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NAZI COLLABORATORS, AMERICAN INTELLIGENCE, AND THE COLD WAR:  
THE CASE OF THE BYELORUSSIAN CENTRAL COUNCIL

A Thesis Presented

by

Mark Alexander

to

The Faculty of the Graduate College

of

The University of Vermont

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
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## ABSTRACT

When the military forces of the Third Reich invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, the German authorities used local anti-Communist collaborators to facilitate the invasion and the occupation of the conquered territories. Many of these Byelorussian collaborators became complicit in the perpetration of the Holocaust and eagerly created a puppet regime under the direct control of the Schutzstaffel (SS). However, this regime and the crimes of its members remain largely unknown.

As the Third Reich crumbled, the members of the SS-sponsored Byelorussian Central Council (BCC) hid themselves in the confusion of postwar Europe's Displaced Persons camps, where they began to forge relationships with the intelligence agencies of the western Allies. As the mistrust between the Soviet Union and its erstwhile allies grew, these Nazi collaborators represented themselves as anti-Communist refugees from Stalinist persecution. They successfully navigated the currents of the early Cold War, evading arrest and prosecution for their wartime crimes with the help of their new sponsors in American intelligence. Many of the most notorious members of the BCC immigrated to the United States and became naturalized citizens, trading the vestiges of the Third Reich's Byelorussian intelligence networks and military forces to American intelligence in exchange for protection from extradition and prosecution.

This thesis is the first scholarly work to focus on the members of the BCC, the extent of their criminal collaboration with the Third Reich, and the role American intelligence played in helping these Byelorussian Nazi collaborators escape justice and become United States citizens.

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## INTRODUCTION & HISTORIOGRAPHY

On a hilltop behind Saint Euphrosynia Orthodox Church in the small community of South River, New Jersey, a large memorial adorned with the official seal of the Byelorussian Central Council (Byelorusskaya Tsentral'naja Rada, or BCC) reads, "glory to those who fought for freedom and independence of Byelorussia."<sup>1</sup> This tall red and white concrete and stone memorial is topped by a large iron cross, which has a small double-barred cross at its center. In the original parish cemetery a few blocks away, the tall black tombstone of Radoslaw Ostrowski proudly boasts of his achievements as "President of Byelorussian Central Council of the Byelorussian Democratic Republic and Founder of Byelorussian Armed Forces."<sup>2</sup> These prominent memorials a short distance from the New Jersey Turnpike may be the only public monuments to Nazi collaborators on United States soil. The Byelorussian Central Council was, in fact, a puppet regime created by the Schutzstaffel (SS) in German-occupied Minsk in December 1943. The Byelorussian police and military forces recruited and organized by the BCC eventually became the 30th Waffen-Grenadier Division der SS, whose soldiers wore a red and white machine-woven armshield on their uniforms; the double-barred cross atop the red and white monument is the division's insignia, which was depicted both on the armshield and

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas O'Toole, "The Secret Under the Little Cemetery: Under the Stones, the Secrets of the White Ruthenian Cemetery," *The Washington Post* (May 23, 1982), A1.

<sup>2</sup> "Photograph and Biography of Radoslaw Ostrowski on His Gravestone in South River, NJ," in John Loftus, *America's Nazi Secret: An Insider's History of How the United States Department of Justice Obstructed Congress by: Blocking Congressional Investigations into Famous American Families Who Funded Hitler, Stalin and Arab Terrorists: Lying to Congress, the GAO and the CIA about the Postwar Immigration of Eastern European Nazi War Criminals to the US: And Concealing from the 9/11 Investigations the Role of the Arab Nazi War Criminals in Recruiting Modern Middle Eastern Terrorist Groups* (Walterville, OR: TrineDay, 2010), 72.

the collar patch worn by these soldiers of the Third Reich.<sup>3</sup> These Byelorussian Nazi collaborators participated in many of the most brutal crimes of the Third Reich.

Byelorussian territories were split between Poland and the Soviet Union in the years before the Second World War, and many resentful Byelorussian nationalists found themselves sympathetic to the anti-Polish and anti-Communist ideology of National Socialism. Located squarely on the route from Berlin to Moscow, the territories of Byelorussia were also of great interest to the authorities of the Third Reich as they prepared for war to the East. Pinning their hopes for the liberation of their homeland from Polish and Soviet hegemony on the aggressive expansionism of Germany's leadership, these activists eagerly pursued relationships with German authorities in anticipation of war. They organized Byelorussian émigré communities in Poland and Germany before the outbreak of war, they recruited paratroopers for sabotage missions against the Soviet Union in preparation for Operation Barbarossa, and they guided the forces of the Third Reich into the territories of their homeland. During the German invasion and occupation, these collaborators served with the mobile killing units of the *Einsatzgruppen* (operational groups) and became the German authorities' translators, burgomasters, policemen, and soldiers.

When the Red Army forced the Wehrmacht to retreat from Byelorussian territory in 1944, these collaborators fled with their sponsors and attempted to portray themselves as a legitimate government-in-exile in Berlin before disappearing into the chaos of postwar Europe's Displaced Persons (DP) camp network. Guilty of a multitude of crimes on Byelorussian soil, they were desperate to avoid capture and prosecution by Soviet

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<sup>3</sup> Gordon Williamson, *The Waffen-SS: 24-38. Divisions & Volunteer Legions* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2004), 21.

authorities. Five years after the end of the Second World War, many of the members of the BCC had already escaped the Soviet authorities by immigrating to the United States. Wanted in the Soviet Union as war criminals for their roles in atrocities during the German occupation, they were protected and sponsored after the war by the intelligence agencies of the western Allies. Many of the most infamous members of the BCC settled in New Jersey, where they produced voluminous amounts of propaganda innocently depicting their cadre as dedicated, anti-Communist Byelorussian nationalists. They dismissed any allegation that they had collaborated with the SS as Communist propaganda or attributed it to the jealous factionalism within the Byelorussian diaspora. For decades, officials at the highest levels of American intelligence lied and withheld evidence in order to protect them from extradition and prosecution. These war criminals, brought here in direct violation of national and international law, exacerbated the tensions of the Cold War without providing any reliable intelligence or military benefits to the United States. Instead, harboring these collaborators tarnished the reputation and wartime legacy of the United States and added extreme right-wing, antisemitic Nazi collaborators to the body politic.

This examination of the members of the Byelorussian Central Council will reveal their eager and enthusiastic collaboration with the Third Reich, their complicity in the perpetration of the Holocaust, and their subsequent illegal emigration to the United States under the auspices of American intelligence. Utilizing many untapped documents from the files of the Central Intelligence Agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), this study tells the story of the BCC by focusing on the careers of several of its most infamous members, from their first contacts



with the Third Reich to their emigration to the United States.<sup>4</sup> The men selected for this study were the most influential and notorious members of the Byelorussian Central Council and serve as representative illustrations of the various roles played by elite collaborators throughout the occupation of Byelorussia. As local guides and informants for the Wehrmacht and the infamous Einsatzgruppen, men such as the elegant former deputy to the Polish Sejm, Radoslaw Ostrowski, organized local auxiliary police forces and facilitated the mass murder of countless Jews, Poles, and other racial and political victims of the Third Reich. Appointed to serve as the German occupation's local officials, men such as the scholar of Slavic philology, Stanislaw Stankievich, ordered the executions of thousands of their Jewish neighbors. Men like Emanuel Max Jasiuk worked for the German Sicherheitsdienst (Security Service, or SD), submitted lists of persons to be executed, and developed reputations for cruelty and sadism.<sup>5</sup> Leaders of the occupied land's police and nascent national guard such as Francizek Kushel, a former officer of the Polish army, placed local auxiliary police and military forces at the disposal of the SS, greatly relieving the rising demands of manpower faced by the Third Reich as the tide of war turned. The creation of the Byelorussian Central Council in December 1943 marked the culmination of years of collaboration, although the BCC barely spent six months on Byelorussian soil before retreating with the German forces in the face of the advancing Red Army in June 1944.

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<sup>4</sup> These files are now available to researchers as a result of the efforts of the Interagency Working Group established by the Nazi War Crimes Disclosure Act of 1998. <http://www.archives.gov/about/laws/nazi-war-crimes.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Leroy L. Dubois, "Agent Report: September 19, 1950," College Park, MD: National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter NARA), RG 319, Investigative Records Repository Files (hereafter IRR), Jasiuk, Emanuel, E 134, B 339.

As the Third Reich crumbled, members of the BCC vanished into the confusion of postwar Europe's system of Displaced Persons (DP) camps. Soon they gained positions of trust and authority within these camps, and the Byelorussian Nazi collaborators began to reorganize themselves. They found that the growing tensions of the Cold War had caused the western Allies to become interested in eastern European refugees who might be capable of establishing intelligence or guerrilla networks behind the Iron Curtain in the event of a future war with the Soviet Union. The members of the BCC, terrified of being prosecuted in the USSR for their crimes, seized the opportunity to forge a collaborative relationship with American intelligence, selling their services as a potential fifth column in exchange for money, residency, and citizenship in the United States. A few years after the end of the Second World War, most of the top leaders of the BCC were living comfortably in the US. The Byelorussian collaborators undoubtedly received the best of this arrangement, for they had exaggerated their resources and their support behind the Iron Curtain as well as their following among the Byelorussian diaspora. Worse still for American intelligence, these new resources in the covert struggle against Communism had been heavily infiltrated by double agents. The intelligence they produced proved to be useless, and the paramilitary guerrilla operations they attempted ended in disaster.

By the 1970s, the clandestine espionage activities of the BCC had abated and its members had settled into their new lives in America. In 1972, however, members of Congress began calling for investigations into allegations that suspected Nazi war criminals had been hiding in the United States. In 1979, this agitation resulted in the creation of the Office of Special Investigations (OSI) within the Justice Department, a

bureau devoted to building cases for the deportation and extradition of such figures. In May 1982, newspaper headlines across the US reported that the government had been aware of the presence of these war criminals, and had even recruited hundreds of Nazi collaborators for clandestine operations in the Cold War. John Loftus, a retired OSI prosecutor who had been in charge of the Byelorussian cases, published a sensationalistic book on the subject and exposed the scandal on prime-time television.<sup>6</sup> In spite of this significant media attention and the extensive official investigations, none of the Byelorussian collaborators living in the United States ever answered for their crimes in a court of law.

