵³

From the late autumn of 1941, some reports began to appear in the press about the massacres that had taken place in the East. In particular, the mass execution at Babi Yar became very quickly known through foreign journalists who visited Kiev within a few weeks of its capture by the German army. The Jewish Telegraphic Agency published a report, in October 1941, stating that, in Zhitomir, only 6,000 out of 50,000 Jews survived. The *Jewish Chronicle* in London reported around the same time that thousands of Jews in the Ukraine had died in pogroms.⁵⁴ A lengthy study published by the Institute of Jewish Affairs in November 1941, a copy of which was received by the British Foreign Office in February 1942, cited pogroms staged by German and Romanian forces in Kamenetz-Podolsk, Rovno, Berdichev, Kiev, Odessa, Chernigov, Uman, and Minsk, and drew attention to the "fate of the Jews expelled from Hungary to Galicia (more than 18,000)."⁵⁵

Mass executions had indeed taken place at every one of the locations described in the press reports in the summer and autumn of 1941, but there had been no indication of these from the Police Decodes, with the exception of the actions at Kamenets-Podolsk, and then only imprecisely. Nor did the Police Decodes provide any evidence of those pogroms that did take place in the summer of 1941, in eastern Poland. Moreover, the Foreign Office dismissed

53 Colonel HC Hatton Hall, MI6, to Mr Clarke, Bletchley Park, September 2, 1941, PRO HW 14/19.

54 Laqueur, *Terrible Secret*, p. 68; Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews*, p. 167.

55 Jews in Nazi Europe, February 1933 to November 1941. A Study Prepared by the Institute of Jewish Affairs Submitted to the Inter-American Jewish Conference November 23–24–25 1941, Baltimore MD, copy in PRO FO 371/30915, p. 140.

the press reports out of hand. One of its senior civil servants, Victor Cavendish-Bentinck, described the news of Babi Yar as “products of the Slavic imagination.”⁵⁶ This remark mirrored the general British reluctance to give too much credence to “atrocities stories,” a circumspection generated both by the excesses of atrocity propaganda during World War I and by the resounding flop of the British government’s White Paper on German atrocities in the autumn of 1939.⁵⁷

By far the most distracting source of information, however, was the Soviet government. In early January 1942, the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs issued a formal note on German atrocities to all governments with which the Soviet Union had diplomatic relations. The publicity generated by this note was considerable; in Britain, the full text was published in the widely distributed newsletter issued by the Soviet Embassy in London, *Soviet War News*.⁵⁸ Though the note included direct references to massacres in Lvov, Kiev, Kamenets-Podolsk, Dnepropetrovsk, Mariupol, and Kerch, the ethnicity of the victims was most often thoroughly obscured. The “mass slaughter” in Lvov was supposedly organized under the slogan “Kill off the Jews and Poles”; in Kiev there was “horrible slaughter and pogroms... mercilessly dealing with all Ukrainians, Russians and Jews”; the Germans “subjected to similar outrages and violence Jews, Georgians, Armenians, Uzbeks, Azerbaijanians, Tadjiks and other representatives of the Soviet peoples welded together in fraternal friendship and collaboration.” And these were isolated references in a very lengthy text that overwhelmingly concentrated

56 Tom Bower, *Blind Eye to Murder. Britain, America and the Purging of Nazi Germany. A Pledge Betrayed* (London: Picador Paperbacks, 1983), p. 43.

57 See Tony Kushner, “Different Worlds: British Perceptions of the Final Solution during the Second World War” in David Cesarani, ed., *The Final Solution. Origins and Implementation* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 246–267.

58 *Soviet War News*, “New Facts About German Atrocities,” No. 153, January 8, 1942; copy in PRO FO 371/32942.

on the plight of Russian civilians and soldiers.⁵⁹ In Soviet propaganda designed for "export" outside of Russia, as well as in much of the propaganda aimed at the Russian people itself, it was "peaceful Soviet citizens," not Soviet Jews, who fell victim to the "German-Fascist invaders."⁶⁰

The fact that it was Soviet policy, in early 1942, to avoid explicit references to the plight of the Jews is brought out by a report from the British embassy in Kuibyshev concerning the publication in *Pravda*, on January 15, of a captured copy of the infamous, and explicitly antisemitic, "Reichenau order."⁶¹ As the order was published in facsimile, the embassy staff could check whether the published Russian translation had in fact been accurate; they swiftly determined that it was not.

A fourth passage, which has been partly obliterated in German texts does not appear at all in the Russian translation but is still just legible, reads as follows: "in the East the soldier is not merely a fighter according to the ordinary rules of warfare, but also the bearer of an inexorable racial idea and the avenger of all bestialities committed against the Germans and kindred people. For this reason

59 Confirmation of German atrocities against Soviet prisoners of war was received by the British embassy in Sweden in January 1942, which passed back to Britain copies of photographs from German POW camps in Poland showing evidence of cannibalism and an "incredible degree of malnutrition" among the Soviet POWs in the camps, as well as photographs "taken immediately after a group of Russian prisoners had been murdered en masse by machine-gunning"; British Legation Stockholm to The Minister of Information, 7.1.42 (C1284), PRO FO 371/30939.

60 This led to the formulation "peaceful Soviet citizens of Jewish nationality," a phrase which is used widely in the reports of the Soviet Extraordinary Commission into German war crimes. (Cf. among countless examples, Akt, 26.11.44, gor. Shlobine, National Archives of the Republic of Belarus 861-1-6, p. 144, U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum microfilm RG53.002M, Reel 7.) A full consideration of the reactions of the Soviet government to the mass murder of Soviet Jews is now available in Ilya Altman, *Victims of Hate. The Holocaust in the USSR 1941-1945* (Russian) (Moscow: Kollektzia Sovershenno Sekretno, 2002), especially pp. 373-399.

61 Baggallay to Foreign Office, Telegram, January 18, 1942, PRO FO 371/32942, p. 12.

the soldier must have a full understanding of the need for severe (one word illegible) against just expiation of the Jews. This serves the further purpose of nipping in the bud all risings in the rear of the army, experience having shown that these are invariably instigated by Jews.”

Other allusions to the “Jewish” character of the Bolshevik regime have also been omitted in the translation.

