

## HISTORY

# A Slaughter of Jews in Ukraine

Who perpetrated the Lviv pogrom of July 1941?

BY JOHN-PAUL HIMKA

JULY 06, 2023

---

**T**HE DAY AFTER THE PROCLAMATION OF UKRAINIAN NATIONALIST leader Yaroslav Stetsko's state of Ukraine, on July 1, 1941, the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) pasted posters around Lviv with Mykola Mikhnovsky's slogan, "Ukraine for Ukrainians," printed in white letters against a red background. On the same day in Lviv and in many other localities of Galicia and Volhynia, another poster appeared, authored by Ivan Klymiv sometime earlier; it instructed Ukrainians: "People! Know! Moscow, Poland, the Hungarians, the Jews are your enemies! Destroy them!" These posters issued a clear signal as to what non-Ukrainians in Lviv could expect. And under the conditions of Nazi occupation, the only non-Ukrainians who could be targeted with impunity were Jews.

But much more incendiary than any posters of the new nationalist state was the discovery of the hundreds of prisoners murdered in Lviv by the NKVD in the last days of Soviet rule. Emotions ran high—rage, outrage, grief. Some people went inside the prisons to look for missing relatives. Famously, Roman Shukhevych discovered his brother Yuri's body in a mass grave in the NKVD prison on Lontsky Street. When the corpses were exhumed and laid out in courtyards so that the public could search for relatives among the victims, a strong stench of rotting flesh permeated areas near the prisons. Photographs from the time show people with kerchiefs over their mouths and noses to blunt

the stomach-churning smell. Isolated incidents of anti-Jewish violence escalated into the Lviv pogrom of July 1, 1941.

The word “pogrom” has a number of meanings. The term originated with the incidents of anti-Jewish violence that erupted in cities on Ukrainian territories within the Russian Empire in the early 1880s. These pogroms included much looting of Jewish businesses, beatings and rapes of Jews, and some murders. The pogroms of 1903-06 on the same territories were similar. But the pogroms in Ukraine of the civil war period, largely perpetrated by soldiers, were marked by great numbers of murders. Pogroms initiated by the Nazis, as when they seized Vienna in March 1938 and throughout the Reich in November 1938 (the November pogrom, often called Kristallnacht), primarily involved the destruction of Jewish property, the humiliation of Jews, and assaults, although there were also some murders.

The Lviv pogrom of 1941 combined many features of the preceding pogroms: There were beatings, sexual assaults and humiliations, murders by the urban crowd, shooting by soldiers, and ritual humiliations; Jewish apartments were robbed, but not their businesses, if we can speak of the businesses nationalized by the Soviets as in some sense still Jewish.

The main stages of the pogrom were three prisons in Lviv where bodies of the NKVD victims were exhumed, although anti-Jewish violence and humiliations also occurred in other areas of the city, particularly in the central town square (*rynok*), but also near the opera house and near the seat of the Greek Catholic metropolitan’s residence, St. George’s hill. Two of the prisons were close to largely Jewish neighborhoods: the Brygidky prison and the prison on Zamarstyniv street. As numerous Jewish survivors’ accounts make clear, members of the Ukrainian National Militia entered nearby apartment buildings and rounded up Jews, men and women, and took them to the prisons. The other prison, the NKVD prison on Lontsky Street (now a museum) was closer to the center of the city, outside the Jewish neighborhood. For this prison Jews were rounded up off the street by militiamen and volunteers from the urban crowd. They were marched with their hands up, sometimes on all fours, to the prison.

How did the pogrom start? It grew out of a general policy of the Wehrmacht to force Jews to do repairs and cleanup after war-related damage. German troops made Jews repair streets in Lviv that had been damaged by bombardment. Not infrequently, the impressment into labor was accompanied by physical harm or even death. On June 30, 1941, Czeslawa Budynska, her sister, and a neighbor girl were put to cleaning up battle sites in the city. The women were beaten and pushed as they carried out their tasks. Men were also drafted to the work, but according to Budynska, they were drowned later in the day.

