



**Philip W. Blood**

# **Birds of Prey**

**Hitler's Luftwaffe, Ordinary Soldiers,  
and the Holocaust in Poland**

*ibidem*

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In Memory of  
Professor E. Richard Holmes (1946–2011)  
Soldier, scholar, gentleman.

Philip W. Blood

## **BIRDS OF PREY**

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Lw. Flieger or Aircraftsman 2 Class, upon completion of basic training circa 1942 © Author's private collection.

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## Acknowledgements

‘This is the smoking gun of all your research.’  
Professor Richard Holmes, 18 February 2001.

On 3 February 2020, I met Heinrich Schreiber for the last time. My friend and neighbour was 97 and his faculties were rapidly decining through the lethal onset of dementia. In 1943, he was called up to the German Army, severely wounded at Smolensk in Soviet Russia, and was awarded the *Allgemeines Sturmabzeichen* (general assault badge). The memory of the badge remained his foremost achievement in a lifetime of struggles faced by so many working class people born before the war. Since 1970, I was fortunate to meet many Second World War veterans but Heinrich had taught me aspects of military culture barely studied by military historians. He discussed combat reports, the importance of signals and short-hand report writing. He could read and explain the meaning of reports and would explain the limits of his experience through his platoon, company and battalion. His division(s) had long since disappeared from memory. His only observation about the reports in this book, ‘so the Luftwaffe were also at it’. Perhaps a veiled reference to Nazi crimes, perhaps the universality of the military culture, or perhaps the memories of the east. From talking with Heinrich over ten years, I learned that working class German men went to war not much differently from those of other countries. The hardships of life continued after Hitler came to power, his family lost their farm tenancy when the rents were raised beyond their meagre means. Heinrich began work as a shoemaker, but his apprenticeship was interrupted by the war. After the war he became a stonemason. He passed away a month later, finally drawing to a close my contact with the war generation in Britain and Germany.

There were several key persons behind the completion of this book. The late Professor Brigadier E. Richard Holmes (1947–2011) was my doctoral supervisor. Our relationship began as professor-student, but then he turned mentor, and eventually became friends. During the research for my PhD, Richard saw the Luftwaffe records

in this book and after reading my thesis summary said it was ‘the smoking-gun of my Bandenbekämpfung research.’ He recommended *Birds of Prey* should be a specific book and include the synthesis between the hunt and the military training. Richard’s colleague, Professor Chris Bellamy (Greenwich) was the second supervisor and he agreed with Richard that a chapter in the thesis should form the foundation for a subsequent book. Chris encouraged more research of the underlying violence between the Soviet partisans and the Germans to explain why Bandenbekämpfung was not anti-partisan warfare. Scholarly technicalities aside, studying under Richard and Chris was a dynamic experience. A special mention should also be made for Steph Muir, Richard’s assistant who was a constant pillar of support to all of us.

Beyond mentoring and friendship is another level of scholarly relationship that defies definition. During a meeting of the Anglo-German seminar group (1997–98), I met Dr. Nicholas Terry (University of Exeter). He was then a PhD candidate researching the German Army and we became immediate friends. Our friendship has spanned from the Goldhagen-Browning debates, the ‘clean Wehrmacht’ scandals, several conferences with publications and on into the Twenty-First Century. In 1998 we first discussed the content in the Luftwaffe files. He recommended presenting a paper at the Wiener Library event. While drafting my PhD thesis, Nick suggested signposting the role of the Luftwaffe in Bandenbekämpfung. Since 2006, Nick has been the constant advisor/mentor for this book and his was on his advice I decided upon the microhistory format.

There have also been a number of specialist advisors who have assisted me. Dr. Declan O’Reilly (London-KCL) has been a scholarly conciliare and tough critic since 1998. My dear friend Dr Joe White, from the USHMM, was very supportive of my research. Following a visit to the UK, Joe recommended an article for the *Holocaust and Genocide Studies Journal* and introduced me to Dr. Michael Gelb (USHMM). Thanks to Michael’s editing the article was published in 2010. Joe passed away in 2016 and as did Dr Geoffrey Megaggee four years later. Fond recollections of those ‘brown bag’ lunches and

