

Jan Láníček

Between Resistance and Collaboration

The Ambiguity of the Protectorate Gendarmes' Service in the Theresienstadt Ghetto (1941–1945)

Abstract

The article analyses the role members of the Czech Protectorate gendarmerie played in the persecution of the Jews during the Second World War. A Special gendarmerie unit guarded Theresienstadt, the only major Jewish ghetto created during the war in the occupied Bohemian lands. Whilst some of the gendarmes supported Jewish prisoners and tried to alleviate their plight, others collaborated with the SS unit – in charge of the ghetto, behaved brutally or denounced prisoners for any transgressions of the ghetto laws. Most of the gendarmerie unit vacillated between both extremes and remained passive observers to the events. The article centres on both extremes of support and betrayal, and asks what they can reveal about the wartime service of the gendarmes in the ghetto and their role in the persecution of the Protectorate Jews, as well as those deported to the ghetto from Germany, Austria, the Netherlands and other territories.

*"I walk through the world with the gendarme behind me, from the cradle to the grave!
Until my cremation – either in Terezín or Auschwitz [...]."*¹

*"The SS raged at the transport assembly point, the Protectorate police raged on the march to the Bubny station, the Schutzpolizei raged on the train, the Protectorate gendarmerie raged at the train station in Bohušovice and on the march to the ghetto, the SS and the gendarmes raged in the ghetto, the Schutzpolizei again raged on the transport to the Auschwitz hell, then came the SS combined with the infamous Canada, then gas, cremation, and the end of the pilgrimage."*²
František R. Kraus (1946)

Otto Beck spent the war incarcerated first as a Gestapo political prisoner in Prague and later as a Jew in the Theresienstadt (Terezín) Ghetto. He worked in a squad that was regularly sent on work assignments to the nearby Bohušovice train station. One day, he was unable to collect his documents from the guard upon their return to Theresienstadt. The guard immediately informed the Protectorate gendarmerie station in the ghetto. In March 1946, Beck described his arrest and interrogation as follows:

"I noted that the guard duty was carried out by the so-called Protectorate gendarmerie and that the report was also made by the so-called Protectorate gendarmerie. [...] Captain Janeček and the staff warden Hašek were present. I reported in Czech, but Captain Janeček began to interrogate me in German as though he did not speak Czech at all, and although I again

1 František R. Kraus, *A přived' zpět naše roztroušené ... [And Bring Back Our Scattered ...]*, Prague 1946, 53–54.

2 *Ibid.*, 145.

answered in Czech, he spoke to me only in German. I would like to point out that I knew that Janeček and the staff warden Hašek spoke the Czech language well. During the interrogation, the staff warden Hašek stood unnoticed next to me, before suddenly beginning to punch me in the face with his fists, alternating using his left and right hands, as if I were some punching bag. Of course, blood immediately started pouring from my mouth and nose, but the staff warden Hašek ignored the fact that I was covered with blood and sadistically pounded me until he knocked out two of my teeth.”³

Captain Theodor Janeček or Janetschek, the commandant of the special gendarmerie unit, kept Beck in custody for a fortnight. In his post-war testimony, Beck repeatedly stressed that it had been more painful for him to be treated in this manner by people whom he considered to be in the same boat during the painful years of the German occupation.⁴ After the war, Hašek was sentenced by the Prague Extraordinary People’s Court to eight years in prison, whilst Janeček died in prison awaiting trial for collaboration.⁵

This story raises the intriguing question of how the special unit of the Czech Protectorate gendarmerie contributed to the persecution of the Jews in Theresienstadt. Some of the survivors vocally condemned the policemen. For František R. Kraus, a survivor of Theresienstadt and Auschwitz, the gendarmes were an integral part of the machinery of destruction that started in Prague and ended in the gas chambers of Auschwitz. Other survivors passed a more lenient judgement, stressing the material help and mental support that some of the gendarmes provided to the ghetto prisoners. The post-war police and judicial authorities investigated only a few of the gendarmes as traitors or collaborators. At the same time, the number of those publicly praised for their support of the Jewish prisoners was low. Only one gendarme, František Makovský, has been recognized by Yad Vashem as a Righteous among the Nations, but the available archival evidence raises questions about his conduct during the war.⁶ By focussing on the police, one of the essential cogs in the Protectorate administration, this article aims to stimulate discussion about responses in Protectorate society to the Nazi persecution of the Jews. If the gendarmes were neither villains nor heroes, how should we conceive of their role during the Holocaust?

Let Us Not Talk About It: The State of the Field

The police, as a part of the state bureaucracy, play a key role in every society, namely as those who protect citizens and enforce the law. As professionals, they have the capacity to adapt very quickly to radical political changes, as is proven by the career of Emil Kheil, who was in his early twenties during the war. After the collapse of Czecho-Slovakia in March 1939, Kheil, as a Czech, was expelled from Transcarpathian Ukraine and subsequently moved to Prague. He later served as a guard in the

3 Státní oblastní archiv v Praze [State Regional Archives in Prague] (SOA), MLS Praha, Ls 428/46, deposition by Otto Beck, 16 March 1946.

4 See also: Mirko Tůma, *Ghetto našich dnů* [The Ghetto of Our Days], Prague 1946, 18; Židovské muzeum v Praze [Jewish Museum Prague] (ŽMP), testimony no. 077, J. T.

5 SOA Praha, MLS Praha, Ls 428/46, judgement against Emil Hašek and František Drahoňovský, 11 April 1946.

6 Yad Vashem Archives, M.31.2/7166; Archiv bezpečnostních složek [Security Services Archive] (ABS), 2M/10303, statement by Jaroslav Trojan, 3 February 1948; see also: ABS, 305-96-3. Other survivors, for example, also mention Příbyl brothers as gendarmes who supported prisoners.

Lety u Písku camp, where the Protectorate authorities concentrated those considered workshy, those accused of leading an anti-social way of life, and later Romani and Sinti from Bohemia before they were deported to Auschwitz. In 1944, he was sent for three months as a guard to Theresienstadt. His service did not end there. After the liberation, he served as a policeman in the town of Vrchlabí, where he oversaw the “orderly and humane”⁷ transfer of ethnic Germans out of Czechoslovakia.⁸ Antonín Zachař is another example of a policeman serving in highly exposed positions under diverse regimes. He first served in Theresienstadt, later being accused by survivors of acts of brutality against the inmates.⁹ After the war, he became the commandant of an internment camp for ethnic Germans near the town of Opava in Silesia.¹⁰ Kheil, Zachař, and others only followed orders. In most cases there is no indication that they crossed the line of conduct expected from those in service. Yet they were willing to fulfil orders from authorities representing diametrically opposed political systems and, in the process, they contributed to the persecution of minority communities.

The wartime service of the local police under German occupation, which was characterized by one historian as a conflict between professional and national loyalties,¹¹ has presented a point of contention in national historiographies. In his historiographical survey, Robby van Eetvelde concluded that all over Europe, Nazi Germany was “able to identify and employ [...] necessary collaborators” in the ranks of local police units. From the perspective of police involvement, “the Holocaust was a European project”.¹² During the war, all over occupied Europe, ordinary policemen continued to serve in their positions and enforce the law. Local German administrations could rely on the cooperation of long-established or newly formed auxiliary police units. The German troops were spread thin over the vast swathes of the ‘Third Reich’ and thus the enforcement of anti-Jewish policies would have been impossible without the local police, who were often ten times the size of the local German order police units (*Ordnungspolizei*). The involvement of the local police in the persecution of the Jews depended on the local context. In France and the Netherlands, police units played a dominant role in the arrest and deportation of the Jews.¹³ Further East, at the actual killing sites, the local police and auxiliaries (such as the *Omakaitse* or Home Guard in Estonia and the *Schutzmannschaften* in Ukraine) became deeply involved in the mass murder.¹⁴ The most recent research on the so-called Blue Police (*Policja granatowa*) in the General Government has demonstrated that apart from

7 This phrase was used in the Potsdam Agreement, which sanctioned the population transfer.

8 On Kheil, see: Markus Pape, A nikdo vám nebude věřit. Dokument o koncentračním táboře Lety u Písku [And No One Will Believe You. Documentary about the Lety u Písku Concentration Camp], Prague 1997, 139.

9 ABS, personnel file of Antonín Zachař.

10 Ibid.

11 Niklas Perzi, “Auch er stand Posten für die Freiheit und Unabhängigkeit Großdeutschlands”. Die heimischen (tschechischen) Sicherheitskräfte im Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren im Widerstreit der Loyalitäten, in: Miroslav Kunštát et al. (ed.), *Krise, Krieg und Neuanfang. Österreich und die Tschechoslowakei in den Jahren 1933–1938*, Vienna 2017, 95–118.

12 Robby van Eetvelde, *Police forces and the Holocaust*, in: Cathie Carmichael/Richard C. Maguire (ed.), *The Routledge History of Genocide*, New York 2019, 303.

13 Simon Kitson, *From Enthusiasm to Disenchantment. The French Police and the Vichy Regime, 1940–1944*, in: *Contemporary European History* 11 (2002) 3, 371–390.

14 Ruth Bettina Birn, *Collaboration with Nazi Germany in Eastern Europe. The Case of the Estonian Security Police*, in: *Contemporary European History* 10 (2001) 2, 181–198; Eric Haberer, *The German Police and Genocide in Belorussia, 1941–1944. Part I: Police Deployment and Nazi Genocidal Directives*, in: *Journal of Genocide Research* 3 (2001) 1, 3–19; Idem, *The German Police and Genocide in Belorussia, 1941–1944. Part II: The “Second Sweep”. Gendarmerie Killings of Jews and Gypsies on January 29, 1942*, in: *Journal of Genocide Research* 3 (2001) 2, 207–218.

guarding the perimeter of the major ghettos and participating in expulsions and deportations, Polish policemen also actively contributed to the murder of the Jews during what was called the hunt for the Jews (*Judenjagd*).¹⁵

The Protectorate, as a territory, did not witness the actual mass murder of the Jews, with the involvement of the police reflecting Nazi policies. As early as the spring of 1939, the Germans deployed Czech gendarmes and uniformed police in the first crackdown against any potential resistance activities, especially among German émigrés, communist functionaries, and in particular the Jews. Even the Gestapo was surprised by the excessive willingness with which the Czech police partook in the first arrests.¹⁶ For the rest of the occupation, the police – after the reform in July 1942 fully under the organisational control of the German authorities – vacillated between resistance and collaboration.¹⁷

The wartime contribution of the Czech police to the “Final Solution” has to date stood at the margins of historical research.¹⁸ Only recently have authors published first studies on Czech policemen’s role in the segregation of the Jews and Roma. Benjamin Frommer and Helena Petrův have demonstrated the large-scale involvement of the police in the enforcement of the anti-Jewish laws in the Protectorate. As part of their daily routine of maintaining order, the policemen also contributed to a ‘social death’ of the Jews, which was a necessary stepping stone towards the Nazi genocide.¹⁹ Projects undertaken by researchers in Prague²⁰ have revealed numerous cases in which policemen apprehended Jews for visiting parts of cities forbidden to them or for not wearing or covering up the ‘Jewish star’ that visibly identified them as ‘non-Aryans’. For example, in September 1941, Hugo Eger was walking on the Švehla embankment in Prague and stopped for a while to watch a tennis game. He was apprehended by police officer Jan Galia because Jews were not allowed to enter embankments. He was given a choice between paying a fine of 3,000 Crowns or spending eight days in prison. The policemen thus deepened the misery of the destitute Jews, already fully restricted in their economic opportunities and often dependent on social support from the Jewish community.²¹ Furthermore, Jews arrested for

15 Klaus-Peter Friedrich, Collaboration in a “Land without a Quisling”. Patterns of Cooperation with the Nazi German Occupation Regime in Poland during World War II, in: *Slavic Review* 64 (2005) 4, 723–724; Jan Grabowski, Na posterunku. Udział polskiej policji granatowej i kryminalnej w Zagładzie Żydów [At the Post. The Participation of the Polish Blue Police and Polish Criminal Police in the Extermination of Jews], Warsaw 2020; Tomasz Frydel, Ordinary Men? The Polish Police and the Holocaust in the Subcarpathian Region, in: Peter Black et al. (ed.), *Collaboration in Eastern Europe during the Second World War and the Holocaust*, Vienna 2019, 69–126.