When the Germans entered Lviv, they discovered many hundreds of corpses in the prisons, heaped up or hastily buried in mass graves. Someone had to exhume the bodies, and it was not surprising that the Germans assigned Jews to this task, a nasty one, since the bodies fell apart as they were retrieved and the stench was unbearable. Outside Lviv, too, Jews were routinely assigned to exhumation work in localities where NKVD victims were found. Thus Jews, whom both the Nazis and Ukrainian nationalists identified as carriers and beneficiaries of Bolshevism, were placed at the forefront of the NKVD crime, in a position that appeared to be punishment for their own criminal responsibility. Moreover, this was in a context in which Ukrainian public opinion was being influenced to regard the Jews as the main perpetrators of the refined tortures and mass killings that the numerous decomposing corpses indicated.

Impressing Jews into work at the prisons posed a problem: finding and assembling Jews. As Dieter Pohl correctly noted:

One should not underestimate the practical problems these SS men faced when they entered the Western Ukrainian towns. They did not know the population, the topography, and of course neither did they know the language. Thus, they were totally dependent on interpreters, local administrations or the militias that surfaced in June 1941.

In Lviv, it was the Ukrainian National Militia that rounded up the Jews and participated in the violence against them. There is a photo from the time showing a uniformed militiaman pulling the hair of a half-undressed woman at the gate to the prison on Zamarstyniv street. There is a film that shows a

militiaman with his armband beating a Jew with a truncheon inside one of the Lviv prisons. Numerous survivor testimonies and memoirs describe the arrests and brutality of the militiamen. The militia rounded up many more Jews than could be put to use in the exhumation project. Jewish women were rounded up primarily for misogynist sport. The extra men just huddled in the courtyards of the prisons, trying to avoid additional assault.

Although the militia played a major role in the pogrom of July 1, it was not the only OUN contributor to the anti-Jewish violence on that day. Some part in the pogrom activities was also taken by a military unit in German service commanded by Shukhevych. This was the Nachtigall (“Nightengale”) battalion, one of two battalions of what the nationalists called the Legion of Ukrainian Nationalists, although contemporaries also called it the Ukrainian Bandera legion. The place of Nachtigall in the pogrom has been confused by a campaign launched in 1959-60 by the German Democratic Republic and the Soviet Union aimed at taking down the government of Konrad Adenauer in the Federal Republic of Germany. Because Adenauer’s Minister for Displaced Persons, Refugees, and Victims of War Theodor Oberländer had been a liaison with Nachtigall back in 1941, the East Germans and Soviets tried to blame the Lviv pogrom entirely on the nationalist unit. Many manufactured testimonies were collected to prove the case, and although the evidence was flimsy, Oberländer was forced to resign from Adenauer’s cabinet. In February 2008 the Security Service of Ukraine (the SBU) released a number of documents that showed how the KGB had concocted the evidence against Oberländer, leaving no doubt about the falsity of their accusations against Nachtigall.

---

## READ MORE IN HISTORY

**The Hunt for Judah P. Benjamin, the Spy Chief of the Confederacy**

Suspected of orchestrating the

**Kabbalah Trees**

The story of a former converso’s invention of the Lurianic ‘ilan’

BY J.H. CHAJES

**Were ‘Ordinary Poles’ Perpetrators of the Holocaust?**

Rescuing peasants under Nazi occupation from the

Lincoln assassination, the South's most prominent Jew escaped to London to start a new life as a high-powered lawyer. The U.S. government secretly tried to bring him home to face justice.

condescension of history

**BY TOMASZ FRYDEL**

**BY JAY  
SOLOMON AND JANE  
SINGER**

---

However, there were a few survivor testimonies from the 1940s, thus written before the Oberländer campaign and its falsifications, that did point to the participation of some soldiers from Nachtigall in the violence at the prisons. The German historian Kai Struve, working with German records, established that at all three Lviv prisons where the major pogrom activities took place, detachments from Nachtigall were serving as guards until at least the evening of July 1. He concluded that the soldiers of Nachtigall were one of several perpetrator groups at the prison and “were only responsible for a small part of the acts of violence.”