lively discussions about our research. During a visit to the BA-MA archive in Freiburg in 1998, I met and discussed the life of ordinary German soldiers with Professor Jochen Böhler (Jena University). This changed my perception of ordinary German soldiers. In 2009, Dr. Tomasz Samojlik (Mammal Research Institute, Białowieża) kindly shared his ideas on the Polish history of the forest. Tomasz very kindly supplied the forest maps that led to the digitization process central to this book. At a critical time, Professor Beatrice Heusser (University of Glasgow) offered important supervisory advice on taking the research to the final manuscript. My life partner Bettina Wunderling BSc. was important to the research by formulating the application of GIS in the cartographical research. In the latter stages of completing this manuscript, Dr. Matthew Ford (University of Sussex) gave up considerable time on modern counterinsurgency, military innovation and concepts of education, including training. He also directly edited several chapters. I would like to also thank Dr. Olaf Bachmann (King's College London) and Jake Halliday (Buckingham), for reading and commenting on the manuscript.

Since 1998 several academic institutions have been crucial to this project. Their help and support was particularly welcome since this project was self-funded. The *Bundesarchiv* (Germany), National Archives (London), Mammal Research Institute (Poland), National Archives and Records Administration (USA) provided unhindered access to records and advice. The RWTH-Bibliothek (Aachen), *Staatsbibliothek* (Aachen) and British Library (London) granted full access to holdings and inter-library loans. Germany has retained many of the traditional ideas open access learning for all and this deserves special mention in this book. The Internet Archive (Washington DC) granted unfettered access to all digitised sources, which was particularly helpful for older books outside the e-book systems. ESRI provided advice and guidance in the application of GIS software in 2010–12.

In fourteen years, many people have been involved in this book, for which I am eternally grateful: Special thanks are reserved for: Mike Buckley MA, Michael Birklein MA, Dr. Roger Cirillo



(AUSA), Dr. Halik Kochanski, Dr. Bernd Lemke (Potsdam), Professor James Corum (Salford), Professor Dennis Showalter (†), Jörg Muth (Baltic Defence College), Professor Jesse Kauffmann (Eastern Michigan), Michael Birklein (RWTH-Aachen), Tomasz Frydel (Ottawa), Michael D. Miller, and Valerie Lange and Malisa Mahler from ibidem publishing house. In 2020, I joined the Twitter community and have received very supportive advice and guidance.

Finally, to family and friends. Whereas in a second book family and friends become part of a list, unusual to this story was the extended period of serious illness launched them into a strategic role. My parents, Pamela and Peter Blood, have always supported my work and career. Also to my relatives Jan, Lauren, Colin and Dr. Alexander Ford. My dearest friend for more than forty years, Manny Phelps passed away in 2015. After major surgery and disability, he devised the means to restore my writing that led to this book. We shared an interest in the Luftwaffe and I would hope this meets with his high standards of accuracy and detail. Manny's family of Maria, Ricky, Danielle and Nicole remain precious to me. Dr. Barry Rosenthal (Baltimore) is a dear friend and supported this project with advanced computers. Harry Wise (London taxi driver) and Bradley J. Hodgson (gunsmith) spent hours explaining gun-making, drive-hunting, and that special relationship between rifles and marksmanship. All my friends mentioned in my first book were also part of the progress to this. Thank you to German doctors and medical staff who have worked incredibly hard in my interest over the last fourteen years.

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# Abbreviations and Glossary

AA: Arolsen Archives, located at: <https://collections.arolsen-archives.org/en/search/>

BArch: Bundesarchiv, including BA: Berlin (Lichterfelde); BAK: (Koblenz); BA MA: Bundesarchiv Militärarchiv, (Freiburg); BA-ZNS: Bundesarchiv-Zentralnachweisstelle (formerly in Aachen).

CMH: United States Army Center of Military History.

CP: command post.

DDSt: Deutsche Dienststelle (WASSt), former Wehrmacht personnel archive.

FJK/FSK: Feldjägerkorps or Feldschützkorps, Nazi paramilitary forestry formations.

FMS: US Army Historical Branch, Foreign Military Studies (German army).

FSKAB: *Forstschutzkommando-Abteilung Bialowies*, the paramilitary forestry formations assigned to Białowieża.

HSSPF: *Höhere SS-Polizeiführer*, regional or theatre SS and Police commander.

IMT: International Military Tribunal, Nuremberg.

IWM: Imperial War Museum, (London).

*Jagen*: a 1 kilometre square sector, a measure to micro-manage trees and game reserves.