Nor have they been the subjects of much scholarly research. While the Second World War, the Holocaust, and the Cold War have all been extensively studied, English-language scholarship concerning wartime collaboration in Byelorussia is still emerging. This thesis is the first academic work to focus on the wartime crimes, postwar emigration, and Cold War intrigues of the members of the Byelorussian Central Council. It builds upon several more synthetic works that have emerged in recent years. Leonid Rein's 2011 monograph, *The Kings and the Pawns*, is a reliable and thoroughly-researched work that focuses upon many different aspects of collaboration in Byelorussia.<sup>7</sup> Rein writes in response to a monolithic Soviet historiography, which generally asserts that the peoples of the Soviet Union rose as one against the fascist invaders. *The Kings and the Pawns* focuses upon the years of the German occupation, revealing that local collaborators shaped many facets of life during the invasion and occupation of Byelorussia, including

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<sup>6</sup> John Loftus, *The Belarus Secret*, ed. Nathan Miller (New York: Knopf, 1982).

<sup>7</sup> Leonid Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns: Collaboration in Byelorussia during World War II* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011).

politics, propaganda, religion, and police and military affairs. Rein also firmly establishes local collusion in the perpetration of anti-Jewish persecution and mass murder. Martin Dean's 2000 work, *Collaboration in the Holocaust*, also focuses upon the role of local collaborators in the occupation of Byelorussia and Ukraine.<sup>8</sup> Unlike Rein, Dean relies heavily upon eyewitness descriptions of atrocities in order to focus more narrowly upon the crimes of the local police in the perpetration of the Holocaust. Another important source used in this project is *Hitler's White Russians*, a 2003 monograph by Antonio J. Munoz and Oleg V. Romanko.<sup>9</sup> Munoz and Romanko focus on the collaboration of local police and military forces in Byelorussia, but they also include valuable information on the political collaborators studied in this thesis. Unfortunately, none of this scholarship focuses intently upon the elite collaborators responsible for providing Byelorussian police and military resources to the authorities of the Third Reich, and none of these scholars concern themselves with the postwar intrigues of the members of the BCC. The only books that directly address the crimes and subsequent emigration of these collaborators are John Loftus's *The Belarus Secret* and its expanded 2010 edition, *America's Nazi Secret*, which contain unsubstantiated conspiracy theories and much unverifiable information.<sup>10</sup>

Other scholarship focusing on the German occupation of Byelorussia or the Cold War provides the necessary context to understand these events. Alexander Dallin's classic 1957 work, *German Rule in Russia*, contains useful background information on

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<sup>8</sup> Martin Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941-44* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> Antonio J. Munoz and Oleg V. Romanko, *Hitler's White Russians: Collaboration, Extermination, and Anti-Partisan Warfare in Byelorussia, 1941-1944* (Bayside, NY: Europa Books, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> John Loftus, *The Belarus Secret*; idem, *America's Nazi Secret*.

German policies and practices in the occupied territories of the East, and recent works by authors such as Waitman Wade Beorn, Wendy Lower, and Timothy Snyder help to illuminate the devastation wrought by the brutal German occupation.<sup>11</sup> In addition to the English-language scholarship addressed above, German-language studies, such as Bernhard Chiari's *Alltag hinter der Front* and Christian Gerlach's *Kalkulierte Morde*, have also contributed to the development of this area of Holocaust studies in recent years.<sup>12</sup> Studies on intelligence operations in the postwar era, such as Christopher Simpson's 1988 *Blowback* and Eric Lichtblau's recent *The Nazis Next Door*, reveal that American intelligence protected Byelorussian, Latvian, Lithuanian, and Ukrainian Nazi collaborators.<sup>13</sup> *Hitler's Shadow*, a recent publication by Richard Breitman and Norman J.W. Goda, also illuminates this phenomenon by revealing the relationships forged between American intelligence agencies, German war criminals, and Ukrainian Nazi collaborators after the war.<sup>14</sup>

Because there is still relatively little scholarship on the members of the BCC, this study relies heavily upon primary source materials. These include memoirs written in English for western audiences during the Cold War, although it is worth noting that

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<sup>11</sup> Waitman Wade Beorn, *Marching into Darkness: The Wehrmacht and the Holocaust in Belarus* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); Alexander Dallin, *German Rule in Russia, 1941-1945: A Study of Occupation Policies* (London: MacMillan and Company Limited, 1957); Wendy Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> Bernhard Chiari, *Alltag hinter der Front: Besatzung, Kollaboration und Widerstand in Weissrussland 1941-1944* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1998); Christian Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde: Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weissrussland 1941 bis 1944* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2000).

<sup>13</sup> Eric Lichtblau, *The Nazis Next Door: How America Became a Safe Haven for Hitler's Men* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014); Christopher Simpson, *Blowback: America's Recruitment of Nazis and Its Effect on the Cold War* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1988).

<sup>14</sup> Richard Breitman and Norman J.W. Goda, *Hitler's Shadow: Nazi War Criminals, U.S. Intelligence, and the Cold War* (College Park, MD: National Archives, 2011).

autobiographical accounts intended for public consumption must be handled with great care, for they often reflect the self-interest of the authors. This is especially problematic when using the memoirs of accused war criminals, whose accurate biographies could be used to incriminate them. The majority of the primary sources cited below are documents and memoranda from the files of the CIA, the FBI, and the INS at the National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, Maryland. These largely untapped sources not only reveal the crimes committed by the members of the Byelorussian Central Council during the Second World War, but also the extensive ties they forged with the intelligence agencies of the United States during the early Cold War.

The first part of this thesis provides necessary context and reveals how the future members of the Byelorussian Central Council first began their relationships with representatives of the Third Reich in German-occupied Poland. Part Two focuses on the period from summer 1941 to autumn 1943, beginning with the German invasion of the Soviet Union and ending with a change in the German leadership of occupied Byelorussia that provided the Byelorussian collaborators with an opportunity to expand their influence and prestige. The third part explains the foundation of the Byelorussian Central Council and its actions during the six-month period in which the council existed on Byelorussian soil. Part Four of the thesis focuses on the fall of the Third Reich and the immediate postwar period, when members of the BCC fled to Berlin before disappearing into DP camps, where they first began forging relationships with American intelligence operatives. The fifth and final part of this study reveals how several members of the BCC evaded justice by immigrating to the United States, eventually becoming naturalized citizens.

Several government agencies in the United States were aware of the presence of these men for decades, and multiple agencies sponsored and protected them. Culpability for harboring wanted war criminals in the United States extended to the top levels of American intelligence. This study is among the first academic works to tell the story of America's Byelorussian Nazi collaborators, revealing the extent of their wartime crimes as well as the postwar relationship they forged with American intelligence during the heightened tensions of the Cold War.

**PART 1**  
**WILLING TO “WORK WITH THE DEVIL HIMSELF”:  
BYELORUSSIAN NATIONALIST EMIGRES, 1919-1941**

Modern Belarus has been an independent state only since the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, but the Byelorussians have long been a people torn culturally between their powerful neighbors and divided politically by the machinations of foreign armies and governments. The geographic border separating interwar Poland from the Soviet Union ran approximately north to south along a line to the west of Minsk, dividing Byelorussian lands into two comparable areas, each composed of five *oblasts* (regions). The western oblasts became known as the Polish *kresy* (borderlands). The region also was divided by ethnic and religious differences, for the population of the Byelorussian territories in the early twentieth century was comprised of a wide variety of peoples, including those who identified themselves as Byelorussians, Poles, Russians, Ukrainians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Jews, and Tatars. Most Christians who identified more closely with Russia practiced the Russian Orthodox faith, while most who identified more closely with Poland were Roman Catholic. Located in the heart of the Pale of Settlement, Byelorussian territories had been home to one of the largest population of Jews in Europe for centuries, and though many craftsmen and traders from the *shtetls* (rural Jewish villages) enjoyed good working relationships with their gentile neighbors, antisemitic prejudices abounded.

At the outbreak of the Second World War, many Byelorussian nationalists saw Nazi Germany as a natural ally against the many perceived threats posed by these non-Byelorussian ethnic, national, or religious groups. The first seeds of this relationship were



cultivated by Byelorussian political refugees from the Soviet Union who came into contact with German representatives in interwar Poland. The Byelorussians began to organize themselves, seeing a vehicle for their own eventual independent statehood in the aggressive expansion of the Third Reich. As German preparations for the invasion of the Soviet Union progressed, these relationships developed into plans for the subversion of Soviet forces by parachuting in Byelorussian recruits to conduct guerrilla action and sabotage behind Red Army lines. Under the subsequent German occupation of Byelorussia, these collaborators became integral to the implementation of brutal German policies and rose to prominent positions of authority. In order to understand how and why these men came to collaborate with Nazi Germany, it is necessary to begin with the context in which their relationship with the Third Reich developed.

In the final turbulent decades of Romanov rule, many national minorities in the Russian Empire strongly asserted their own cultures, languages, and identities. A unique Byelorussian national identity had been developing since the late 1800s. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Byelorussian territories were all within the borders of the Russian Empire, comprising the westernmost lands of the czars' kingdom. The propagation of Byelorussian-language literature in the early 1900s helped a sense of cultural nationalism to flourish despite Russian political hegemony and mid-nineteenth century efforts at cultural assimilation. Byelorussia's elite were among the most successfully Russified of the empire's national minorities, but many young Byelorussians were still hopeful that the disintegration of the empire in 1917 meant the door for their national independence had been opened. However, the Bolshevik coup in October 1917 quickly frustrated their ambitions and threatened to extend Russian hegemony once more.

