

TERROR AND LOCAL COLLABORATION IN OCCUPIED BELARUS: THE CASE OF THE *SCHUTZMANNSCHAFT* BATTALION 118: II: WAR CRIMINALITY

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This is the second part of a study on the activities of the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118, a Ukrainian auxiliary police formation in the service of Nazi Germany in occupied Belarus. Whereas part one¹ focused on the background, historiography and sources on the unit, part two recounts the battalion's involvement in large scale atrocities in the Belarusian countryside in 1943, the punitive actions against the villages Chmelevichi, Dal'kovichi, Koteli, Makov'e, Novaia Vileika, Osovy, Ubor'e, Zarech'e, and against the Bielski partisans and Jewish civilians in the Naliboki forest. It concludes with a short discussion on ultranationalist narratives of denial and the glorification of the unit in post-Soviet Ukraine and its diaspora.

Keywords: Belarus; WWII; *Schutzmannschaft* Battalions 115 and 118; *Bukovyns'kyi Kurin'*; German occupation; genocidal policies; collaborators; partisans

The Canadian court records from the denaturalization proceedings against former Schutzmann Volodymyr Katriuk corroborate some of the information from the BSSR court cases against his fellow members of the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118. This battalion has come to be associated with one atrocity in particular, the brutal destruction of the Belarusian village of Khatyn' and the murder of its 186 civilian residents in March 1943.² A symbol of Belarusian and Soviet war-time suffering, Khatyn' has entered popular consciousness and become an integral part of Belarusian and post-Soviet historical and political culture.³ Yet, Khatyn' was but one of the villages destroyed by the unit. The *Schutzmannschaft*

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¹ *Historical Yearbook* 8 (2011): 195–214.

² On Katriuk's role in the Khatyn' massacre of March 1943, see Per Anders Rudling, "The Khatyn Massacre in Belorussia: A Historical Controversy Revisited," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 356–381.

³ *Ibid.*; Alexandra Goujon, "The Memory of Nazi Punitive Actions in Belarus and Ukraine: The Khatyn Case in Comparative Perspective" (paper presented at the Fifth Annual Danyliw Seminar, Chair of Ukrainian Studies, University of Ottawa, October 29, 2009).

Battalion 118 left a path of destruction. The court cases against its officers Meleshko, Vasiura, and Katriuk give a detailed insight into how the punitive operations in Belarus were organized on the local level, illustrating in horrific detail the mechanisms and implementation of the *Generalplan Ost* in the Belarusian lands.

The Chmelevichi *Aktion*

The Chmelevichi *Aktion* on January 6, 1943 marked the beginning of the battalion's punitive actions in Pleshchenitsy raion. Vasiura ordered Vinnitskii's first company to the village, where, together with the third company, it opened fire on civilians and deliberately burnt buildings.⁴ Chmelevichi was surrounded, the residents were chased out on the street and forced to stand naked in the cold, while the *Schutzmannen* looted the houses. According to *Schutzmann* Knap, the entire village was then burnt to the ground.⁵ Seized German documents from January 7, 1943 confirm the burning of the village and of three inhabitants.⁶ Local residents claim that over 60 houses were burnt, and that only six remained intact. Witnesses recovered the burnt corpses of local residents in the ashes.⁷ According to *Schutzmann* Kachan, the third company burnt the village, the *Schutzmannen* Morzitskii, Abdalaev, and Bondarenko being particularly active in this operation.⁸ *Schutzmann* Khrenov of the first company testified that he himself had participated in the burning of Chmelevichi.⁹ Meleshko also identified the clerk Liutik and the

⁴ O. F. Knap, p.d. 27.8.85, Tsentral'nyi arkhiv KGB, Respubliki Belarus (hereafter: TsA KGB RB), Arkh. ug. d. 26746, t. 6, l.d. 231; Judge Viktor Vasil'evich Glazkov's legal notes, originals in the personal archive of Judge Glazkov, Minsk, Belarus, summary of the Vasiura and Meleshko cases (hereafter: Glazkov notes), p. 5.

⁵ O. F. Knap, p.d. 21.03.73, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 2, l.d. 56; p.d. 21.6.74, t. 4, d. 246–247.

⁶ Cited in Vasiura case, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746, t. 8, l. 138.

⁷ Eyewitness accounts from A. P. Zholud', p.d. 3.6.86, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746, t. 12, l.d. 89–92; A. D. Rabetskaia, p.d. 5.6.86, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746, t. 12, l. 83–86; Glazkov notes, p. 6.

⁸ I. T. Kachan, p.d. 30.8.85, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746, t. 6, l.d. 256, t. 11, 38–58, t. 12, 25–27.

⁹ “When asked whether the respondent [Katriuk] had participated in this operation, he answered that he could not say, but that he could say that the company ‘was there.’” Testimony by Mr. Khrenov, Nizhnyi Novgorod, Russia, March 30, 1998, “The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration (applicant) v. Vladimir Katriuk (respondent) (T–2408–96), Federal Court of Canada Trial Division, Nadon, J., January 29, 1999,” *Federal Trial Reports*, vol. 156 (Fredricton, NB: Maritime Law Book Ltd, 1999), 185–186.

translator Lukovich as active in burning the houses, stating that the order to set the village on fire originated with Körner, Smowski, and Vasiura.¹⁰ The burning of the village was linked to allegations that partisans from the villages had infiltrated the unit. “There was talk among the policemen that the operation was somehow linked to the arrest of Vinogradov and other policemen,” remembered one of the veterans during the Meleshko trial.¹¹

The Destruction of Koteli and Zarech’e

The destruction of Zarech’e in February 1943 followed a similar pattern. People were divided into two groups. Under the pretence that they were awaiting deportation, one group was forced into the barn, and then burnt alive.¹² According to the testimonies from the trial against the *Schutzmäänner*, in the operation, four people were killed in the village of Koteli, ten in Zarech’e, six of which were burnt in their houses. Altogether, 30 houses were burnt in Zarech’e.¹³ As in the case of Chmelevichi, local residents testified that the number of victims was higher:

The members of the punitive expedition entered the villages of Koteli and Zamosh’e. Afterwards the punitive squad set on fire the houses of our village Zarech’e. I saw how they killed my neighbor by shooting him in the stomach. Two members of the punitive expedition robbed their house, and a third killed my neighbor’s mother by shooting her in the head with a rifle. I jumped out and started to run, but the same member of the punitive expedition wounded me with a second shot in my arm, and deadly wounded in the chest mother Mariia Geina, who died after a few minutes. In the village of Zarech’e about half of all the houses were burnt and no less than 30 local people were shot.¹⁴

¹⁰ V. A. Meleshko, p.d. 8.12.74, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 5, l.d. 390–392, t. 5, 385–403; Glazkov notes, p. 5.

¹¹ N. A. Franchuk, p.d. 1.6.74, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 5, l.d. 30; Glazkov notes, p. 5.

¹² Ales’ Adamovich, “Zapisnye knizhki raznykh let,” *Nėman: Ezhemesiachnyi literaturno-khudozhestvennyi i obshchestvenno-politicheskii zhurnal*, no. 7 (July 1997): 19, 1972 interview with Zinaida Ivanovna Miadzel’ from the village of Borkavichy.