JSKB: *Luftwaffe Jäger Sonderbataillon Bialowies* zbV. (March 1943–August 1944).

Ln. : *Luftwaffenachrichten*, Luftwaffe signals.

Luftwaffe: German Air Force.

Lw.: Luftwaffe abbreviated for ranks and units.

LWSB: *Luftwaffe Sonderbataillon Bialowies* zbV. (July 1942–March 1943).

MGFA: *Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt*, Bundeswehr's military history department since changed to ZMSBw, see below.

NARA: National Archive, College Park annex, Colombia Park Maryland, USA.

NCOs: German *Unteroffiziere* and non-commissioned officer ranks.

OP: observation post.

ORs: other ranks, non-commissioned military personnel.

PB: police battalion.

PoW: Prisoner(s) of War.

RFA: *Reichsforstamt* – Nazi ministry of state forestry.

Soltys: Lithuanian, refers to the local head person of a village.

SSPF: *SS-Polizeiführer*, district SS and Police commander.

TNA: The National Archives, formerly the Public Records Office (PRO), London

TsAMO Bestand 500 Findbuch 12452: Deutsch-Russisches Projekt Zur Digitalisierung Deutscher Dokumente in Archiven Der Russischen Föderation (digitised captured

German records). Located online at: <https://wwii.germandocsinrussia.org/de/nodes/>

2410-findbuch-12452-oberkommando-der-luftwaffe-okl

USHMM: United States Holocaust Memorial and Museum, Washington DC, USA.

*Waffen-SS*: militarised *Schutzstaffeln*, the military expansion from Hitler's bodyguard detachment.

YVA: Yad Vashem, The World Holocaust Remembrance Centre, located at: <https://documents.yadvashem.org>

zbV: zur besonderen Verwendung, special duties or special deployment.

ZMSBw: *Zentrum für Militärgeschichte und Sozialwissenschaften der Bundeswehr*.





## 1942

In January 1942 a popular German hunt magazine published a remarkable story about Luftwaffe Colonel Adolf Galland. During the German army's attack on Moscow, in the winter of 1941, the famous fighter ace took time out to go hunting. He was an expert hunter, like so many Luftwaffe officers, and wanted to extend his record to the forests of the east. Galland together with his adjutant set off without an armed escort into a gloomy forest just north of Dünaberg (today Daugavpils in Latvia). The forest was renowned for its game but was badly scarred by war. The Soviet Red Army had put up a spirited defence, however the Germans forced them to retreat. The Russians had abandoned their trenches leaving behind the detritus of war; discarded equipment, clothing and weapons littered the forest floor. As the two hunters strolled deeper into the forest, they disturbed a herd of Roe deer. They decided to separate, and Galland took up a position in a bush by a clearing and a stream. Very soon he observed and shot a roe-buck. The single shot wounded the buck and it sprinted away. Galland set off in pursuit but stumbled into a ditch breaking through ice immersing himself and coat in sticky mud. He sloshed around in the freezing muddy water trying to break free from its suction. By luck, his hunting rifle hadn't got wet and continued the search as he followed a blood trail. Covered in sticky wet mud, Galland trudged deeper into the gloomy forest and eventually located the buck, it was dead. An impressive trophy, 'I am overcome with joy! I did not expect such strong antlers.' Galland put down his rifle, took up his hunter's blade, and began preparing the carcass.

Suddenly, and without warning, Galland faced three armed Russians. 'We were all surprised' he exclaimed. Galland shouted 'sstaj', presumably meaning stop or halt, but a Russian fired at him. He took up his rifle and fired back, 'one of the Russians clasped his chest and collapsed.' Galland tried to shoot again but his rifle wasn't loaded. He struggled to pull a bullet from his coat pocket,

but it was snagged in sticky mud. Unable to gauge the Russians' intentions, Galland opted to back off. He was temporarily forced to abandon his trophy later recalling, 'only a hunter will understand how I felt!' After a short time, he returned for his trophy: 'I don't think I will ever value a set of antlers more than those for which I had to fight with considerable luck.' Galland penned his hunting tale, 'in my shelter while being heavily bombarded by Russian artillery during the great offensive against Moscow that promises final victory'. He pondered the shortcomings of hunting in the 'paradise of farmers and workers' (contemptuous Nazi brogue for the Soviet Union), and that most wildlife had fled the forests as the front lines approached. The animals that remained had been exterminated rendering minimal hunting opportunities. To conclude his tale, Galland warned his fellow hunters and foresters to seek permission before hunting in the forests of the east: 'A number of dangerous bandits are still roaming the large forest areas between the River Memel and Lake Peipus and will do for a long time to come.' Galland's parting shot was to assume his 'report' offered sound advice to those who recognise the value and the importance of German protective security in the east.<sup>1</sup> Within a year, the random confrontations with partisans had turned into a major Soviet insurgency campaign.