16 Jan Vajskebr, Protektorátní uniformovaná policie mezi odbojem a kolaborací [Protectorate Uniformed Police between Resistance and Collaboration], in: Marek Syrný et al. (ed.), *Kolaborácia a odboj na Slovensku a v krajinách nemeckej sféry vplyvu v roku 1939–1945* [Collaboration and Resistance in Slovakia and the Countries in the German Sphere of Influence 1939–1945], Banská Bystrica 2009, 117–122.

17 Ibid, Perzi, “Auch er stand ...”. From July 1942 they fell under the General Commander of the Uniformed Protectorate police (in the case of the gendarmerie or municipal police) and the General Commander of the Non-Uniformed Protectorate police (in the case of the criminal police and other similar units). Commanders of both branches came from the top ranks of the SS.

18 For more background, see: Pavel Macek/Lubomír Uhlíř, *Dějiny policie a četnictva III. Protektorát Čechy a Morava a Slovenský štát (1939–1945)* [History of the Police and the Gendarmerie III. The Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia and the Slovak State], Prague 2001.

19 Marion Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair. Jewish Life in Nazi Germany*, Oxford 1998.

20 The documents were selected and digitised as a part of the “Terezín Album” project of the Terezín Initiative Institute and a project to create a mobile application making data on Holocaust victims from Prague available to the public (funded by the Technological Agency of the Czech Republic). I would like to thank Dr Magdalena Sedlická for this information.

21 On Eger, see: <https://www.holocaust.cz/databaze-obeti/obeti/142104-hugo-eger/> (16 November 2020).

breaking the anti-Jewish laws could face an earlier deportation, though we cannot really identify a clear pattern in this respect.²²

Later, between October 1941 and the spring of 1943, Czech Protectorate police units supervised the deportation of the Jews from the whole territory of the Protectorate to the Theresienstadt Ghetto or directly to the East.²³ The Protectorate criminal police then helped with the hunt for Jews who tried to avoid deportation.²⁴ Other scholars have written extensively on the wartime involvement of the Protectorate bureaucracy and guards in the Lety and Hodonín camps. The guards came from the ranks of the Protectorate gendarmerie – often from the reactivated older generation – who supervised the camps where over 500 Roma prisoners succumbed to the inhumane conditions, before almost 1,400 were deported to their deaths in Auschwitz-Birkenau.²⁵ We know much less about the wartime service of the Protectorate gendarmerie in Theresienstadt and other internment camps.²⁶ Key works on Theresienstadt present the gendarmes as heroic helpers and martyrs who suffered as a consequence of their support for prisoners, though they also add that a few rotten apples collaborated with the Germans.²⁷ Only in the 1980s did the historian Miroslav Kárný question the established belief that a large number of the gendarmes had been executed by the SS for helping the Jews.²⁸ Another major contribution to the topic came only decades later from two German-speaking historians who offered a more global perspective on the Protectorate police during the war.²⁹ The lack of interest among Czech historians in the special unit is all the more surprising when considering that this was the only instance that a large group of Czech nationals directly witnessed the Holocaust of European Jews. The Lety debate has confirmed that even minor attempts to address the topic of Czech involvement in the Holocaust triggers exasperated reactions amongst Czech nationalist historians, politicians, and the public.³⁰ The notion of victimhood is deeply embedded in the Czech historical narrative of the war, but the story of the Theresienstadt gendarmes reveals how complex the behaviour of the policemen was during the Holocaust.

22 Benjamin Frommer, *Verfolgung durch die Presse. Wie Prager Büroberater und die tschechische Polizei die Juden des Protektorats Böhmen und Mähren isolieren halfen*, in: Doris Bergen/Andrea Löw/Anna Hájková (ed.), *Leben und Sterben im Schatten der Deportation. Der Alltag der jüdischen Bevölkerung im Großdeutschen Reich 1941–1945*, Munich 2013, 137–150; Václav Buben, *Šest let okupace Prahy* [Six Years of Occupation in Prague], Prague 1946, 122–125.

23 Jan Lániček, *Czechoslovakia and the Allied Declaration of December 17, 1942*, in: Dina Porat/Dan Michman (ed.), *The End of 1942. A Turning Point in World War II and in the Comprehension of the Final Solution?* Jerusalem 2017, 248–249.

24 SOA Praha, MLS Praha, Ls 3710/46.

25 Ctibor Nečas, *Holocaust českých Romů* [The Holocaust of Czech Roma], Brno 1999; Pape, *A nikdo vám*; Petr Klínovský, *Lety u Písku. Neznámý příběh dozorců* [Lety u Písku. The Unknown Story of the Guards], in: *Paměť a dějiny. Revue pro studium totalitních režimů*, 10 (2016) 2, 3–16; Idem, *Velitelé tzv. Cikánského tábora v Letech u Písku* [Chief Commanders of the So-Called Gypsy Camp in Lety u Písku], in: *Paměť a dějiny. Revue pro studium totalitních režimů*, 13 (2019) 1, 26–35; Jiří Smlsal, *Holocaust Romů v retribučním soudnictví* [The Roma Holocaust in Retributive Justice], in: *Romano Džaniben*, 1 (2018), 93–122.

26 Alfons Adam, *Die tschechische Protektoratspolizei. Ihre Rolle bei der Verfolgung von Juden, Roma und Tschechen*, in: Peter Black/Bela Rásky/Marianne Windsperger (ed.), *Collaboration in Eastern Europe during World War II and the Holocaust*, Vienna 2019, 127–146.

27 Rudolf Iltis, *The Unsung Heroes*, in: Terezín, Prague 1965, 292–96; Zdeněk Lederer, *Ghetto Theresienstadt*, London 1953, 78; Karel Lagus/Josef Polák, *Město za mřížemi* [City behind Bars], Prague 2006, 113.

28 Miroslav Kárný, *Die Gendarmerie-Sonderabteilung und die Theresienstädter Häftlinge. Zur Methodologie der kritischen Interpretation von Erinnerungen*, in: *Theresienstädter Studien und Dokumente* 1996, 136–152. After the war, Kárný was involved in the effort to prosecute the most brutal among the gendarmes. SOA Praha, MLS Praha, Ls 428/46, Kárný to Velitelství Sboru národní bezpečnosti, 28 July 1946.

29 Perzi, “Auch er stand ...” and Adam, *Die tschechische*.

30 Regarding Estonia, Ruth Bettina Birn wrote about an “emotional and acrimonious” debate, Birn, *Collaboration*, 182. See also the short article by Jiří Weigl, <https://www.klaus.cz/clanky/1385> (16 November 2020).

This study offers conclusions about the nature of the gendarmes' service based on official German and Protectorate documents from the National Archives (accessed through microfilm copies at the USHMM) and the Archives of the Security Forces. I also worked extensively with files from post-war investigations of the gendarmes who were accused of collaboration with the Germans (State Regional Archives). I then complemented this documentary material with information from published memoirs and oral testimonies (the Jewish Museum in Prague and the Visual History Archives of the USC Shoah Foundation). Most of the key sources originated in the context of post-war prosecution. Because of the articles in the retribution law and the heightened anti-German sentiments in society, witnesses and investigators focused on putative collaborators among the gendarmes and especially their 'pro-German behaviour', which went against 'national honour'. Conversely, the gendarmes tried to supply evidence about their rescue and resistance activities, proving that they had remained loyal patriots, or, alternatively, attempted to accuse prisoners of collaboration with the Germans, thus justifying their strict enforcement of their guarding duties. Certain myths originated during and early after the war, which then further developed in the following decades. In these early post-war files we learn far less about life in the ghetto and daily encounters between the gendarmes and prisoners, full of economic and trade activities, but also, as it seems, private contacts, including sexual relations. The aim of this article is to move beyond the myths associated with both extremes of collaboration and resistance, to focus on the gendarmes' involvement in the daily life of this major Jewish ghetto in the Protectorate.

The Special Gendarmerie Unit in the Theresienstadt Ghetto

Throughout the entire existence of the Theresienstadt Ghetto, the Protectorate Gendarmerie was in charge of guarding duties. At the secret meeting in Prague that took place on 10 October 1941, the Acting *Reichsprotektor* in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, SS-Obersturmbannführer Reinhard Heydrich, announced the establishment of a ghetto in Bohemia and Moravia. He suggested that approximately 600 Czech policemen, in three shifts, would serve as guards "under the supervision of the [German] security police".³¹

The first 25 Protectorate gendarmes, including their commandant, Lieutenant Theodor (Bohdan) Janeček (Janetschek), already arrived in Theresienstadt on 17 and 18 November 1941, almost a week before the first transport of 342 Jewish prisoners.³² The policemen formed the core of the special unit, which soon reached a size of between 125 and 150 gendarmes deployed there from stations all over Bohemia, only later, to a much smaller degree, and only temporarily, from Moravia as well.³³ This was a sizeable unit in comparison with the SS troops stationed in the ghetto (28 in total during the existence of the ghetto, which means that less than 15 to 20 could have been present at any one time).³⁴ In September and October 1944, when the last extensive deportations from the ghetto to Auschwitz were taking place, the SS increased the size of the gendarmerie unit. Thus, 75 new gendarmes arrived on 25 Sep-

31 Hans Günther Adler, *Theresienstadt 1941–1945. The Face of a Coerced Community*, Cambridge 2015, 646.

32 United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), RG-48.016M, reel 247, register of gendarmes in the Special unit (*Sonderabteilung*).

33 *Ibid.* Only in September 1943 did twenty gendarmes arrive from Moravia.