After the German authorities and the revolutionary Bolshevik government concluded the treaty of Brest-Litovsk ending the conflict between them, many Byelorussians found themselves in territories under German control. To ease their administrative burden, the German forces sponsored the creation of the Belaruskaja Narodnaja Respublika (Byelorussian People's Republic) in March 1918. Nine months later the short-lived regime ended as German forces withdrew from eastern Europe. A struggle between the Red Army and the military of the newly-created Republic of Poland ensued, and the peace settlement in 1920 drew the boundary between the Soviet Union and Poland through the middle of Byelorussian territories. The redrawing of national boundaries at the conclusion of the war only incorporated the eastern regions of Byelorussian territory into the Soviet Union; the western territories and their large Byelorussian population were included in the new Polish state.<sup>15</sup> Byelorussian lands were divided among their larger neighbors, and the population found itself torn between the Soviet Union and the Republic of Poland. The first seeds of Byelorussian collaboration with the Third Reich were then planted in interwar Poland, as anti-Bolshevik political refugees from the Soviet Union became disillusioned with Polish rule and came into contact with German intelligence operatives.

Several of these political enemies of the Soviet Union, such as Francizek Kushel, Radoslaw Ostrowski, and Juri Sobolewski, feared arrest in their homeland for fighting against the Red Army during the Russian Civil War and the Polish-Soviet War. Kushel, later the leader of the Byelorussian military forces created for the Third Reich, had been a young lieutenant in the Russian Army during the First World War. Born in Minsk in

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<sup>15</sup> Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns*, 57-60.

1895, Kushel had attended an officer's school in Vilno before being deployed. He was a conservative young officer who fought against the Bolshevik forces during the Russian Civil War following the October Revolution. At the outbreak of the Polish-Soviet War in 1919, Kushel joined a division of Lithuanians and Byelorussians that fought with the Poles against the Red Army.<sup>16</sup> A professional military man rather than an ardent Byelorussian nationalist, Kushel served successfully with the Polish forces for two decades. He rose to the rank of captain and remained in the Polish Army until his capture by the Red Army in September 1939.<sup>17</sup>

Ostrowski, the future president of the Germans' puppet regime and their most influential collaborator, had a colorful political career that began as a student agitator. Born in 1887, he enjoyed a privileged youth and a classical education as the only son of prosperous landowning family that lived in Slutsk, a provincial center one hundred kilometers south of Minsk.<sup>18</sup> Although Ostrowski was listed as a reserve officer in the Russian Army, unlike Kushel, he did not actually fight in the First World War. Ostrowski was primarily a politician and agitator. After the Russian Revolution in 1917, he served as the Minsk district delegate to the August 1917 Moscow State Conference of Alexander Kerensky's provisional Russian government. A Byelorussian nationalist seeking independence from Moscow, Ostrowski became an intelligence agent for the anti-Bolshevik forces gathering in the Black Sea town of Mariupol in southern Ukraine. He only served a few months with the White Army forces of General Denikin before he

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<sup>16</sup> "Operational: Franc(is)zek (Frantisek or Franz) Kuschel (Kusiel, Kuszal, or Kuszel), September 12, 1950," NARA, RG 263, Central Intelligence Agency Files (hereafter CIA), Kushel, Francis, E ZZ-18, B 76.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> V. Kalush, *In the Service of the People for a Free Byelorussia: Biographical Notes on Professor Radoslav Ostrowski* (London: Abjednannie, 1964), 9.

deserted in order to join the struggle for Byelorussian independence that had been brewing while he was in Mariupol. Ostrowski was appointed Minister of Education in the short lived Byelorussian National Republic, sponsored first by the retreating German military and then by the Polish forces battling the Red Army. As the Polish military began withdrawing in 1920 under the conditions of the Treaty of Riga, Ostrowski's home town became the site of the last attempt to assert Byelorussian independence. The provincial capital became the epicenter of a massive revolt against the imposition of Soviet authority.<sup>19</sup> However, the improvised uprising was disorganized and outmatched by the Soviet forces. Ostrowski and his compatriots fled to Poland before the Red Army's advance, where Polish authorities briefly interned him and the other members of the Byelorussian National Republic. Ostrowski remained in Poland until the German forces invaded in September 1939, when he began creating a Byelorussian organization in Berlin.<sup>20</sup>

Ostrowski's vice-president in the Byelorussian Central Council, Juri Sobolewski, was an equally opportunistic politician. Sobolewski was born in 1889 in Stolpce, approximately 75 kilometers southwest of Minsk. He received a classical Russian education, attended four years of professional school to become a surveyor, and served in the Russian Army from 1915 until the end of the First World War<sup>21</sup> Then, like Kushel, he fought against the Red Army until the end of the Polish-Soviet War. Finding refuge in

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<sup>19</sup> Vitali Silitski and Jan Zaprudnik, *Historical Dictionary of Belarus* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2007), 269-70.

<sup>20</sup> Radoslaw Ostrowski, "Brief Biography," NARA, RG 263, CIA, Ostrowski, Radoslaw, E ZZ-18, B 98.

<sup>21</sup> Harold F. Good, "Changed: George Sabolewski, was: Alexanderovitch Sokolowski, Alexei Sokolovsky, August 2, 1951," 5, NARA, RG 65, Federal Bureau of Investigation Files (hereafter FBI), Sobolewski, George, E A1-136AB, B 129.

Poland, Sobolewski became a personal and political rival of Ostrowski within the Byelorussian community there.<sup>22</sup>

Many of these Byelorussian political refugees in Poland had developed a bitter, personal antipathy to the Soviet Union, identifying themselves as the victims of an oppressive and dehumanizing regime. Several of these future collaborators belonged to wealthy so-called *kulak* families whose lands had been forcibly collectivized in the 1930s, and others lost family members to relocations and political purges. These anti-Soviet refugees quickly came to view Poland antagonistically as well. The Polish government did little to develop the infrastructure of the Byelorussian territories that comprised its eastern borderlands, and the impoverished region became known in Polish society as a backward land of subsistence agriculture. Poland as a whole suffered from a great deal of poverty, but the destitution in the kresy was especially severe.<sup>23</sup> The widespread poverty in the region combined with the peasants' resentment against the disparaging attitudes of their wealthy Polish landlords to produce a bitterly anti-Polish attitude in these already vehemently anti-Soviet émigrés.

Meager attempts by the Polish government to ameliorate these tensions failed. The state granted mild concessions to the rights of the large Byelorussian minority in eastern Poland, and in 1922 they were even permitted to send representatives to the Polish parliament, or Sejm. Two of the most important future collaborators of the Third Reich were among the handful of Byelorussians elected to the Sejm: Ostrowski and Sobolewski. The Polish Government's conciliatory gestures to the Byelorussian minority backfired, as these Byelorussian nationalists in the Sejm used their positions as a mandate

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>23</sup> Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns*, 61.

to criticize the Polish government. Their vocal opposition only escalated Polish-Byelorussian tensions, resulting in an oppressive Polonization campaign that negated the Polish government's few concessions and left a Byelorussian population embittered to both Soviet *and* Polish rule.<sup>24</sup> By the end of 1924, Polish authorities had closed hundreds of Byelorussian schools, restricted the activities of the Byelorussian press and Byelorussian politicians, and increased taxes in the kresy.<sup>25</sup>

Naturally, these oppressive measures further widened the rift between the Byelorussian minority and the Polish authorities. Anti-Byelorussian Polish policies rapidly produced more support for the cause of Byelorussian nationalism than its own activists had achieved in years. Reacting against Polish authority, thousands of Byelorussians flocked to left wing, yet nationalist political parties, including the Communist Party of West Byelorussia and the newly created Byelorussian Workers' and Peasants' Union (Hramada). These two parties, which merged communist political platforms with nationalist tenets, were closely linked, and many Byelorussians held dual memberships. In addition, the founder of the new Hramada, Branislau Taraskievic, remained an active member of the Communist Party of West Byelorussia. His old friend, Professor Radoslaw Ostrowski, served on the Central Committee of the new party.<sup>26</sup> Sobolewski joined in February 1926.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Nicholas P. Vakar, *Belorussia: The Making of a Nation: A Case Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), 122.

<sup>25</sup> Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns*, 63.

<sup>26</sup> Ostrowski, "Brief Biography," 4; Vitali Silitski and Jan Zaprudnik, *Historical Dictionary of Belarus* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2007), 279.

<sup>27</sup> "Central Intelligence Agency Memorandum for Director Federal Bureau of Investigation, January 19, 1951," 1, NARA, RG 65, FBI, Sobolewski, George, E A1-136AB, B 129.

By the late 1920s, the young Hramada had registered over 100,000 members and posed a serious threat to stability in the Byelorussian territories of eastern Poland.<sup>28</sup> In early 1927, Polish authorities arrested thousands of Hramada members, charging them with collaborating with Moscow to undermine the Polish Government. Ostrowski and Sobolewski were both arrested, although both men managed to arrange for their freedom well ahead of their colleagues.<sup>29</sup> Sobolewski was released later that year, although he later claimed to have served a four-year sentence after rejecting a vaguely defined “proposition” from the authorities.<sup>30</sup> As the director of the Byelorussian Cooperative Bank, Ostrowski was charged with receiving funds “from Bolshevik sources” in order to finance the “subversive activities of the Hramada.”<sup>31</sup> Despite the gravity of the charges against him, Ostrowski also managed to regain his freedom in a short time. Upon his release, he relinquished his post with the bank, but returned to his previous position as the director of the Byelorussian *Gymnasium* in Vilno, which became a center of Byelorussian anti-Soviet and anti-Polish agitation. In 1935, Ostrowski was terminated, again on charges of financial misconduct. Remarkably, he managed to avoid prison once again, and he was transferred to a school far to the west in Lodz, where he remained until the German invasion in 1939.<sup>32</sup>

Many other influential future collaborators served as educators in interwar Poland. These men used their positions as educators and administrators working

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<sup>28</sup> Vakar, *Belorussia*, 126-127.