On 1 December 1942, Adolf Hitler faced a military calamity. A week before, the Soviet Red Army had encircled Stalingrad, isolating the Sixth Army from adequate supplies or relief. Since the beginning of 1942, a raging Soviet insurgency had undermined all efforts to pacify the German occupied territories.<sup>2</sup> The increased Soviet partisan penetrations had become a priority discussion for that evening's military conference. Hitler introduced the *Draft of Official Regulations for the struggle against banditry* and explained:

---

1 Adolf Galland, 'Oberst Galland', *Wild und Hund*, No. 47, 1941–42, pp. 357–358.  
 2 See Chris Bellamy, *Absolute War: Soviet Russia in the Second World War*, (London, 2007) and Evan Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East: The Nazi-Soviet War 1941–1945*, (London, 2016).

The goal must be to destroy the bandits and restore peace and order. Otherwise, we will end up in the same situation that we had once in our domestic affairs, with the so-called self-defence clause. This clause led to the situation that no policeman or soldier actually dared to use his gun in Germany.<sup>3</sup>

The progress of Hitler's policy, from proposal to directive to doctrine to dogma, had followed a predictable path. In late 1941, Hitler invited Heinrich Himmler, chief of the SS and German police, to find a solution. In June 1942, Himmler initiated a planning process with particular instructions to his senior SS-Police officers. He demanded their proposals must include the vilification of the 'partisan' as an illegal 'bandit'. Then from the proposals Hitler issued: Führer Directive No. 46, *Richtlinien für die verstärkte Bekämpfung des Bandenunwesens im Osten* (Instructions for Intensified Action against Banditry in the East) in August 1942.<sup>4</sup> The policy was tried and tested under SS auspices, and in parallel, the chief of staff of the Army issued general instructions to form *Jagdkommando* (hunting-squads) to combat the 'bandit bands'. All rear area forces were directed to exterminate the 'bandits' with the utmost ferocity. Also, cruel sanctions were imposed on civilians for assisting the bands, including execution or slave labour, their homes burned, and crops destroyed. The *Bandenbekämpfung* doctrine was officially introduced on 27 November but the doctrine's architecture and language were already institutionalised by the summer of 1942.<sup>5</sup>

The Luftwaffe's participation in *Bandenbekämpfung* was critical to security operations on the Eastern Front. In April 1942, the Luftwaffe committed ground forces and support units. At that stage, German security and counterinsurgency still conformed to the army's regulations and tactical doctrines. From August, the SS

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- 3 Helmut Heiber, David M. Glantz (ed), *Hitler and his Generals: Military Conferences 1942–1945*, (New York, 2002) pp. 14–17.
  - 4 NARA, T175/140/2668141-355, Weisung Nr. 46: Richtlinien für die verstärkte Bekämpfung des Bandenunwesens im Osten, Der Führer, OKW/WFSt/Op. Nr. 002821/42g.K., Führerhauptquartier, 18 August 1942.
  - 5 Philip W. Blood, *Hitler's Bandit Hunters: The SS and the Nazi Occupation of Europe*, (Virginia, 2006), pp. 3–28.

became the guardians of Bandenbekämpfung dogma within all the Third Reich's civil-military authorities, while the Wehrmacht gradually filtered the terminology into reports. On 31 December, the *Luftwaffen Kommando Ost* issued a report on the entire period since April. The report opened:

The increasing activities of the bandits since 1941/42 in the rear of Army Group Centre, presents a serious danger to the supply and the conduct of the war by the army and air force, or exploit or colonize local economies. Although large-scale operations and smaller actions to combat the bandits were conducted successfully by the security units, the bandit activity increased, especially in the frontline or area of the frontlines. This was aggravated by Red Army Frontlauffer, or stragglers, often supplied by the Red Air Force, and the bands' press-ganged local people and trained them.<sup>6</sup>