This, however, was an internal comment written by an unusually perceptive British diplomat. Public and official reaction followed the Soviet line in viewing the reports of atrocities as evidence of “German barbarism” in general. Mr. Ronald Stewart of Bath, for example, wrote to Anthony Eden, the British foreign secretary, in February 1942. It seems he was still stuck in 1914 mentality:

Some short while ago I enquired from you as to the purchase of the official account of the atrocities committed by the Hun in Russia. I have obtained a copy and perusing it, have realized its great value as propaganda to rouse people in this country to some understanding of the kind of obscene and devilish brutalities the Hun is as ever still guilty of, and of what the brute will do *when this country is invaded* [emphasis added].⁶²

At the end of April 1942, a second note was issued, based in large part on captured documents and giving many more details of German atrocities.⁶³ The note reported, among other crimes, the murder of 14,000 “persons” in Kharkov, 3,000 in Taganrog, 6,000 “peaceful residents” in Vitebsk, 10,000 in Pinsk, and over 12,000 in Minsk. These were completely accurate figures and reflected exactly the scale of the mass executions of Jews in these Belorussian and Ukrainian towns. The figures were published in the *News Chronicle* in June 1942.⁶⁴ The bulletin also provided

62 Ronald Stewart to Eden, February 6, 1942, PRO FO 371/32942, p. 48.

63 Soviet Monitor Radio Bulletins from the USSR, Issued by Tass Agency, Special Bulletin, April 28, 1942, PRO FO 371/32942, p. 143.

64 *News Chronicle*, “This is the Enemy We Too Must Beat. New Soviet List of Nazi Crimes,” June 12, 1942, cutting in PRO FO 371/32942, p. 146.

evidence from captured documents that chimed eerily with British information from the Police Decodes. The massacre at Pinsk had been perpetrated by the SS Cavalry Brigade, while, more disturbingly, the Soviet note referred to documents captured at Toropets from the same unit, including

a report of the first cavalry regiment of this brigade "on the pacification of the Starobinsky district" of Byelorussia. The regimental commander reports that, in addition to the 239 prisoners, a detachment of this regiment shot 6,504 peaceful inhabitants. The report states that the detachment acted on the strength of regimental order No 42 dated July 27 1941. The Commander of the second Regiment of the same brigade, von Nagel,⁶⁵ in his "report on punitive operations between July 27th August 11th 1941" says "we drove women and children into the marshes but this did not yield the desired results as the marshes were not deep enough to drown them. In most places the water was not more than three feet deep."

The Foreign Office copy of the bulletin was highlighted in the margin with thick red pencil marks next to this passage; the citation of Magill's infamous remark "we drove women and children into the marshes" was circled dramatically with further pencil marks.⁶⁶ This was complete confirmation of the intelligence received by the Police Decodes in the summer of 1941. However, it suffered from the same drawback as the interpretation placed on this intelligence by both the Bletchley Park analysts and by Churchill in his speech of August 24, 1941: it whitewashed the ethnicity of the victims.

BRITISH INTELLIGENCE ON THE DEPORTATIONS OF JEWS, 1941–42

What did the Allies understand of the rationale and logic behind the deportations of 1941–42? It would seem that the initial news of the

65 A garbling of Magill, the actual name of the regimental commander.

66 The report (SS-Kav.Rgt.2, Bericht, August 12, 1941) with this infamous remark is published in *Unsere Ehre heisst Treue. Kriegstagebuch des Kommandostabes Reichsführer SS* (Vienna: Europa Verlag, 1984), p. 230.

deportations was firmly assimilated into the existing category of “persecution.” From British embassies in neutral countries, in particular from Sweden, Switzerland, and Portugal, a constant stream of reports arrived in London from informants who had recently visited occupied Europe or who had fled from the area. Swedes with relatives in Germany and the occupied countries, or travelling on business, were one significant source of information for the British.⁶⁷ Over half of all such reports referred to the “persecution” of the Jews. From these sources the Foreign Office Political Intelligence Department could observe the introduction of the “yellow star,” first in Germany in the autumn of 1941, and subsequently in Western Europe in the spring of 1942. Petty persecutions, such as the lack of fuel for heating available to Dutch Jews in the winter of 1941/42, were noted, as was the introduction of the “Aryanization” program in Western Europe from the summer of 1941.⁶⁸

Another source of information came from censorship reports of letters and correspondence, which also included information derived from Jewish Telegraphic Agency reports. A report on Germany, in March 1942, described in great detail the “ruthless new drive to clear the Reich of Jews.” An informant in Zurich mentioned deportations from Berlin, Cologne, Frankfurt, Heilbronn, Ulm, Stuttgart, and Würzburg. A New York writer stated that “many Jews from Cologne were sent to Lublin”; a London correspondent claimed that “nearly all the Rhineland Jews are in Lodz.” More ominously, another correspondent had heard

67 Press Reading Bureau Stockholm, Memorandum for PID [Political Information Department], Germany No. 61, December 5, 1941, PRO FO 371/26515 (Swedish university lecturer visiting Berlin-Dahlem for an academic conference); Press Reading Bureau Stockholm, Political Memorandum, Germany No. 20, March 29, 1942, PRO FO 371/30898, p. 213 (Swedish student visiting Berlin).

68 Press Reading Room Bureau Stockholm, Political Memorandum, Holland No. 2, March 2, 1942, PRO FO 371/31029, pp. 8–9.

that German Jews deported to Minsk had been massacred after their arrival as a measure to combat the spread of typhus.⁶⁹

The Police Decodes provided some confirmation of these reports, even though it was surprisingly little. Up to mid-December 1941, a total of forty-one transports had left Germany. Only two deportation transports were indicated by the police signals' traffic — one to Minsk of 971 Jews from Bremen⁷⁰ and one to Kovno. Of these, only the transport of 944 Berlin Jews to Kovno was written up in a summary analysis.⁷¹ From the alternative sources discussed above, however, it can be firmly stated that the British possessed some information on the destinations of most of the forty-one transports dispatched in 1941, and of the thirty-nine transports sent up to the end of April 1942 — if not on their subsequent fate.⁷²

Thus, there is absolutely no doubt that the British government and intelligence services possessed an almost complete picture of the initial deportations from Germany and of the overall campaign of persecution of Jews in Western Europe. From the Polish government-in-exile and from other reports there was also much information available on conditions in the Polish ghettos. The embassy in Lisbon reported, in December 1941, not only that thousands of German Jews were "packed into open lorries and sent off to Poland without food or water," but that "information up to the latter part of October suggests that the Jews in Poland are being

69 Postal & Telegraph Censorship Report on Germany No. 3, March 5, 1942, PRO FO 371/30898, pp. 101–102. Victor Cavendish-Bentinck wrote comments on the report's cover-page but did not draw attention to the material concerning the deportations (*ibid.*, p. 82).

70 Stapo Bremen an Befehlshaber der Orpo und SS Riga, November 20, 1941, GPD 467, item 2, PRO HW 16/32.

71 Summary of German Police Decodes, November 15–December 14, 1941, January 22, 1942, ZIP/MSG31, p. 8, PRO HW 16/6 pt1.

72 Christopher R. Browning, *Nazi Policy, Jewish Workers, German Killers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 51.

starved to death. In the ghettos in Warsaw they receive one kilogramme of bread per month.”⁷³

Taken together, the information on the deportations from Germany and on conditions in Poland indicated that Nazi policy had taken a radical new turn, one that would ultimately lead to the deaths of many tens of thousands, even hundreds of thousands of Jews.⁷⁴ It is furthermore arguable that, by the summer of 1942, the British government understood that the purpose of the reported deportations was to remove all Jews from Germany to “the East.”