34 Tomáš Fedorovič, *Nové poznatky o příslušnících SS v terezínském ghettu* [New Findings on the SS Officers Serving in the Theresienstadt Ghetto], in: *Terezínské listy* 33, Prague 2005, 50–59.

tember, three days before the beginning of the liquidation transports, with the unit reaching a size of around 225 men.³⁵ Adam suggested that in total 1,665 gendarmes served in the ghetto during the war, but my estimate is lower, as it is likely that those who served in the unit on two separate occasions were included twice in the register of the gendarmes assigned to Theresienstadt.³⁶ Although serving in Protectorate uniforms, the special unit was excluded from the jurisdiction of the Protectorate authorities and was subordinated instead to the SS Office (*SS-Kommandantur; SS-Dienststelle*). The SS and Gestapo investigated the gendarmes who were accused of breaking the code of conduct, and from May 1943 they faced the judicial authority of the SS and Police Court in Prague (*SS- und Polizei Gericht Prag VIII*).³⁷ The commandant was directly appointed by the Land Gendarmerie Headquarters (*Zemské četnické velitelství*) and the rest of the unit by respective district (*okresní*) headquarters. In the beginning, most of the gendarmes served in the ghetto on long-term assignments, sometimes even exceeding one year, though the length of their service differed significantly and depended also on their personal preferences. It is unclear how local stations selected those assigned to the ghetto, but several gendarmes implied that their superiors saw it as a good opportunity to get rid of unpopular and troublesome colleagues, or those recently assigned to their stations from other localities.³⁸

The SS Office was divided in their view of how long individual gendarmes should serve in the ghetto. One part preferred to have an experienced unit on longer assignments, but others wanted to prevent the establishment of closer ties between the gendarmes and prisoners that could occur if the policemen stayed for too long. In late 1942, the SS Office agreed to limit the time gendarmes served in the ghetto to three months in the case of married men and six months for bachelors, but the commandant, SS-Obersturmführer Siegfried Seidl, rejected another proposal that half of the unit be replaced every month.³⁹ Furthermore, the gendarmes kept receiving extra payment during their service in the ghetto as a way to deter them from looking for extra income by establishing contacts with prisoners.⁴⁰ A major change was implemented only in the late summer of 1943 after SS-Obersturmführer Anton Burger replaced Seidl and, according to post-war testimonies, after it was endorsed or even initiated by the new commandant of the gendarmerie unit Lieutenant Miroslav Hasenkopf. Henceforth, one third of the unit was replaced every month, and gendarmes who were “weak and soft [and thus] very easily susceptible and subject to the seduction of the Jews” were released from the unit.⁴¹ The fact that in the summer and

35 ABS, 2M/10254, statement by Václav Zoufal, 25 March 1947; statement by Karel Kolářek, 28 March 1947; USHMM, RG-48.016M, reel 247, register of gendarmes in the Special unit (*Sonderabteilung*).

36 Adam, *Die tschechische*, 132.

37 ABS, Kanice, personnel file of Adalbert Klimeš, Abschrift, Feld-Urteil, SS und Polizeigericht VIII Prag, Klimeš, Koutecký, Adámek, Zelníček, 6 June 1944. The first cases of gendarmes caught helping the Jews in 1942 were tried by the internal commission of the Land Gendarmerie headquarters in Prague. The convicted gendarmes were sent to concentration camps, which implies that the Nazi authorities decided the punishment.

38 ABS, 2M/10303, statement by Jaroslav Trojan, 3 February 1948; SOA Litoměřice, MLS Litoměřice, Lsp 136/47, judgement against Jan Sýkora, 27 March 1947.

39 USHMM, RG-48.016M, reel 247, image 168, Vermerk über Änderungen bei der Gend.-Sonderabteilung Theresienstadt, 21445/42.

40 Miroslav Kárný, *Zvláštní četnický oddíl v Terezíně a terezínské vězňové* [The Special Gendarmerie Unit in Theresienstadt and the Prisoners], in: *Vlastivědný sborník Litoměřicko 21-22* (1985/86), 38.

41 USHMM, RG-48.016M, reel 247, image 171; Hasenkopf to Gendarmerie-Landeskommando Böhmen, 8 November 1943. SOA Litoměřice, MLS Litoměřice, Ls 86/48, judgement against Miroslav Hasenkopf, 14 September 1948. Hasenkopf became the commandant in August 1943, after Janeček was sent on leave because of health problems and mental breakdown. USHMM, RG-48.016M, reel 247, image 221, Zouna to the Gendarmerie-Landeskommando, 30 July 1943.

autumn of 1943 the Gestapo revealed several smuggling networks between gendarmes and prisoners seemed to play a role in this decision. Even then, however, the rule was not always strictly enforced. At least four gendarmes served in the ghetto during the entire existence of the unit, until May 1945. Burger also enforced the rule that only those who had not served in the unit previously could be transferred to Theresienstadt, while each gendarme had to prove that he had “no Jewish relations” (*jüdisch versippt*).⁴² The rules changed again shortly before the end of the war, under the last commandant, SS-Obersturmführer Karl Rahm, when several gendarmes served their second term in the ghetto, though those assigned to the unit before 1 September 1943 were officially not eligible.⁴³

The gendarmerie unit executed a whole range of duties in the ghetto and its environs. After the war, the gendarmes claimed that they had mostly fulfilled only a guarding and supervisory role and had not contributed to the investigation and punishment of prisoners who broke any of the imposed laws.⁴⁴ Other testimonies, however, prove that both unit commandants and their close associates brutally interrogated prisoners, usually together with the SS but occasionally even on their own initiative.⁴⁵ The guarding duties also kept developing. In the beginning, when the ‘Aryan’ population still lived in Theresienstadt (they were evacuated by 30 June 1942), the gendarmes served inside the ghetto and guarded the barracks containing Jewish prisoners. In July 1942, they moved outside the walls and patrolled at the gates. Until 1943, when the rail extension to the ghetto was completed, they also escorted the newly arrived prisoners from the railway station in Bohušovice nad Ohří, three kilometres outside of the ghetto, to Theresienstadt, and supervised the inspection of their luggage. In the daily life of the ghetto, the gendarmes escorted prisoners on work assignments, conducted searches of the barracks together with two German female wardens (called ‘berušky’ in Czech, literary meaning ‘ladybugs’, though the word ‘beruška’ is derived from the Czech verb ‘brát’ – to take or steal). They also controlled the incoming post, checked that the Jews who left Theresienstadt on work assignments did not try to smuggle food and other contraband, and also supervised work in the crematorium, including the search for gold among the ashes.⁴⁶

Only Protectorate citizens served in the unit and they were almost exclusively of Czech nationality. The major exception were the two commandants, Janeček and Hasenkopf, who, although they had been Czech before the war, declared German nationality after the invasion. It seems that the SS insisted that the commandant be ‘German’. Both had German spouses and Janetschek had lived in Vienna and other parts of the Habsburg Empire before 1918. The last commandant of the unit, the Czech Lieutenant Bohumil Bambas, was appointed only after the liberation in May 1945.⁴⁷ The SS Office repeatedly complained about the poor knowledge of German among the gendarmes and insisted that the assigned gendarmes should be healthy, energetic, reliable, and have a good command of the German language.⁴⁸ Eventually,

42 The rule was enforced after one gendarme (Emil Zelníček), imprisoned for contacts with prisoners, was found to be related to a Jewish person. USHMM, RG-48.016M, reel 247, Hasenkopf to Gendarmerie-Landeskommando Böhmen, 8 November 1943. The order was issued by Burger.

43 USHMM, RG-48.016M, reel 247, image 160, Auszug aus dem GLK. Befehles ZI.II-1606/1945, 1 February 1945.

44 SOA Litoměřice, MLS Litoměřice, Ls 84/48, written statement by Hasenkopf, 6 September 1948.

45 SOA Praha, MLS Praha, Ls 428/46, protocol with Theodor Janeček, 9 August 1945.

46 Adler, Theresienstadt, 64 f; Yad Vashem Archives, O.7cz/239, protocol with Rudolf Klein (1945).

47 USHMM, RG-48.016M, reel 247, image 207, a handwritten note, undated (most probably early May 1945).

48 USHMM, RG-48.016M, reel 247, Hasenkopf to the Gendarmerie-Landeskommando, 17 April 1945; USHMM, RG-48.016M, reel 247, order of the Gendarmerie Land Headquarters, 1 February 1945; Gendarmerie-Landeskommando Böhmen to Gendarmerie Abteilungskommando, 17 June 1944; Hasenkopf to Gendarmerie-Landeskommando Böhmen, 9 September 1943.

in late 1943 they ordered that at least a few non-commissioned officers of German nationality were sent to the ghetto.⁴⁹

Witness statements and oral testimonies suggest that the majority of the gendarmes behaved decently toward the Jews and often tried to alleviate their plight, either by looking the other way when the prisoners smuggled food to the ghetto or by facilitating contact with the outside world. They also offered words of encouragement to the prisoners or shared news about the development of the war.⁵⁰ Other prisoners were more critical of the gendarmes' conduct or remembered that it was always important to figure out the gendarme's personality or check who was on duty before they tried to smuggle items into the ghetto.⁵¹ Yet this narrative is mostly based on the experiences of Czech-Jewish prisoners, including deportees who lived in mixed marriages and arrived in Theresienstadt only in the last months of the war. There were frequent cases of encounters between prisoners and gendarmes who came from the same city or village and had previously known each other. Such encounters helped to establish close contacts in the ghetto.⁵² Much less is known about the experiences of German and Austrian-Jewish prisoners (and others), who tended to be more critical or to simply be neutral in their judgement of the guards' behaviour. There was in fact no effort to collect witness testimonies from non-Czech Jews in the immediate post-war period. Former prisoners remembered that the gendarmes behaved in a friendlier manner toward Czech-speaking prisoners and were willing to help some of them by smuggling letters to their relatives or by giving them extra food.⁵³ Other testimonies suggest that the gendarmes were also friendlier to younger prisoners, in particular women. The *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD) criticised this behaviour during the war.⁵⁴ The prisoners soon learnt to use this friendliness to their benefit and sent young women to distract the gendarmes when columns of prisoners marched outside of the ghetto.⁵⁵ After the war, survivors and some of the gendarmes reported cases of romantic or sexual relations between the gendarmes and young female prisoners.⁵⁶ Some of these relationships lasted beyond the war, though not very long.⁵⁷

Other available sources, however, suggest that the gendarmes often did not offer acts of support for free, and non-Jewish relatives or prisoners paid a high price for their services. At times, gendarmes demanded a fifty per cent cut of the transaction.⁵⁸

49 USHMM, RG-48.016M, reel 247, image 171, II – 13.261/43. Their names imply that the gendarmes were Czech, but registered as Germans during the war.

50 University of Southern California Visual History Archive (USC VHA), Karel (Honza Winter), testimony no. 17525; Josef Švehla, testimony no. 8717; Jarmila Schicková, testimony no. 19272; ŽMP, testimony no. 691, M.H.

51 USC VHA, Helen Seidner, testimony no. 54289; Eric Sonner, testimony no. 16847; Arnošt Lanzen, testimony no. 19371.

52 ŽMP, testimony no. 165, H.G.; USC VHA, Petr Traub, testimony no. 39219; Helen Seidner, testimony no. 54289; Jan Černoč; Markéta Herzová, testimony no. 31080; Marie Gardová.

53 USC VHA, Henry Adler, testimony no. 27684; Nora Bock, testimony no. 2542; Harry Rowe, testimony no. 9551; Lucie Steinhagen, testimony no. 11864; Adler, Theresienstadt, 230.

54 Národní archiv [National Archives] (NA Praha), 109-8/28, Walter Jacobi to K.H. Frank, 13 April 1942.

55 USC VHA, Hanne Pick, testimony no. 10005; Vera Solarová, testimony no. 7940; Nina Summers, testimony no. 19476.

56 ŽMP, testimony no. 069, A.K. The survivor remembered that the gendarme Karel Salaba had several mistresses among the prisoners. Commandant Seidl was allegedly aware of Salaba's antics. See also: SOA Praha, MLS Praha, Ls 428/46, judgement against Emil Hašek and František Drahoňovský, 11 April 1946.