The Soviets had organised raiding parties or bands of 200–400 men with specialists—scouts, messengers and saboteurs. These bands had constant and reliable communications with the Soviet Union, through signals, messengers and aircraft, which enabled re-supplies and reinforcements. These Red Army bands were properly organised and well armed, and ranged deep into occupied territory.<sup>7</sup> The local populations were either directly assisting them or supplying food. The Germans were also disturbed that the band's weapons were good quality and included mortars, anti-tank guns, and field artillery, and warned against underestimating the 'bandits'.<sup>8</sup>

In response to the partisan threat the Luftwaffe had been forced to take 'special measures' to protect the airfields. *Luftwaffen Kommando Ost* recognised that the few security troops could not stem the advance of the bands. In response, on 24 April, Göring granted permission for the formation of *Lw.Infantry Regiment Moskau* from surplus manpower from tactical formations, building

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6 TsAMO 500-12454-623, Bericht über die Bandenbekämpfung durch Einheiten der Luftwaffe im Bereich des Lw.Kdo.Ost von 10.4. bis 31.12.42, 8 Jan. 1943.  
 7 S.A. Kovpak, *Our Partisan Course*, (London, 1947). Stalin's directive, 1 May 1942, instructed the bands to cause sabotage and destruction behind German lines.  
 8 TsAMO 500-12454-623, Bericht über die Bandenbekämpfung.

and construction units, as well as signallers and staff cadres. Training was shortened and the regiment was deployed in June. For a period, the regiment was the only available infantry in the entire area of *Luftwaffen Kommando Ost* and were committed to security tasks in sectors with high concentrations of partisan infiltrations. They were also briefly engaged in the frontline when circumstances demanded their commitment to conventional warfare. The 'bandits', according to the Luftwaffe's colourful use of the emerging *Lingua Franca*, were committed to widespread *Bandenanschlägen* (acts of terror), with attacks on railways roads, stores, bridges, dairies, landed estates, warehouses, and kidnapping mayors (collaborators). The insurgency increased into Autumn 1942, which led the Germans to take more radical measures. The bands posed a serious threat to the occupation, the supply of the front and military communications. The Luftwaffe had facilitated a general replenishment of all its units, with increased training and reinforcements. The only limitations to the increases were inadequate shelters for the troops with the onset of winter. The army and Luftwaffe imposed similar mission targets of *Befriedungsräume* (entirely pacified area)—achieved through pacification, cleansing, and destruction. The *Luftwaffen Kommando Ost* report included a Butcher's Bill: body counts with destroyed villages and lists of captured booty. The list of destruction included: 19 'bandit-camps', 88 enemy villages, 140 bunkers destroyed, 1,284 partisans shot after capture, and lists of equipment. Subsequent research by James Corum uncovered the *Lw. Infantry Regiment Moskau* was responsible for the destruction of 5,000 houses and killed seventy-six hostages.<sup>9</sup>

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9 James Corum, "Die Luftwaffe und Kriegsverbrechen im Zweiten Weltkrieg." in Gerd Überschar, Wolfram Wette (Hrs), *Kriegsverbrechen im 20. Jahrhundert*, (Festschrift für Manfred Messerschmidt), (Potsdam, 2001), p. 298.



**Map 1: Poland divided, Nazi occupation zones in Poland, Soviet Russia and the Ukraine.**

© J. Noakes & G.Pridham, *Nazism 1919–1945 Volume 3, Foreign Policy, War and Racial Extermination*, A Documentary Reader, University of Exeter Press, Exeter 1995, p. 1222, courtesy Liverpool University Press.