¹³ S. A. Burak, p.d. 4.6.86, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746, t. 7, l. 123–127; O. F. Knap, p.d. 24.10.85, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746, t. 6, l.d. 257; H. V. Spivak, p.d. 13.6.86, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746, t. 11, l. 222–238, t. 6, l. 191–202; Glazkov notes, p. 12.

¹⁴ Ia. I. Butskevich, p.d. 10.6.86, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746, t. 12, l. 136–138; Glazkov notes, p. 13.

The *Aktion* was led by Woellke and Vasiura.¹⁵

On Vasiura's orders we attacked the partisans. I saw how he issued orders before the attack, and commanded the companies and platoons, instructed where to place the canons, mortars and stationary machine guns. During the attack, on the orders of Il'chuk, the commander of the second platoon, the barn, from which the partisans were shooting, was set on fire.¹⁶

On Vasiura's orders all the members of the punitive expedition opened fire on the village of Zarech'e and the partisans, and the local residents with all the types of weapons at our disposal. As a result many houses were burnt down and several people were killed ... Some houses burnt down during the time the village was fired upon, the rest were set on fire by the members of the punitive expedition. All the houses were searched and property was stolen ... In carrying out the orders, two men who were trying to get out of the village were killed by my platoon.¹⁷

Together with the Germans, the Ukrainian *Polizei* of the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118 gathered the men of Osovy and burnt them in the local school.¹⁸ In Bobrovo, on March 7, 1943, the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118 killed two villagers, Petro Meleshko and Ivan Khristovski, accused of making boots and rifle butts for the partisans. Their property and livestock were confiscated.¹⁹

¹⁵ H. H. Lakusta, p.d. 19.6.74, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 4, l.d.; Glazkov notes, p. 11.

¹⁶ O. F. Knap, p.d. 21.6.74, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 4, l.d. 249; p.d. 21.03.73 and t. 2, l.d. 57–58; Glazkov notes, p. 11.

¹⁷ V. A. Meleshko, p.d. 3.12.74, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 5, l.d. 392–393, t. 7, l. 53–55.

¹⁸ Adamovich, "Zapisnye knizhki raznykh let," 19.

¹⁹ Testimony by eyewitnesses N. M. Meleshko, Petro Meleshko's widow, Meleshko case, p.d. 20.6.73, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 12, l. 157–160; A. I. Al'shevskaja, Vasiura case, p.d. 4.6.86, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746, t. 12, 147–150; A. I. Mishkina, p.d. 4.6.86, TsA KGB RB, t. 12, l. 151–155; Glazkov notes, p. 10. Shortage of equipment, particularly leather products, had become an acute problem in the wake of the Holocaust, as many of its victims had been tanners and cobblers. In a June 13, 1942 report from *SS-Brigadeführer* Carl Zenner, of *SS- und Polizeiführer (SSPF) Weissruthenien*, entitled "Partisanenbekämpfung," Zenner described the poor condition of the *Schutzmannschaften* and their equipment. Few possessed boots, he complained, there was no leather for repairs for those who had boots, and there were no boot makers. The *Schutzmänner* on guard post (*Einzeldienst*) duties worked barefoot. Philip W. Blood, *Hitler's Bandit Hunters: The SS and the Nazi Occupation of Europe* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2006), 74.

Dal'kovichi

On May 13, 1943, Vasiura ordered a punitive *Aktion* against the village of Dal'kovichi, during which, according to Lakusta, "eight partisans and six peaceful residents were killed, and the village was burnt."²⁰ The order to burn the entire village was issued by Vasiura.²¹ V. P. Davzhonok, a local partisan veteran, testified that eight or nine partisans had been killed in battle. He identified the victims and confirmed that they had been tortured before being shot. A star had been cut out from the flesh of the breast of one of the victims, Anna Stanislavovna Kononovich.²² Sergei Myshak, the cook of the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118, gave the following testimony:

In mid-May 1943, a large group of policemen from different companies of the 118th Battalion carried out an operation against the village of Dal'kovichi. Vasiura led and commanded the group. In the village I saw the corpse of a young woman, a burning barn, from which the partisans were firing with a machine gun. Filippov and I left the village earlier [than the rest of the men].²³

Myshak later overheard the *Schutzmänner* discussing the events.

In the evening of that day the policemen said that they had burnt the village of Dal'kovichi ... [*Schutzmänner*] Kotov and Shul'ga told me that in the village of Dal'kovichi Lakusta and Lukovich distinguished themselves by throwing grenades into the barn from which the partisans had opened fire, and the house, in which the local staff of the partisans was located.²⁴

²⁰ H. H. Lakusta, p.d. 19.6.74, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 4, l.d. 185–186; S. V. Sakhno, p.d. 13.6.74, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 4, l.d. 140–141, 163, t. 6, l.d. 22; Glazkov notes, p. 28.

²¹ O. F. Knap, p.d. 31.5.86, TsA KGB RB; Glazkov notes, p. 29; G. P. Subbotin, p.d. 16.6.86, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746; O. S. Lemesh, p.d. 3.6.86, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746, t. 12, l. 255–258; Glazkov notes, p. 30.

²² V. P. Davzhonok, p.d. 5.6.86, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746, t. 12, l. 252–254; Glazkov notes, p. 30.

²³ S. P. Myshak, p.d. 15.5.86, 17.05.86, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746, t. 11, l. 4; O/s Myshaka s Vasiuroi 16.5.86, TsA KGB RB, Myshak confirmed this version t. 12, l. 6–7; Glazkov notes, p. 29.

²⁴ S. P. Myshak, p.d. 14.5.74, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 4, l.d. 13–14; p.d. 13.8.85, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746, t. 6, l.d. 147–148; Glazkov notes, p. 29.

The Biarezina Aktion

From May 20–25, the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118 took part in the so-called Biarezina Aktion against the villages of Makov'e and Ubor'e, and other settlements in Biarezina raion. From May 20–23, the second platoon of the first company burnt 25 houses in the village of Novaia Vileika. Some residents were burnt alive in their houses, others were thrown into wells.²⁵ In his testimony during the Meleshko trial, Vasiura stated:

As the companies were marching through the forests and by settlements there were firefights with partisans, villages were totally or partially burnt down, especially those that were located in the forest. Peaceful residents were captured and deported to Germany. In some villages that were still populated, family members of the partisans or people connected to them were shot together with suspects who had been arrested in the forest. People were chased into some sort of barn next to the village, locked in and the barn was set on fire. When people attempted to escape or shouted loudly, fire was opened with rifles and machine guns. Those barbaric acts were carried out on German orders, they commanded the [auxiliary] police during the execution of the orders.²⁶

Vasiura claimed never to have witnessed those crimes himself, only to have seen the fires in the villages, and how arrested people were transported on trucks and taken somewhere else. He claimed to have heard about the atrocities only through his conversations with the policemen.²⁷ Vasiura's story was contradicted by a number of separate testimonies. After a land mine had exploded on the road, killing *Schutzmann* Slovskii,²⁸ Vasiura forced the local residents of Novaia Vileika to march through the burning village, along the mined road, ahead of the police battalion.²⁹ Vasiura was identified as leading and taking part in the atrocities, during the burning of the village of Novaia Vileika in Begomil'ski raion,³⁰ "beating with a bat two or three old men, who told him that if they were deported to

²⁵ Glazkov notes, p. 31.