<sup>29</sup> “Internal Security Report on George Sabolewski, December 20, 1951,” 3, NARA, RG 65, FBI, Sobolewski, George, E A1-136AB, B 129.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 2; Robert K. McQueen, “Internal Security Report on George Sabolewski, January 15, 1951,” 2, NARA, RG 65, FBI, Sobolewski, George, E A1-136AB, B 129.

<sup>31</sup> Kalush, *In the Service of the People*, 29.

<sup>32</sup> Ostrowski, “Brief Biography,” 4.

throughout Byelorussia to influence a younger generation of nationalists who came of age in this turbulent political atmosphere. Stanislaw Stankievich, the “butcher of Borisov,” was one of the most notorious Byelorussian war criminals to collaborate with the Germans in the massacres of Byelorussian Jews, but he began his professional life teaching Byelorussian language and literature to high school students at a *Gymnasium* in Dzisna, a small town on the Latvian border.<sup>33</sup> Born in a small town in the Vilno region in 1907, Stankievich received his doctorate from the University of Vilno in 1936 for a well-received dissertation on Byelorussian influences in Polish romantic poetry.<sup>34</sup> At the time of the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, Stankievich was teaching in Soviet-controlled Byelorussian territory at a school in Navahrudak, an ancient town nearly 150 kilometers southwest of Minsk.<sup>35</sup> Boris Ragula, born in Navahrudak in 1920, was younger and less prudent than his colleagues. In early 1941, he was arrested by the NKVD (the Soviet secret police) for politically subversive remarks made to his class, and was imprisoned in Minsk until the Germans took control of the city in the summer of 1941.<sup>36</sup> Ostrowski, Stankievich, and Ragula would soon tap into their extensive networks of former students to organize Byelorussians in the service of the Third Reich. For example, Vitaut Tumash, one of Ostrowski’s favorite pupils from the Gymnasium in

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<sup>33</sup> John Loftus and Mark Aarons, *The Secret War against the Jews: How Western Espionage Betrayed the Jewish People* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 301; “Extract from HICOG Despatch 2617, March 17, 1953,” NARA, RG 263, CIA, Stankievich, Stanislaw, E ZZ-16, B 50; “Brief Biography: Translation,” 1, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Stankievich, Stanislaw, E ZZ-16, B 50.

<sup>34</sup> “Extract from HICOG Despatch 2617, March 17, 1953.”

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*; “Brief Biography: Translation,” 1; “Application for Employment,” NARA, RG 263, CIA, Stankievich, Stanislaw, E ZZ-16, B 50.

<sup>36</sup> “Belorussian Émigré Organizations: Major Boris Ragula, February 7, 1951,” 3, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Ragula, Boris, E ZZ-18, B 104, 1 of 2.



Vilno, soon grew into an active early proponent of collaboration with the Third Reich, and eventually served the Germans as the Byelorussian burgomaster of Minsk.<sup>37</sup>

Although tensions simmered between the Polish state and its Byelorussian population throughout the entire interwar period, the 1930s began as a period of relative calm after the tumult of the previous decade. German expansionism in the late 1930s upset this precarious balance, as National Socialist designs on Polish and Soviet territories increased the profiles of the Byelorussians as a potential fifth column for the Germans to exploit in the impending war. According to one collaborator, Nazi Party officials first contacted Byelorussian elements in Poland in 1937 with the “mission of forming a [Byelorussian] National Socialist Party similar to the NSDAP.”<sup>38</sup> Fabian Akinczyc, the man entrusted with this mission, was a former NKVD agent who had also worked for Polish intelligence. Rein explains that Akinczyc simply “aped the German Nazis [sic] style and slogans” but failed to produce any significant support for his new party.<sup>39</sup> In 1939 he abandoned the effort to organize a Byelorussian Nazi Party and traveled to Berlin to serve instead as the Germans’ expert on Byelorussian affairs.<sup>40</sup>

When the Red Army invaded Polish territory in mid-September 1939, many anti-Soviet Byelorussians living in the Polish kresy fled to German-controlled central and western Poland. Ostrowski’s former student Tumash fled westward to Warsaw with several prominent political activists before continuing on to Berlin to study medicine.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Loftus and Aarons, *The Secret War Against the Jews*, 507.

<sup>38</sup> “Extract from Interrogation Report No. 2, Third US Army,” May 1945, 1, NARA, RG 319, IRR, Hrynkievich, Stanislaw, E A1 134-B, B 318.

<sup>39</sup> Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns*, 129;

<sup>40</sup> “Extract from Interrogation Report No. 2, Third US Army.”

<sup>41</sup> Radoslaw Ostrowski, “The Belorussian Central Rada (Council), Past and Present,” August 22, 1952, 1, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Ostrowski, Radoslaw, E ZZ-18, B 98.

Many had left their families behind in Soviet territory. Ostrowski was cut off from his family in Vilno. The NKVD quickly arrested his wife and son, and his daughter went into hiding. Ostrowski did not allow this personal blow to interfere with the opportunities provided by the war, for by the end of September 1939, he had organized a Byelorussian committee in Lodz to work with the German occupation forces.<sup>42</sup> Similar organizations were founded in major cities throughout occupied Poland, including Krakow, Poznan, and Warsaw.

From the very beginning of the Second World War, Byelorussian leaders held few illusions about the brutality of National Socialism's racial hierarchy or political worldview. Ostrowski would later explain that "the greatest impulse propelling all nationalities to the formation of national organizations" at the beginning of the German occupation was the fear of being lumped together with "the Poles and Jews," who were being "treated worst of all by the Germans."<sup>43</sup> In fact, the antisemitic, anti-Bolshevik, and anti-Polish policies of the Third Reich reflected the goals and ideology of these Byelorussian nationalist refugees, and Ostrowski was eager to deepen German-Byelorussian ties. He quickly went to work "organizing a central...committee in Berlin, which would unite all of the existing [Byelorussian] committees" in Germany and occupied Poland.<sup>44</sup>

Less eager Byelorussian collaborators frequently entered the service of the Third Reich after arrest or capture by the Germans while fighting in the Polish Army. Francizek Kushel, the future leader of the Byelorussian armed forces under the control of the SS,

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

had remained in the Polish Army during the interwar years.<sup>45</sup> While defending Lvov from the German onslaught in September 1939, Kushel and his contingent received orders to surrender to the advancing Red Army rather than the German forces. The officers were taken into the custody of the NKVD that fall, and Kushel was interned in the notorious camp at Starobilsk, Ukraine for eight months before being transferred to a camp near the Katyn Forest in what had been eastern Poland.<sup>46</sup> In April and May of the following spring, thousands of Polish officers, policemen, and intelligentsia were murdered and buried in mass graves by agents of the NKVD, in what became known as the Katyn Massacre.<sup>47</sup> Kushel was present to witness NKVD agents leading officers away from the camp “in small groups” after March 1940.<sup>48</sup> Transferred to a cell in NKVD headquarters on Lubyanka Square in Moscow on May 17, 1940, he narrowly escaped becoming a victim of the massacre. Although the reason Kushel survived this campaign of mass murder remains obscure, a clue may be found in the fact that he shared his Moscow cell with Polish General Wladyslaw Anders, who was released after the German invasion of the Soviet Union in order to form a Polish military force under the auspices of the Red Army.<sup>49</sup> The Soviet authorities likely hoped that Kushel would create Byelorussian forces for the Soviet war machine similar to Anders’ Army. Kushel’s wife, a well-known Byelorussian poetess, managed to obtain his release in early June 1941 under condition of

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<sup>45</sup> “Memorandum for the Record: Subject: Frantisek Kushal,” October 14, 1952, 1, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Kushel, Francis, E ZZ-18, B 76, 2 of 2.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> “Katyn Massacre,” in I.C.B. Dear and M.R.D. Foot, eds., *The Oxford Companion to World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 644.

<sup>48</sup> Wladyslaw Anders, *An Army in Exile: The Story of the Second Polish Corps* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1949), 40.

<sup>49</sup> “To: Chief, Foreign Division M. From: Chief of Station, Karlsruhe: Operational: Kuszal or (Kuszal),” August 8, 1950, 1, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Kushel, Francis, E ZZ-18, B 76, 2 of 2; “Memorandum for the Record: Subject: Frantisek Kushal”; Wladyslaw Anders, *An Army in Exile: The Story of the Second Polish Corps* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1949), 40.

close NKVD monitoring. Kushel claimed he managed to evade Soviet authorities by hiding in the forest until the German military swept the Red Army from the region. Although one source stated that Kushel “actively collaborated with the NKVD, perhaps in order to save his live [sic],” Kushel was an avowed Germanophile who “deeply believed” that the Third Reich represented “a civilized, cultured nation” that could help Byelorussia to gain its independence.<sup>50</sup>

Some Byelorussians captured while serving in the Polish army traveled to Germany in order to work closely with the authorities of the Third Reich. Jan Avdziej, a young man from Juri Sobolewski’s hometown of Stolpce in the Minsk region, would become a notorious collaborator during the German occupation of Byelorussia. Like Kushel, Avdziej was also captured by the Red Army while serving with the Polish military in September 1939.<sup>51</sup> Somehow Avdziej managed to escape and flee to Germany, where he joined the central committee of Byelorussian collaborators organized by Ostrowski.<sup>52</sup> He worked closely with the Sicherheitsdienst (SD), the intelligence service of the SS, and an acquaintance later recalled that Avdziej quickly developed a reputation for being “sympathetic toward [the Nazis’] political beliefs.”<sup>53</sup> Another young Byelorussian collaborator, Stanislaw Hrynkievich, was captured by the Wehrmacht and held in a prisoner of war camp until he went to work for the Byelorussian committee in Berlin in 1941. Hrynkievich had attended the *Gymnasium* in Grodno before enrolling in

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<sup>50</sup> “Memorandum for the Record: Subject: Frantisek Kushal,” October 14, 1952, 2, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Kushel, Francis, E ZZ-18, B 76, 2 of 2.

