



## Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland

*By Christopher R. Browning*

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The shocking account of how a unit of average middle-aged Germans became the cold-blooded murderers of tens of thousands of Jews.

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### **Editorial Review**

#### **Amazon.com Review**

Shocking as it is, this book--a crucial source of original research used for the bestseller *Hitler's Willing Executioners*--gives evidence to suggest the opposite conclusion: that the sad-sack German draftees who perpetrated much of the Holocaust were not expressing some uniquely Germanic evil, but that they were average men comparable to the run of humanity, twisted by historical forces into inhuman shapes. Browning, a thorough historian who lets no one off the moral hook nor fails to weigh any contributing factor--cowardice, ideological indoctrination, loyalty to the battalion, and reluctance to force the others to bear more than their share of what each viewed as an excruciating duty--interviewed hundreds of the killers, who simply could not explain how they had sunken into savagery under Hitler. A good book to read along with Ron Rosenbaum's comparably excellent study *Explaining Hitler*. --Tim Appelo

#### **From Publishers Weekly**

Browning reconstructs how a German reserve police battalion composed of "ordinary men," middle-aged, working class people, killed tens of thousands of Jews during WW II.  
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#### **From Kirkus Reviews**

Chilling analysis of how a typical unit of German police actually operated during the Holocaust, by Browning (History/Pacific Lutheran Univ.). In March 1942, some 75 to 80 percent of all victims of the Holocaust were still alive. Eleven months later, 75 to 80 percent were dead--the result, Browning says, of "a short, intense wave of mass murder," centered in Poland. During 16 months, Reserve Police Battalion 101, a unit of just over 450 men from Hamburg, was responsible in Poland for the shooting of 39,000 Jews and the deportation to Treblinka of 44,000 more. The horror began on July 13, 1942, when the unit's commander, one Major Trapp, ordered his men to round up 1,800 Jews from the village of Jozefow, to select several hundred as "work Jews," and to shoot the rest--men, women, and children. Trapp apparently gave the order with tears in his eyes and gave permission to older soldiers not to participate. Altogether, 10 to 20 percent of the battalion availed themselves of this permission. The remaining men carried out the assignment: "the shooters were gruesomely besmirched with blood, brains, and bone splinters. It hung on their clothing." What sort of men were they? Browning bases his answers on the judicial interrogation in the 1960's of 210 men from the battalion. They were ordinary men, he finds, on the elderly side, drawn from the lower orders of German society, and few had an education above junior-high-school level. And after examining studies dealing with this phenomenon and evidence of such conduct in other wars, Browning determines that it's not just Nazism or Germans that produces such men: There were American units in the Pacific that boasted of never taking captives. "If the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 could become killers under such circumstances," he writes, "what group of men cannot?" It is the care with which Browning examines the evidence, as well as the soberness of his conclusions, that gives this work such power and impact. (Eight pages of b&w photographs--not seen.) -- Copyright ©1992, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

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