A Volunteer for a "Special Action": The Police Secretary and Administrative Official Walter Mattner (1941–42)

Abstract

During the Second World War, Superior SS and Police Leader Ernst von dem Bach-Zelewski set up his headquarters in the Belarusian city of Mogilev. From 1941 to 1942, Walter Mattner was a member of his administrative staff. Mattner volunteered for a mass execution and wrote to his wife afterwards, describing how he had murdered small children by throwing them up in the air and shooting them before they hit the ground. Mattner equated "German" with "National Socialist." He felt especially German when—and because—he personally participated in the policy of extermination.

Source

September 22, 1941
"If I were not already a National Socialist, the first day of my war deployment would have made me one 100 percent."

September 29, 1941
"All we do is organize, that is, take everything away from the Jews."

October 2, 1941
"Actually, I should be in bed by now, since it is already 9pm, and I signed up for a special action tomorrow. Reveille is at 4:30am, and we set out at 5:30am. Tomorrow will also be my first opportunity to make use of my pistol. I have taken 28 bullets with me. That probably won't suffice, but another comrade will lend me his pistol or rifle. I really don't know whether I am allowed to tell you this, but you have long known that the Jews are our misfortune; on the journey here from Warsaw, we heard again and again about the many comrades already resting in the cold ground. […] And thus many young men, both single and married, the flower of our German nation, now sleep, having tried to protect the homeland from these monsters, whom we have come to know here. It is simply awful to have to look at these Asiatic hordes. How are we Europeans to feel there? […] You can therefore understand the bitterness that grips me and that all of us here feel at the thought of our homeland and the great, fateful struggle that we must fight here for our people. Who cares if another 1,200 excess Jews in a city have to be taken out, as people put it so nicely. It is only fair punishment for all the suffering they have put us Germans through and are still putting us through. I will have some fine things to tell you before I get home. But that's enough for today, otherwise you will think me bloodthirsty."

October 5, 1941
"I have something else to report. I was actually present for the great mass death the day before yesterday. My hand shook a bit when I took aim as the first vehicle arrived, but you get used to it. By the tenth I aimed very calmly and shot expertly at the many women, children and infants. Especially considering that I also have two babies at home, which these hordes would treat similarly, if not ten times worse. The death we gave them was a nice, quick death, compared to the hellish torments of thousands and thousands in the GPU prisons. Babies flew through the air in a wide arc and we shot them on the fly before they landed in the pit and the water. Away with this brood, which has

cast all of Europe into war and is now fomenting sentiments even in America to drag them into the war. Hitler's word is coming true. Once, before the war, he said: If Jewry thinks they can start another war in Europe, Jewry will not be the victor, but it will be the end of Jewry in Europe. . . . M.[ogilev] is now poorer by a figure with three zeroes, but that is of no importance here. I am actually pleased already, and many people here say that we will be returning home, and then our local Jews will have their turn."

October 9, 1941
"My neighbor at table, first lieutenant in an SS unit, was just returning from a prisoner transport and talked about the savagery of the Asiatic prisoners, saying: 'They cut the asses off the ones who die on the way and throw them in a frying pan and eat them. Often they don't have knives because they have to surrender everything, so they use cans to cut instead.' Can you imagine the kind of cannibals we find ourselves amongst? I have often seen them pass by, unbelievable faces. Tomorrow another group of Gypsies will be dealt with. / Approx. 50. / And so it goes every day. There is always something happening. A human life is worth nothing here. Nevertheless, I am enjoying life and am still glad for the privilege of experiencing and participating in this fateful struggle of our people."

October 27, 1941
"I didn't manage to write today, I'm too tired. 10:45pm. One thing, though: At dinner I heard that 27,000 Jews have already been taken out in our district. And 24,000 in Kiev!"

April 19, 1942
"In the 7 months since arriving here and spending time with hundreds, I have heard no one attack any party, I can tell you that honestly, because here everybody simply feels himself to be a 'German,' and today 'German' simply means 'Nazi'. There is nothing else."

Source: Letters from Police Secretary Walter Mattner, Administrative Official under the SS and Police Garrison Leader Mogilev, to his Wife (excerpts), Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, Dok. Slg. Verschiedenes 301 v (048), Bl. 260 f., 263 ff; reproduced in Klaus-Michael Mallmann, Volker Rieß, and Wolfram Pyta, eds., *Deutscher Oster 1939-1945. Der Weltanschauungskrieg in Photos und Texten*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2003, pp. 27-28.

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