

Holocaust Days of Remembrance



MC: In 1980, the United States Congress established the Days of Remembrance as our nation's annual commemoration of the victims of the Holocaust and created the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum as a permanent, living memorial to those victims. This is observed each year during the week of Remembrance that runs from the Sunday before Holocaust Remembrance Day (Yom Hashoah) through the following Sunday. This year, the Holocaust Days of Remembrance week will be observed from April 28th to May 5th. According to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Holocaust was the state-sponsored, systematic persecution, and annihilation of European Jewry by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945. Jews were the primary victims—six million were murdered; Roma and Sinti Gypsies, people with mental and physical disabilities, and Poles were also targeted for destruction or decimation for racial, ethnic, or national reasons. Millions more, including homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Soviet prisoners of war, and political dissidents, also suffered grievous oppression and death under Nazi Germany. The Nazis, who came to power in Germany in January 1933, believed that Germans were “racially superior” and that the Jews, deemed “inferior,” were an alien threat to the so-called German racial community.



The Holocaust is a very complicated subject as it involved virtually every aspect of society and consisted of countless actors. However, for a military context, there are vital lessons that we can take away and apply to our own profession. It is imperative to recognize that Hitler's war strategy was directly linked to the Holocaust. His goal was to expand German borders to obtain more "lebensraum," or living space for Germans to flourish. This meant that when occupying new territory the land had to be free of all Jews and other unwanted races. As the war progressed, so did German aggression. Between the years of 1938 and 1942, Germany annexed Austria and invaded Poland, Denmark, Norway, France, Belgium, Yugoslavia, Greece, and the Soviet Union. As the German armies swiftly advanced, small killing teams known as "Einsatzgruppen" remained in the rear of newly occupied territory and specifically sought out the Jews within the area. The Einsatzgruppen would round up the Jews in the town center, escort them to a nearby wooded area, and conduct mass shootings burying them on site. This accounted for roughly one and a half million of the total death count of Jews during the Holocaust. In addition to these small killing teams, there were many occasions in which normal German Army units conducted similar mass killings.

“Ordinary Soldiers” Case Study: The 691st, Fall 1941



Mission for 691st Infantry Regiment:

- Secure and pacify occupied Belorussia immediately in order to eliminate partisan threat

Implied Tasks

- Partisan= Soviet “Bolshevist” Sympathizer=Jew
- Jew=Partisan=Enemy
- Eliminate all Jews in occupied Belorussia

The 1st Battalion, 691st Infantry Regiment, was such a unit. This battalion's mission was to secure and pacify occupied Belorussia immediately in order to eliminate a perceived partisan threat. To the German Army, this meant eliminating all Jews in occupied Belorussia.

German MAJ Alfred Commichau,
Commander of the 1st Battalion, 691st Regiment

**Verbal Order
Issued:
Shoot the entire
Jewish population
in the area where
each company was
quartered.**

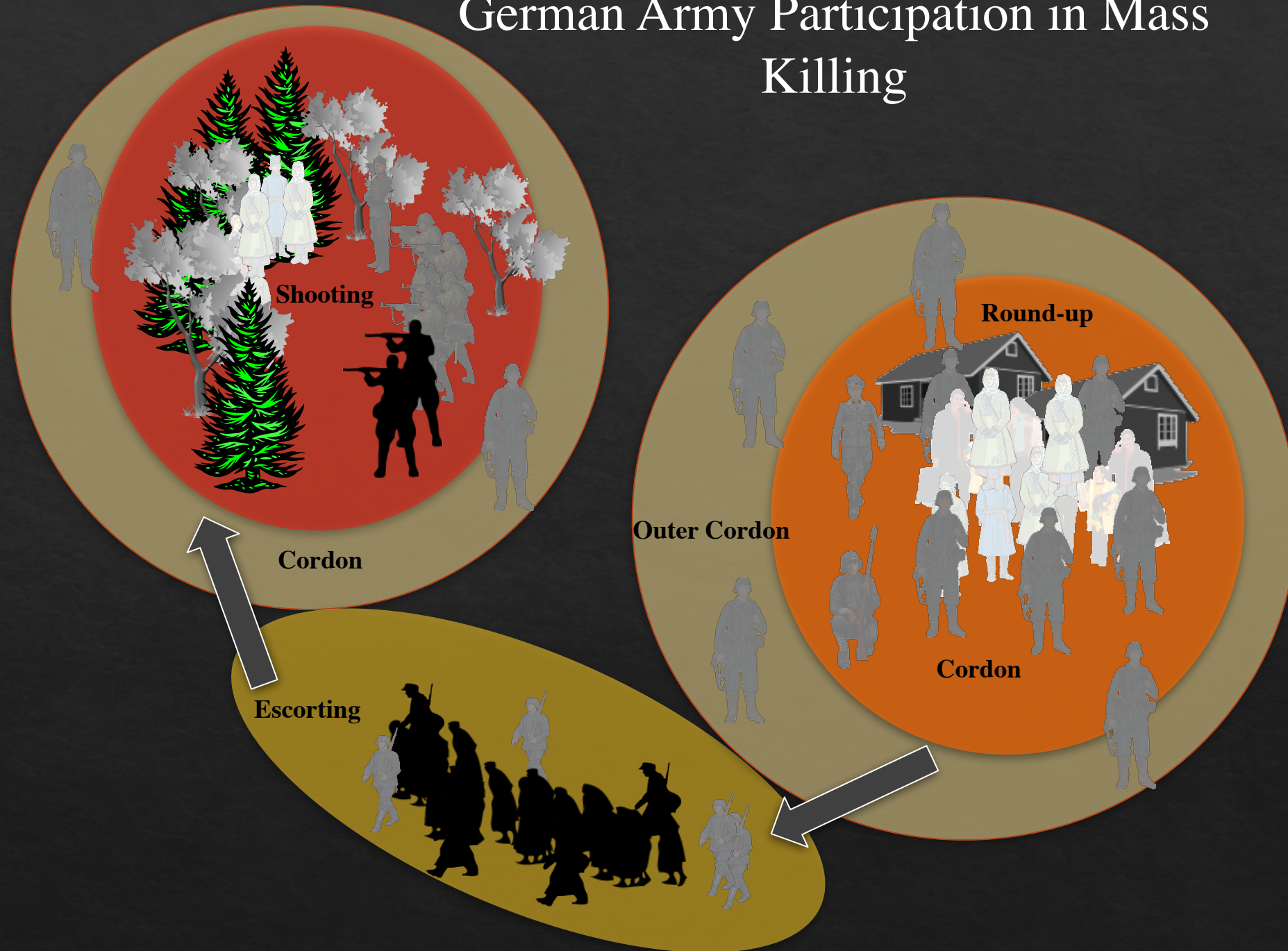
1st Company Commander:
Refuses to carry out order:
“Good German Soldiers don’t
dirty their hands with such
things”