The report closed with a series of post-operational observations, which indicate that Göring's lieutenants were not only experts in the application of security warfare, but were well versed in the politics of *Bandenbekämpfung*. The first observation concerned the local population vis-à-vis the *Bandenlage* (bandit situation): if the locals were peaceful, they were usually 'happy' to be protected by German troops; in *bandenbeherrschten Gebieten* (bandit-controlled areas) the locals work for the 'bandits'; however, in the *bandenverseuchten Gebieten* ('bandit' diseased areas) the locals expected to be targeted by both sides. One comment concluded that local co-operation was necessary for the successful pacification and exploitation of an area, and it was therefore, critical to impose German rule. A second observation concerned the compromise of Nazi propaganda by security operations. It was recognised that burning villages for revenge or retribution might backfire, especially if the locals were both harmless and helpless. However, if an area was collaborating with the 'bandits' it was necessary to 'cleanse with a firm hand.' The third observation noted how the morale of the troops suffered when expected to combat the 'bandits' with inferior weapons. The bands were well supplied with superior and heavy weapons, and several times Luftwaffe flak artillery engaged in direct firing against heavily armed 'bandits'. Another point mentioned the high level of mobility adopted by the 'bandits', which meant the Luftwaffe depended on the army's security units to effect a mobile counter-strategy. A further observation criticised the absence of a unified command, and there had been reports of chaotic incidents. This had led to a centralisation of all Luftwaffe forces and the reorganisation of command structures. There had also been an introduction of strongpoints at important hubs along the railway lines, with Luftwaffe troops assigned to guarding junctions. A final point noted how the 'bandits' adopted 'sneaky' tactics, which required strong forces to counter and eradicate them. There was a palpable reluctance in a recommendation to conduct night-time actions and the troops to be trained to work in 'night and fog' – the distasteful notion of resorting to 'bandit' tactics to counter the 'bandits'. Operational training was acknowledged as the key to success and especially in learning to exploit the same methods as the 'bandits' – the use of cunning, and ruthlessness.<sup>10</sup>

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10 TsAMO 500-623, Bericht über die Bandenbekämpfung.



## Excursions in Microhistory

Writing history has history. The Luftwaffe's participation in the Holocaust had always been on the fringe of history. Although Hitler's air force was known to have held an instrumental part in the war, it was not associated with killing Jews, civilians, and partisans. The senior officers of the Luftwaffe tried to destroy the evidence in 1945 and very nearly succeeded. A small section of files survived that served as a catalyst for in-depth research of the Luftwaffe. The central thread of the narrative of this book is about ordinary Luftwaffe soldiers, the *Landser* and the Holocaust. The *Landser* is a slang word for the common soldier akin to the British *Tommy*. There was only partial evidence of the *Landser's* footprint in the military documents. Consequently, painstaking research was adopted to piece together and collect scraps of evidence to construct a microhistory. From its origins in my PhD research, *Birds of Prey* was destined to be a microhistory. The research for this book, however, took a scientific path and applied historical GIS methods as forensic means to map the movements and the spatiality of the *Landser*. The outcome is this microhistory of Luftwaffe security troops in occupied Poland during the period 1942–44.

The general hypothesis underpinning this book re-confirmed my original research conclusions. Hitler's *Bandenbekämpfung* was not conventional anti-partisan warfare or counterinsurgency. *Bandenbekämpfung* was not a bureaucratic reclassification of anti-partisan warfare without consequences, and the Wehrmacht was no longer able to conduct security operations within the parameters of its traditional guidelines. The application of *Bandenbekämpfung* was relatively easy and ideologically inexpensive. In practice, it vilified opponents, placed civilians under suspicion, and rendered them defenceless to exemplary punishment. Within its historiography, the school of military history has perpetuated the myth of *Partisanenbekämpfung* or anti-partisan warfare rather than recognise *Bandenbekämpfung* and its genocidal implications. This approach downplayed the place of Nazi ideology, as it sought to make

sense of anti-partisan warfare. Given the evidence, this is no longer a sustainable argument. *Bandenbekämpfung* evolved from the forester's battles with poachers and bandits. Christopher Hale makes a compelling argument that *Bandenbekämpfung* originated in the Thirty Years' War. The word existed long before it was institutionalised as a doctrine of militarised security in the Nineteenth Century. *Bandenbekämpfung* was radicalised as an operational doctrine within Imperial Germany's colonizing security warfare, and was extended into the German way of war from 1908. *Bandenbekämpfung* was Germany's approach to security warfare from 1942 onwards.<sup>1</sup>

The setting for the book's research was Białowieża forest in eastern Poland. This primaeval forest lies in the historical region of Podlasie and is famous as a habitat for the European bison. Białowieża established a reputation for hunting and since the 1500s was a hunting reserve for the Polish kings. The forest and surrounding areas became populated with Poles, Lithuanians, Belorussians and Jews. There were few municipal conurbations, other than Białystok, but many small towns, villages, and shtetls. The forest had a long history of authoritarian and violent occupation. After 1795, following the third partition of Poland, Białowieża was subject to consecutive annexations: Prussia, Russia, Imperial Germany and then Nazi Germany in 1941. After 1918 this region once again returned to Poland, but war with Soviet Russia turned the region into one of the shattered lands of the east. After the experience of German Army occupation, during Great War, the Nazis increasingly craved the forest as a trophy. Hermann Göring pursued Hitler's ambitions for *Grossdeutschland* (Greater German Reich) on the eastern frontier by locking Białowieża forest into a defensive plan. This defensive plan envisaged a primaeval wilderness as a natural barrier to the threat of the 'Bolshevik' horde. In theory, this geopolitical strategy was scientifically sophisticated, but proved wholly naive as a defence line. This was Germany's Maginot Line on the eastern frontier.