²⁶ H. Vasiura, p.d. 26.11.73, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613; Glazkov notes, p. 31.

²⁷ Ibid., and H. Vasiura, p.d. 18.4.52, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746, t. 1, l.d. 60–61; Glazkov notes, p. 31.

²⁸ H. Vasiura, p.d. 19.6.86, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746; Glazkov notes, p. 32.

²⁹ I. M. Varlamov, p.d. 6.04.74, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 3, l.d. 74–75, 93–94; p.d. 26.6.86, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613; Glazkov notes, p. 31.

³⁰ H. H. Lakusta, p.d. 31.10.73, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 2, l.d. 28, t. 5, l.d. 383; Glazkov notes, p. 31.

Germany their children would die of hunger.³¹ Vasiura ordered the platoon leader Il'chuk to burn the village.³² The battalion then continued to the village of Staraia Vileika, on May 19–20, where the first and third platoons of the first company encountered partisan fire. In response they burnt 40 houses. On May 22, they punished the villagers harshly. In one of the village barns 17 children, seven women, and one man were burnt alive, in another five men. Five other people were killed outside the barns. The young people of the village were taken to Germany. Only one lightly wounded young boy was able to escape from the barn during the slaughter.³³

During the time of the deportation of the youngsters of the village and family members of the partisans, Vasiura commanded the policemen, who executed his orders. On his order, the staff clerk wrote down the names of the villagers on some sort of list, after which the relatives of partisans were selected. Vasiura led all that work. I was also a member of the staff and saw how Vasiura led the selection of people. When the gathered residents were marched in convoy towards the barn, I saw, and remember well, how Zats, Vasiura, Lukovich, Liutik marched in front of the convoy and pointed out the barn, into which the people were forced. After they were forced into the barn, Zats and Vasiura ordered it set on fire and started to shoot on the people locked inside. After the staff had arrested a few men in the village of Vileika, they were shot after having been interrogated. I was not an eyewitness to the execution, therefore I cannot say how many people were shot, and who shot them, but I suppose that this could not have happened without Vasiura's participation.³⁴

In the village, next to the wooden church, we fought a battle with the partisans. Whether Vasiura personally fired upon the village, I cannot say. I

³¹ S. P. Myshak, p.d. 15.5.74, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 4, l.d. 15; p.d. 13.8.86, t. 6, l.d. 148; Glazkov notes, pp. 31, 36.

³² O. P. Knap, p.d. 21.6.74, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 4, l. 257–258, t. 5, l. 381; p.d. 22.11.74 and p.d. 27.8.85, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746, t. 6, l.d. 235; H. H. Lakusta, p.d. 31.10.73, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 2, l.d. 28, t. 5, l.d. 383 (Meleshko case, p.d. 21.11.74, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 7, l.d. 101–102); I. I. Kozynchenko, p.d. 6.6.86, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746, t. 5, l. 397; G. P. Subbotin, p.d. 10.6.86, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746, t. 11, l. 61; Glazkov notes, p. 31.

³³ V. I. Dmitrenko, p.d. 7.2.75, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 7, l.d. 66–69; Glazkov notes, pp. 31, 36.

³⁴ V. A. Meleshko, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 2, l.d. 124–125, t. 5, l.d. 383, 397–398; Glazkov notes, p. 31.

did not see him. More likely, he probably commanded the battle. Vasiura and other commanders sorted the captives, who were gathered in front of the staff into groups. About 20 people were chased into the barn and shot. I am not entirely sure, but it seems to me that Vasiura was among the group of Germans who went up to the barn, into which the people had been forced, and led the *Schutzmänner* firing upon the people. I cannot say whether Vasiura himself took part in the shooting, but he was by the barn and issued, together with the Germans, the command to the *Schutzmänner* to open fire on the people who were locked inside. I stood by the barn and I saw the members of the punitive expedition with my own eyes.³⁵

On the fourth or fifth day of the operation, the first company and the [battalion] staff stayed in one village, in which many peaceful residents were gathered, awaiting deportation to Germany. The people were sorted, and the young were selected, but they objected to being taken to Germany. They were then taken to the barn and shot. The operation was carried out in front of the staff, and the staff members participated in its execution.³⁶

Being part of my section of the staff of the battalion, I saw Smowski, Vasiura, Vinnitskii, Meleshko, and Pasechnik there. During the selection of people, Lukovich had some sort of list. Soon after the people had been sorted, a command was issued to bring the people in a convoy to the group that included women and children to a barn at the edge of the village, not far from the staff. As the doomed people were marched [towards the barn], the commanders of the battalion and the staff members, including Vasiura, walked behind us. Outside the barn the people began to crowd, as they did not want to enter. The first platoon of the punitive detachment, as well as the policemen of our platoon began pushing the people into the barn. Vasiura stood next to us, ordered us to hurry up and to lock the people up in the barn faster.³⁷

Under his direct command and with Vasiura's personal participation the village of Novaia Vileika was annihilated. After it had been burnt, the battalion stayed nearby, in the village of Vileika, in which many houses were burnt during that very day. The following day, villagers who had hidden in

³⁵ H. V. Spivak, p.d. 26.4.74, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 3, l.d. 196–198; H. V. Spivak, p.d. 13.6.86, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746, reconfirms the statement; Glazkov notes, pp. 31, 32.

³⁶ P. F. Dzeba, p.d. 14.8.73, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 2, l.d. 168; Glazkov notes, p. 31.

³⁷ S. V. Sakhno, p.d. 13.6.74, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 4, l.d. 144–149, statement from 17.8.84, t. 6, l. 19–20ob; Glazkov notes, p. 31.

the forest began to return. The policemen of the first company, on the order of Vasiura and the German officers who were present, divided the residents of Vileika into a few groups. One of the groups, numbering no less than 25 people, and consisting primarily of women and children, was chased into the barn on the outskirts of the village. After it was set on fire, we opened fire on the barn. Vasiura issued the orders to the policemen ... I personally saw how Vasiura played a most active role in the execution of the *Aktion*.³⁸

The policemen under Vasiura's leadership selected a group of women and children among the residents of Vileika, over twenty of them, whom they chased into the barn on the outskirts of the village. Vasiura, Meleshko, Lukovich and other officers walked next to us, escorting the people to the barn. They issued orders to force the people into the barn. After the people had been forced into the barn, one of the policemen – I do not recall exactly who – threw in a grenade through an opening in the barn. There was an explosion. Following that, on Vasiura's orders, the policemen opened fire upon the people that were locked in the barn. As I took part in this atrocity myself, I saw how Vasiura himself fired on the barn with the people from the side of the barn where the doors were. One of the policemen set the barn on fire. As a result, all the people were killed. After the slaughter of the women and children, Vasiura and Lukovich interrogated the men in the staff. They were also local residents and were suspected of contacts with the partisans. Through conversations with the other policemen I heard that five or six of these men were burnt in a different barn. Which of the policemen carried out that slaughter, I cannot say. I don't know.³⁹

In the village of Vileika, the first company of the police and the staff of the battalion, with Vasiura's participation, shot peaceful citizens. They were shot in two barns on the outskirts of the village ... The police staff and the first company shot the first group of people a few meters away from the barn, in one of the houses where the staff of the battalion was stationed. I happened to be in the staff building and saw how the barn was burning. One of the policemen in the staff told me that all the people in the barn, most of them women, children, and old men, local villagers, had been shot on the orders of Smowski, the battalion commander, with Vasiura's participation. At that moment I saw Vasiura in the staff building. He was questioning the arrested men in civilian clothes, who were held in the barn that belonged to the house where the staff was located ... they were six or seven people. Afterwards

³⁸ O. F. Knap, p.d. 21.6.74, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 4, l. 258, 22.11.74, t. 5, l. 381–382, 27.8.85, t. 6, l. 235; Glazkov notes, p. 34.