57 USC VHA, Doris Grozdaničová, testimony no. 24083.

58 Testimony by Valter Kesler and Irena Rieselová, in ŽMP, Miroslav Kárný, Zvláštní četnický oddíl v Terezíně a terezínští vězňové [The Special Gendarmerie Unit in Theresienstadt and the Prisoners], unpublished manuscript, 1982; USHMM, RG-48.016M, microfilm 256, image 43, Anonymous letter sent to the Gestapo in Hradec Králové (June/July 1943); USC VHA, Joe Seidner, testimony no. 54320; Helen Seidner, testimony no. 54289; ŽMP, testimony no. 77, J.T.

Others asserted that the gendarmes stole items from the newly arrived deportees or profited from the black market, selling food for gold or cigarettes for watches.⁵⁹ After the war, survivors reported cases of gendarmes who had earned “fortunes” in the ghetto. In some cases, Jewish orderlies in the gendarmerie barracks were directly approached by gendarmes to sell food to prisoners on their behalf.⁶⁰ Other survivors praised the gendarmes for “saving their lives”, though they only later revealed that they had to give them a diamond ring for a pair of shoes.⁶¹

Financial profit for rescuers is a sensitive issue in Holocaust historiography.⁶² The public likes to hear redemptive stories about altruistic people, but the reality was not that simple. Accepting reward in exchange for offering help was not exceptional, though it is impossible to draw a clear line between a payment that compensated for the danger and an immoral profiteering from the desperate situation of the Jews. The power structure in Theresienstadt was similar to that of other ghettos or camps. The asymmetry created by the Nazi administration offered opportunities for those among the gendarmes who were seeking personal benefit or to rise in the ranks of the unit. They held what Sofsky called a delegated “absolute power”.⁶³ Gendarmes who caught or reported prisoners breaking the ghetto laws could receive extra days of leave or a monetary reward. Those who systematically collaborated with the SS Office held the promise of a quick promotion,⁶⁴ whilst those who were willing to take a risk could profit enormously from the booming black market. The SS had to accept that there were areas outside of their direct control – an unavoidable result of their reliance on non-German police forces.

Most of the gendarmes who served in the ghetto remained passive observers. They did not engage in any overt, brutal collaboration with the SS, but at the same time did not develop any extensive effort to help prisoners. After the war, some gendarmes claimed to have engaged in resistance activities. Karel Salaba allegedly managed to smuggle a radio receiver into the ghetto, which allowed prisoners to listen to foreign broadcasts. He also secretly took photos in the ghetto, including during the executions in early 1942, and allegedly send them to Switzerland.⁶⁵ The rest of the gendarmes possibly helped individuals or groups of individuals – sometimes for a monetary or other rewards – sharing their lunches or a snack and leaving newspapers lying where the prisoners could read them.⁶⁶ However, their presence in the ghetto needs to be seen as an example of the Czech contribution to the Holocaust. Kárný concluded that the presence of the gendarmes relieved a significant German military manpower needed elsewhere.⁶⁷ The SS were evidently aware that the gendarmes were not enthusiastic or entirely reliable guards, but they served their purpose. The fact that the SS, concerned about possible resistance in the ghetto, further increased the size of the unit during the liquidation transports in the autumn of

59 USC VHA, Josef Klenka, testimony no. 16573; Lothar Strauss, testimony no. 42185; Hedy Schick, testimony no. 2986.

60 ŽMP, testimony no. 069, A.K.

61 USC VHA, interview 8165, L.B., segment, 14-15.

62 Jan Grabowski, *Rescue for Money. Paid Helpers in Poland, 1939–1945*, Jerusalem 2008.

63 Wolfgang Sofsky, *The Order of Terror. The Concentration Camp*, Princeton 1999, 114.

64 ABS, personnel file personal file of Felix Ulman (born 21 May 1911). František Makovský to Military Court in Prague, 12 May 1947; Oberst der Schutzpolizei to Generalkommandant der Gendarmerie, 28 May 1942; testimony by Max Ruchenberg cited in Kárný, 1982.

65 This story is often cited by historians. I have not been able to find out the Swiss newspaper that published the photos. Some of the post-war interior ministry reports on Salaba moreover contain mixed information about his service in the ghetto. ABS, personnel file of Karel Salaba (3 November 1910).

66 ŽMP, testimony no. 069, A.K.

67 Kárný, *Zvláštní*.

1944 confirms that they were satisfied with the gendarmes' service. But what about the extremes of collaboration and help – what can they reveal about the wartime service of the Czech gendarmes in the ghetto?

Perpetrators?

Věra Kalinová was a sixteen-year-old orphan when she was deported to Theresienstadt. She worked with a group of girls in the garden outside of the ghetto walls. As she was starving, Kalinová one day decided to hide small pieces of lettuce in her clothes, but she was caught by Commandant Janeček, who immediately found the contraband. He ordered Kalinová to be taken into custody, where, according to survivors, she was humiliated and had her head shaved. After several months she received the feared *Weisung* and was put on a train to Auschwitz, where she perished.⁶⁸

Several months earlier, in the autumn of 1942, Theresienstadt experienced frantic deportations of thousands of elderly prisoners to the East. The transports left at regular intervals, taking unfortunate deportees to Treblinka and other camps. Horrific scenes accompanied the loading of the trains in Bohušovice. On 22 October 1942, one of the prisoners getting on the train was ninety-year-old Žofie Londonová. After the war, another prisoner, Zdeňka Langerová, described how the furious Janeček approached the elderly Londonová, who was moving too slowly, and “using all his strength, kicked her in the stomach”. She died a few minutes later.⁶⁹

These stories are representative of the activities of the first commandant of the unit and show the two main ways in which the gendarmes could harm the inmates: By reporting them to the SS for breaking ghetto rules and by inflicting physical violence on them. From the perspective of post-war justice, survivors and gendarmes also accused other policemen, such as Felix Ulman, of fraternisation with the SS, speaking German in public (which was after the war seen as an act of national treason and collaboration) and assuming the manners of the SS. Others verbally abused the Jews, enforced all the rules that many gendarmes tended to ignore (such as that the Jewish prisoners had to greet them in the street), and beat Jews with a stick when deportees were loaded onto the trains to the East.⁷⁰ Only a small part of the unit behaved in this way.

Janeček was an exceptional character among the gendarmes. He became a symbol of Czech collaboration, but he was also an outlier. The activities of other gendarmes paled in comparison to the long list of crimes committed by Janeček and he thus inadvertently helped to exculpate the other members of the unit. This was also the case with the second commandant, Lieutenant Hasenkopf, who was accused of a long list of crimes against the Jews and subordinate gendarmes. Survivors and former gendarmes kept stressing that Janeček and Hasenkopf had behaved like ‘Germans’. They portrayed them as active collaborators, who in their activism went well

68 SOA Praha, MLS Praha, Ls 428/46, witness testimony by Hana Pámová, 26 March 1946; Ibid, undated letter to the public prosecutor by Aleš Kraus (March 1946); <https://www.holocaust.cz/databaze-obeti/obet/97036-ve-ra-kalinova/> (18 November 2020). It is often difficult to verify with certainty whether a person went to the transport as a direct punishment or by chance.

69 SOA Praha, MLS Praha, Ls 428/46, undated letter by Zdenka Langerová to the Extraordinary People's Court in Prague (received 2 April 1946).

70 SOA Praha, MLS Praha, Ls 428/46; ABS, personnel file of Felix Ulman (21 May 1911). Testimonies by Alžběta Kussá, 28 July 1945 and 23 October 1945; Makovský to the Prague Military court, 12 March 1947; ABS, 52-88-3.

beyond the German orders.⁷¹ The witnesses especially condemned the zeal with which they dispatched their duties. Hasenkopf himself admitted that upon his suggestion, the SS decided to periodically replace the gendarmes who served in Theresienstadt. His intention was to prevent gendarmes from establishing close contacts with the inmates.⁷² They both kept infusing the gendarmes with hatred against the Jews and were also involved in the beating of prisoners. Janeček wanted to be respected by the SS, who often mocked him in public.⁷³ At the same time, the survivors never forgot to emphasise that they were ‘Czech’ and that they wore the uniform of the Protectorate gendarmerie (though Janeček altered it to resemble the German uniforms, including the officer hat). They were also hated among the gendarmes because they kept ‘educating’ them about the danger of the Jewish menace, supervised their daily duties, and punished all transgression against the rules of conduct.⁷⁴

Janeček and Hasenkopf were not the only gendarmes accused of brutality. Karel Kubizňák was an experienced policeman who served in the ghetto for over a year, being primarily responsible for supervising the guarding duties.⁷⁵ One of his tasks was to supervise the patrol that accompanied the Jews between Bohušovice and the ghetto. According to several survivors, the prisoners feared Kubizňák for his temperament. Other gendarmes even warned them about him. Three former female prisoners, who worked in the Jewish commando in Bohušovice, described two incidents when Kubizňák, angry at their slow pace, brutally beat and kicked two Jewish prisoners, Josef Guth and an unknown fifty-year-old man. Guth had to be taken to the hospital, and according to the testimonies died several months later as a result of the injuries he sustained.⁷⁶

Individuals’ behaviour during the war was rarely one-dimensional, however. Gendarmes who were accused of brutality against some prisoners could at the same time provide evidence of the support they gave to others or of their involvement in anti-German resistance activities. Staff warden Emil Hašek, who was mentioned at the beginning of this article, was the most extreme example of this complex behaviour. According to some gendarmes, as the person in charge of the gendarmerie office, Hašek was the real commandant of the unit under Janeček, who spent most of the time drunk, beating about in the ghetto, looking for Jews who breached the ghetto laws and gendarmes who did not follow orders. As a protégé of the SS, Hašek used to ride horses around the ghetto together with the commandant Seidl and took part in brutal interrogations of inmates. Witnesses accused Hašek of murdering, or at least contributing to the murder, of Evžen Weiss, who was caught smuggling large amounts of money into the ghetto by another gendarme. He was allegedly beaten to death by Hašek, Janeček, and the SS Inspector of the ghetto, Karl Bergel.⁷⁷ On another

71 SOA Praha, MLS Praha, Ls 428/46; see also: Kraus, 1946; Tůma, 1946, 22.

72 SOA Litoměřice, MLS Litoměřice, Ls 86/48, judgement against Miroslav Hasenkopf, 14 September 1948.

73 Ibid, testimony by Jindřich and Bedřich Stern, 21 June 1945.

74 Ibid, Statement (udání) prepared by the SNB station in Mělník, 22 August 1945.

75 NA Praha, ZČV, box 1146, Kubizňák, Karel (born 1890), personnel file; ABS, personal card, Karel Kubizňák (who served in the ghetto from 12 December 1941 until 15 December 1942). SOA Litoměřice, MLS Litoměřice, Lsp 237/47, protocol from the main hearing with Kubizňák, 16 April 1947.