In June 1942, the Foreign Research and Press Service, based in Balliol College, Oxford, compiled a chronology of antisemitic laws and events from 1933 to 1941. Among the events listed was Hans Frank’s speech at the end of November 1941, in Cologne, “indicating that all Jews will be removed into the Russian Sphere further East beyond the Polish frontiers.” The speech was listed in the chronology immediately after the deportation of “20,000 Jews from Germany and Czechoslovakia to Poland” in October and the “Total Ban on Exit Permits for Jews” in November.⁷⁵

73 Lisbon to Foreign Office, Combined Intelligence Report No.9, December 3, 1941 (C13729), PRO FO 371/26515. The information received by the Polish Government-in-exile has been examined in David Engel, *In the Shadow of Auschwitz: The Polish Government-in-Exile and the Jews, 1939–1942* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987) and, more recently, by Dariusz Stola, “Early News of the Holocaust from Poland,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 11/1, 1997, pp. 1–27.

74 In a lengthy memorandum written by the Foreign Research and Press Section of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, primarily dedicated to the situation of East European Jews in the inter-war period, the cynical remark was made that “it is possible to point to two ways in which the dimensions of the Jewish problem in its East European form may be reduced as a result of the war. In the first place, the population of the German-occupied territories may be considerably diminished, and the Jewish population will certainly show a relative decline”; *The Present Position of World Jewry*, especially in Eastern Europe, January 1, 1942 (received in FO April 18, 1942), PRO FO 371/32680.

75 Denis Allen, the Foreign Office expert on war crimes, described the chronology as a “useful record” (notation on file of September 27, 1942); FRPS, *Anti-Jewish Legislation in National-Socialist Germany, 1933–1941*, including Outstanding Political Events, and Non-Official Actions and Reactions, June 22, 1942, p. 37 (C9133), PRO FO 371/30938b.

The Deception of Deportation for Forced Labor. It would appear that British intelligence drew a different conclusion from the information received. In fact, their conclusion pointed to the success of certain German deception schemes; it would also delay the acceptance of the news of total extermination taking place in Poland as it emerged over the course of 1942. Intelligence on the deportations from Western Europe seems to have been assimilated by some parts of the British government into the much more widespread intelligence on the mass deportation of foreign workers to Germany. The reason for this interpretation lay in the assessment of Germany's overall manpower situation, as of the end of December 1941, by the Ministry of Economic Warfare (MEW), the agency responsible for economic intelligence analysis.⁷⁶ The MEW received information from a wide variety of sources, including the Political Information Department of the Foreign Office, and, from these, produced weekly intelligence reports given comparatively wide circulation within Whitehall. These reports usually ran to about twelve pages of printed (not typed) text and were graded "Secret" — in contrast to the "Most Secret" classification of the Bletchley Park summaries.

Every six months a special edition presented a summary survey and attempted to forecast future developments. The December 1941 summary contained the observation that Germany had essentially reached the point of full mobilization. The "safe" margin of labor that could be withdrawn from industry and agriculture for conscription into the armed forces had been exceeded, and, if Germany were to maintain industrial output, it would have to release men from the army in order to do so.⁷⁷ The British assessment agreed with the contemporary German understanding of their manpower situation. Indeed, the MEW analysis was undoubtedly based on this understanding, as Britain disposed of

76 On economic intelligence available in general, see Hinsley, *British Intelligence*, vol. II, pp. 126ff.

77 Ministry of Economic Warfare, Summary of Enemy Economic Developments No. 119, December 19, 1941, PRO FO 837/14.

some excellent sources of intelligence on German economic policy, not least from Swedish industrialists who visited Germany to conduct business. In mid-November 1941, the British ambassador debriefed one such industrialist, Jacob Wallenberg, after he returned from negotiations with the German government in Berlin.⁷⁸ From business and governmental circles, Wallenberg learned of hopes that the Germans would go over to the defensive, “which would enable Germany to bring home for winter work in the factories anything up to a million men.” This same view was expressed by the Labor Ministry to the Armed Forces High Command at the same time as Wallenberg’s visit.⁷⁹

From the start of 1942, the MEW weekly reports tracked the developments of German labor policy as well as the increasing evidence of the forcible conscription of French and Russian civilian workers.⁸⁰ In late March 1942, the editorial of the weekly bulletin tried to make sense of this:⁸¹

The disintegrating force which is draining men and women from the occupied countries has not spared Germany itself. The ever-increasing fluidity of mobilized German labor, the transplantation of Germans to remote parts of the conquered area, the deportation of Jews, must have spread throughout the Reich the same dissociative influence which Germany has carried into the occupied territories.

78 HM Minister Stockholm, conversation with Mr. Jacob Wallenberg regarding conditions in Germany, Memo November 17, 1941, PRO FO 371/25615, p. 89ff. Jacob was the uncle of the more famous Raoul Wallenberg. A full publication and consideration of this document by the author will appear in *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Nationalsozialismus*, Vol. 20, in 2004.

79 Der Reichsarbeitsminister an den Chef OKW, Umstellung der Rüstung, October 24, 1941, NA T77/332/1168243.

80 MEW, Intelligence Weekly Report No. 1, week ending February 13, 1942, February 19, 1942, p. 1; MEW, IWR No. 8, week ending April 3, 1942, April 11, 1942, pp. 1–2, PRO FO 837/15. On German policy toward foreign labor during this period, see Ulrich Herbert, *Hitler’s Foreign Workers: Enforced Foreign Labour in Germany under the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

81 MEW, IWR No. 6, week ending March 19, 1942, March 28, 1942, p. 1, PRO FO 837/15.

There were other grounds for this (mis)assessment. During the winter of 1941/42, almost every mention of Jews in the Police Decodes concerned their use as forced laborers, reflecting both the enforced radio silence concerning the extermination process and the continued use of skilled workers in the surviving ghettos of the civilian-administered *Ostland* and Ukraine. References to Jewish forced labor had first emerged in September 1941, as the British analysts noted:

the problem of labour for the construction of these bases has a simple solution: the Jews. A Jewish work-command (*Arbeitskdo*) is to be inaugurated for the construction of a troop supply depot on confiscated ground in Minsk. It is a particularly acceptable solution since by an order from SSPF Lublin it is forbidden to pay Jews any wages.⁸²

The intercepts also revealed Himmler's involvement in the planning of the *Durchgangsstrasse IV* that was to employ Jewish forced labor in camps in Galicia as well as in the Ukraine.⁸³ A further signal to the HSSPF *Ostland*, Jeckeln, just a week before the Wannsee Conference, was even more curious:

The *Führer* has ordered that Jewish compulsory labour gangs are to be sent with all speed into the area of Russian operations for the carrying out of important constructional undertakings. They go on 18.1.42 in special transport into the building area allotted to the Silesian Operational Group in the region of Duenaburg/Moscow. Medical examination and injection is necessary. The Jews wear black working-dress with green arm bands. Employment — Reichsautobahn. Organisation Todt undertakes guard duties.