³⁹ M. D. Kurka, p.d. 25.6.74, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 4, l.d. 280–282; Glazkov notes, p. 34.

there was talk in the battalion that all the men of the first company of the police, led by Vasiura and Lukovich, shot and burnt their prisoners along with the building.⁴⁰

In the village of Vileika, the first company and the staff of the battalion stayed three days. I was stationed by the cemetery with my stationary machine gun. I saw how local residents returned to the village during the first and second day. The staff of the battalion, Vasiura and other commanders were located in the village, across from the cemetery. About the second day I saw Vasiura, Smowski, other commanders and members of the police staff by the staff building. On the orders of Smowski and Vasiura, the clerk drew up lists of local residents. One group of young people were handed over to Germans in yellow-brown uniforms, who had just arrived. They took away the young people on trucks for transportation to Germany. When I returned to the cemetery I saw how the barn, which stood next to the building where the staff was located, was burning, and how people were opening fire by the staff building. When he returned to his post, Shcharban' said that under Smowski and staff leader Vasiura's command the *Polizei* had shot a woman with children, and that the barn was burnt in order to cover the traces of that crime.⁴¹

A surviving victim of the Vileika massacre gave the following account:

In the second half of May 1943 the partisans warned the residents of our village that the Hitlerite command was carrying out punitive operations against partisans and the peaceful population ... There was a battle between the members of the punitive expedition and the partisans ... Almost all the houses in the village were burnt ... The members of the punitive battalion brought some kind of lists and started to sort the gathered residents according to these lists into two groups. First they separated the group of young people, including myself, and took us aside to the barn, which was surrounded by a line of guards. Thereafter the members of the punitive expedition again separated a group of women and children, about 20–25 people. The members of the punitive expedition chased them towards the wooden barn which stood at the end of the village ... The people were chased into that barn and locked up inside. Suddenly a flame appeared over the roof of the barn, and a few explosions were heard ... Thereafter fire was opened on the people [inside]. No one in the barn survived.⁴²

⁴⁰ [S. A.] Khrenov, 26.7.85, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746, t. 6, l.d. 131ob–133; Glazkov notes, p. 34.

⁴¹ T. P. Topchii, p.d. 22.5.86, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746, t. 12, l. 40–45; Glazkov notes, p. 35.

⁴² O. I. Praded, p.d. 17.06.86, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746, t. 13, l. 59–61; Glazkov notes, p. 35.

According to the testimonies by the perpetrators, the people burnt in the barn were relatives of partisans.⁴³ The survivor V. A. Praded testified that there were many Ukrainian speakers among the members of the punitive battalion.⁴⁴ Altogether, over 30 people were killed in Vileika that day.⁴⁵ In the so-called Biarezina *Aktion*, Katriuk commanded the section, while Vasiura was the leader of the staff. The adjutant Lukovich raped a teacher, before burning her alive together with six men in a barn in Rasokha or Vileika. Thereafter the battalion continued to raid the village of Osovy, where they burnt 78 residents in a barn.⁴⁶ The operation followed patterns similar to previous ones.

In the village of Osovy the first company and the battalion staff opened fire on and burnt together with the barn 78 people, residents of the village. They were relatives of partisans, identified with the help of the local elder [*starosta*]. When the doors were locked, there was an explosion and, following it, on the order of the German officer and of Vasiura, the policemen opened fire on the people locked in the barn. At the time, I was standing by the barn and saw how Meleshko and Vasiura, among other policemen, were firing on the barn. What sort of weapon Vasiura was firing, I cannot tell.⁴⁷

That morning, two sections of the first platoon, mine and Katriuk's, were sent out on the orders of the staff. Meleshko went with us as well. We also had a part of the third platoon at our disposal. In the house next to the staff there were up to 60 local women, men and adolescents. On the orders of the battalion commanders Smowski and Körner, we convoyed the captured citizens to the barn which stood on the side of the village in the direction of the river Biarezina. When we chased the people, Lukovich, Zats, and Vasiura went ahead, showing the way, where to chase the people. On their way there, the people started to scream that their village elder [*starosta*] was a traitor, that his family members were also in the partisan movement. The elder

⁴³ O. F. Knap, p.d. 27.8.85, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746, t. 6, l.d. 235; Glazkov notes, pp. 35, 36.

⁴⁴ V. A. Praded, p.d. 17.06.86, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746, t. 13, 54–57; Glazkov notes, p. 35.

⁴⁵ H. V. Spivak, p.d. 16.8.85, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746, t. 6, l.d. 195; O. F. Knap, p.d. 27.8.85, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746, t. 6, l.d. 235.

⁴⁶ Adamovich, "Zapisnye knizhki raznykh let," 24–25. See also survivor testimonies by A. A. Skakun and V. N. Kovel, p.d. 8.6.86, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746; Glazkov notes, p. 41.

⁴⁷ M. D. Kurka, p.d. 25.6.74, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 4, l.d. 282–283; Glazkov notes, p. 40.

[*starosta*], who had been left behind with the staff, was brought by Liutik and Kozynchenko, and united with the people we were marching to the barn. All of them were chased into the barn which Zats, Vasiura, and Lukovich showed us, and locked in. The policemen stood in a semicircle in front of the barn. Zats and Vasiura issued the commands to Lukovich and Liutik to set the barn on fire. They walked up to the barn and lit it from the rear side. When the barn caught fire an explosion was heard. I did not see whether any of the policemen in the encirclement threw grenades into the barn. It is possible that Lukovich and Liutik had placed some explosive device under the barn which they lit along with the roof of the barn. When Lukovich and Liutik walked away from the barn to a safe distance, the German Zats and Vasiura gave order to open fire on the barn. All the policemen in the encirclement fired on the people in the barn.⁴⁸

On May 27, 1943 the staff of the police was presented with several partisan families in the village of Osovy. Its elder [*starosta*] had informed on them. I remember well how I was called to the staff, where Vasiura ordered me and my platoon to arrest the families whose doors were marked with crosses. I carried out Vasiura's order. Up to 30 people were arrested by my platoon and marched to a free-standing barn. We first chased them to the staff [building], then marched them to the barn. Vasiura, together with Zats, Lukovich, Liutik, Kozynchenko, and other policemen of the staff helped marching the partisans' family members of the village of Osovy to the barn, and then forced them into the barn. After it was set on fire, we opened fire on the locked barn, full of people. The order to open fire was issued by Zats. Vasiura was standing next to him. Whether he repeated his order, I cannot say ... I can only say that Vasiura, together with Zats, led the shooting of the people, in the village of Vileika as well as in Osovy. Together with his subordinate policemen, he gathered the partisan families, which were then shot and burnt in the barn.⁴⁹

At the gate of the barn, the people began to scream and resist, as they did not want to enter the barn. They felt what was awaiting them. Vasiura enlisted the support of other members of the punitive expedition to gain strength to force people into the barn, the gates of which were wide open. I clearly saw that Vasiura himself pushed people into the barn, since I participated in this myself. Vasiura was the senior officer during that *Aktion*. Vasiura ordered that fire be opened on the burning barn as screams, crying and moaning were

⁴⁸ H. H. Lakusta, p.d. 31.10.73, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 2, l. 31–33; p.d. 21.11.74, t. 4, l. 19; Glazkov notes, p. 39.