76 SOA Litoměřice, MLS Litoměřice, Lsp 273/47, case against Karel Kubizňák. Guth died on 10 August 1943, eight months after Kubizňák left the ghetto <https://www.holocaust.cz/databaze-dokumentu/dokument/97869-guth-josef-oznameni-o-umrti-ghetto-terezin/> (19 November 2020). After the war, Kubizňák was acquitted by the Litoměřice court. The judges believed the incidents happened, but could not prove that Kubizňák was the guilty gendarme.

77 See for example: SOA Praha, MLS Praha, Ls 428/46, statement by Stanislav Smrtka, 30 October 1945; Ibid, Ota Hekš, 9 March 1946; Josef Frišman, 13 March 1946; Karel Berner, statement received on 16 March 1946; Leo Fink, 24 July 1945, and many more.

er occasion, Hašek threatened to kill Eva Mändel (later Roubíčková), a young woman from Žatec who worked in the gardens, aiming his pistol at her because she did not want to reveal who had given her the pieces of vegetables she had tried to smuggle into the ghetto.⁷⁸

The most extreme accusation against Hašek was submitted by Marta Černá, and endorsed by others, including the gendarme František Makovský. At the end of October 1942, the gendarmes caught a non-Jewish woman near Bohušovice who was trying to smuggle items in for the prisoners. In her possession, they found the name and ghetto address of Šarlota Žižalová. A mother in her thirties, Žižalová was interrogated and beaten by Hašek. She spent two months in prison, on Hašek's orders, and as a punishment was put on the next transport to the East. In January 1943, Žižalová, together with her four-year-old son Mírek, were deported to Auschwitz, where they both perished.⁷⁹

In the summer of 1943, after a conflict with Burger, the new commandant, Hašek was transferred back to his home station, but he left behind a long record of brutal behaviour.⁸⁰ Makovský – a vocal critic of the other gendarmes – described Hašek as a gifted and skilful person, but also as a careerist whose skills were unfortunately placed at the disposal of the SS. Consequently, Hašek “ceased to be a Czech and perhaps even a human being”. This comment is characteristic of the immediate post-war discourses, which defined proper behaviour during the war in ethnic terms. He became an “absolute ruler and a feared person” and a person with almost “dictatorial powers”, Makovský concluded.⁸¹ He was also accused during the war of stealing money and personal belongings from the Jews or from non-Jews who tried to smuggle items into the ghetto.⁸²

The post-war investigation, however, also confirmed that Hašek had been one of the bravest Czech fighters during the May 1945 Prague uprising.⁸³ He fought the German troops with the same fervour with which he had previously beaten Jewish prisoners in the ghetto. His story demonstrates the ambiguity of categories such as collaboration and resistance during the war. Indeed, Hašek was not an exception. Other gendarmes who were accused of a very strict enforcement of the ghetto rules and of brutality could also provide evidence of having supported other prisoners.⁸⁴

The other way in which the gendarmes could harm individual prisoners stemmed from their role as a law-enforcing agency.⁸⁵ The Jews caught breaking any of the countless regulations faced severe punishment and the imminent danger of being sent to the East. It seems that the gendarmes at least initially considered their service to be just another regular police assignment and not a guarding duty in a ghetto or camp. However, the defining moment for the unit came shortly after the arrival of the first prisoners. Over the following weeks, the gendarmes apprehended several inmates who had attempted to establish contact with the outside world or tried to buy extra food in ‘Aryan’ shops, where they were caught not wearing the ‘Jewish star’.

78 SOA Praha, MLS Praha, Ls 428/46, Eva Roubíčková, 11 March 1946; see also the testimony of Doris Schimmerlingová, 20 July 1945.

79 SOA Praha, MLS Praha, Ls 428/46, Marta Černá to the Extraordinary People's Court in Prague, 10 April 1946. Co-signed by František Makovský and Hana Fischlová.

80 ABS, personnel file of Emil Hašek (born 25 May 1942), undated statement by Hašek (1945?).

81 SOA Praha, MLS Praha, Ls 428/46, testimonies by František Makovský, 21 February 1946 and 11 April 1946.

82 USHMM, RG-48.016, reel 255, images 577-583.

83 SOA Praha, MLS Praha, Ls 428/46, SOA Praha, MLS Praha, Ls 428/46, judgement against Emil Hašek and František Drahoňovský, 11 April 1946. It is very likely that his involvement in the Prague Uprising saved Hašek's life during the prosecution trial.

84 Ibid. František Drahoňovský was sentenced to ten years in prison in April 1946.

85 See also: ŽMP, testimony no. 077, J. T.

According to post-war testimonies, Janeček and another gendarme, František Drahoňovský, were involved in at least some of these cases. Nine of the prisoners were publicly executed in January and another seven in February 1942. At this stage, the gendarmes could not have anticipated that the denounced prisoners would be executed or sent to the East. The gendarme Karel Salaba believed that the execution was unavoidable – implying that the SS wanted to deter the prisoners from any future defiance.⁸⁶ The execution also served as an initiation for the gendarmes and as a way to make them accomplices in the Nazi persecution. However, after the public execution, during which the gendarmes stood guard at the gallows, none of them could have any illusion about the fate that awaited the prisoners reported to the SS.⁸⁷

We will never be able to establish how many prisoners suffered because the gendarmes reported them, but some policemen gained notoriety for actively pursuing inmates. In his mid-forties, Jan Sýkora belonged to the older generation of the gendarmes. He spent more than eighteen months in the ghetto before he was transferred back to his home station in Sušice. In Theresienstadt, he went beyond the orders and actively looked for inmates who tried to smuggle contraband into the ghetto. He also supervised two Sudeten German women, who searched the prisoners' rooms for hidden items, and enforced a thorough search. Other post-war witnesses reported cases of Sýkora's violence against prisoners. The most serious accusation, however, was that Sýkora's zeal had led to the deaths of several inmates either in the ghetto or following their deportation to the East. He even received a monetary reward for reporting the Jews. After the war, Sýkora was sentenced to death, but in June 1948, the newly elected communist president Klement Gottwald commuted his sentence to 25 years in prison.⁸⁸

Were the gendarmes volitional or situational perpetrators?⁸⁹ Shortly after his dismissal from the position of commandant in late July 1943, Janeček reported to his superiors in Prague that about 35,000 Jews had died or “rather had been killed and executed” in the ghetto. He allegedly stated that he would rather commit suicide if there was a change in the political regime.⁹⁰ This demonstrates that the gendarmes were aware of their role in the Nazi persecution of the Jews. Survivors, too, remembered that some of the gendarmes made comments about the fate of the deportees to the East.⁹¹ Did the gendarmes' behaviour manifest antisemitic feelings? Some of the statements the gendarmes made after the war clearly contained antisemitic sentiments, which confirms the observation put forward by Helena Krejčová.⁹² We also should not ignore the constant propaganda in the ghetto spread by their superiors

86 SOA Praha, MLS Praha, Ls 428/46, statement by Karel Salaba, 1 October 1945.

87 The execution is mentioned in all works on Theresienstadt. It also played an important role in the judicial proceedings against Janeček and Drahoňovský; SOA Praha, MLS Praha, Ls 428/46.

88 SOA Litoměřice, MLS Litoměřice, Ls 136/47; ABS, OK249/46; Archiv kanceláře prezidenta republiky [The Archive of the President's Office], fond KPR, inventory no. 2035, kart. 463, sign. 207088/48, A proposal for clemency, minister Čepička to Gottwald, 15 June 1948.

89 On historiography see: Peter Hayes, *Why? Explaining the Holocaust*, New York 2017, 137–160.

90 This was an exaggeration. SOA Praha, MLS Praha, Ls 428/46, Pplk. Sameš to Závodní rada (vyšetřující komise) zemského velitelství SNB [Company Council (Investigating Committee) of the Provincial Police Headquarters], 4 July 1946.

91 Yad Vashem Archives, O.93/9835, testimony by Jaroslav Kraus; SOA Praha, MLS Praha, Ls 428/46, Kárný to Velitelství Sboru národní bezpečnosti [Headquarters of the National Security Corps (police)], 28 July 1946.

92 Helena Krejčová, Karl Rahm. Otázky (ne)nastolené a (ne)zodpovězené [Karl Rahm. Questions Neither Posed Nor Answered], in: *Poválečná justice a národní podoby antisemitismu. Postih provinění vůči Židům před soudy a komisemi ONV v českých zemích v letech 1945–1948 a v některých zemích střední Evropy* [Post-war Justice and National Forms of Antisemitism. Punishment of Offenses against Jews before ONV Courts and Commissions in the Czech Lands 1945–1948 and in Other Central European Countries], Opava 2002, 180–203; ABS, OK249/46, protocol with Jan Sýkora, 24 June 1946.

and the gendarmes' fear of serious consequences if the SS found out they had been negligent in their service. Furthermore, in every society there are individuals who abuse their power, especially under such extreme conditions, with impunity for their actions and benefits stemming from collaboration. In fact, under the specific conditions prevailing in Theresienstadt, the gendarmes harmed the prisoners simply by their presence and by performing their duties, even if after the war they could provide evidence of having helped individuals. Wolfgang Sofsky's comments on privileged prisoners in concentration camps also apply to the gendarmes: "[...] assistance was impossible without first becoming an accessory".⁹³

If we consider other factors, the small core of the unit around the two commandants (especially Janeček, Hasenkopf, Hašek, and Ulman) were influenced by their proximity to the SS, and these situational factors shaped their behaviour, as they began to mimic their SS supervisors. The influence on the rest of the unit differed. They held the delegated 'absolute power' over prisoners, but their behaviour, as Sofsky argued with regard to concentration camps guards, was also influenced by their feeling of being imprisoned in military style units.⁹⁴ The gendarmes had been removed from their hometowns and villages, as well as from their families. They lived in communal rooms, with other policemen, inside an overcrowded ghetto. Subjected to military style discipline, they were supervised by the SS, who could target them at a whim as well. Some of them tried to apply for release on medical grounds, leading the gendarmerie headquarters to announce that they would have to return to the unit once their health improved.⁹⁵ Such conditions frequently led to feelings of humiliation and frustration, which could easily be vented against the prisoners, with deadly consequences.⁹⁶ This does not mean that the gendarmes necessarily harmed prisoners, but they could conduct a stricter search, go beyond received orders, or zealously inform on prisoners who broke the ghetto rules. The fact that the gendarmes did not decide the fate of the prisoners they caught allowed them to distance themselves from the consequences of their actions. They could persuade themselves that as policemen, they just ensured that prisoners followed the law. The fact that the whole town had been turned into a ghetto with a Jewish self-administration and that the inmates did not have to wear uniforms may have supported their feeling of normalcy. At the same time, the space created by the delegated 'absolute power' and the lacunae outside of the easy reach of the SS⁹⁷ allowed the gendarmes to appease their conscience by supporting individual prisoners. Such small acts of help played an important psychological role, especially with the changing tides of the war – the gendarmes, aware of their role in the persecution, could feel they were also engaging in anti-German activities and behaving as patriots. Not surprisingly, after the war such gendarmes contacted former prisoners and requested statements in support of their 'impeccable' behaviour. Survivors often complied.

These conclusions position the gendarmes outside of the standard perpetrator historiography. The gendarmes were not typical perpetrators who pulled the trigger.⁹⁸ The isolation of the ghetto from any densely populated areas also made it more difficult to apply conclusions reached by historians of police collaboration in other

93 Sofsky, *The Order*, 20.

94 *Ibid.*, 114.