<sup>51</sup> Charles H. Schwartz, “Report of Investigation: Awdziej, Jan,” December, 30, 1958, 7, NARA, RG 85, Immigration and Naturalization Service Files (hereafter INS), Avdziej, Jan, E P3, B1.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

the University of Vilno in 1934.<sup>54</sup> In Vilno, Hrynkievich's anti-Soviet Byelorussian nationalism grew intensely passionate. Stating that his "hatred of Bolshevism" made him willing to "work with the devil himself," he then thrived in the capital of the Third Reich during the Second World War, ascending to the leadership of the Byelorussian committee in the German capital while pursuing his medical education at the University of Berlin.<sup>55</sup> He also represented Byelorussia in the Deutsch-Ausländischer Akademiker Verein (German-Foreign Academic Association), which met in Berlin under the auspices of the National Socialist Students League.<sup>56</sup>

In 1940 the German authorities transferred Avdziej, Hrynkievich, and their committee to Warsaw, where they joined a large Byelorussian émigré community organizing themselves under the guidance of their German sponsors.<sup>57</sup> Shortly after the committee relocated to Warsaw, the German authorities revealed why they had transferred the center of Byelorussian émigré activity to occupied Poland.<sup>58</sup> Ostrowski explained that German intelligence officers approached the Byelorussian committee in early 1941 in order to "organize a parachute detachment to be dropped on the other side of the demarcation line" separating German-occupied Poland from the oblasts of the kresy incorporated into the Soviet Union.<sup>59</sup> A military school for the training of

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<sup>54</sup> "Third US Army and Eastern Military District Screening Center: Summary Report Internee Hrynkievitsch, Stanislaus," 26 October, 1945, 1, NARA, RG 319, IRR, Hrynkievich, Stanislaw, E A1 134-B, B 318.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 2; Jack Warga, "Civilian Internment Cap No. 91 Darmstadt: Preliminary Interrogation Report: Hrynkievitsch, Stanislaus," July 12, 1946, 2 NARA, RG 319, IRR, Hrynkievich, Stanislaw, E A1 134-B, B 318; "Confidential: Headquarters Third United States Army Interrogation Center APO 403: Subject: Hrynkievitsch, Stanislaus, AIC 572," May 5, 1945, 1, NARA, RG 319, IRR, Hrynkievich, Stanislaw, E A1 134-B, B 318.

<sup>56</sup> "Extract from Interrogation Report No. 2, Third US Army," 4.

<sup>57</sup> Schwartz, "Report of Investigation: Awdziej, Jan," 2.

<sup>58</sup> Ostrowski, "The Belorussian Central Rada (Council): Past and Present," 2.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

Byelorussian parachutist saboteurs was quickly organized by the Germans in Ostrolenka, a railroad junction town 120 kilometers northeast of Warsaw.<sup>60</sup> However, this first collaborative effort with the Germans did not produce the results the Byelorussian émigrés had expected. During the spring months of 1941, German officers trained Byelorussian recruits to handle parachutes and undertake sabotage on Soviet communications and railroads. From the start, the German authorities assumed complete operational control of these forces from the Byelorussian political activists who had helped to muster them, and Ostrowski complained bitterly that “none of us were admitted to participation in this operation.”<sup>61</sup> The disillusionment of the Byelorussian committee was compounded by the fact that more than half of the Byelorussian soldiers who parachuted behind the Soviet lines on the eve of the German invasion were killed.<sup>62</sup> Despite the evident failures of this first joint mission, the Byelorussian nationalists working with the Germans retained their belief that the Third Reich’s aggressive expansionism held the key to establishing an independent and ethnically homogeneous Byelorussia by destroying Poland and the Soviet Union and liquidating their mutually perceived political and racial enemies.

The Byelorussian nationalist émigrés working with the Third Reich before the German invasion of the Soviet Union could entertain few illusions about the nature of their relationship to the German authorities. They had witnessed the application of National Socialist racial ideology in Germany and occupied Poland, and they had seen

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

that the German authorities viewed them only as pawns to be used in furtherance of their own war aims. The leaders of Nazi Germany had no interest in establishing an independent Byelorussia, but instead intended to exploit these malcontented expatriates and their knowledge of the anticipated theater of war. Despite their recognition of this dynamic, the lofty personal ambitions of these Byelorussian nationalists and the anti-Communist fervor they shared with their Nazi sponsors combined to overcome the collaborators' objections and misgivings. In fact, Ostrowski and his cadre pushed for closer collaboration with Nazi Germany.<sup>63</sup> As German military forces invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, these collaborators scrambled to return to Byelorussia as guides and informants. Once there, they organized auxiliary Byelorussian police forces and local bureaucracies to facilitate the German administration of the conquered territories. Over the course of the German occupation these men made themselves complicit in a variety of crimes, including some of the most egregious atrocities of the Holocaust.

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 3.

**PART 2**  
**“FOLLOWING THE GERMAN LEAD”:**  
**THE GERMAN OCCUPATION OF BYELORUSSIA, 1941-1943**

Operation Barbarossa, the merciless German attack upon the Soviet Union, began on June 22, 1941. From its inception, the war against the Soviet Union contained a murderous ideological component. Battalions of the Einsatzgruppen immediately followed the Wehrmacht into Soviet territories in order to eliminate those whom National Socialist ideology deemed political and racial enemies of Germany, and the men who would comprise the Byelorussian Central Council became involved in these campaigns from the beginning. Guided and assisted by opportunistic collaborators such as Jasiuk, Sobolewski, and Stankievich, the Einsatzgruppen committed mass murder and genocide of hitherto unknown proportions.<sup>64</sup> As German forces rapidly swept through Byelorussian territories, they appointed their Byelorussian guides, mostly exiled collaborators, as the local mayors and governors of their conquered homeland under the strict oversight of the German military and civil administrations. In positions of authority, these men did the bidding of their German overseers, created local auxiliary police and militia forces that greatly facilitated the occupation, and made themselves responsible for the persecution, torture, and deaths of thousands of innocent civilians. The German authorities relied on the Byelorussian collaborators to facilitate the occupation of their homeland, but the Third Reich initially paid the lowest possible price for this cooperation, offering few concessions to the Byelorussian nationalist aspirations of their collaborators.

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<sup>64</sup> Jürgen Förster, “Barbarossa Revisited: Strategy and Ideology in the East,” *Jewish Social Studies* (Jan 1, 1988), 23.



“Generalplan Ost,” the German plan for the conquered territories of the Soviet Union, was a vaguely-defined but brutal scheme to repopulate land coveted by the Nazis with ethnic Germans. The extant populations were to be eliminated through war, deportation, starvation, and mass murder. These plans for the reorganization of the territories of the Soviet Union began as much of Europe was already under German control, and the anticipation of a swift military victory initially caused confident planners to construct grand plans for the reorganization of eastern Europe. In his classic study of the German occupation of the Soviet Union, Alexander Dallin observes that “there is no evidence...of high-level discussions of political problems-particularly of any attempt to enlist the help of the Soviet population.”<sup>65</sup> Detailed plans to exploit local collaborators from among the disaffected anti-Communist national minorities of the Soviet Union were neglected by German strategists.<sup>66</sup> Instead, Nazi propaganda promoted the idea that the conflict would be an epic war of annihilation against the most reviled scapegoats of Nazi ideology: Communists, Jews, and Slavs. The virulent antisemitism and anticommunism of National Socialism had always been integral planks of the party’s platform, and Hitler had been referring to the entire Slavic people as an inferior race for decades.<sup>67</sup> Accordingly, Operation Barbarossa and the occupation of the Soviet Union became the very manifestation of Nazi racial theories through war.

Different German authorities interpreted Hitler’s vague directives with varying levels of personal ambition, practical considerations, and political zealotry. The major

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<sup>65</sup> Dallin, *German Rule in Russia, 18-19*.

<sup>66</sup> Rolf-Dieter Müller and Gerd R. Ueberschär. *Hitler's War in the East, 1941-1945: A Critical Assessment* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 290.

<sup>67</sup> Alex J. Kay, *Exploitation, Resettlement, Mass Murder: Political and Economic Planning for German Occupation Policy in the Soviet Union, 1940-1941* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 147.

competitors for influence in the conquered territories of the East included the Schutzstaffel (SS), the Wehrmacht, and Alfred Rosenberg's Ostministerium (Eastern Ministry). The priorities and interests of these different groups conflicted with one another and provoked constant struggles between them. Dallin describes "very broad and vague directives prescribed from above," which allowed for the implementation of separate and distinct occupational policies at different times and in different places.<sup>68</sup> This was especially true because of the rotating nature of any area's occupation authorities. As the front advanced, military administrations ceded control of rear areas to civilian administrators under the nominal jurisdiction of the Ostministerium. The SS and the Einsatzgruppen committed mass murder and provoked violent anti-Jewish pogroms among the local populace, which conflicted with the Wehrmacht's need to maintain order in its rear areas and Rosenberg's feeble attempts to foster collaborators in the territories of the Soviet Union in order to maximize local cooperation with the occupation authorities. This competition for influence continued for years, and in late 1943 Byelorussian territories became completely controlled by the SS.

The exploitation of local collaborators was initially hindered by Hitler's wish that "there should be no strong rulers in Russia," but opportunistic Byelorussian anti-Communists like Ostrowski benefitted from the changing fortunes of the war and the improvisational measures of the changing German administrations.<sup>69</sup> The Wehrmacht, the Ostministerium, and the SS interpreted Hitler's vague directives differently and made the execution of occupation policies a chaotic affair dependent upon the ambitions and

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<sup>68</sup> Dallin, *German Rule in Russia*, 296.

<sup>69</sup> Gerald Reitlinger, *The House Built on Sand: The Conflicts of German Policy in Russia, 1939-1945* (New York: Viking Press, 1960), 196.

personalities of the commanders, troops, and organizations stationed in a given area. Dallin states that it is “impossible to speak of any distinct ‘policy’ pursued in the occupied areas of Russia proper” because the severity of the occupation “varied from village to village, from year to year, as commandants and detachments were moved.”<sup>70</sup> The competition for influence among the different branches of the German government, the vague policy directives issued by the top leaders of the Third Reich, and the improvised measures of the frequently changing German administrators meant that the Byelorussian collaborators’ aspirations were limited by and dependent upon the policies of the particular German authorities for whom they worked.