⁴⁹ V. A. Meleshko, p.d. 2.11.73, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 2, l. 128–130, t. 5, l. 398–399, t. 11, l.d. 238; Glazkov notes, p. 39.

heard from inside. After the firing on the barn the screams gradually went silent.⁵⁰

Several other acts of violence, torture, and killing of civilians appear in the court cases. A number of witnesses testified to how Smowski, Vasiura and Lukovich for hours tortured two suspected partisans, young boys aged 16 or 17, in the village of Makov'e. They crushed their fingers in a door post, forcing them to dig their own graves, after which they were killed by a bullet to their heads on June 6, 1943.⁵¹ In Ubor'e, Lukovich bragged to other *Schutzmänner* about his harsh methods:

When I was in the staff in the village of Ubor'e, the first person I met was Lukovich, who showed by pointing towards the village: "Learn how to deal with the partisans the way we do. Look how many of these bastards we – Vasiura, Meleshko, and myself – have chopped up. As I looked that way, I saw at different distances from the village in various poses about 16 corpses."⁵²

In the summer of 1943, the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118 burnt the village of Kholmovka, which had 63 houses before the war. At least four residents were killed during that operation.⁵³

The *Aktion* against the Bielski Camp in the Naliboki Forest

Following the Biarezina *Aktion*, the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118 continued to the Grodno area, where they tracked down and killed Jews who were hiding in dugouts in the Naliboki forest. The Jews were killed by grenades that

⁵⁰ S. V. Sakhno, p.d. 13.9.74, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 11, l.d. 151, t. 6, l.d. 21; p.d. 28.8.85; Glazkov notes, p. 40.

⁵¹ P. S. Vus, p.d. 24.6.86, 17.07.85, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746, t. 6, l.d. 96–97; I. I. Kozynchenko, p.d. 5.4.74, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 3, l.d. 35–36, 7.8.73, t. 2, l.d. 225, pr. Op. 12.4.74, pr. Och. Ot. TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 5, l.d. 113, pr. Sud. Zased. T. 5, l. 173, t. 6, l.d. 6–7, 166, p.d. P. S. Dubrovskaiia, p.d. 25.4.86, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746; I. M. Varlamov, p.d. 26.6.86, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613; Glazkov notes, pp. 42, 43, 47.

⁵² N. A. Franchuk, p.d. 30.5.74, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 5, l.d. 45; Glazkov notes, p. 43.

⁵³ A. N. Strel'chennok, p.d. 25.1.86, and 24.4.86, 3.8.86, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746, t. 13, l.d. 202–204; V. N. Kur'ian, p.d. 3.7.86, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746, t. 13, l. 183; Glazkov notes, pp. 45, 46.

were thrown into the dugouts. They carried out punitive operations in the villages of Pavlovichi in Iv'evskii raion, the villages of Morino and Nikolaevo.⁵⁴ The *Aktion* in the Naliboki forest has recently gained some attention. The Jews in the dugouts were part of the Bielski partisans, a community of Jews who survived the war in the forest, a topic of a number of recent books and a motion picture.⁵⁵ The *Aktion* took place in August 1943, during an operation in which the Germans had concentrated a force of 50,000 men. Among them were “two German divisions, several regiments of *Osttruppen* and battalions of Latvian, Lithuanian, Byelorussian and Ukrainian *Schutzpolizei*, which formed part of the SS.”⁵⁶ The operation lasted for thirty-five days, but did not go as expected. The Germans and their local collaborators suffered significant casualties, and responded by targeting civilians; they burnt down “over 150 villages, shot or burnt alive several hundred women and children who had not fled from the villages in time, and drove away several thousand peasants into slavery and concentration camps.”⁵⁷ About 50 Jews who were hiding from the punitive expedition in three dugouts were shot.⁵⁸

The testimonies of the former *Schutzmänner* shed further light on these atrocities.

In the summer of 1943, the battalion, together with other punitive detachments, conducted a punitive operation in the Naliboki forest, during which we found dugouts with Jews, hiding from the Germans. The members of the punitive expedition, among them the platoon leader Meleshko, attacked the dugouts and killed all the citizens there. Meleshko himself told me it was he who had ordered that grenades be thrown into the dugouts, after having noticed first smoke in the forest.⁵⁹

In the summer of 1943, the Battalion 118 conducted an operation against the partisans in the Naliboki forest. During the execution of the operation [the

⁵⁴ Adamovich, “Zapisnye knizhki raznykh let,” 25–26.

⁵⁵ See, for instance, Peter Duffy, *The Bielski Brothers: The True Story of Three Men Who Defied the Nazis, Built a Village in the Forest, and Saved 1,200 Jews* (New York: HarperPerennial, 2004); Nechama Tec, *Defiance: The Bielski Partisans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁵⁶ Reuben Ainsztein, *Jewish Resistance in Nazi-Occupied Eastern Europe: With a Historical Survey of the Jews as Fighter and Soldier in the Diaspora* (London: Paul Elek, 1974), 316.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Glazkov notes, p. 49.

⁵⁹ H. Vasiura, personal testimonies in the Meleshko case, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 12, l.d. 8; Glazkov notes, p. 49.

battalion] encountered and shot Jews. How many dugouts were found and how many Jews were shot, I do not know. I was not at the place of the slaughter of the Jews. I found out about it later. According to Meleshko, it was he who discovered the Jews and issued the orders that they be annihilated.⁶⁰

I saw Vasiura among the commanders on the island, where he was interrogating a captured Jew with a large black beard, which showed the dugouts in which the Jews were hiding. Grenades were thrown into one of them and it was blown up along with the people inside it. A few policemen who were searching the [surrounding] swamps found corpses of people. Vasiura stood next to the pit with corpses and saw how the policemen searched the bodies of the killed people. The first platoon of the first company participated in the annihilation of the Jews.⁶¹

Vasiura and the other commanders of the battalion were present when Ivankiv shot three Jews.⁶²

After having killed three Jews who attempted to escape from the dugouts, I returned to the second dugout together with the policemen Pepa, Bilyk, Temechko, and Shveiko. At that point we discovered a hollow in an oak in which some Jews were hiding. Vasiura was already there. I did not see when he arrived. Vasiura, Vinnitskii, and Meleshko stood between two dugouts and discussed something. From the policemen of my platoon I learned that a German had been wounded by a bullet fired from the second dugout. Meleshko informed us of Vinnitskii, Vasiura, and the German Zats' decision to throw grenades into the dugouts. In order to carry out that order, I told my subordinate Pep to tie a few grenades together and throw them into the dugout. This was done by one of our policemen of the second section of the first platoon. Policemen Kmit and Iurchenko of that section shot a few people by the dugouts. The order to the policemen of the second platoon to shoot the Jews was issued by Zats, Vasiura, and Vinnitskii. After the shooting of the Jews in the two dugouts, Vasiura continued to interrogate a Jew who had been captured from the hollow of the oak. After finishing the interrogation, he and Filippov personally shot him. Vasiura shot the Jew with his pistol,

⁶⁰ H. Vasiura, p.d. 19.02.74, l.d. TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, 86–87; Glazkov notes, p. 49.