82 Summary of German Police Decodes, September 1–30, 1941, October 22, 1941, ZIP/MSGP 29, p. 6, PRO HW 16/6pt1.

83 Summary of German Police Decodes, December 16, 1941–January 15, 1942, February 14, 1942, MSGP 32, pp. 10, PRO HW 16/6 pt.1; cf. *Dienstkalender Himmler*, January 11, 1942, p. 314; on the *Durchgangsstrasse IV* project in general, see Hermann Kaienberg, "Jüdische Arbeitslager an der 'Strasse der SS,'" *1999* (1/1996), pp. 13–39.

Please see to it that the pool of compulsory labourers is not reduced.⁸⁴

Similar intelligence continued to flow in during the early months of 1942. In January, the German civilian commissar in Rovno used the police signals' net to enquire of his counterpart in Kremenetz as to the availability of Jewish tailors with sewing machines.⁸⁵ A few weeks later, the commissars in Letischev, Stara Konstantinov, Kastopol, Sarny, and Vladimir Volinsk were asked to provide 400 male Jews each, for urgent work on bridge construction.⁸⁶ In February, the commissar in Brest applied for twenty to thirty Jewish workers; a message then sent from Lublin to Zhitomir "stated that after consultation with the SSPF [Odilo] Globocnik it had been decided that no further Jewish workers could be provided." To the British analysts, this "reflected a shortage of labour."⁸⁷

The Police Section was not alone in highlighting a policy of forced labor: the Institute for Jewish Affairs claimed the previous November that "Jews are being mobilised everywhere for forced labour on highways, railroads, etc. About 200,000 Ukrainian Jews have been impressed into such labour battalions."⁸⁸ Nor was this

84 Summary of German Police Decodes, December 16, 1941–January 15, 1942, February 14, 1942, MSGP 32, pp. 10–11, PRO HW 16/6 pt.1. Transports of German Jews were indeed sent to Latvia as forced labor; see Ereignismeldungen No. 152, January 7, 1942, p. 10: "*Am 30.12 entflohen 2 Juden aus dem bei Salaspils im Bau befindlichen Barackenlager, in dem zurzeit 1000 Juden aus dem Reich als Arbeitskräfte eingesetzt sind.*" See also Bella Guttermann, "Jews in the Service of Organization Todt in the Occupied Soviet Territories, October 1941–March 1942," *Yad Vashem Studies*, XXIX (2001), pp. 65–107.

85 Summary of German Police Decodes, December 16, 1941–January 15, 1942, February 14, 1942, ZIP/MSGP 32, p. 12, PRO HW 16/6 pt. 1.

86 Summary of German Police Decodes, January 16–February 15, 1942, March 17, 1942, ZIP/MSGP 33, p. 11, PRO HW 16/6 pt. 1.

87 Summary of German Police Decodes, February 16–March 15, 1942, April 11, 1942, ZIP/MSGP 34, p. 9, PRO HW 16/6 pt. 1.

88 Jews in Nazi Europe, February 1933 to November 1941, PRO FO 371/30915, p. 140.

analysis restricted to occupied Russia. According to a MEW study of the economic exploitation of occupied Poland, "full use is also made of the Jews in the ghettos in tailoring, leather work, etc."⁸⁹ The beginning of the deportation of West European Jews was also initially assimilated into the notion of the use of Jewish forced labor. In late July 1942, the MEW weekly report contained the following reports from France and Holland:⁹⁰

France

Conscription of Foreign Refugees

6. The Germans are beginning to draw on the reserve of labour formed by the large refugee element in both zones of France. It is reported that Laval is negotiating to deliver into forced labour the Spanish Republican refugees in Unoccupied France, and all alien and stateless Jews in Occupied France who immigrated after 1st September 1939, are to be sent to Upper Silesia. 20,000 men and women are now awaiting transportation....

Holland

Anti-Semitic Measures

10... Decrees restricting the civil liberties of the Jews have been followed up by a decree ordering the transportation of all Dutch Jews between the ages of 18 and 40 to work in Germany. It is reported that the first party for the Reich have already left.

A further report from France, in early September 1942, continued to perceive the "large-scale round up" of Jews in terms of their deportation for labor purposes.⁹¹

The intelligence concerning Jewish forced labor mirrored the way in which the RSHA began the deportations from Western

89 MEW, IWR No. 16, week ending May 28, 1942, June 6, 1942, p. 5, PRO FO 837/15.

90 MEW, IWR No. 25, week ending July 30, 1942, August 8, 1942, p. 7, PRO FO 837/15.

91 MEW, IWR No. 30, week ending September 4, 1942, September 12, 1942, p. 8, PRO FO 837/15.

Europe. This, in turn, reflected the policy announced at the Wannsee Conference of sending the Jews “road building to the east.” The initial deportations from France, Holland, and Belgium were largely composed of able-bodied young men and women. Deportations from Slovakia were also initially intended to provide forced labor for the Auschwitz camp.⁹² Only in July did Himmler give the green light to a policy of total extermination, once the machinery of the death camps was in place and the policy of “selection” on the ramps at Auschwitz was instituted from July 17, 1942.⁹³

It would therefore seem as if British intelligence was largely hoodwinked in the first half of 1942 — firstly by the twists and turns of German policy, and, secondly, by the conscious element of deception in beginning deportations under the cover of the “Sauckel Action.” Every other source available to the British indicated a massive labor shortage in the German war economy that was being combatted by a policy of systematic conscription of foreign labor. The deportation of Jews for forced labor fit comfortably into this overall picture and could therefore be “explained.”

The legacy of this interpretation, however, persisted even in the face of the direct evidence of extermination that began to become known in the West from August 1942. The British Section of the World Jewish Congress compiled a report for the British government, in the autumn of 1942, concerning the overall program of persecution of European Jews. While emphasizing

92 Jan Erik Schulte, “Vom Arbeits- zum Vernichtungslager. Die Entstehungsgeschichte von Auschwitz-Birkenau 1941/42,” *Vierteljahrsheft für Zeitgeschichte*, 50 (2002), pp. 41–70.