2nd Company Commander:
Carries out order –
no hesitation

3rd Company Commander:
Waits for written verification;
instructs 1SG to carry out
order

On or about October 7th, 1941, the battalion commander ordered his three company commanders to kill all the Jewish civilians in their respective areas of operation. The first company commander reportedly refused; the second complied immediately; and the third tried to ignore the order, but when it was issued in writing, he directed the company first sergeant to conduct the shootings and retreated to his office.

German Army Participation in Mass Killing



The third company first sergeant responded upon receipt of the order, "We can't change anything. Orders are orders." He then divided the men into three details: Round-up and escorting, cordon, and shooting. The detail consisted of average every day German Soldiers. Some were committed to the Nazi cause, and others were not. Regardless, Soldiers chose to participate and were directly responsible for the deaths of hundreds of innocent men, women, and children.

1LT Josef Sibille, 1st Company Commander



- Refused order to execute Jews in his unit's assigned area of operations
- Maintained that the order would damage his and his unit's honor
- Faced ridicule from peer officers for being "too soft," but never faced formal reprimand
- Lack of reprimand for those who refused to participate was surprisingly common in German Army

In contrast, the 1st Company did not participate in the ordered killings. The first company commander stated, “good German soldiers don’t dirty their hands with such things.” The Battalion Commander then asked his subordinate when he would ever be “hard for once,” to which the company commander responded, “In this case, never.” He continued to refuse, saying he would never carry it out and that he would besmirch neither his honor nor that of his company. Other than an apparent assessment by his fellow officers in the battalion that he was too soft, the first company commander, 1LT Sibille, suffered no further repercussions from his refusal to obey the execution order. This lack of reprimand was surprisingly common for those who refused to participate in these kinds of mass killings. There is no way of knowing how many lives were saved by his decision, but it provides service members today a useful example: that it is possible to act morally in the face of immense pressure, or even direct orders. This fits aptly with what Chief of Staff of the Army, General Mark Milley, refers to as “disciplined disobedience,” stating that, “a subordinate needs to understand that they have the freedom and they are empowered to disobey a specific order, a specified task, in order to accomplish the purpose.” This applies even further if issued orders are unethical, illegal, or immoral. It is our duty as members of our Armed Forces to act in accordance with our values and take necessary action to prevent otherwise.

More information about this case study can be found in your programs.