⁶¹ O. F. Knap, p.d. 21.03.73, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 2, l.d. 65–66; Glazkov notes, p. 49.

⁶² G. M. Dumych, p.d. 4.5.74, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 3, l.d. 259–261; Glazkov notes, p. 49.

Filippov opened fire with a submachine gun. Vasiura fired first, with his pistol. I saw it myself, the shooting took place in front of my eyes.⁶³

I remember that Vasiura participated in the punitive operation against the partisans and local residents in the summer of 1943 in the Naliboki forest, but during the time of the slaughter of the doomed Jews in the dugouts I did not see him. Where he was at that time, I do not know.⁶⁴

At the end of the summer of 1943, the policemen of the 118th Battalion discovered a dugout with 42 Jews in the Naliboki forest. Firing from the dugout wounded a German in the stomach. Thereafter we threw grenades into the dugouts and shot the people inside. Vasiura participated in the operation, but what he did concretely, I do not know.⁶⁵

Vasiura participated in the punitive operation in the Naliboki forest. On the day of the annihilation of the Jews in the forest I met with Vasiura twice. After searching through the forest we reached a dry place. There I saw Vasiura, and other commanders talking to a Jew. As we had encircled the place, and stood some 150 meters away, I heard firing and grenade explosions. Later I walked up to the place where the grenades had exploded and saw the deformed corpses of the people in the dugouts, torn apart and disfigured from the grenade explosions. There stood the same Jew, Vasiura, Smowski and other members of the punitive battalion. Thereafter that Jew showed the place where another Jew was hiding, in a pit under some shrub. Soon thereafter both were shot in the forest nearby. Who issued the order to shoot the Jews and destroy their dugouts, I do not know.⁶⁶

Our entire battalion left Novahrudak for a punitive expedition to the raion of the Naliboki forest in the summer of 1943, during which the policemen annihilated many people of Jewish nationality which we discovered in dugouts. I personally participated in that operation. During the departure, I saw Vasiura, the leader of the staff of the battalion. But whether he participated in the annihilation of the Jews in the dugouts, I do not know.⁶⁷

⁶³ H. H. Lakusta, p.d. 20.6.74, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 4, l.d. 194–195; Glazkov notes, p. 49.

⁶⁴ V. A. Meleshko, p.d. 3.12.74, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 5, l.d. 401; Glazkov notes, p. 49.

⁶⁵ I. T. Kachan, p.d. 30.8.85, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746, t. 6, l.d. 257; Glazkov notes, p. 49.

⁶⁶ O. F. Knap, p.d. (illegible).10.85, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746, t. 6, l.d. 293; Glazkov notes, p. 50.

⁶⁷ I. D. Petrichuk, p.d. 29.5.86, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746; Glazkov notes, p. 50.

Vasiura participated in the extended punitive operation, which was conducted in the summer of 1943 in the marshy forest on the territory of Western Belarus ... We discovered three or four dugouts, in which citizens of Jewish nationality were hiding. We threw grenades into them. Whether I saw Vasiura by the dugouts, I cannot say, because I cannot remember. Therefore I cannot say what his role was in the extermination of the Jews.⁶⁸

Vasiura, in his position as leader of the staff of the 118th Battalion, participated in the punitive expedition in the summer of 1943, during the time when the 118th police Battalion discovered dugouts with Jews in the forest. Grenades were thrown in. I was not there during the slaughter. I saw the dugouts, but not Vasiura. I do not know the details of the massacre, nor anything about Vasiura's role in it.⁶⁹

A few dugouts with people of Jewish nationality were discovered in the Naliboki forest. We threw grenades into the dugouts and fired upon them with machine guns. Vasiura participated in that operation, conducted the activities of the companies, but whether he took part personally in the extermination of the Jews, I cannot tell.⁷⁰

The testimonies of local residents provided a similar picture.

The members of the punitive expedition entered the Lushchinski pine forest, and I heard shooting and grenade explosions. I heard screams of women and children ... By the dugout lied the corpses of Shlomo Gol'dshmidt, his wife, and another two or three citizens of Jewish nationality ... By the second ruined dugout laid the bodies of men, women, and children.⁷¹

Assessing a Bloody Past

The third president of Ukraine, Viktor Yushchenko, turned the glorification of Ukrainian radical nationalism into a cornerstone of his legacy. On January 29,

⁶⁸ B. P. Subbotin, p.d. 10.6.86, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746; Glazkov notes, p. 50.

⁶⁹ V. P. Otripka, p.d. 22.05.86, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746; Glazkov notes, p. 50.

⁷⁰ H. V. Spivak, p.d. 13.6.86, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26746; Glazkov notes, p. 50.

⁷¹ A. I. Sobolevskii, p.d. 23.6.86; D. M. Shakal', p.d. 23.6.86; I. I. Sobolevskii, p.d. 5.3.75, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 7, l.d. 250–252; V. M. Shakal', p.d. 5.3.75, TsA KGB RB, Arkh. ug. d. 26613, t. 7, l.d. 247–249; Glazkov notes, p. 50.

2010, after having been devastatingly defeated in the first round of the presidential elections, the outgoing president recognized not only the OUN (Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists) and the UPA (Ukrainian Insurgent Army), but a whole list of military formations as “heroes of Ukraine,” including “other military formations, parties, organizations, and movements, who fought for Ukrainian statehood and independence,” an indirect recognition of the Waffen-SS Division *Galizien*.⁷² In 2007, Yushchenko designated Roman Shukhevych, the supreme commander of the OUN(b)-organized UPA, who from March 1942 to January 1943 was a captain of the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 201, as an official hero of Ukraine. In comparison, the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 115/118 plays a relatively marginal role in the nationalist mythology. In Bukovyna, nationalists regard Petro Voinovs’kyi, the commander of the *Bukovyns’kyi Kurin’*, who led the Ukrainian police in occupied Kyiv, as a hero.⁷³ Both Voinovs’kyi and Katriuk have been made honorary citizens of Chernivtsi, and the city has erected a monument to honor the *Kurin’* and the Melnyk wing of the OUN – OUN(m) –, so “that the memory of the heroes of the *Bukovyns’kyi Kurin’* will live forever.”⁷⁴

Andrii Duda and Volodymyr Staryk, nationalist activists, followers of the OUN(m), present the Belarusian partisans as NKVD agents provocateurs, inciting the Germans to terrorize the population. “Every act of terror cost the Belarusians hundreds and thousands of lives among the local residents – entirely innocent

⁷² “Ukaz Prezydenta Ukrainy no. 75/2010 Pro vshanuvannia uchstnykiv borot’by za nezalezhnist’ Ukrainy u XX stolitti,” Ofitsiine Internet-predstavnytstvo Prezydenta Ukrainy, February 28, 2010, <http://www.president.gov.ua/documents/10379.html> (accessed January 30, 2010).