93 For the context, see Christian Gerlach, “Die Bedeutung der deutschen Ernährungspolitik für die Beschleunigung des Mordes an den Juden 1942,” *Krieg, Ernährung, Völkermord. Forschungen zur deutschen Vernichtungspolitik im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1998), pp. 167–257; Christopher R. Browning, “A Final Hitler Decision for the Final Solution? The Riegner Telegram Reconsidered,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 10:1 (1996), pp. 3–10.

the news of massacres from Eastern Europe, the authors of the report also argued that "the adults arrested all over France are being deported to Eastern Europe for *slave labour* and, eventually, annihilation."⁹⁴

Even a week after the United Nations Declaration of December 17, 1942, the MEW could observe that, in Holland, "the official plan contemplates the confiscation or elimination of all Jewish firms, and the deportation of all Jews of working age; this programme is already on the way to completion." By this time the deportations had extended to include children, the infirm, and the elderly.⁹⁵

Undoubtedly, continuing evidence of the deportation of forced laborers from Western Europe influenced this interpretation, especially when intelligence reports mentioned deportation of Jews and of non-Jewish laborers in practically the same breath.⁹⁶ This understanding also shaped the reaction of the Foreign Office to the news of the famous "Riegner Telegram."⁹⁷ This telegram brought an 'alarming report' that a plan had been discussed in Hitler's headquarters to 'exterminate at one blow... all Jews in countries occupied or controlled by Germany'. It was sent by Gerhard Riegner in Geneva via diplomatic channels on August 8, 1942 and was intended to be passed on to the British and American Sections of the World Jewish Congress. As one civil servant in Britain wrote concerning "this rather wild story":

94 Report of the World Jewish Congress (British Section), n.d. (before October 29, 1942), p. 8 PRO FO 371/32680; emphasis added.

95 MEW, IWR No. 45, December 24, 1942, p. 53, PRO FO 837/15.

96 Cf. Press Reading Bureau Stockholm, Political Memorandum, Holland No. 10, November 7, 1942 (C11119), PRO FO 371/31029, p. 72.

97 Raya Cohen, "Das Riegner-Telegram – Text, Context und Zwischentext," *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte*, 23 (1994), pp. 301–324. The telegram was passed to Sydney Silverman MP of the British Section on August 17, who immediately telegraphed a copy to Rabbi Stephen Wise of the American Section, who had not yet received his copy as the US State Department had decided against passing on a supposedly uncorroborated story.

We have also received plenty of evidence that Jews deported from other parts of Europe have been concentrated in the Government-General and also that Jews once there are being so badly treated that very large numbers have perished: either as a result of lack of food or of evil conditions eg in the Warsaw ghetto, or as a consequence of mass deportations and executions. Such stories do provide a basis for Mr Riegner's report but they do not, of course, amount to "extermination at one blow". The German policy seems to be rather to eliminate "useless mouths" but to use able bodied Jews as slave labourers.

As a summary of Nazi intentions toward Jews in the first half of 1942, this assessment was surprisingly accurate, but it remained one crucial step behind the radicalization of German policy.⁹⁸

British Intelligence Knowledge of Auschwitz and "Einsatz Reinhardt" in 1942. As long ago as 1981, F. H. Hinsley revealed that the Police Section had intercepted and decrypted the daily and monthly returns sent out by radio from concentration camps of the WVHA, including Auschwitz. According to Hinsley, "the returns from Auschwitz, the largest of the camps with 20,000 prisoners, mentioned illness as the main cause of death, but included references to shootings and hangings. There were no references in the decrypts to gassings."⁹⁹ In the same year, Martin Gilbert claimed that the British and American governments had no inkling of the true function of Auschwitz until the first reports from escapees emerged in June 1944.

With the release of the Police Decodes to the British archives in 1997, Richard Breitman was able to make an initial examination of the so-called No.3 Traffic through which the prisoner returns were sent.¹⁰⁰ His analysis was limited by the fact that he was working solely from the raw decrypts and could only speculate on the

98 Minutes, R. Allen, September 10, 1942 (C7853), PRO FO 371/30917, p. 93.

99 Hinsley, vol. II, p. 673.

100 Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies*, pp. 339–40; Breitman, *Official Secrets*, pp. 110–121.

British interpretation. In late 1998, after the publication of Breitman's *Official Secrets*, the remaining files of the Police Section were released to the British archives; these included a file containing the summary analyses of the No.3 Traffic for 1942 and 1943. It is, therefore, now possible to examine the first attempts by British intelligence to analyze information received on Auschwitz.

It is clear from the summaries that the movements of prisoners in and out of the camp puzzled the British analysts considerably. The volume of radio traffic from the camps that could be intercepted and decrypted was initially slow in the early months of 1942, but increased progressively through the year. Thus, the first summary analysis was written as late as August 21, 1942, to cover the first seven months of the year.¹⁰¹ From this, the analysts noted that, on June 5, the camp had been told that "for political reasons they will not receive 2000 Jewish workers," but that, on June 17, Jewish transports from Slovakia were announced. Auschwitz was also told to "hand over useless Jewish clothing to the clothing works at Lublin." Until August 1942, no monthly death returns were collated and dispatched by radio. Prisoner strength returns, however, were given out on a monthly basis and were duly noted by the analysts. They clearly noticed the rise in the Jewish population of the camp:

	Jews	Poles	Russians	Politicals
6.1.42:	191	9186	2095	-
4.2.42	254	9506	1280	-
2.3.42	380	9221	871	-
3.4.42	1269	8475	354	-
5.4.42:	4010	9559	182	-
2.6.42:	3466	9985	153	-
10.7.42:	5998	7676	153	459

101 Summary covering the period January 1, 1942–August 15, 1942, ZIP/OS 1, August 21, 1942, p. 18, PRO HW 16/65.

The analysis for August revealed evidence of significantly higher mortality rates among the prisoner population in Auschwitz, especially when compared with the radioed figures sent by other camps. Whereas Buchenwald reported seventy-four deaths and Flossenburg eighty-eight, the total for Auschwitz was 6,889 men and 1,525 women. The cause, thought the British, “is likely to be typhus, as typhus was rife in June.” Furthermore, “deaths must constitute a large proportion, if not all of the ‘departures’ mentioned in the GPCC [German Police Concentration Camp] figures, which total 5325 for 19 days of August. During 19 days of August arrivals total 4989 so that they nearly always balance deaths. About half of the prisoners are Jews.”¹⁰²

During September and October 1942, the British analysts saw more evidence concerning the arrival of “transports of Jews” from Czechoslovakia, Holland, and France. On the basis of this evidence, they argued that “it seems therefore clear... that the arrivals and departures in Auschwitz are chiefly Jews but sometimes Poles.”¹⁰³ Though no monthly figures for deaths were intercepted, the analysts also noted a fall in the Jewish population of the camp from 11,837 on September 1, to 6,475 on September 22.