As the date of the German invasion of the Soviet Union approached, the Byelorussian émigrés recruited Byelorussian paramilitary forces for the Third Reich and entered into the service of the Einsatzgruppen. Contact between the Byelorussian committee in Warsaw and the designated leaders of the Einsatzgruppen began in the spring of 1941, when a group of approximately thirty to forty Byelorussian émigrés was assembled to serve as local guides and spies known as “people of trust” (Vertrauensleute).<sup>71</sup> The members of the Byelorussian committee also assembled an ill-fated cadre of hastily-trained airborne saboteurs in order to disrupt communications and sow confusion. These Byelorussian guerrillas parachuted behind Soviet lines in mid-June, but most of the men were quickly apprehended by the Soviet border guards.<sup>72</sup> On June 22, 1941, German military forces attacked the Soviet Union along a broad front, and several Byelorussian committee members serving as Vertrauensleute guided the German

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<sup>70</sup> Reitlinger, *The House Built on Sand*, 196; Dallin, *German Rule in Russia*, 297, 296.

<sup>71</sup> Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns*, 97.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

military and the Einsatzgruppen through the territories of their homeland. One of these men, Emanuel Jasiuk, a member of the Warsaw committee, quickly became “well known for his cruelty” as a guide for Vorkommando Moskau and an agent of the SD.<sup>73</sup> Jasiuk and his ilk were instrumental in the organization of collaborationist police forces, politicians, and bureaucrats to assist in the administration of their conquered homeland. In addition to facilitating the military invasion and occupation, these men were also crucial to the identification of political and racial targets of Nazi persecution, compiling lists of individuals to be executed by the German forces. Appointed to positions of authority by their German masters, these collaborators even ordered the mass murder of thousands of Jewish citizens.

As Operation Barbarossa began, the leaders of the Byelorussian committees in Berlin and the cities of occupied Poland anxiously awaited news of the invasion. They resented being marginalized by the German authorities in the training and deployment of their Byelorussian parachutist saboteurs, and they eagerly sought ways to increase their influence in the war effort and the occupation of Byelorussian territories. Several of the leading personalities of the Byelorussian committees decided that they would have to find a way to return to their homeland with the invading German forces. Leading the Byelorussian committee in the occupied Polish city of Lodz, Professor Radoslaw Ostrowski pressed upon his colleagues the importance of returning to Byelorussia. Vitaut Tumash, a former student of Ostrowski’s at a Byelorussian *Gymnasium* in Vilno, had joined his former teacher in Lodz earlier in 1941, and the two spearheaded the return of

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<sup>73</sup> Stanley A. Lewczyk, “Emanuel (Max) Jasiuk, was. Edward Jasinski, Maj, Mike,” September 14, 1951, 10, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Jasiuk, Emanuel, E ZZ-16, B 27; Loftus and Aarons, *The Secret War against the Jews*, 509.

their fellow collaborationist Byelorussian anti-Communists to their war-torn homelands. Ostrowski later recalled how he had immediately seen “the necessity of our getting to Belorussia [sic]” in the wake of the German invasion, but had been forced to rely upon Tumash’s contacts with the German authorities to accomplish this.<sup>74</sup> Tumash had spent the last several years studying medicine in Berlin, and the energetic young student had made several influential friends there before moving to Lodz. According to Ostrowski, “the Germans did not allow anyone to go at that time,” but his young protégé was rapidly able to arrange efficient travel accommodations for them.<sup>75</sup>

On June 29, exactly one week after the German invasion began, Ostrowski sent Tumash from Lodz in order to consult with Dr. Nikolai Schors, a leader of the Byelorussian committee in Warsaw who worked closely with that city’s Gestapo. Two days later Tumash telephoned Ostrowski from Warsaw to tell him that everything was arranged for them to travel to Minsk, and he should prepare to leave within days. Ostrowski later recalled how, “on July 3, at night, the Gestapo called for me with an official car and toward morning of July 4<sup>th</sup> we were already in Warsaw....I was to go to Minsk via Brest, Pinsk, Gomel, Bobruisk, in view of the fact that I knew these areas well and had many acquaintances there.”<sup>76</sup> Ostrowski did indeed have many acquaintances, having spent many years as a teacher in various cities throughout Byelorussia, Lithuania, and Poland.

Soviet resistance to the German invasion delayed the return of Ostrowski and four other collaborators who departed Warsaw on July 4, but they finally arrived in the

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<sup>74</sup> Ostrowski, “The Belorussian Central Rada (Council), Past and Present,” 3.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

Byelorussian capital on July 13. There they discovered that three weeks after Operation Barbarossa had begun, the “young and ambitious” Tumash “had already become the burgomaster of Minsk.”<sup>77</sup> Martin Dean has explained that one of the first priorities of the German forces involved appointing politically sympathetic local individuals as burgomasters and police officers in order to secure German rear areas and leave German manpower free for the advancing front.<sup>78</sup> Ostrowski and his companions entered the capital to find Soviet prisoners of war huddled miserably in public squares and the registration of the city’s Jewish residents nearing completion. Within days, this registration was completed, orders were issued for Jews to wear yellow stars, and a ghetto was formed.<sup>79</sup> Tumash’s signature appeared at the bottom of the order for the establishment of the Minsk ghetto.<sup>80</sup>

As the brutal relocation of the city’s approximately 75,000 Jewish residents continued, Ostrowski blithely set out to prove himself an ambitious and energetic asset to the German military administration, who assigned him to organize a local auxiliary administrative network for the Minsk oblast. “This task was easy for me,” Ostrowski later wrote proudly, “because I had acquaintances in almost every district and area. Exactly a week later, having been supplied with military transport, I had been able to organize 21 raions in the Minsk oblast.”<sup>81</sup> This involved recruiting political collaborators and police officials to support the German occupation and identifying potential enemies of the Reich

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust*, 21.

<sup>79</sup> Vasily Grossman, “The History of the Minsk Ghetto,” in *The Black Book: The Ruthless Murder of Jews by German-Fascist Invaders Throughout the Temporarily-Occupied Regions of the Soviet Union and in the Death Camps of Poland During the War of 1941-1945* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1980), 146.

<sup>80</sup> Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns*, 267.

<sup>81</sup> Ostrowski, “The Belorussian Central Rada (Council), Past and Present,” 3.

for imprisonment or liquidation. Suitable individuals were found to become burgomasters of towns and cities, although their authority was limited by their ability to carry out the orders of the German administration officials to whom they remained responsible. Ostrowski remained proud of this feat years later, boasting that he had “astonished and impressed the Germans” with his organizational abilities.<sup>82</sup>

As the front advanced, responsibility for the occupied territories shifted from the German military administration to a civilian administration nominally under the direction of Rosenberg’s Ostministerium. In September, 1941, Generalkommissar Wilhelm Kube and the civil administration took control of the Minsk oblast from the German military. Ostrowski claims that Kube asked him personally to stay on in his capacity coordinating the administration of the oblast for the new civil authorities. Tumash agreed to stay in his position as the burgomaster of Minsk as well.<sup>83</sup> However, they soon found it difficult to work with the civil administration. Ostrowski believed that his position had become superfluous once individuals had been appointed to lead the towns and districts of the oblast, and the ambitious politician felt that his talents and energies were being squandered. In addition, the arrival of the German civil authorities in Minsk coincided with the arrival of additional Byelorussian collaborators from occupied Prague, and these men competed with Ostrowski and his cadre from occupied Poland for influence with their German bosses. Not surprisingly, internecine feuding quickly erupted among the Byelorussian collaborators in Minsk, and according to Ostrowski, “they all aspired to leadership, an infection they had caught from Hitler.”<sup>84</sup> Ostrowski was always careful to

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Loftus and Aarons, *The Secret War Against the Jews*, 507.

<sup>84</sup> Ostrowski, “The Belorussian Central Rada (Council), Past and Present,” 3.

paint himself as a reluctant wielder of power, only accepting the burden of leadership after acceding to the desperate pleas of others. However, he was as ambitious and opportunistic as his competitors from Prague, and when the latter became dominant in the battle for influence with the German civil administration, Ostrowski indignantly left Minsk.

In October 1941, on the initiative of Kube, a Byelorussian aid organization was created to take over the functions of the Red Cross. One of Ostrowski's chief rivals, Dr. Ivan Ermachenko, was appointed by Rosenberg to lead the organization.<sup>85</sup> Although Ermachenko had been a leading Byelorussian nationalist in Prague in the interwar years, his admiration of all things German earned him a reputation as an avowed and enthusiastic Germanophile. Married to an ethnic German, Ermachenko drew criticism from his fellow Byelorussian nationalists before the war for "following the German lead too closely."<sup>86</sup> Ermachenko admired National Socialism, and attempted to ingratiate himself to the German authorities shortly after the occupation of Prague in the spring of 1939.<sup>87</sup> On April 20, 1939, he sent a seventeen-page memorandum personally asking Hitler to consider the Byelorussian nationalist groups in any "future developments" in the East.<sup>88</sup> He had even traveled to Berlin in August 1939 in order to meet with the head of the Eastern Department of the German Foreign Ministry.<sup>89</sup> His close political affinity with the Third Reich and his ties in Berlin led directly to his appointment to the leadership of the newly created aid organization. The statute of his organization reflected

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<sup>85</sup> Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns*, 143.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*



its leader's beliefs, declaring that it existed in order "...to liquidate in Byelorussia a misfortune...raised by the Polish and Communist-Jewish dominion."<sup>90</sup> Ermachenko's Nazi sympathies and his sycophantic posture towards his German bosses in Minsk earned him the moniker "Herr Jawohl" among his peers and the local population.<sup>91</sup>

The appointment of Ermachenko to the leadership of the Byelorussian aid organization catapulted the obsequious physician into an important position with the new German authorities just as Ostrowski's own influence seemed to be waning. Ostrowski's department in the German administrative headquarters in Minsk was redesignated a *Nebenstelle* (a secondary or subsidiary office), and he later ruefully recalled how "when everything had been arranged I was left with only one statistics department."<sup>92</sup> Reacting against his reduced influence, Ostrowski petulantly informed Kube "that there was actually nothing for me to do" in Minsk, and he attempted to resign from his position in order to pursue his teaching career.<sup>93</sup> Kube refused to accept his resignation, and temporarily mollified Ostrowski by offering him the position of rector at the teaching college in Minsk.