⁷³ See, for instance, the statement from the Chernivtsi leadership of the OUN(m) on the 90th anniversary of his birth, “Petru Voinovs’komu – 90 pokiv,” *Ukrains’ka hazeta “Chas,”* September 4, 2003, <http://www.chas.cv.ua/36-03/vojnovskij.html> and Kornii Tovstiuk, “Polkovnyk Petro Voinovs’kyi – orhanizator i komendant Bukovyns’koho kurenia,” *Ukrains’ka hazeta “Chas,”* September 4, 2003, <http://www.chas.cv.ua/36-03/vojnovskij2.html> (both accessed August 16, 2008).

⁷⁴ Aleksandr Shlaen, cited in Vladimir Tol’ts, “Raznitsa vo vremeni: 60 let posle Bab’ego iara,” *Radio Liberty*, September 23, 2001, <http://www.svoboda.org/programs/TD/2001/TD.092301.asp> (accessed August 16, 2008). Petro Voinovs’kyi was the initiator of the *Bukovyns’kyi Kurin’* and leader of the Ukrainian police in occupied Kyiv. Aleksandr Burakovs’kii, *Evrei i Ukraintsy, 1986–2006: istoriia i analiz evreisko-ukrainskikh otnoshenii* (New York: IRSA, 2007), 206, 234; Andrii Duda and Volodymyr Staryk, *Bukovyns’kyi Kurin’ v boiakh za Ukraïns’ku Derzhavnist’: 1918–1941–1944* (Chernivtsi: Ukraïns’kyi Narodnyi Dim v Chernivtsiakh, 1995), 239–240, 242–243. On Voinovs’kyi’s participation in mass shootings of Jews, see Ivan Fostii, “Diial’nist’ OUN na Bukovyni u 1940–1941 rr.,” *Z arkhiviv VUChK-GPU-NKVD-KGB*, no. 2/4 (13/15) (2000): 454–471.

people, truly peaceful local residents, unable to take weapons in their hands. Hundreds of Belarusian villages were destroyed at the hands of the Germans only because their destruction was provoked by the partisans.”⁷⁵ They deny that the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalions 115 and 118 were involved in atrocities against the civilian population, dismissing Soviet allegations of war crimes as fabricated. Furthermore, they claim that the battalion was ethnically inclusive, even listing four Jews among its soldiers.⁷⁶ Citing the memoirs of former *Schutzmann* Orest Bilak, Duda and Stryk present the Ukrainian *Schutzmänner* as friends, beneficiaries, and tutors of the Belarusian people:

The Soviets could hunt us, discredit us, but did not have a case against us, because our behavior among the Belarusians was exemplary ... As the Belarusians themselves put it: “The Ukrainians are a lovely people.” We never took anything from them and strived so that nothing bad would happen to them. At the important holidays we brought large loafs of dark bread and moonshine – we were paid 20 marks a month. The Belarusians knew in advance that we would buy things for New Year’s, Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost and were not afraid to sell us moonshine, even though it was illegal to make your own liquor. That we were in Belarus to fight the Red bands was entirely normal, since Belarusians are our Slavic brothers since the time of Volodymyr the Great. Not only did the Red *Moskali** rob them and burn their villages, they prevented them from organizing their own powerful nationalist partisan formations.⁷⁷

As evidence of the battalion’s supposed innocence, Duda and Stryk argue that Hryhoryi Lakusta would never have returned voluntarily to the USSR, had he been guilty of war crimes. If atrocities were committed, the occupants and their collaborators were not to blame, but Soviet Belarusian partisans, who misrepresented themselves as members of the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118.

H. Lakusta returned voluntarily to the USSR. This raises the question: would a person with so much blood on his hands return to the Stalinist Soviet Union, knowing what he could expect there? Obviously not. H. Lakusta himself was no doubt unaware of the sins which the Soviet “legal” courts

⁷⁵ Duda and Stryk, *Bukovyns'kyi Kurin*’, 126, n. 1.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 148.

* A derogatory term for Russian.

⁷⁷ Duda and Stryk, *Bukovyns'kyi Kurin*’, 150, citing the unpublished memoirs of *Schutzmann* Orest Bilak, “Z istorii odnoho kurinia,” the Archives of the Ukrainian Narodnyi Dim in Chernivtsi, O. Bilak’s file, spr. 1, ark. 50.

accused him of. Apart from the fact that simple logic contradicts such slander, we have at our disposal memoirs which open the door to the kitchen of such fabrications. As a matter of fact, thanks to deserters (close to one hundred people deserted Battalions 118 and 115), the partisans knew the individual appearance and the last names of the members of both battalions. During their habitual punitive or robbing raids, the Bolshevik partisans deliberately referred to themselves by the names of the Ukrainian *Schutzmänner* ... The soldier Chornohuz learned from local Belarusian women that in the neighboring village two short Ukrainians were setting houses on fire. Reportedly "one officer called himself Katriuk, and the other Lakusta." It would be interesting to know why these "soldiers" would reveal their names to the villagers. Also, information on their height should be cause for suspicion. In reality Lakusta and Katriuk were rather tall ... According to eyewitnesses, the testimonies and large criminal cases against totally innocent people were falsified after the war. Thus, the above-mentioned Lakusta was shot after returning to the USSR.⁷⁸

Similar arguments have been voiced within certain circles of the Ukrainian diaspora, to whom Katriuk has become something of a martyr and cause célèbre. In Canada, the Katriuk case has been actively pursued by Will Zuzak,⁷⁹ an engineer

⁷⁸ Duda and Staryk, *Bukovyns'kyi Kurin'*, 149. Hryhoryi Hryhorievych Lakusta was born in 1920 and, like Katriuk, in the village of Luzhany in Bukovyna. He became a Melnykite and a lieutenant (*chotovyi*) in the *Bukovyns'kyi Kurin'* and the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118. He was responsible for maintaining the discipline in the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118. Lakusta worked as a joiner after the war, and received several medals for his work efforts. According to Adamovich, Lakusta's wife was the widow of a man killed by his punitive squad. His wife was aware of her husband's past. Duda and Staryk, *Bukovyns'kyi Kurin'*, 68, 110; Adamovich, "Zapisnye knizhki raznykh let," 23, 25, 26.