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1 Christopher Hale, *Hitler's Foreign Executioners: Europe's Dirty Secret* (Stroud, 2011).

The research set out to explore how other ranks (ORs), or the rank and file, adapted to *Bandenbekämpfung* in Hitler's race war. From 1942, the common soldiery perpetrated genocide in most theatres of the war: without overt ideological indoctrination; without being ordered by junior officers to commit crimes; and with everyday killing normalised to within military procedures or routines. There was no evidence the troops resisted this work. Indeed, trained into aggressive military concepts such as *Auftragstaktik* (mission-tactics) the soldiers were roused to heightened levels of violence.<sup>2</sup> The research synthesized Göring's geopolitical ambitions with the study of the Landser as perpetrators of genocide. In many ways this contradicted the general opinion that Göring disappeared into the shadows after Stalingrad. However, the findings set him apart from Hitler and Himmler. Whereas Hitler wanted to be excluded from the killing process, Himmler was a keen visitor to the extermination sites. Göring, in contrast, participated in the planning and willed its execution, but never visited the killing sites, or Białowieża after the Nazi-occupation in June 1941.

My research focused upon Göring's manipulation of two key institutions within his mandate as a Nazi leader. The German hunting fraternity and the *Luftwaffe*. Both institutions contained influential social elites and controlled a large proportion of the population. The hunt created the Nazified honour code for his 'court etiquette', and the *Luftwaffe* was the foundation of a 'revolutionary' military order. Together they merged the institutional symbolism of 'The Blue' (*Luftwaffe*) and 'The Green' (state forester-hunters). This was the culmination of Göring's corporatism. By exploiting this institutional dynamic, Göring set about his plans for a permanent national frontier in the east. Stalin was determined to frustrate these plans and waged an intense insurgency campaign within Białowieża. Göring escalated the conflict by sending *Luftwaffe* security troops to destroy the Soviet partisans. Jews fleeing to the

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2 Jeff Rutherford & Adrian E. Wettstein, *The German Army on the Eastern Front*, (Barnsley, 2018), p. 41. They refer to *Auftragstaktik* as 'Mission Command', a commander ordered a mission, arranged forces and set the goal but then left it to a junior officer or NCO to complete the mission as they saw fit.

forests to escape the Holocaust were caught in the middle and became victims of Göring's hunter killers — the *Landser*. This microhistory was demarcated by three groups: Göring and the Nazi leaders plotting from the hunting lodges in East Prussia, the Luftwaffe soldiers on the ground hunting partisans and Jews, and the German hunt officials serving as the authoritarian lynchpin in the middle. Together, they all worked towards winning Hitler's race war, but Göring had his own views how this should be achieved. This is a challenging book, but as close as possible it is a real-time reconstruction of Nazi-occupation of Białowieża, German soldiers and the Holocaust. Michel Trouillot's words are evocative: 'This is a story within a story — so slippery at the edges that one wonders when and where it started and whether it will ever end.'<sup>3</sup>

## The acquisition of sources

The research was hindered by the absence of a central repository of records and archives to anchor the book. The grouping of documents was like different corners of a jigsaw puzzle without an original picture to bring them together. There were mismatches between known actions, where histories had percolated into myths and no bridges to span any connection between maps and documents. My doctoral research into *Bandenbekämpfung* doctrine was helpful, as was defining *Sicherheitskrieg* (security warfare) as a traditional German response to armed resistance in occupied and colonial territories; but it was not yet clear how all of this applied to the Białowieża case.<sup>4</sup> There was a vague outline for a case study article, but too thin to stand alone as a book. Richard Holmes recommended I pursue my post-doctoral research along multiple lines of investigation. The primary sources from six key topics included: Hitler's Luftwaffe, the hunt and environmental history, military geography, Colonialism and Nazi *Lebensraum*, the Holocaust, and the war in the east. Gradually, the evidence was acquired from a

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3 Michel Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: The Power and Production of History*, (Boston, 1997), p. 1.