As about 2000 men in the total are always unaccounted for, it is difficult to be certain to what categories the arrivals and departures belong. But on 7.9 the numbers of political prisoners, Jews and Poles have fallen by 1, 2020, 284 respectively, a net loss of 2305; the net loss in the total column is 2379, therefore it is clear that the majority of departures are Jews.

The analysis for October/November was equally explicit concerning the nature of the arrivals in the camp:

102 Summary covering the period August 3, 1942–September 25, 1942, ZIP/OS 2, September 27, 1942, p. 8, PRO HW 16/65.

103 Summary covering the period up to October 17, 1942, ZIP/OS 3, October 29, 1942, p. 7, PRO HW 16/65.

the very large arrivals are mostly Jews and the number of Jews rises from 7300 in the middle of October to 10000 on 20.11. 2000 Jews are known to be employed on the Buna Works. There is ample evidence that typhus is still rife and may account for many of the departures.¹⁰⁴

The final analysis for 1942 reinforced the existing impression of trends:

the numbers rise from 20645 on 17.11 to 24692 on 15.12; half of these numbers are Jews and large numbers arrive and depart every day. The figures for the women's camp falls from over 7000 in the middle of November to 4764 on 9.12 and then rises again to 5231 on 14.12.¹⁰⁵

For the first month of 1943, the analysts continued to note the prevalence of typhus, observed a decline in the Jewish population of the (male) camp from 12,360 prisoners on December 15, 1942, to 11,332 on January 25, and noted that Jewish watchmakers were to be sent to Sachsenhausen, "where they are urgently needed."¹⁰⁶ From February 1943, no returns of inmates were received: the monthly reports were thereafter sent out by courier.¹⁰⁷

What can be concluded from these initial attempts at analyzing the information received through the police signals' decrypts concerning the function of Auschwitz? The summaries suggests that the British analysts were crystal clear that Auschwitz was increasingly intended for Jews and, at the very least, had received transports of Jews from Holland, France, and Slovakia. The majority of deaths reported from the camp were of Jews, and the number of deaths in Auschwitz exceeded any other concentration

104 Summary covering material received October 18–November 25, 1942, ZIP/OS 4, November 27, 1942, p. 5, PRO HW 16/65.

105 Summary covering material received November 25–December 25, 1942, ZIP/OS 5, December 28, 1942, pp. 4–5, PRO HW 16/65.

106 Summary covering material received December 21, 1942–January 25, 1943, ZIP/OS 6, January 28, 1943, p. 6, PRO HW 16/65.

107 Summary covering material received January 25–February 26, 1943, ZIP/OS 7, February 27, 1943, PRO HW 16/65.

camp known to the British. The British guess that the majority of deaths were caused by typhus reflected a widespread contemporary fear of the disease and matched other intelligence concerning large-scale epidemics in occupied Poland and Russia. Not only was Churchill briefed on the spread of typhus, but the MEW also took an interest and produced a special paper on “Typhus in Europe” in early 1942.¹⁰⁸

The British analysis was a brave attempt to try to understand the causes of the high mortality rate in the camp. The limitations of the analysis, however, should be immediately apparent: the majority of deportees arriving at Auschwitz were gassed on arrival and never were registered in the camp; therefore, they did not show up in the prisoner returns.¹⁰⁹ The information contained in the intercepts from Auschwitz was in many respects too precise for its own good.

This point is all the more worth emphasizing in light of other sources of intelligence relating to Auschwitz that were in British possession by the summer of 1942. The first was passed to the British by the Polish Government-in-exile, offering unusually precise intelligence on the gassing experiments carried out against 600 Soviet prisoners of war and 200 Polish political prisoners in 1941, dating the murder to September 5.¹¹⁰ News of the killing by

108 “C” to PM, “German Police — Typhus III,” November 27, 1941, PRO HW1/148; MEW, IWR No. 7, week ending March 26, 1942, April 4, 1942, p. 7,

109 The British Holocaust denier David Irving has used the Bletchley Park reports on the typhus outbreak in Auschwitz to create a smokescreen around the question of the existence of the gas chambers, implying that, if this is what British intelligence thought, then this can explain the overall death toll in the camp; see, for example, his bald citations of the reports in his recent *Churchill’s War, Vol. II: Triumph in Adversity* (London: Focal Point, 2001), pp. 548, 700–701 (available as download from www.fpp.co.uk), as well as his website page entitled “Auschwitz, and the Typhus Plague in Poland”: <http://fpp.co.uk/bookchapters/WSC/Typhuswar.html>.

110 Situation dans les pays occupés par l’ennemi, Juillet 1942, p. 24, PRO FO 371/30917. The gassing experiment is dated to September 5 in Danuta Czech, *Kalendarium der Ereignisse im Konzentrationslager Auschwitz-Birkenau 1939–1945* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1989).

gas circulated widely, to the point where a backbench Conservative MP could write to Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, in March 1942, concerning the fate of Russian prisoners of war in Germany: "when these prisoners are sick they are just killed off with gas like rats."¹¹¹ The British were thus completely aware that gas chambers were in operation within the concentration-camp system, including in Auschwitz. By early 1942, they were also aware of the Nazi euthanasia program and its use of "poison."¹¹²

Given that the British knew that prisoners were being murdered by gas at Auschwitz, should they not have put two and two together and concluded that there was more going on at the camp than the signals' intercepts led them to believe? Both Walter Laqueur and Richard Breitman have argued that it ought to have been possible for the British to have determined that a very large number of deportation transports were arriving at Auschwitz through signals' intercepts of German railway traffic.¹¹³ The Ministry of Economic Warfare maintained a Railway Research Section to analyze German railway transportation and, according to Breitman,

the railway decodes must have contained even more detailed information, so British intelligence analysts must have known about the scale of deportations. They also knew from the data that the Auschwitz camp population was not taking in Jews in numbers comparable to what the transports must have brought and that Jews were not departing. Had Auschwitz become one of the largest cities of Europe? There was only one logical conclusion about the fate of Jews transported there.

111 Sir Waldron Smithers MP to Anthony Eden MP, March 25, 1942, PRO FO 371/33000.

112 Cf. PRB Stockholm Memorandum for PID, Germany No. 2, February 2, 1942 (Clearing of lunatic asylums for German wounded from Russia), C1898. The news, from a Swedish medical official who had recently visited Germany, was given considerable credence by the British: "this is the first case of a Swede having first-hand evidence of this practice, and what he says should be fairly reliable as he is a man in a responsible government position."