⁷⁹ A Holocaust revisionist, Will Zuzak dismisses as "mythology that 850,000 Jews died in Treblinka." Glenn Sharfman, "The Quest for Justice: The Reaction of the Ukrainian-American Community to the John Demjanjuk trials," *The Journal of Genocide Research* 2, no. 1 (2000): 77. Instead, he offers an alternative explanation: "To gain world sympathy and support for their cause, the Zionists publicized exaggerated reports of Jewish deaths during the war. (There is also credible evidence that the Zionists deliberately hindered the saving of Jewish lives in order to increase the number of Jewish casualties.) After the war both Zionists and Communists were instrumental in instituting and running the infamous Nurnberg War Trials. And in 1948 the state of Israel was established exactly as planned." Will Zuzak, "Realities of WWII," <http://www.telusplanet.net/public/mozuz/wlzzk/zuzak19990201.html> (accessed July 27, 2006). See also John-Paul Himka, "A Central European Diaspora under the Shadow of World War II: The Galician Ukrainians in North America," *Austrian History Yearbook* 37 (2006): 28.

and community activist from Quebec, who, on behalf of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, has lobbied members of Parliament to terminate the denaturalization and deportation procedures against elderly collaborators, such as Wasyl Odynsky and Volodymyr Katriuk.⁸⁰ Zuzak presents Katriuk as a hero and a victim of a Zionist conspiracy,⁸¹ dismissing not only the Canadian government, but also the court's expert consultants in the Katriuk case, as "paid professional experts of the Holocaust industry."⁸²

Zuzak sees in Katriuk a man of high integrity and moral standards: "Mr. Katriuk is recognized by Canadians as a person of exceptionally good character, as illustrated by his activities during the Second World War, in particular his striving for Ukrainian independence, his honorable participation in the *Schutzmannschaften* and Waffen-SS battalions when coerced to do so by the German regime."⁸³

⁸⁰ "Ukrainian Canadian Congress – Alberta Provincial Council Meeting with Deborah Grey: UCC-APC Greatly Encouraged by Meeting with Grey," press release, April 17, 2004, <http://www.telusplanet.net/public/mozuz/odynsky/levytsky20010417.html> (accessed August 23, 2008).

⁸¹ "Critique by Will Zuzak, November 1999 of Judge Marc Nadon Denaturalization Verdict re Vladimir Katriuk, Date: 19990129; Docket T-2409-96" (*sic!* – should be T-2408-96), <http://www.fortunecity.com/meltingpot/pakistan/83/katriuk/katriuk991130.html> (accessed August 23, 2008).

⁸² Zuzak instead holds "many so-called Jewish 'survivors'" responsible for the "Holodomor of 1932/33, or the Great Terror of the 1930s." He alleges "Soviet espionage infiltration" of the Canadian Jewish community. "Critique by Will Zuzak," comments {42} and {95}; Will Zuzak, September 29, 2005 response to David Matas, "Action on War Crime Overdue," *Winnipeg Free Press*, September 18, 2005, <http://www.telusplanet.net/public/mozuz/furman/matas20050918WinnipegFreePress.html> (accessed September 4, 2008).

"It is also the era of Ilya Ehrenburg and Vassily Grossman, of the Jewish anti-fascist committee, traveling the countryside looking for evidence of atrocities against Jews. It was a symbiotic relationship made in hell. The Zionists needed atrocity stories to attract world sympathy for the creation of the forthcoming Israeli state. The Communist NKVD was delighted to torture suspected Ukrainian nationalists to confess to imagined atrocities and sign documents in a vain effort to stop the torture ... So how did the "collaborator" criterion become such an important issue with Canadian politicians and bureaucrats struggling with post-WW II immigration? We suggest that it is the result of the demonic collaboration between the Holocaust Industry and the KGB/NKVD." "Critique by Will Zuzak," comments {5} and {73}.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, comment {36}.

Conclusions

The pioneering work of Martin Dean and others, based primarily on British war crime cases, has furthered our understanding of the dynamics of local collaboration in Belarus and Ukraine. BSSR court cases, however, remain a largely untapped source, and unfortunately still largely inaccessible to western scholars. There are also other obvious problems with the material. The Soviet legal system during the Brezhnev and Gorbachev eras left much to be desired, and the fact that the trials took place decades after the crimes were committed is an obvious shortcoming. Alexander Victor Prusin, who has worked extensively with Soviet war crimes trials of the immediate post-war era, stated: “While the testimonies ... do not give exact dates or numbers of victims, they provide relatively accurate descriptions of the Holocaust in various localities. These descriptions are corroborated by archival documents and modern studies. Hence, there is no reason why the interrogation and trial records – if combined with other available materials – should not be used as historical sources relating to the sites and instances of genocide.”⁸⁴ In this article, I have sought to balance the witness testimonies from the Meleshko and Vasiura cases in the BSSR against the Katriuk case in Canada. Despite some inconsistencies in details, what stands out when these events are recalled 30, 43, or even 55 years later is how relatively consistent the larger picture remains over the decades, when recalled by different participants. The testimonies, by different people, and from various angles, reconfirm the basic events.

The legal cases against the officers of the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118 provide a valuable insight into the implementation of Nazi German rule in Belarus. It highlights the complex dynamics within the collaborationist formation. The “ruthless scenario of terror,” by which the Germans ruled the occupied territories of the Soviet Union, extended into the instruments of terror themselves. Within the *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 115/118, several forces were at work. A clear distinction, even rivalry, existed between volunteers from Western Ukraine, and former Soviet POWs from Dnieper Ukraine, between the privates and the officers who maintained iron discipline through brutal force and terror. Vasiura, the commanding officer, despised his subordinates. Many of his soldiers, in turn, feared their superiors. The rivalry took place under the watchful eye of the mostly

⁸⁴ Alexander Victor Prusin, “‘Fascist Criminals to the Gallows!’: The Holocaust and Soviet War Crimes Trials, December 1945 – February 1946,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 17, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 18. See also Tanja Penter, “Collaboration on Trial: New Source Material on Soviet Postwar Trials against Collaborators,” *Slavic Review* 64, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 782–790.

German *Aufsichtsoffiziere*, designated to supervise the implementation of the ruthless terror.

As the hangmen and executors of partisans and civilians alike, the *Schutzmänner* were dreaded and hated by the local population. Yet, the *Schutzmänner*, at least the Soviet Ukrainians who were recruited from the POW camps, were themselves both perpetrators and victims. Their collaboration enabled the German rule, which would have been impossible without local support. Anti-communism and personal ambitions were both important motivating factors for the collaboration. While the Soviet narrative, to the extent it did focus on local collaboration, presented them as vile perpetrators, accounts by émigrés and post-Soviet nationalists often present the people who volunteered their services for Nazi Germany as heroic victims who chose the lesser of two evils, often denying any wrongdoings on their part. Whether motivated by personal ambition, anti-communism, ultranationalist ideology, or merely trying to save their own skin, they played a key role in some of the most gruesome episodes of modern European history.

The *Schutzmannschaft* Battalion 118 was but one of up to 200 such formations active in *Reichskommissariat Ostland*. The material used for this article covers a small area of Belarus, over a limited period of time, six months in 1943. The atrocities presented here are but a tiny fraction of the massacres carried out in Minsk raion, and account for a very small part of the more than 2.2 million people who perished during the German occupation of Belarus.⁸⁵ This microstudy aimed at highlighting and recovering some of the local history, thereby shedding light on the dynamics of local collaboration.

⁸⁵ Christian Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde: Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weißrußland 1941 bis 1944* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1999), 11, 1159 n.