95 USHMM, RG-48.016M, reel 247, image 167, order by Colonel Jan Voženílek, 6181/42 (undated).

96 Sofsky, *The Order*, 114-115.

97 *Ibid.*, 19-20.

98 Frydel, *Ordinary Men*, 69-126. Hayes, *Why?*

European territories.⁹⁹ In the following, we will turn to the image of the Theresienstadt gendarmes that emerged after the end of the war and what it can tell us about their wartime service.

The Tale of Fourteen Gendarmes

The trial of Karl Hermann Frank, one of the masterminds behind German rule in the Protectorate, was a highlight of the post-war judicial reckoning in Czechoslovakia.¹⁰⁰ Nobody doubted Frank's guilt, and the trial rather offered an opportunity to present the official narrative of the brutal German occupation. Even though the evidence in some cases was patchy, nobody bothered about small inaccuracies in this major trial that ended with the former state minister being sent to the gallows.¹⁰¹ One story in the indictment during this highly publicised trial influenced the discussions about the Theresienstadt gendarmes that followed. Two weeks into the trial, the witness stand was taken by Antonín Macht, a business school professor from Prague, who had been imprisoned by the Gestapo in the Small Fortress of Theresienstadt in 1943.¹⁰² There he worked in the SS Office in close proximity to the commandant SS-Hauptsturmführer Heinrich Jöckel. *Rudé právo* (Red Justice), the communist daily, relayed the following story from Macht's testimony:

“One day, probably in October 1943, fourteen Czech gendarmes from the ghetto were brought to Theresienstadt [to the Small Fortress]; three were in civilian clothes. They had been picked up for helping the Jews, providing them with supplies or passing letters. Commander Jöckel then made an urgent phone call to Prague, to Secretary of State Frank, which the witness heard with his own ears, as he was in the room. [..., When we returned] there were men's shirts, suits, and uniforms in a pile in the corner.”¹⁰³

The gendarmes were executed. Macht repeated the testimony during the subsequent trial of Jöckel in October 1946. Both Jöckel and Frank denied any knowledge of the execution, which could either have been an attempt to reject responsibility for the crime or a genuine difficulty to remember one particular murder.¹⁰⁴ Yet the story took on a life of its own in the following months, during the trials of former gendarmes who had served in Theresienstadt, and later in the historical memory of their service in the ghetto. It helped create an image of Czech gendarmes who were murdered by the SS in high numbers for supporting prisoners. The gendarmes who had spent the war guarding Jewish prisoners became martyrs.

An even more sinister image emerged during the post-war investigation, when the notion of the deadly assignment in the ghetto merged with the image of omnipresent Jewish informers in the ghetto, who collaborated with the SS and betrayed the brave gendarmes. Although neither the witnesses nor the defendants during these trials of former gendarmes presented any concrete example of such behaviour,

99 Frydel, *Ordinary Men*.

100 Benjamin Frommer, *National Cleansing. Retribution against Nazi Collaborators in Postwar Czechoslovakia*, Cambridge 2005, 233-237.

101 *Český národ soudí K.H. Franka* [The Czech Nation Judges K.H. Frank], Prague 1947.

102 *Rudé právo*, 5 April 1946, 1; SOA Litoměřice, MLS Litoměřice, Ls 1200/46, Macht's testimony against Heinrich Jöckel, 25 June 1946.

103 *Rudé právo*, 5 April 1946, 1. The story was also relayed by *Svobodné slovo*, the newspaper of the Czechoslovak National Socialist Party, on 5 April 1946.

104 SOA Litoměřice, MLS Litoměřice, Ls 1200/46, indictment of Jöckel, 20 September 1946; *Ibid.*, Vol. X, protocol of the main hearing, testimony by Macht, 21 October 1946.

the judges used this notion as an exonerating factor.¹⁰⁵ Soon, gendarmes accused of collaboration began to emphasise the existence of Jewish informers as a justification for why they had to follow SS orders.¹⁰⁶ For gendarmes, the alleged threat of Jewish informers evidently also fulfilled an important psychological role as an easy personal justification for the enforcement of the ghetto rules.¹⁰⁷ The first such mention appears in the testimony of the gendarme Karel Salaba. He – as a witness – suggested to the Extraordinary People’s court in Prague that there had been “hundreds” of Jewish informers in the ghetto, who “acted fawningly toward the gendarmes, but for even the smallest willingness to help displayed by a gendarme toward the prisoners, they turned him in”.¹⁰⁸ Not only were the prisoners said to have betrayed the gendarmes, they also actively provoked them. Some gendarmes in their memoirs further spread stories about the “many gendarmes” who had ostensibly been imprisoned in the Small Fortress for small favours offered to the Jews.¹⁰⁹ On other occasions, gendarmes claimed that the main group of Jewish informers, mostly from Austria, had worked for SS-Scharführer Rudolf Heindl. Such gendarmes blamed more specifically “German” or “Viennese” Jews, emphasising their ethnicity.¹¹⁰ The roles were reversed, the guards becoming victims and the prisoners collaborators of the Germans. Although in some cases, we can easily refute these allegations,¹¹¹ even some contemporary historians uncritically accept these stories in their scholarly work.¹¹²

It is true that there were cases of Jewish informers in the ghetto, who cooperated with the SS as a means to save their lives, and it is possible that the gendarmes were indeed afraid that they could be betrayed by prisoners. The SS intentionally created this atmosphere of distrust. Of course, there were also cases of gendarmes who reported their peers or betrayed them during interrogation.¹¹³ How did the situation in Theresienstadt differ from other gendarmes’ assignments outside of the ghetto? Even there, they had to be afraid that a failure to report acts considered illegal by the Germans could be reported by informers among the population of the Protectorate. After the war, however, the gendarmes painted an image suggesting that it was a specifically Jewish characteristic to betray their helpers or, more importantly, actively incite the gendarmes into helping with the intention of reporting them to the SS. This image was disseminated with the help of former gendarmes, people’s judges, and press reports on trials, and helped to reaffirm the notion that the Jews were weak,

105 SOA Praha, MLS Praha, Ls 428/46, judgement against Emil Hašek and František Drahoňovský, 11 April 1946.

106 ABS, personnel file of Karel Šindler, protocol of 18 June 1945. Šindler stated that Jewish informers were guilty basically in all the cases that gendarmes were imprisoned.

107 ABS, personnel file of Antonín Zachař, protocol of 20 August 1946.

108 SOA Praha, MLS Praha, Ls 428/46, judgement against Emil Hašek and František Drahoňovský, 11 April 1946.

109 ŽMP, Terezín Collection, inventory no. 343, František Fara, “Smrt za cigaretu” [“Death for a Cigarette”]; Josef Písařík, *Memoirs of a Former Czechoslovak Gendarme, Later a Refugee from the Year 1948*, private print. Písařík’s memoirs are not a reliable source. They are also full of antisemitic remarks.

110 SOA Litoměřice, MLS Litoměřice, Ls 147/48, witness statement by Stanislav Hlaváč, 23 April 1948, among others.

111 SOA Litoměřice, MLS Litoměřice, Ls 147/48, witness statement by Jan Novák, 30 June 1948. Novák alleged that the gendarme František Kubín was betrayed by a Jewish informer and died in Mauthausen. In reality, Kubín was betrayed by a Czech person in Prague and later died in Auschwitz.

112 Anna Hájková, *Prisoner Society in the Terezín Ghetto, 1941–1945*, (PhD Thesis), University of Toronto 2013, 86; Tomáš Fedorovič *Konfidenti v ghettu Terezín [Nazi Informers in the Theresienstadt Ghetto]*, Terezínské listy 37, Prague 2009, 134–140.

113 USHMM, RG-48.016M, reel 256, image 43, anonymous letter sent to the Gestapo in Hradec Králové, accusing two gendarmes of profiting from the black market in Theresienstadt (June/July 1943).

deceitful and unpatriotic.¹¹⁴ This representation was in line with other post-war discussions that nationalised and ethnicised the question of wartime behaviour and of loyalty to the state and the Czechoslovak republic.

The reality was more complicated. The historian Miroslav Kárný already pointed out that Macht completely misrepresented a story that had no relation to the ghetto. The case was either related to a group of gendarmes, not from Theresienstadt, who were executed for listening to enemy broadcasts, or possibly such mass execution of gendarmes in the Small Fortress did not even take place.¹¹⁵ There is no documented case of fourteen gendarmes having been executed for helping the Jews. There is also a lack of concrete or convincing evidence that those gendarmes imprisoned by the SS were directly betrayed by Jewish prisoners.

The SS, Gestapo, and Protectorate authorities investigated altogether 28 gendarmes in relation to their service in the ghetto from the most likely well over 1,000 who served in Theresienstadt. At least six of these men were investigated for acts that had no connection to prisoners.¹¹⁶ A case involving seven gendarmes apprehended in early January 1944, the largest group arrested by the Nazis, was more complicated. Other historians already pieced together the story.¹¹⁷ The Gestapo apprehended them for stealing items (tobacco, razors, and cologne) from suitcases of Jews who had arrived in the ghetto that day. The gendarmes were sentenced by the Prague SS and Police Court to between four and six months in prison. All of them resumed service after their release, though they were prohibited from returning to the special unit.¹¹⁸ The commandant of the unit, Hasenkopf, later kept suggesting that Jewish informers had betrayed the gendarmes, which was also a way for him to reject any responsibility for their imprisonment.¹¹⁹ None of the seven submitted court testimony after the war. Some of their personnel files contain statements in which they denied the allegations of stealing the prisoners' possessions. One of the reasons for such statements could be that being persecuted for theft in service did not qualify as a reason for receiving withheld monetary benefits or the status of a political prisoner. Their superiors, however, rejected the claims, stating that there was no evidence that the SS had fabricated the case.¹²⁰ It is likely that they had intended to sell the stolen items on the black market. Furthermore, as Kárný asserted, had they been caught for helping the Jews the punishment would have been more severe.¹²¹

Consequently, we are left with fifteen cases of gendarmes who, according to the available documents, were imprisoned by the SS for supporting prisoners. They were apprehended in eight separate incidents. One of them, Eduard Škoda, was released after less than a month, and another, Makovský, after several months in the Small Fortress, without being sentenced by the SS court. Both were readmitted to the gendarmerie, though not in Theresienstadt, and Makovský even became the commandant of a small station. After the war, some of his former colleagues questioned his

114 Jan Orlický, Terezínští četníci [Theresienstadt Gendarmes], *Hlas revoluce*, 20 (1946), 2. Orlický was one of the peoples' judges during the trial against Hašek and Drahoňovský. In this short article, he depicted a brave gendarme who helped an elderly Jewish prisoner, who in turn reported him to the SS.

115 Kárný, *Zvláštní*, and *Die Gendarmerie-Sonderabteilung*.

116 Some other gendarmes also claimed they had been interrogated by the Gestapo, but I have not been able to find any supporting documentation.

117 Kárný, *Zvláštní*, and *Die Gendarmerie-Sonderabteilung*.

118 USHMM, RG-48.016, reel 256, images 198-258.

119 SOA Litoměřice, MLS Litoměřice, Ls 86/48, the main proceedings against Hasenkopf, 14 September 1948.

120 ABS, personnel file of Ignác Černý, the interior ministry file Č. IV 4.210/1947. Undated comment on Černý's request (sent 25 February 1947).