Ostrowski's dissatisfaction with his diminished prestige in the offices of the German civil administration could not be assuaged, and by the end of the month he found a specious reason to resign dramatically from his position with the civil administration and rejoin his "former colleagues in the Military Administration Headquarters" on their

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<sup>90</sup> "Statute of Byelorussian Popular Self-Aid Organization in Minsk," 28 October, 1941, in Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns*, 145.

<sup>91</sup> Munoz and Romanko, *Hitler's White Russians*, 445; Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns*, 144.

<sup>92</sup> Ostrowski, "The Belorussian Central Rada (Council), Past and Present," 3.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

drive towards Moscow.<sup>94</sup> On the evening of October 30, Ostrowski was dining with guests at his apartment in Minsk when the civilian administration's German police interrupted their meal, saying that they had orders from the chief of the German police in Minsk to confiscate his radio. Although Ostrowski's radio was playing music in the background, he disdainfully informed the astonished police that he had no radio.<sup>95</sup> An officer pointed at the device, exclaiming, "But there it is!"<sup>96</sup> Ostrowski coolly replied that the radio belonged to one of his guests, a former student of his who now worked for a Geheime Feldpolizei (Secret Field Police) unit attached to Germany's Army Group Center.<sup>97</sup> With a high degree of independence and extensive police powers, the GFP had developed an intimidating reputation for torture and terror, becoming known as the "Gestapo of the Wehrmacht."<sup>98</sup> After learning of Ostrowski's guest's position, the intimidated German police officer saluted and left them to their meal.<sup>99</sup> Ostrowski immediately notified the German military administration that he wished to accompany them in their eastward advance the following morning, and he sat down to write Kube a furious letter. Ostrowski claimed that it was written "in correct form," although he conceded that "the language was somewhat sharp."<sup>100</sup> Although he made much out of this incident, in reality Ostrowski's anger stemmed from being replaced by Ermachenko when Generalkommissar Kube and the civilian administration assumed control of the conquered Byelorussian territories.

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 4; Munoz and Romanko, *Hitler's White Russians*, 160.

<sup>98</sup> Munoz and Romanko, *Hitler's White Russians*, 161; Klaus Gessner, *Geheime Feldpolizei: die Gestapo der Wehrmacht* (Berlin: Militärverlag, 2010).

<sup>99</sup> Ostrowski, "The Belorussian Central Rada (Council), Past and Present," 4.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

Traveling eastward in the wake of the invading German armies, Ostrowski organized networks of local collaborators in Smolensk, approximately halfway between Minsk and Moscow. He expected to be installed as the burgomaster of Moscow once the Soviet capital fell to the German forces.<sup>101</sup> The foundering German invasion and the resilience of the Red Army derailed these plans, however, and Ostrowski fled westward to Mogilev in 1943 as the Wehrmacht continued its retreat. In Mogilev, Ostrowski served as head of the municipal council and organized a Byelorussian police school under German auspices.<sup>102</sup>

While Ostrowski and other collaborators energetically organized Byelorussian bureaucrats and police for the German occupation authorities, German forces oversaw massacres of civilians, often relying on the assistance of local collaborators. Historian Waitman Beorn, whose scholarship has established the Wehrmacht's complicity in the Holocaust in Byelorussia, has observed that "soldiers and Nazi executioners literally traveled together from the beginning."<sup>103</sup> The Einsatzgruppen had been actively conducting the mass murder of Jews since the beginning of Operation Barbarossa. Einsatzgruppe B followed Army Group Centre through Byelorussian territories on the drive towards Moscow, and with the assistance of regular Wehrmacht and police units, they destroyed many of the Jewish communities of Byelorussia in the first months of Germany's war upon the Soviet Union. When the German forces invaded in late June

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<sup>101</sup> Morris Riley, *Kim Philby: The Hidden Years* (Penzance, UK: United Writers Publications Ltd, 1990), 40; Crankshaw, *Gestapo: Instrument of Tyranny* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1956), 166.

<sup>102</sup> Ostrowski, "The Belorussian Central Rada (Council), Past and Present," 5.

<sup>103</sup> Beorn, *Marching into Darkness*, 56.

1941, approximately 375,000 Jews lived in Byelorussian territories; by the end of the year nearly 200,000 of these civilians had been brutally murdered.<sup>104</sup>

The members of the Einsatzgruppen and the soldiers of the Wehrmacht who committed these atrocities could not have conducted these mass executions so efficiently without the assistance of local collaborators who served as guides and identified potential political and racial enemies of the Third Reich for liquidation. Indeed, an Einsatzgruppe report from July 1941 stated that without local Vertrauensleute, “German soldiers are not always able to distinguish between the Jewish and the local non-Jewish residents.”<sup>105</sup> Some of these Byelorussian collaborators included “the cream of the intelligentsia,” such as Stanislaw Stankievich.<sup>106</sup> This cosmopolitan scholar of Slavic philology would enjoy “many positions of trust” under the German occupation in the years to come.<sup>107</sup> At the time of the German invasion, he was teaching at a *Gymnasium* in Navahrudak, approximately 150 kilometers west of Minsk.<sup>108</sup> Einsatzgruppe B arrived in Navahrudak on July 3, 1941 and massacred approximately 100 Jews.<sup>109</sup> Dr. Franz Six, the SS leader and head of the forward unit of Einsatzgruppe B (optimistically named Vorkommando Moskau), personally chose Stankievich to assist the mobile killing units on their path

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<sup>104</sup> Munoz and Romanko, *Hitler's White Russians*, 149-153; Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns*, 262.

<sup>105</sup> “Operational Situation Report USSR No. 31,” July 23, 1941, in Yitzhak Arad and Shmuel Krakowski, eds., *The Einsatzgruppen Reports: Selections from the Dispatches of the Nazi Death Squads' Campaign Against the Jews, July 1941-January 1943* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1989), 43.

<sup>106</sup> Riley, *Kim Philby*, 36.

<sup>107</sup> “Stankevich, Stanislaw AKA: Stankiewicz, Stanislaw; Stankiwych, Stanislaw; Stankievic, Stanislaw,” October 5, 1977, 1, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Stankievich, Stanislaw, E ZZ-16, B 50.

<sup>108</sup> “Extract from HICOG Despatch 2617, March 17, 1953.”

<sup>109</sup> Munoz and Romanko, *Hitler's White Russians*, 150.

through Byelorussia.<sup>110</sup> After briefly serving Vorkommando Moskau, Stankievich was installed by the German military authorities as the burgomaster of Borissow, a medium-sized city nearly 100 kilometers northeast of Minsk on the Berezina River.

The German authorities quickly established local administrative organs in Borissow, and anti-Jewish actions began almost immediately. A report filed by Einsatzgruppe B on July 23, 1941 states that a local Jewish council (*Judenrat*) had been established under the authority of Borissow's newly appointed, "reliable" burgomaster.<sup>111</sup> Eager to prove his value in this new position of authority, Stankievich zealously began arrangements for the ghettoization of approximately 8,000 Jewish residents of the region in the poorest areas of the city. Rein writes that Stankievich "was active in all stages of the extermination process, issuing orders for the ghettoization... 'taxing' ghetto inmates...and, ultimately...bearing direct responsibility for the massacre of between 6,500 and 7,000 members of the Jewish community in October 1941."<sup>112</sup>

On the night of October 19, 1941 Stankievich threw a "wild party" for the Byelorussian auxiliary police forces of Borissow, where the men got "properly drunk" in anticipation of the planned early morning ghetto clearing action.<sup>113</sup> The police entered the ghetto at approximately 3:00 on the morning of October 20. According to David Ehof, the local ethnic German in command of Borissow's Byelorussian police, they "broke into the Jewish houses, chased the people to the square in the centre of the ghetto, drove them into the vehicles by force and transported them to the place of execution. There was no

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<sup>110</sup> Riley, *Kim Philby*, 37.

<sup>111</sup> "Operational Situation Report USSR No. 31," in Arad and Shmuel, eds., *The Einsatzgruppen Reports*, 43.

<sup>112</sup> Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns*, 267.

<sup>113</sup> Loftus and Aarons, *The Secret War against the Jews*, 497-98.

mercy shown either to old people, children, pregnant women, or the sick.”<sup>114</sup> By sunrise nearly 7,000 of Borissow’s 8,000 Jewish residents had been taken to the outskirts of town.<sup>115</sup> Near the airport outside of the city long trenches had been dug on the side of the road. Here the drunken Byelorussian police forced their Jewish victims to undress and climb down into the pits. After the first Jewish men were shot, the following victims were forced at gunpoint to arrange the contorted bodies neatly before sprinkling a layer of dirt over them and lying down head to toe on top of the corpses and awaiting their own execution.<sup>116</sup> This system became known as the *Ölsardinenmanier* (sardine method), and was developed in order to save space in the mass graves.<sup>117</sup> In order to save ammunition, Stankievich had also thought “to shoot through a double row of bodies....to cover the wounded with a thin layer of dirt and then suffocate them beneath another double layer of bodies.”<sup>118</sup>

Sadism pervaded the execution site outside of town. Young women were raped before being forced into the death pits, babies were thrown into the trenches alive, men were clubbed to death with rifle butts, and the bodies of the dead were mutilated.<sup>119</sup> The architect of these atrocities was not present at the execution site during the massacre. Years later, Stankievich confided to a colleague that he had absented himself to the countryside rather than witness the bloody realization of his planning firsthand.<sup>120</sup> After

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<sup>114</sup> David Ehof, in Martin Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust*, 51-52.

<sup>115</sup> Riley, *Kim Philby*, 37.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1961), 319.