4 Blood, *Hitler's Bandit Hunters*, *passim*.

variety of sources, but with a common cut-off date of 1945. This evidence was then categorized into victims, perpetrators, and bystanders. Some postwar evidence that directly contributed to the narrative was included to explain how the perpetrators escaped justice and manufactured 'new' lives. This methodological approach of synthesising multi-disciplinary research satisfied some but generated criticism from others.

There was also a story about the Luftwaffe records. On 3 August 1945, US Army intelligence officers interrogated Karl Mittman, formerly deputy commander of the Historical Section of the *Luftwaffe* (8. Abteilung). Mittman, born in Frankfurt in 1896, had served in the Great War and afterwards had established a career as an industrial merchant. In 1935 he was called up and joined the *Luftwaffe*. His work had initially involved publishing a history of the war in the air 1914–1918. The onset of the Second World War suspended all previous work, as the section began collecting material for the present conflict. The section also expanded, employing well-educated officers with experience in writing historical narrative. Lw. Brigadier General Herhudt von Rohden (1899–1951) was placed in overall command. Section eight had six subsections: *Auswertung* (evaluation), *Kriegsgeschichte* (war history), *Wehrwissenschaftliche Gruppe* (military science), *Bildgruppe* (photographic section), *Technische Gruppe* (technical) and *Archiv* (archives). Mittman claimed the purpose of military history was to establish the basis for a world history, a medium for the education of service personnel, and to present 'a responsible account to one's own war.' He identified three categories of military history: a political history of the war, a history of the military strategy of the war, and a 'history for the education of the people.' During the war, the section had completed a review of the period 1939–43; fifteen annuals of air war accounts including Poland, France et al; had compiled special instructional guides for officers; and had published pamphlets on aspects of the air war. All this work and output, according to Mittman, had been carried out without political controls or interference. Then, as the war drew to a close, the section made several moves from Berlin to Thuringia, Bavaria, and Czechoslovakia. Driving from Karlsbad to

Bavaria, as allied thrusts quickened, Mittman decided to destroy the material. Fifty cases reached Vorderriss near Bad Toelz, mostly maps and material regarded as 'little importance', were stored in a forester's office. Mittman helpfully offered tips to the allies how the archive could be reconstructed.<sup>5</sup>

More than fifty years later, I was in the *Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv* in Freiburg-Im-Breisgau, the last day of a long research trip. Frau Noske, the resident but kindly official, presented a print-out of files that had just arrived in the reading room. They were a small collection of diaries of a *Luftwaffe* security battalion and a *Luftwaffe* 'special commando'. They were assigned to security actions against Soviet partisans in 'Bialowies', the German spelling of Białowieża, during 1942–44. The battalion was the *Sicherungsbataillon der Luftwaffe Bialowies zbV*. The battalion was raised on 18 July 1942, disbanded on 18 March 1943. The other formation was *Jäger-Sonderkommando Bialowies der Luftwaffe zbV*. This smaller unit was activated on 6 March 1943, but was increased to battalion size from October 1943, and remained in Białowieża until the great German retreat in July 1944. It was immediately apparent they were an important source. Panic: hasty photocopy requests in bulk, hatched and dispatched, in the age before digitalisation. Subsequent deflation: under scrutiny, it was apparent that the primary content was locked in obscure map references. Richard Holmes recognized this was the 'smoking gun' of the research, but only so long as all the evidence was collected and deciphered.<sup>6</sup> In lieu of managing the maps, a search process was started to locate the personnel records of the men. The *Deutsche Dienststelle* (WASSt), in Berlin, held the Wehrmacht's card index records. The *Wehrmachtsauskunftstelle für Kriegsverluste und Kriegsgefangene* (WASSt) maintained a complete record of combatants, casualties, and POWs for all the Wehrmacht. Alongside the names extracted from the diaries with the casualty

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5 NARA, RG165 721A, Seventh Army Interrogation Center APO 758, Final Interrogation Report, Historical Section of the OKL, Ref. No. SAIC/FIR/51, 3 October 1945.

6 Philip W. Blood, 'Bandenbekämpfung, Nazi occupation security in Eastern Europe and Soviet Russia, 1942–45,' PhD diss. (unpublished), Cranfield University, 2001.