113 Laqueur, *Terrible Secret*, p. 86; Breitman, *Official Secrets*, pp. 115–116.

There are grounds, however, for questioning the validity of Breitman's assumption that the British "must have known about the scale of deportations" by analyzing railway traffic.¹¹⁴ The number of "special trains" (in other words, those not running according to normal passenger or goods train schedules) used for deportations was an almost infinitesimal fraction of overall railway traffic in occupied Europe. In April 1942, thirty-seven transports of Jews amounted to just over 1 percent of 3,523 *special* trains and upward of 30,000 *scheduled* trains.¹¹⁵ Identifying special transports from railway intercepts would be to find the proverbial needle in the haystack.

Breitman's argument is further weakened by the considerable evidence already cited above that British intelligence was indeed well aware that Jews from Western Europe, Germany, and Czechoslovakia were being deported to the occupied Soviet Union, Poland, and "Upper Silesia" for either forced labor or ghettoization. Via Richard Lichtheim, the Jewish Agency for Palestine representative in Geneva, the British Foreign Office was informed of the deportations of 90,000 Slovak Jews "to ghettos near the Polish border" as early as March 1942.¹¹⁶ In early July

114 It would appear that the files of the Railway Research Section and of any decrypts of German civilian railway traffic have either not been released to the British archives, or have been destroyed as supposedly "unimportant." Files containing summarized information on German railway traffic derived through *military* signals sent through "Ultra," however, have survived and have been released. As the German military was rarely involved in deportations directly, it is not surprising that they contain no evidence of further British knowledge of deportation trains. They also indicate an extremely fragmentary interception of railway signals' traffic in general; see files PRO HW 13/119, 13/121.

115 Der Beauftragte für den Vierjahresplan, Geschäftsgruppe Verkehr, Tätigkeitsbericht für April 1942, 18.5.42, BA R 26 IV/47. On the organization of deportation transports in general, see Raul Hilberg, *Sonderzüge nach Auschwitz* (Mainz: Horst-Werner Dumjahn Verlag, 1981).

116 Lichtheim to Linton, Telegram, March 16, 1942. Lichtheim suggested appealing to the Slovak leader Tiso via the Vatican, as "Catholic influence very strong." The reaction of the Foreign Office was swift, the enquiries discovering that the Vatican had already made diplomatic representations to the Slovak government. After the British diplomatic enquiry to the Holy See, the

1942, Ernst Fischer, a member of the Czechoslovak State Council, briefed the Foreign Office on the government-in-exile's knowledge of the deportation of 40,000 Slovak Jews to Poland, stating that "it is known that Slovak Jews are now concentrated in the following Polish localities: Lukow, Miedzierjesz-Podlowski, Cholm (all in the Lublin province) and Oswiecim."¹¹⁷

The British possessed evidence of deportations to Kovno, Minsk, Lodz, and Krakow as well as Auschwitz. Through the Police Decodes, British intelligence also had some indication of the forced-labor camp network of the Organization Schmelt in Upper Silesia as early as the winter of 1940.¹¹⁸ In all likelihood, if any analyst compared the figures intercepted for Auschwitz with the known number of deportations of Jews to Poland, they would have concluded that the deportees were arriving both in the concentration camp at Auschwitz and in ghettos at a variety of destinations.

If intelligence on Auschwitz were partially misleading, British knowledge of "Aktion Reinhardt" was simply meager. Nevertheless, a few, isolated intercepts did provide hard and possibly crucial evidence of the extermination process. In August 1942, the Police Section intercepted a message from "Chef der Amtsgruppe C ('Bauleitung')" wanting to know the date of the evacuation of the Warsaw ghetto.¹¹⁹ This information would have undoubtedly

representations were repeated. The Jewish Agency in London was informed of the diplomatic representations within seventeen days of the original telegram arriving from Geneva. Cf. Mr. Kelly Berne to Mr. Osborne FO, Telegram, March 26, 1942; FO to L.B. Namier, Jewish Agency for Palestine, Letter, April 4, 1942, all W4555/4555/48, PRO FO 371/32680.

117 Extract from memorandum communicated by M Ernst Fischer on July 2, 1942 (W 9559/4555/48), PRO FO 370/32680.

118 MSGP 23, November 17, 1940 (signal on November 9, 1940, of HSSPF Krakau to Plenipotentiary for Employment of Foreign Labour Upper Silesia), PRO HW 16/6 pt. 1.

119 Summary of German Police Decodes, August 1–31, 1941, ZIP/MSG38, n.d., p. 16, PRO HW 16/6 pt.1.

reinforced the news emerging from other sources about the deportations from the Polish capital in the summer of 1942.¹²⁰ From the No.3 Traffic, indications came through in late November that “new camps for Jews are being set up in the General Gouvernement for which experienced guards are being demanded from the existing camps.”¹²¹

The most striking intercept has recently been put into its German context by Stephen Tyas and Peter Witte; namely, an intercept of a message sent from the SSPF Lublin to the SD commander in Krakow and to Eichmann in Berlin in early 1943. This report cited figures on “Einsatz Reinhardt” up to the end of 1942, which exactly match the figure subsequently used in the well-known Korherr report of the spring of 1943.¹²² According to this signal, 1,274,166 Jews died in the “Einsatz Reinhardt” camps at Majdanek, Sobibór, Treblinka, and Bełżec up to the end of 1942.¹²³ Tyas and Witte, however, made no attempt to discover whether British analysts paid any attention to this signal. According to the summary analysis for January 1943, the analysts at Bletchley Park did indeed notice the signal, but did not know what to make of it:

120 Indeed, some reports relied in part on open-source information derived from the Nazi *Krakauer Zeitung*. Cf. British Section of the World Jewish Congress, Chronicle of Jewish Events Issue of August 1942 (W14510/4555/48), PRO FO 371/32680. This report was not, however, marked “received” by the FO until October 29, 1942, only a short time before the major reports from the Polish Government-in-exile and Gerhard Riegner in late November. Cf. Engel, *In the Shadow of Auschwitz*, p. 198; Breitman, *Official Secrets*, pp. 144–146.

121 Summary covering material received November 25–December 25, 1942, ZIP/OS 5, December 28, 1942, pp. 4–5, PRO HW 16/65.

122 Peter Witte and Stephen Tyas, “A New Document on the Deportation and Murder of Jews during ‘Einsatz Reinhardt’ 1942,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 15:3 (2001), pp. 468–486.