We know a bit more about Nachtigall's participation in the killing of Jews from an autobiographical document prepared in 1946 for OUN's Security Service by a former soldier of Nachtigall who wrote under his nom de guerre Khmara. As historian Ivan Patryliak has noted, “the value of the document lies in that it was not intended for publication, and in it the author writes about the events of his life as they, of course, truly unfolded.” Khmara described Nachtigall's march from Lviv to Vinnytsia:

At the time of our march we saw with our own eyes the victims of the Jewish-Bolshevik terror; this sight so intensified our hatred towards Jews

that in two villages we shot all the Jews we encountered. I recall one fragment. During our march we saw many people wandering before one village. When questioned, they replied that the Jews are threatening them and they are afraid to sleep in their own houses. As a result of this we shot all the Jews we encountered.

It is not possible to ascertain whom Khmara was referring to in speaking of Jews who threatened the villagers. Perhaps these were Jewish communists who frightened them with the return of the Red Army. But whoever did what, all the Jews whom Nachtigall laid hands on paid with their lives.

OUN may have been even more deeply involved in the Lviv pogrom. Jeffrey Burds identified a certain Ivan Kovalyshyn as a participant in the pogrom. Among the photographs of the pogrom taken by a German photo crew in the vicinity of the Zamarstyniv street prison and held now by the Wiener Library in London, two show a man in a flat cap whose facial features seem to match the photograph in a militia ID card belonging to Kovalyshyn. Both photos show pogromists, among whom stands Kovalyshyn, mocking a naked Jewish woman, who also appears to have been physically assaulted. Burds' discovery had indicated that some militiamen, without armbands or uniforms and dressed like the city's ruffians (*batiari*), took a leading role in guiding the pogrom. But Serhii Riabenko has argued against this view, on two grounds. He questioned whether the pogrom photos showed the same person as the militia ID card, remarking that the photo on the ID card was of poor quality. Also, he pointed out that, according to the ID card, Kovalyshyn only joined the militia on July 21, almost three weeks after the pogrom took place. But Struve found that Kovalyshyn had actually joined the investigative unit of the militia, which seems to have been a branch of the OUN Security Service (SB), already on July 3.

In my own view, the photo on the militia ID card and the two photos of the pogrom show the same individual, i.e., Ivan Kovalyshyn; perhaps at some point sophisticated facial recognition technology can help resolve the issue. Also, I continue to think that Kovalyshyn's presence in the thick of the violence was no accident but rather indicates that there were certain OUN operatives active in the pogrom. There are only 10 militia ID cards with photographs that have been

preserved to the present, and that one of the 10 men pictured was where he was on July 1 seems to indicate the tip of an iceberg. There is also German evidence that plainclothes OUN-B militants were active in the Zolochiv pogrom a few days later.

The Lviv pogrom did great damage to the Jews of the city. Many men suffered wounds, especially head wounds, and many women suffered forms of sexual assault. All who were taken to the prisons suffered trauma, and the Jewish community of Lviv at large was put into a precarious position. It is hard to estimate the number of fatalities from the Lviv pogrom. For one thing, no one was keeping count. Also, many estimates of the number of victims of the pogrom are including in their tally the much more systematic violence that was to follow over the course of the rest of July.

Struve, whose estimates of the number of victims tend to be conservative, argued that at most several hundred Jews perished during the pogrom. A major portion of the murders was committed by members of Einsatzgruppe C, who shot about a hundred Jews at Brygidky prison. The rest were killed as a result of beatings with thick sticks, paving stones, shovels, and other objects by the remaining perpetrators: Nachtigall, German police battalions, the Ukrainian National Militia, the urban crowd, and the Wehrmacht.

The lull in anti-Jewish violence in Lviv after the pogrom was very brief. Already on July 3 thousands of Jewish men were being detained and brought to a sports arena not far from the citadel, where the NKVD had recently had its headquarters. The militia once again made most of the arrests, but they had some help from Einsatzgruppe C. Some of the men were picked up because they were on a list of Jews who had cooperated with the Soviet organs of repression; but many others were just grabbed at random because they were Jewish. In the sports arena the Jews were tortured by the Germans; they were made to go up and down on the ground repeatedly and then to run around the arena while they were beaten with thick sticks. Most of them were taken by truck to woods

outside the city and shot by the Einsatzgruppe. Altogether, about 2,000 or more were executed in this way. However, for reasons that are not certain, some of the assembled Jews were released.