121 Kárný, *Die Gendarmerie-Sonderabteilung*, 141.

wartime behaviour and alleged that he had good contacts with the Germans.¹²² It is unclear why the SS apprehended Makovský and Škoda. Karl Löwenstein, a prominent German-Jewish prisoner, suggested that the Jewish Elder Paul Eppstein reported them to the SS for asking him to remove certain prisoners from the September 1943 transport to Auschwitz. Löwenstein's bias against Eppstein is well known and Makovský did not make such allegations in any of his post-war depositions.¹²³

None of the remaining thirteen were sentenced to death for helping the Jews, though three of them succumbed to the conditions in the concentration camps and prisons: František Kubín in Auschwitz in September 1942 and Jiří Anton Černý and Vilém Vach in the Small Fortress of Theresienstadt in April and May 1945. Another eight gendarmes remained in the camps until the end of the war. One of them, Imrich Biró, spent almost three years in various camps, including Auschwitz.¹²⁴

Myths about the fate of the imprisoned gendarmes and about executions already circulated during the war. Kárný offered the useful hypothesis that they had been intentionally spread by the SS with the help of the gendarmerie commandants, intended to discourage gendarmes from helping prisoners even if offered large sums of money.¹²⁵ After the war, the gendarmes testified that the SS Office, especially Heindl, frequently warned them about possible consequences if caught being lenient to the prisoners.¹²⁶ Furthermore, the Gestapo at least initially tried to make an example of the caught gendarmes. In May 1942, František Kubín was the first gendarme apprehended for helping the Jews. The head of the Gestapo in Kladno, which investigated the case, almost immediately asked the Land Gendarmerie Headquarters in Bohemia to publicise Kubín's case as a warning.¹²⁷ They complied, stressing the unfortunate fate of the young Czech gendarme, whose existence was destroyed because of his "lack of sense of duty and low greed".¹²⁸ The warning concluded that Kubín had been sent to a concentration camp. It also seems that in 1944 the SS changed their approach and left imprisoned gendarmes at the nearby Small Fortress as a constant reminder to their peers. Soon the notion spread amongst the gendarmes that *every small act* of support for the Jews could lead to the gendarme being sent to the Small Fortress, also because of the activities of "hundreds" of Jewish informers.¹²⁹

The available evidence paints a different image. All three gendarmes apprehended in 1942 were involved in smuggling activities between the prisoners and their relatives or friends outside of the ghetto. Kubín received a key from Vilém Bondy, a member of the *Ghettowache* (Jewish ghetto guard), who asked him to collect items from his Prague apartment. In Prague, Kubín also received a large sum of money (including 1,000 Crowns for himself) and parcels to bring back to the ghetto. He was betrayed in Prague by a Czech person (she gave her name as Jelínková) and appre-

122 USHMM, RG-48.016, reel 256, image 37-43 (Škoda case) and images 44-49 (Makovský case); ABS, 2M/10303, statement by Jaroslav Trojan, 3 February 1948; see also: ABS, 305-96-3.

123 Kárný rejected such allegations, Die Gendarmerie-Sonderabteilung, 146-147. Škoda was denounced by another gendarme for black market activities in the ghetto. USHMM, RG-48.016M, reel 256, image 43, anonymous letter sent to the Gestapo in Hradec Králové (June/July 1943).

124 ABS, personnel file of Imrich Biró.

125 SOA Litoměřice, MLS Litoměřice, Lsp 1711/46, case against Josef Plešák. The judgement, on 17 April 1947.

126 SOA Litoměřice, MLS Litoměřice, Ls 147/48, protocol with František Stehlik, 30 June 1948; Ibid, statement by Josef Bercha, undated; protocol with Jindřich Švarc, 28 June 1948.

127 USHMM, RG-48.016, reel 253, image 353, pplk Vít to the Land Gendarmerie Headquarters in Prague, 14 May 1942.

128 USHMM, RG-48.016, reel 244, Gendarmerie-Landeskommando Brünn, Tagesbefehl Nr. 37, 19 June 1942. The warning was published on 2 June 1942.

129 SOA Litoměřice, MLS Litoměřice, Ls 147/48, protocol with Stanislav Pravda, 27 June 1948.

hended after his arrival in Bohušovice.¹³⁰ Imrich Biró was involved in smuggling letters, food, money and cigarettes for prisoners. The wartime report stated that he earned 25,000 Crowns over a period of four weeks from prisoners and their relatives. After the war, Biró denied having received any money, claiming that the SS had fabricated the allegations, which in this case lacks any logic. It is more likely that Biró, who wanted to receive recognition as a political prisoner, realised that help for profit would not be recognised as an act of resistance.¹³¹ The third gendarme, Josef Menoušek, also received gifts from prisoners in exchange for smuggling.¹³²

The remaining gendarmes were apprehended in three separate major actions that took place in the space of one year. The evidence in the first case is scarce. The prisoners Julius Taussig and his brother Hanuš were allowed to travel between the ghetto and nearby Bohušovice with a cart to collect mail for the gendarmes. They mended the cart and created a false bottom to smuggle items back into the ghetto. During their frequent journeys, they established contact with the gendarmes supervising them, and eventually approached one of them with the request to take a letter out of the ghetto. They also attached a large sum of money as a payment. After the war, Taussig asserted that the gendarme got drunk and was caught with the letter. During the interrogation, he immediately revealed the identity of the Jewish prisoners and the Taussigs were jailed.¹³³ In total, the SS imprisoned four gendarmes, including František Vokroj, who had left the ghetto almost six months previously, and was captured by the Gestapo in Budweis (České Budějovice).¹³⁴

The SS tortured the gendarmes and the Taussigs for six weeks to reveal other involved gendarmes and contacts among the prisoners. Julius Taussig accused the drunk gendarme of divulging the identity of his colleagues who had been involved with the prisoners, and also of some Jews. By contrast, he, despite the violent beatings, did not reveal anything, though he could have named people in Bohušovice who were involved in smuggling.¹³⁵ The evidence suggests that the Taussigs were part of a network of smugglers, including members of the gendarmerie unit. After the war, Julius Taussig remembered that at the time of the interrogation, members of the gendarmerie, concerned about their fate, kept bringing food to the prisoners. They stopped visiting him once the interrogation had finished.¹³⁶ The Jewish prisoners were sent to the Small Fortress, while the gendarmes faced the SS court in Prague. All the gendarmes returned after the war from various concentration camps – Buchenwald, Mauthausen, and Flossenbürg. Taussig miraculously survived more than twenty months as a Jewish prisoner in the Small Fortress and other labour camps. His brother perished shortly before the end of the war.¹³⁷

130 USHMM, RG-48.016, reel 253, image 348-355, investigation of the Kubín case. Egon Redlich also noted the affair, which led to the disbanding of the Ghetto wache, in his diary. Egon Redlich, *Zítro jedeme, synu, pojedeme transportem. Deník Egona Redlicha z Terezína 1. 1. 1942–22. 10. 1944*. [Tomorrow We Will Go, Son, We Will Go on Transport: The Diary of Egon Redlich from Theresienstadt, January 1, 1942–October 22, 1944] Brno, 1995, p. 119 (entry for May 14, 1942).

131 USHMM, RG-48.016, reel 253, image 50, Der Generalkommandant der Uniformierten Protektoratspolizei to the Gendarmerie – Landeskommando Prague, 25 September 1942; ABS, personnel file of Imrich Biró, Biró to Sbor národní bezpečnosti, Prague, 28 April 1946.

132 USHMM, RG-48.016, reel 253, image 37, Land Commandant of the Gendarmerie, Prague to Jaroslav Růček's deputy, 16 July 1942.

133 ŽMP, testimony no. 77, J.T.; Ibid, testimony no. 973, A.Š. Taussig identified the gendarme as František Vokroj, but Vokroj had already left the ghetto in February 1943. In the records originating from the SS investigation, it was stated that Karel Čípa was smuggling letters from the ghetto for 1,000 Crowns a piece.

134 USHMM, RG-48.016, reel 255, images 627-644.

135 ŽMP, testimony no. 77, J.T.

136 ŽMP, testimony no. 973, A.Š.

137 ŽMP, testimony no. 77, J.T.; USHMM, RG-48.016, reel 255, images 627-644.

In the autumn of 1943, the SS imprisoned four gendarmes who were sentenced in June 1944 by the Prague SS and Police Court to between two and six years in prison for receiving bribes and for “military disobedience”.¹³⁸ The case of Emil Zelníček was the simplest. The court sentenced him to two years for smuggling some vegetables for the prisoner Teresa Podlahová, whom he had previously known.¹³⁹ The SS also found out that Zelníček had Jews among his family relations.¹⁴⁰ He was released from the Small Fortress several weeks before the end of the war. His colleague Josef Kouček played the main role in the rest of the affair. He was sent to Theresienstadt in the summer of 1943 for the second time. The SS later alleged that during his first term there, he had smuggled at least five parcels from prisoners’ relatives into Theresienstadt and taken letters back to Prague. He re-established these contacts in 1943 and received a payment of 200 cigarettes (an expensive item on the black market) and around 5,000 to 7,000 Crowns. Furthermore, he repeatedly had sexual intercourse with a young Jewish prisoner, B. B., and was also involved in the sale of cigarettes at exorbitant prices (30 Crowns a piece). He received the cigarettes from another gendarme accused in this case, Adalbert Adámek, who was sentenced to thirty months, also for other black market activities.¹⁴¹ The last gendarme facing the SS court in June 1944 was Vojtěch (Adalbert) Klimeš, who received a raincoat for bringing cigarettes and food to a prisoner from the gravedigger who lived near the ghetto. Furthermore, shortly before he was apprehended, Klimeš agreed to bring a letter from B.B. to Kouček, who had already been sent back to his home station. B.B. and Klimeš also kissed, according to the court protocol. Kouček, who was accused of a whole range of transgressions against SS rule, received six years in prison. Klimeš was sentenced to four years. They both survived and returned after the war from concentration camps in the Reich.¹⁴² The main evidence in this case comes from SS court files, which are obviously a highly problematic source. There is a lack of other documents, though one member of the Gestapo after the war remembered a brutal interrogation of a gendarme and a gravedigger from Theresienstadt in the Pankrác prison. Both were involved in a smuggling network which seems to have been related to this affair.¹⁴³

The final case, which also had the harshest consequences for the gendarmes and the Jews involved, was revealed in mid-1944. Most of the evidence was supplied by survivors and other witnesses, though their statements often contradicted each other. The gendarmes Jiří Anton Černý and Vilém Vach were taken into custody on 18 and 19 July, respectively, together with some members of the *Ghettowache*.¹⁴⁴ After six weeks of interrogation, the SS sent both gendarmes and the members of the *Ghet-*

138 ABS, Kanice, personnel file of Adalbert Klimeš, Abschrift, Feld-Urteil, SS und Polizeigericht VIII Prag, Klimeš, Kouček, Adámek, Zelníček, 6 June 1944; see also their files in USHMM, RG-48.016, reel 256.