123 SSPF Lublin an BdS Krakau, March 11, 1943, GPDD 355a, items 13/15, PRO HW 16/22. Item 13 of same GPDD was addressed “Geheime Reichssache! An das Reichssicherheitshauptamt, zu Händen SS Obersturm[bann]führer Eichmann, Berlin...rest missed!!!”. For the use of the statistic, cf. Korherr-Bericht, April 19, 1943, Nbg Doc NO-5193 (German-language copy from Nizkor Project website).

miscellaneous

Einsatz Reinhardt: SSPF Lublin sends the Befehlshaber der Sipo Krakau a report on Einsatz Reinhardt for the 14 days up to 31.1.42: Increase to 31.12.42: L 12671, B O S 515, T 10335, altogether 23611. Totals on 31.12.42: L 24733, B 434508, S 101370, T 71355, altogether 1274166 (355a 13).¹²⁴

The next month the analysts further noted that "the Einsatz Reinhardt is probably referred to again: on 15 Feb a car is sent from Auschwitz to try out the field kitchens for the Aktion Reinhardt."¹²⁵

While the Bletchley analysts clearly could not make full sense of this information, they were professional enough to know that it meant something and included it in their summary report. Whether anyone at MI6 or another British intelligence service possessed corroborating information is not known. It would appear that the decryption of this unique message concerning "Einsatz Reinhardt" was in keeping with much of the intelligence knowledge of the "Final Solution" in 1941–42: the British came very close to a complete picture of the entire extermination process, but perhaps close was not close enough.

CONCLUSION

By May 1944, British intelligence knew enough about the extermination process to ask Major-General Friedrich Kreipe (recently kidnapped from Crete by commandos and whose capture was later the subject of the film *Ill Met By Moonlight*), a standard, routine question about "mass carbon-monoxide asphyxiation."¹²⁶

124 Summary covering material received between December 21, 1942–January 25, 1943, ZIP/OS/6 of January 28, 1943, p. 6, PRO HW 16/65. As Tyas and Witte point out, the "T" (Treblinka) figure lost a digit in transmission and should read 713,555. "L" designates Majdanek.

125 Summary covering material received between January 25–February 26, 1943, ZIP/OS/7, February 27, 1943, PRO HW 16/65.

126 CSDIC (UK), Preliminary report on information obtained from M 506 [the code designation for the German general] Generalmajor, GOC [General Officer Commanding] 22 Luftlande Division Mot[orized], captured Crete, April 26, 1944, May 24, 1944, PRO WO 208/4363. Kreipe "hotly denied" knowing anything concerning any atrocities.

In 1941 and 1942, however, the intelligence services had been far less forthright in their questioning regarding the information that flowed to them concerning Nazi policies toward European Jews.

The British were presented with just two exceedingly brief opportunities to deduce a policy of systematic extermination of Soviet Jews at the hands of police battalions and Waffen-SS units in the summer of 1941. A total of no more than twenty intercepts from the Police Decodes explicitly mentioned the mass execution of Jews in 1941 and 1942. The most striking, the von dem Bach reports of early August 1941, were fudged by the lack of specificity concerning the “30,000 executions in my sector” reported on August 7. The British political reaction to these reports, the Churchill broadcast of August 24, condemning the actions of “German police troops,” represents a swift and honorable response. However, the consequence of this political reaction was to close down the source: the police signals went silent concerning mass executions of Jews just at the moment when analysts had accumulated enough evidence to infer that a policy of systematic butchery was under way. British analysts did not doubt the numbers but, perversely, doubted that all the victims were in fact Jewish. Had the police signals continued to report in detail, one can only presume that the analysts would have corrected their mis-comprehension.

The lack of confirmation from Soviet sources and the continuing evidence of vicious anti-partisan warfare contained in the Police Decodes up to November 1942, further undermined the possibility of drawing a correct conclusion from the evidence of the few reports on mass executions of Jews that were actually intercepted. When, in October 1942, the Foreign Office wished to provide the United Nations Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes with evidence of German atrocities from the Police Decodes, it only claimed that they “contained accounts of wholesale executions, etc.” The “etc” speaks volumes about the lack of full comprehension of the evidence.¹²⁷

127 V. Cavendish Bentinck to Sir Alexander Cadogan, October 8, 1942, PRO HW 14/54

The subsequent silence of the police signals concerning mass executions inadvertently highlighted other evidence of Nazi policy toward Soviet Jews; namely, their use as forced labor. This misinterpretation of the true nature of Nazi policy was underscored both by British assessments of Germany's economic and manpower situation in the winter of 1941/42, and by the evidence received, in the first half of 1942, of the initial deportations of German and West European Jews to the East.

The evidence of the intercepts from Auschwitz was not sufficient to shake this interpretation. Although these intercepts clearly revealed immense Jewish suffering, they did not pre-empt the reports emerging from Poland of "the bestial policy of cold-blooded extermination" of European Jews condemned by the British government, along with eleven other Allied powers, on December 17, 1942, in the United Nations Declaration.¹²⁸

Persecution, starvation, decimation, and slave labor — all these crimes were amply confirmed in the intelligence received by Bletchley Park in 1941 and 1942. On the basis of these and other sources, the British government joined in diplomatic and public protests of Nazi crimes against humanity. Having condemned German atrocities in Russia in 1941, on September 8, 1942, Churchill condemned "the most bestial, most squalid and the most senseless of offences, the mass deportation of Jews from France" in a speech in the House of Commons.¹²⁹ From July 1942 onward, the British cabinet established a committee on the treatment of war criminals and cooperated in the creation of the aforementioned United Nations Commission for the Investigation of War

128 Declaration of the United Nations, December 17, 1942, published in Jacob Apenszlak, ed., *The Black Book of Polish Jewry. An Account of the Martyrdom of Polish Jewry under the Nazi Occupation* (New York: American Federation for Polish Jews, 1943), p. 236.

129 Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies*, p. 68. Churchill's protest was followed by a protest by the papal nuncio in Vichy France: Berne to FO, Mr Norton, Telegram, September 14, 1942 (W12493), PRO FO 371/32680.

Crimes.¹³⁰ Yet it took the outside interventions of the World Jewish Congress and the Polish Government-in-exile in August, October, and November 1942, and the fresh information provided from their sources to convince the British government that Nazi policy amounted to what in hindsight would be labelled genocide.¹³¹

“Hindsight” is, of course, proverbially 20/20. It could perhaps be argued that the intelligence services failed the British political establishment in not providing accurate confirmation of the reports received from outside sources in late 1942, and that they should have been able to cut through the fog of war and see clearly what is now obvious to subsequent generations. There were, undoubtedly, failures of imagination, yet there were also attempts to make what was beyond belief conform to an existing understanding. Therefore, it would be more accurate to conclude that the history of the Police Decodes reveals the limitations of intelligence services too often thought to be omniscient and all-comprehending.

130 CWC (42) 1st Meeting, War Cabinet Committee on Treatment of War Criminals, Agenda for July 22, 1942, July 16, 1942; CWC (42) 4, Proposal for a Fact-Finding Commission, Memorandum by Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, July 20, 1942, PRO FO 371/30917.

131 John P. Fox, “The Jewish Factor in British War Crimes Policy in 1942,” *English Historical Review*, 92 (1977) remains the best summary of Foreign Office reactions first to the Riegner Telegram of August and of the subsequent Polish governmental and World Jewish Congress reports of November and December 1942.