One of the killers active on July 5, Felix Landau, ran across a group of these released Jews and described in his diary what they looked like after their experience in the arena:

There were hundreds of Jews walking along the street with blood pouring down their faces, holes in their heads, their hands broken and their eyes hanging out of their sockets. They were covered in blood. Some of them were carrying others who had collapsed. We went to the citadel; there we saw things that few people have ever seen. At the entrance of the citadel there were soldiers standing guard. They were holding clubs as thick as a man's wrist and were lashing out and hitting anyone who crossed their path. The Jews were pouring out of the entrance. There were rows of Jews lying one on top of the other like pigs, whimpering horribly. The Jews kept streaming out of the citadel completely covered in blood.

The role of the militia in this particular incident of torment and mass killing had been to arrest the Jews. Isolated recollections of the militia's presence within the arena or at the gate as the Jews were being released are most likely, as Struve suggests, failures of memory.

Thus by the end of the first week of July, OUN was well aware of what its alliance with the Germans entailed with regard to the Jewish population: Its militia was to help them by rounding up Jews for torment and mass murder. At this time the Germans had not yet determined to kill all Jews, but they were clearly aiming to kill a great many of them. How did the leadership of OUN-B react to the Germans' Jewish policy? We can answer that question with authoritative evidence.

First, we have the evidence from the head of the unrecognized Ukrainian state, one of the most influential figures in OUN, Yaroslav Stetsko. Arrested by the Germans on July 9, 1941, and taken from Lviv to Berlin, Stetsko composed an autobiography in both Ukrainian and German about a week later. In it, he stated

his position on the Jewish question in general and the Germans' Jewish policy in particular. He reiterated his long-held view that Moscow, not the Jews, was the primary enemy of Ukraine, but that the Jews played an important role in helping Moscow to keep Ukraine enslaved. He therefore supported "the destruction of the Jews and the expedience of bringing German methods of exterminating Jewry to Ukraine, barring their assimilation and the like." Thus he approved of the anti-Jewish violence in which his militia participated.

---

**“By the end of the first week of July 1941, OUN was well aware of what its alliance with the Germans entailed with regard to the Jewish population: Its militia was to help them by rounding up Jews for torment and mass murder.”**

Share ↗

---

Only a few days later, on July 18-19, OUN-B held a meeting of its propaganda sector in Lviv. Among the topics discussed was national minorities, and in particular the Jewish minority. The first to raise the matter of Jews was Oles Hai-Holovko, a writer from pre-1939 Soviet Ukraine who had moved to Lviv during the first period of Soviet rule. Stetsko had named Hai-Holovko to head the propaganda section of his government. In the course of delivering a report on Ukrainians in Kuban (then and now in the Russian republic), he noted: “There are a lot of Jews there who have trampled upon Ukrainian culture.”

The discussion continued about Ukrainians in areas outside Ukraine's territory, including Ukrainian settlements in Siberia. A certain Hupalo said: "It would be good if they [the Germans] gave us the regions inhabited by Ukrainians. The main thing is that there are a lot of Jews everywhere. Especially in the centers. They shouldn't be allowed to live there. There should be a policy of expulsion. They will flee themselves. Or maybe we should assign them some cities, for example, Berdychiv [in Zhytomyr oblast]."

Stepan Lenkavsky, then head of OUN-B's propaganda sector, addressed Hai-Holovko: "Characterize the Jews for me." The latter replied: "The Jews are very arrogant. One couldn't even use the word *zhyd*. It is necessary to treat them very harshly. They cannot be kept in the center, absolutely. We must put an end to them."

Then Borys Lewytskyj, former editor of OUN's newspaper for the peasantry, *Nove Slovo*, and briefly of *Krakivs'ki visti*, spoke:

In Germany, the Jews have the Aryan paragraph. More interesting for us is the issue of the General Government. There every Jew is marked (naznacheno). Every Jew had to be registered in a religious community. They were removed from some cities, for example from Kraków, and resettled to others, for example to Warsaw, with walled off ghettos assigned to them. They have cinemas and theatres, but nothing to eat. The young who are fit for work go to work. A portion has to be destroyed. Although already some have been destroyed ... It is a fact that some have crept into Ukrainian blood; many married with Ukrainian women. In Germany there are various half-Jews, quarter-Jews, but this isn't possible for us. A German who marries a Jewish woman becomes a Jew.