France During WW2



- France defeated and occupied by Germany in spring of 1940
- French interim “Vichy” regime in unoccupied zone led by Marshal Philippe Petain
- Regime abolished principles of the French Third Republic
- Controversial as to level of collaboration with Nazi state during the war

- Ultimately, Jews were not safe anywhere in France: 120,000 passed through concentration camps within France (3,000 of those died). 80,000 (25%) of French Jews were deported and 73,000 of those were killed

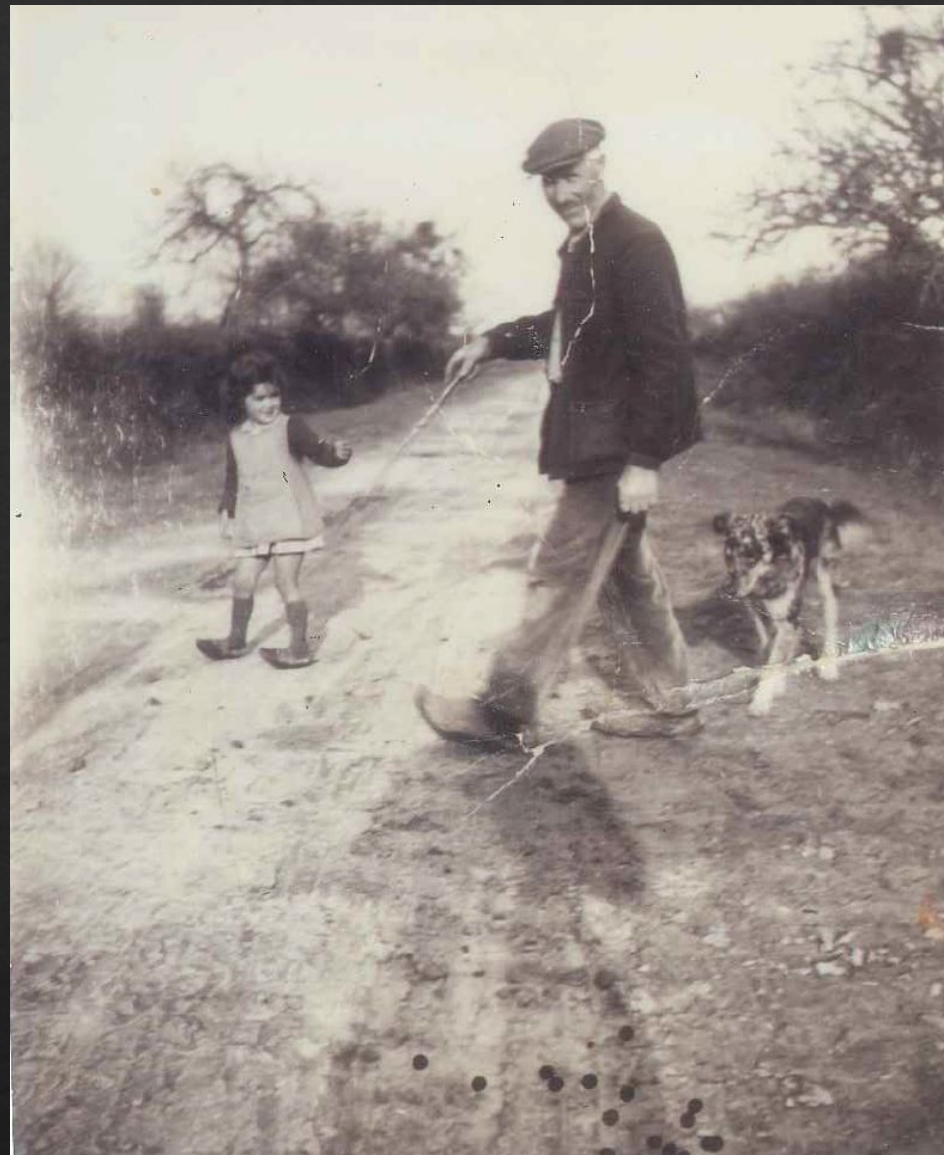
MC: Today, we have the absolute honor and privilege to welcome as our guest speaker, someone who lived and endured the tragic events of the Holocaust. Ms. Nicole Yancey was born in France during World War 2. France at this time, similar to most of Europe, was not a safe place for Jews. Germany invaded, defeated, and occupied France in the spring of 1940. Not only did Germany enforce harsh policies on Jews in the area, but the French government and in some cases even local citizens collaborated to help enforce these policies. Ultimately, 120,000 Jews passed through concentration camps within France, and 3,000 of those died under direct French watch. By the end of the war, 80,000 or 25% of French Jews were deported and 73,000 of those were killed in the Nazi death machine. However, not all individuals targeted Jews. In fact, some even risked their lives to protect Jews from persecution. Our guest speaker's story is a testament to that. After the war, she began to sense that there were significant tragic events that deeply troubled her family and community in France. Through this, she learned more about having a Jewish identity and how hatred of perceived "others" can have devastating effects on societies. She has devoted much time to spreading awareness of the Holocaust locally and abroad, and has remained an active citizen both in the US and France. Her story is an inspiration, and we as a community are all incredibly fortunate to be able to have her here with us today. More of her background and accolades can be found in your programs. Without further ado, I would like to welcome our guest speaker, and Holocaust Survivor, Ms. Nicole Yancey.



La Gossonniere is the farm where Ms. Yancey and her sister hid during the war



Ms. Yancey and her sister walking in the farm yard. Behind them are stables and other farm buildings



Etienne Boissery with dog "Papillon" and Ms. Yancey at the end of the war