139 Ibid.

140 USHMM, RG-48.016, reel 247, Hasenkopf to the Gendarmerie Land Headquarters (GLK) in Bohemia, 8 November 1943.

141 ABS, personnel file of Adalbert Klimeš, Abschrift, Feld-Urteil, SS und Polizeigericht VIII Prag, Klimeš, Kouček, Adámek, Zelníček, 6 June 1944; USHMM, RG-48.016, reel 256, image 109, note II-16.188/1944. Adámek was released in July 1944 for health reasons and did not return to the prison for the rest of the war.

142 USHMM, RG-48.016, reel 256, image 96, Velitel stanice SNB Hostouň u Prahy Sboru národní bezpečnosti, Zemské velitelství [Commander of the National Security Corps Hostouň near Prague to the Provincial Headquarter of the National Security Corps], 22 September 1945; image 67, note by Zemský četnický velitel [Provincial Gendarmerie Commander], 7 June 1945.

143 SOA Praha, MLS Praha, Ls 32/45, František Jenne, 17 July 1945. The gravedigger Antonín Šelicha died in Flossenbürg in January 1945.

144 ABS, 2M/10254, statement by František Hejtmánek, 25 March 1947; statement by Václav Průcha, 26 March 1947; statement by Bedřich Solar, 3 February 1947. Olga Schmiedová remembered that she had received her husband’s clothes soaked in blood.

towache together with their family members (eleven Jewish prisoners) to the Small Fortress. All the investigated members of the *Ghettowache* perished, though some of their family members survived. The Prague SS and Police Court sentenced both gendarmes to four years in prison due to “illegal contacts and smuggling with Jews”. They served their prison terms in the Small Fortress but succumbed to the conditions during the last weeks of the war or shortly after the liberation.¹⁴⁵

The exact reason for their imprisonment is unclear. One day before their arrest, the SS had apprehended a group of Jewish painters who were accused of spreading atrocity propaganda by smuggling out paintings depicting the real conditions in the ghetto. However, this was almost certainly an unrelated event.¹⁴⁶ Some witnesses after the war suggested that the Gestapo imprisoned Vach and Černý for throwing a small piece of vegetable to the prisoners or because they had allowed members of the *Ghettowache* to smuggle vegetables into the ghetto.¹⁴⁷ Others suggested that there was a network between the gendarmes and the *Ghettowache* through which prisoners smuggled letters and newspapers, or cigarettes and tobacco.¹⁴⁸ There was indeed an underground economic cooperation between the *Ghettowache* and the gendarmes almost since the ghetto was first established.¹⁴⁹ After the war, Hasenkopf claimed that the gendarmes had been betrayed by Jewish informers, though other gendarmes admired the heroism of the members of the *Ghettowache*, who despite the brutal interrogation did not betray anybody.¹⁵⁰ Benjamin Murlmelstein, the last Jewish Elder in the ghetto, also accused an infamous Jewish informer, who had been deported to the ghetto from Berlin, of betraying the members of the *Ghettowache*.¹⁵¹ After the war, the last SS Commandant, Rahm, claimed that the order to investigate the case came directly from the Prague Gestapo, who reported that gendarmes were facilitating a connection between Prague and Theresienstadt.¹⁵² This could have been an attempt by Rahm to deflect responsibility, though the official records state that both gendarmes were apprehended by the Prague Gestapo, and Rahm on other occasions admitted his personal initiative.¹⁵³ In any case, the length of the sentence, if we compare it to the other cases, suggests that this must have been a case of a more extensive cooperation between the gendarmes and prisoners, and not a simple case of the gendarmes offering small favours to a few individuals.

The theme of victimisation was part of a larger narrative in Czech society during the war. The gendarmes were in a difficult position. They constantly lived in the space between the Nazi authorities and the people in the Protectorate and faced the quandary of whether to report acts of resistance or risk that the Germans would eventually catch those guilty and the gendarmes would be punished as well. This delicate position also informed their main line of defence after the war.¹⁵⁴ Post-war memoirs

145 USHMM, RG-48.016, reel 256, images 453-460.

146 On the painters affair, see: Norbert Troller, Theresienstadt. Hitler's Gift to the Jews, Chapel Hill 2004; Leo Haas, The Affair of the Painters of Terezin, in: Terezin, Prague 1965, 157-161.

147 SOA Litoměřice, MLS Litoměřice, Lsp 441/47, Josef Rindl, 24 April 1947. František Hejtmánek, 25 March 1947.

148 Ibid, Indictment against Karl Rahm, 15 April 1947; testimony of Josef Polák, ABS, 2M/10254, Olga Schmieďová, 12 March 1947; statement by Josef Štěďry, 2 March 1947; statement by Karel Fiala, 28 March 1947; statement by Josef Klaber, 28 March 1947.

149 Adler, Theresienstadt, 23.

150 SOA Litoměřice, MLS Litoměřice, Ls 86/48, protocol with Hasenkopf, 19 December 1947.

151 The alleged informer was deported to Auschwitz on the last transport on 28 October 1944 and most likely perished there. ABS, 305-633-1, Murlmelstein, 11 February 1946.

152 ABS, 2M/10254, interrogation of Rahm, 28 March 1947.

153 SOA Litoměřice, MLS Litoměřice, Lsp 441/47, the main proceedings against Karl Rahm, 23 April 1947.

154 ABS, VOK IV – 438/47, protocol with Josef Hejduk, 24 May 1946.

focused almost exclusively on the victims and members of resistance among the gendarmes. The first commemorative studies, published after 1945, included lists of gendarmes murdered during the war, but also stressed the unwavering patriotic feeling of the corps.¹⁵⁵ The memory of the policemen's service merged with the established master narratives of the war, stressing the martyrdom and resistance of the Czech nation.¹⁵⁶

This was the case also in relation to their service in the ghetto, as the gendarmes tried to create a heroic image of policemen who, despite their dangerous assignment, altruistically helped prisoners. The fact that large sums of money were often involved in these smuggling networks was tacitly overlooked. Yet the evidence shows that the gendarmes played an important part in the ghetto economy and on the black market. They could travel outside of the ghetto and could bring in items highly sought after by the prisoners. The scarce evidence also shows that they became part of the "sexual barter economy",¹⁵⁷ as some of them established sexual contacts with young female prisoners and supported them with extra food or served as couriers for messages to their contacts in the Protectorate. Living for months in military barracks, away from their families and girlfriends and with easy access to extra food, the gendarmes were evidently sought out by female prisoners, though the available sources hint only indirectly at the extent of these arrangements.¹⁵⁸

The punishment the gendarmes received for helping prisoners was in fact significantly milder than for other acts of resistance. They were sentenced by the SS court to at most four to six years in prison, which implies that the German authorities did not consider the cases – at the time of total war – as meriting too much attention and rather used them as a warning to the rest of the unit. Some of the post-war witnesses even noted that the SS tolerated the small favours the gendarmes offered to the Jews, or that they themselves were earning money from the smuggling activities. The available evidence also suggests that the SS were moved to action only in cases of organised networks or after a certain period of time to remind the gendarmes about the dangers associated with any contacts with the Jews.¹⁵⁹ Such sentences were delivered at a time when thousands of Czechs were being executed or sent to Auschwitz for small offenses against German law. For example, black marketeering or listening to enemy radio broadcasts – widespread activities among the Czech population, including gendarmes – could lead to the death penalty. The gendarmes who served prison terms were allowed to rejoin the police force and continued to work until the end of the war, some even in relatively prominent positions. This of course does not mean we should relativise the suffering of the gendarmes sent to Auschwitz, Flossenbürg, Buchenwald, Mauthausen, or the Small Fortress.

155 Šest let okupace Prahy, 211-223.

156 Michal Frankl, *The Sheep of Lidice. The Holocaust and the Construction of Czech National History*, in: John-Paul Himka/Joanna Beata Michlic (ed.), *Bringing the Dark Past to Light. The Reception of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Europe*, Lincoln/London 2013, 166-194; Peter Hallama, *Nationale Helden und jüdische Opfer. Tschechische Repräsentationen des Holocaust*, Göttingen 2015.

157 Anna Hájková, *Sexual Barter in Times of Genocide. Negotiating the Sexual Economy of the Theresienstadt Ghetto*, *Signs* 38 (2013) 3, 503-533. Hájková did not discuss the role gendarmes played in the ghetto's "sexual barter economy".

158 See for example: ŽMP, testimony no. 462, J.Ž.

159 See for example: Adler, *Theresienstadt*, 119.

Conclusions: Where Do We Go from Here?

Of the more than one thousand gendarmes who served in the ghetto, approximately fifteen were investigated by the SS for allegedly helping the Jews, and slightly less were investigated by the post-war Czechoslovak police and judiciary as collaborators. Most of the other gendarmes, as an arm of the Protectorate administration, remained in the ambiguous grey zone between the two extremes. The administrative system of the Protectorate continued to function during the war. Policemen who did not belong to persecuted groups (Legionnaires, Jews, or the resistance) continued to earn a living under the changed conditions. Post-war prosecutions did not find an extensive number of policemen who could be accused of what became labelled 'zealous' behaviour. As long as they remained within the boundaries of a 'normal' engagement with their duties and did not develop initiative, their wartime service was beyond reproach, at least from the judicial point of view. This stemmed from the inevitable decision – based on the sentiments prevailing in society – that it was impossible to reject the whole political system of the Protectorate as a collaborationist entity.¹⁶⁰

However, as the post-war investigations showed, Protectorate structures were involved in all stages of the 'Final Solution' as it developed in Bohemia and Moravia. Czech public servants continued to work in their professions, running the agendas they received from their superiors, who were either Germans or Czechs. Their agendas also expanded. Alongside their regular work of maintaining order in Czech cities, towns, and villages, Czech policemen continued to enforce the law, including the ever-growing list of anti-Jewish regulations. In Theresienstadt, Czechs in the Protectorate gendarmerie uniform guarded Jewish inmates before they were loaded under the supervision of the same policemen onto trains that took them on their final journeys to Treblinka, Auschwitz, and other places.

Even recently, some political commentators and historians suggested that if we imply that parts of Czech society shared in the guilt of the Judeocide or Roma Holocaust, it helps exculpate the German perpetrators.¹⁶¹ However, that is a very simplified and narrow-minded view. Nobody questions the ultimate guilt of Nazi Germany and of the German officials at all levels in the Protectorate administration. We know enough about what the Germans did. At the same time, it is fundamental to point to the fact that in the framework of their ordinary duties, the Czech bureaucracy contributed to the isolation, dispossession, deportation, and incarceration of the Jews and Roma. The Germans relied on hundreds of Czech officials and gendarmes, who played their role in the whole process, even if most of them personally did not harm anybody.

¹⁶⁰ Frommer, *National Cleansing*, 280-293.

¹⁶¹ Vojtěch Blodig, *Review of Wolf Gruner, Die Judenverfolgung im Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren*, in: *Terezínské listy* 46, Prague 2018, 90-97.

Jan Láníček is senior lecturer in modern European and Jewish history at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia. His recent books include *Arnošt Frischer and the Jewish Politics of Early 20th-Century Europe* (2017), *The Jew in Czech and Slovak Imagination, 1938–89* (with Hana Kubátová, 2017), and *Czechs, Slovaks and the Jews, 1938–1948* (2013). He is currently completing a study of post-Holocaust judicial retribution in Czechoslovakia and works on a project on Jewish refugees in Australia during the Holocaust. He is coeditor of the Australian Journal for Jewish Studies.
E-mail: j.lanicek@unsw.edu.au

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