Hai-Holovko added:

In Ukraine married couples with a Jewish woman are mainly in the cities. Jewish women married Ukrainians for a comfortable life; when Ukrainians went bankrupt, they divorced. Jews with Ukrainian women even lived well. I like the German attitude very much.

When Hupalo noted that “we have a lot of workers who are Jews, who are even respected, including some who converted to Christianity before the revolution,” Lenkavsky conceded: “This has to be reviewed on an individual basis.” Lewytzkyj added: “The Germans use specialists. In Kraków there are five Jews who do not wear armbands because they are positive forces (*dobri syly*). In my opinion, the German approach to the Jewish issue does not work well for us. We have to examine individual cases on their own merits.” Lenkavsky ended the discussion on Jews with the following pronouncement: “With regard to the Jews we will accept all methods that lead to their destruction.”

I have quoted the entire discussion of the propaganda sector on Jews, without interpretation. The conclusions that I see emerging from the discussion are: OUN’s attitude remained anti-Jewish; OUN wanted to exempt some Jewish individuals from persecution; it also wanted to segregate Jews from the rest of the population and to kill many of them.

The Ukrainian National Militia in Lviv was to take part in one more major anti-Jewish action, the so-called Petliura days. This action clustered on the days July 25-26, although some of the violence began a bit earlier and also continued for a few days after. It seems that it was the Germans, and specifically their security police, who named this action after Symon Petliura. Petliura, of course, was the leader of the Ukrainian People’s Republic whose troops had unleashed numerous pogroms with tens of thousands of fatalities in 1919. Kai Struve makes a convincing case that the security police were staging a “self-cleansing action” that Ukrainians such as Heydrich had called for about a month previously. Struve links the action with a visit to Lviv by Himmler, probably accompanied by the mass killer and SS commander Friedrich Jeckeln, on July 21.

The Petliura days differed from the Lviv pogrom that had occurred at the beginning of the month; there was very little public participation. The Ukrainians who took part were almost exclusively members of the militia.

Let us first see how Jewish survivors remembered the event. Janina Hescheles, who was at the time 10 years old, remembered going out with her mother to visit her uncle. The streets seemed to be calm, but this was deceptive. At the entrance to their apartment building a man was lying on the ground, groaning and covered with blood. His shoes were missing. Suddenly “two boys with yellow-blue armbands” came up. They said, addressing first Janina’s mother: “To work, please ma’am, and you, little one, go home.” Janina went home, and her mother was taken to scrub floors in a school. Her mother returned home after an hour. The next day there was also unrest. That evening a neighbor appeared at the door with Janina’s 12-year-old cousin Gustek, who was unconscious. His face was black and blue and swollen, his arm was bloody, his whole body bruised. When he came to, he said that he and others were taken by Ukrainians to the prison on Lontsky street where they were beaten; he managed to escape. One of her uncles had also been seized from his apartment on ul. Staszica (today vul. Ye. Malaniuka), outside the Jewish quarter in the vicinity of the citadel, and did not return home for some days.

Izak Weiser wrote that during the Petliura days he saw a group of men and women marched down ul. Pełczyńska (today vul. Dmytra Vyhovskoho) to the Lontsky street prison. On Saturday, i.e., July 26, 170 Gestapo men systematically beat the Jews at the prison all day long; no trace of these people was found later.

Henryk Baldinger was arrested on July 25 and taken to the Lontsky street prison, where he and other Jewish men, women, and children over 10 were systematically beaten by Germans and Ukrainians; when one group of beaters was tired, they were replaced by a fresh batch. Ukrainians armed with rifles maintained order. The Germans and Ukrainians confiscated all money, watches, pens, and other useful goods that their victims had on their persons. Physicians, including Baldinger, were released, but others were taken away in trucks. Baldinger said that later he found out from the Ukrainian who arrested him that the majority of the victims were transported to “the Sands” outside Lviv and shot.

Salomon Goldman lost his brother to the violence of the Petliura days. He heard that people were being beaten in the Ukrainian police precincts, some to death, and others were taken out to “the Sands” and shot. Lucyna Halbergsberg lost her husband. He was taken to Lontsky street prison; she tried to get him released but failed. After three days the prisoners were taken to “the Sands” and, she heard, shot.

Jan Badian was arrested on July 25 by “a Ukrainian from the civil militia” and taken, with the other Jewish men from his apartment building, to the nearest precinct station, that of the sixth commissariat on ul. Kurkowa (now vul. Lysenka). In a group of about a thousand Jews, he was marched to the prison on Lontsky street. As the Jews entered the prison courtyard, a broad-shouldered German beat each of them with a cudgel, bent as a saber from extensive use. He saw several other Germans and Ukrainians with such bent cudgels. There were women standing against a wall, but the men inside were in constant motion. The Germans and Ukrainians would drive them with beatings against one wall, then beat them again until they went to the other wall, back and forth. There were now, Badian estimated, about 10,000 people in the courtyard. There was a group of about 60 black-and-blue Jews who were made to hold their arms up and chant: “We Jews are to blame for the war.” Trucks in the meantime were pulling up to the courtyard. Prisoners tried to escape from the beating and get on the trucks, which perhaps might be taking them to work. “It is unbelievable how many men can fit into a truck,” wrote Badian later. The intensity of the torture in the courtyard did not let up. Zealous Ukrainians held wooden cudgels in one hand and iron bars in another. One of them told Badian that the Jews there were condemned to death. After 2:00 p.m. in the afternoon on July 26, Badian and some others were made to run the gauntlet between some Germans and then released into the street.

Wolf Lichter did not use the term “Petliura days,” but he recounted an incident that he said happened a few weeks after the German occupation began: Going with his mother to a non-Jewish neighborhood, where she thought he would be safer (he was then 11 years old), they saw a disheveled, screaming, pleading woman running and a band, mainly of men but including a few women, chasing after her. The “hoodlums” shouted: Kill the Jewess! Kill the Jewess! They caught

up with her and beat and trampled her. She was pleading and begging until no more sounds came from her.

Testimony given at the denaturalization proceedings of an alleged Ukrainian policeman also seems to refer to the so-called Petliura days, although the dating is off and the term was not used. A Jewish survivor, Joseph Romanski, described events that happened after Jews were forced to wear armbands with the Star of David, yet still in July 1941. This fits the chronology. He said that he was arrested by a Ukrainian militiaman and taken to the nearest precinct station. As he approached the station he saw a truck loaded with people leaving the building. In the lobby of the police station were seven or eight Jewish people. There were not enough of them to be loaded on the truck, and a heavy rain broke out which prevented militiamen from bringing in more Jews to fill a truck. While waiting there, he managed to bribe one of the militiamen with a Swiss watch and make his escape.

When the various accounts are compared, the story that emerges is that the Ukrainian militia, together with members of Einsatz-kommando Lemberg, first arrested a great number of Jews, mainly men but some women. They took the apprehended Jews to the closest militia station, and when enough were assembled, they marched them through the streets or drove them to the Lontsky street prison. There the men were subjected to brutal beatings by both the militiamen and the Germans. As the beatings proceeded, trucks drove up; the Jewish men were crammed into the cargo beds and taken outside the city to be shot. The shooters were the Germans, not the militia.

The involvement of the militia in the violence of the Petliura days is confirmed by a report from OUN's Main Propaganda Center in Lviv to the OUN Security Service, dated July 28, 1941:

Proto-priest Father [Petro] Tabinsky informs us of the following: Our militia is at present conducting, together with German organs, numerous arrests of Jews. The Jews defend themselves against liquidation in all kinds of ways, primarily with money. According to reports that Proto-priest Father Tabinsky received, among our militiamen are supposedly people who for money or gold release Jews who are supposed to be arrested. We,

unfortunately, have received no concrete facts regarding this matter, but nonetheless we provide you with this information to make use of. Glory to Ukraine!

John-Paul Himka is professor emeritus of history at the University of Alberta and the author of several books on Ukraine, including *Ukrainian Nationalists and the Holocaust*.

---

#UKRAINE #HOLOCAUST