<sup>118</sup> Loftus and Aarons, *The Secret War against the Jews*, 497-98.

<sup>119</sup> Riley, *Kim Philby*, 37.

<sup>120</sup> “S. Stankievich, Member of the Institute Council,” July 15, 1954, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Stankievich, Stanislaw, E ZZ-18, B 125.

the atrocious behavior of the Byelorussian police during the execution of the Jews of Borissow, Stankievich returned to the city and received a promotion to the leadership of the entire Baranovichi oblast to the southwest of Minsk as reward for the successful completion of the gruesome operation.<sup>121</sup> Baranovichi, the second largest city in Byelorussia, was home to approximately 15,000 Jewish citizens when Stankievich assumed control of the city's administration in early spring 1942. Another 50,000 Jews lived in the regions of the oblast outside of the city proper.<sup>122</sup> Just as in Borissow, Stankievich immediately began organizing a Jewish ghetto in the poorest section of the city in preparation for the mass murder of the region's Jewish population.<sup>123</sup>

Emanuel Jasiuk, "Stankievich's deputy" in Vorkommando Moskau, had been recruited while working with the Byelorussian committee in Warsaw before Operation Barbarossa began.<sup>124</sup> He traveled with the vanguard unit of Einsatzgruppe B as far as Baranovichi oblast, where he worked for the SD before being appointed by the German administration as the burgomaster of the region surrounding the nearby town of Kletsk.<sup>125</sup> Jasiuk and Stankievich had similar backgrounds. Both men came from wealthy families, spent time abroad, and fluently spoke several languages. They were also classmates at Vilno University, a center of Byelorussian nationalist activism at that time.<sup>126</sup> When the Red Army invaded the Polish kresy in September 1939, Jasiuk fled west to Warsaw, where he worked on the Byelorussian committee under German control until returning to

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid.; *The Secret War against the Jews*, 497-98.

<sup>122</sup> Loftus and Aarons, *The Secret War against the Jews*, 497-98.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 509.

<sup>125</sup> "Jasiuk, Emanuel. Re: War Criminals," September 19, 1950, 1, NARA, RG 319, IRR, Jasiuk, Emanuel, E 134, B 339.

<sup>126</sup> Lewczyk, "Emanuel (Max) Jasiuk, was. Edward Jasinski, Maj, Mike."

Byelorussia with the Einsatzgruppen in the summer of 1941. Like Stankievich, this highly educated and well-traveled man quickly developed a reputation for cruelty and barbarism.

The inhabitants of the rural region that surrounded the small, provincial town of Kletsk did not initially encounter nearly as many Germans as their neighbors in larger Nieswicz or Baranovichi. In the Kletsk area, Jasiuk and the local auxiliary police were practically the only agents of German authority the local residents encountered for the entire first year of the occupation.<sup>127</sup> Jasiuk was left responsible for selecting and equipping the members of the local police, many of whom had no uniforms, rifles, or training for nearly the entire occupation.<sup>128</sup> As burgomaster, Jasiuk proposed individual candidates for the Byelorussian auxiliary police force, the vast majority of whom were young male peasants.<sup>129</sup>

Jasiuk used this police force to persecute the region's Polish and Jewish population. The local Polish intelligentsia became the first victims of the National Socialist racial ideologies imposed by Jasiuk and his untrained and undisciplined auxiliary police.<sup>130</sup> The redacted portions of a 1951 CIA report summarizing an investigation into his past reveal that Jasiuk had personally "submitted names of Poles living in Nieswicz...who were later shot."<sup>131</sup> He also compiled lists of residents in other towns in the region for execution by the SD in Baranovichi, including several priests.<sup>132</sup> Jasiuk later stated that the only religious leader to be killed in the areas under his control

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<sup>127</sup> Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns*, 329-30.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 330.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 330-31.

<sup>130</sup> "Jasiuk, Emanuel. Re: War Criminals."

<sup>131</sup> Lewczyk, "Emanuel (Max) Jasiuk, was. Edward Jasinski, Maj, Mike."

<sup>132</sup> "Jasiuk, Emanuel. Re: War Criminals."



was his own wife's father, an Orthodox priest, who Jasiuk claimed was shot while visiting the area.<sup>133</sup> After the war Jasiuk testified that neither the German nor the Byelorussian police murdered his father-in-law, but instead the culprits were "Russian Protestants who roamed the hills and came from across the border."<sup>134</sup> It is far more likely that these "Russian Protestants" were partisan assassins targeting Jasiuk's family as a reprisal for his complicity in the persecution of the local populace.

Jasiuk became notorious for ordering massacres of racial and political enemies of the Reich who lived in the area under his authority. In a single day in 1942, approximately 5,000 Jewish residents of the region were massacred under his direction and buried in ditches behind the Arinskaya Church in Kletsk.<sup>135</sup> Jasiuk later painted himself as an unwitting pawn who was powerless to resist. In 1951, a CIA investigator reported that Jasiuk stated "that everyone worked together...and that they were helpless to oppose the Germans."<sup>136</sup> However, as Rein reveals, the population of Kletsk saw almost no Germans during the first year of the occupation.<sup>137</sup> Jasiuk himself was the architect of these murders, and the police forces under his control were the executioners. In Kletsk, Emanuel Jasiuk wielded remarkable power over the lives of the region's inhabitants, personally selecting both the members of the police and the victims of their persecution. After several years of trusted service to the German administration, Jasiuk rose to become the burgomaster of the entire Stolpce district.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Lewczyk, "Emanuel (Max) Jasiuk, was. Edward Jasinski, Maj, Mike, 12.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Munoz and Romanko, *Hitler's White Russians*, 453.

<sup>136</sup> Lewczyk, "Emanuel (Max) Jasiuk, was. Edward Jasinski, Maj, Mike," 11.

<sup>137</sup> Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns*, 330.

<sup>138</sup> Lewczyk, "Emanuel (Max) Jasiuk, was. Edward Jasinski, Maj, Mike," 10.

Several other Byelorussian collaborators appointed as local burgomasters by the Germans also became heavily involved in the persecution and murder of the political and racial targets of Nazi ideology, while many future leaders of the Byelorussian Central Council worked as Vertrauensleute in the Baranovichi area. Jan Avdziej, an active member of the Byelorussian committees in both Berlin and Warsaw, traveled to Baranovichi with the advancing German forces in the immediate aftermath of the invasion. Like Jasiuk, Avdziej was transferred to the SD, where he quickly revealed his sympathy for the anti-Polish and antisemitic tenets of National Socialist ideology.<sup>139</sup> The first of the discriminatory acts for which he became notorious in Baranovichi was the dismissal of Polish civil servants from administrative posts in the district. Avdziej also caused the arrests of an untold number of the Polish intelligentsia of the region, including “professors, priests, [and] former military personnel.”<sup>140</sup> He knew the area well, for Baranovichi lay only seventy kilometers from his hometown of Stolpce, and only fifty kilometers from Nieswicz, where his brother Alexander was serving the German administration as the town’s burgomaster.<sup>141</sup> Drawing upon his deep familiarity with the residents of the region, Avdziej compiled a list of 120 members of the local Polish intelligentsia and played an active role in the arrest and execution of these individuals.<sup>142</sup> Avdziej earned the trust of the German authorities through his zealous work with the SD, and in November 1941 he was selected by the German civil administration to become the burgomaster of his hometown of Stolpce before being promoted to head the entire

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<sup>139</sup> Schwartz, “Report of Investigation: Awdziej, Jan,” 3.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

Nieswicz district. As burgomaster of the region, Avdziej helped to organize the mass execution of several thousand of the region's Jewish inhabitants.<sup>143</sup>

Juri Sobolewski, Avdziej's predecessor as the mayor of Stolpce, collaborated with both the invading Soviet forces in 1939 and the representatives of the Third Reich during the German occupation. Sobolewski had been a political rival and a "personal enemy" of Ostrowski's before the war, but after the German invasion of the Soviet Union Sobolewski joined Ostrowski's faction as they allied themselves with the Third Reich in the hopes of exploiting the situation to further their own ambitions.<sup>144</sup> This wealthy, opportunistic former deputy to the Polish Sejm had cravenly organized a welcoming committee to greet the Red Army when it invaded the region in mid-September 1939, and when the Wehrmacht arrived in the summer of 1941, he began collaborating with the German occupation.<sup>145</sup> Sobolewski's warm reception for the invading Soviet forces in the fall of 1939 had not protected him from incarceration for his youthful activism as a Byelorussian nationalist opposed to Soviet rule of his homeland; he was imprisoned by the Soviet authorities until German forces overran Stolpce and reinstated him as mayor. German authorities quickly promoted Sobolewski to the position of burgomaster of the larger city of Baranovichi, and Avdziej succeeded him as mayor of Stolpce.

Sobolewski denied that either his escape or his appointments were due to direct German intervention. He claimed that "during the confusion of the attack and the air raids which were going on, the wall of his prison cell was blown away."<sup>146</sup> The heavysset, aging

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Good, "Changed: George Sabolewski, was: Alexanderovitch Sokolowski, Alexei Sokolovsky, August 2, 1951," 4.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>146</sup> "Internal Security Report on George Sabolewski, December 20, 1951," 3-4.

mayor implausibly testified that he climbed through this convenient hole in the wall of his prison cell, simply walked “into the German lines,” and then “resumed his duties as mayor of Stolpce” as if he had only been returning from a brief holiday.<sup>147</sup> Shortly after his release from prison, the German authorities transferred Sobolewski to Baranovichi, where he served as burgomaster from July 1941 until June 1943. Postwar FBI investigations into his past revealed that during his tenure as burgomaster of Baranovichi, Sobolewski became responsible for innumerable “actions of brutality,” worked closely with the Gestapo, and was integral in the persecution of the city’s Jewish and Polish communities.<sup>148</sup>

In June 1943 Sobolewski moved to Minsk in order to replace Ermachenko as head of the Byelorussian aid organization established by Kube.<sup>149</sup> The sycophantic Ermachenko had occupied the top position in the organization since his appointment by Rosenberg in October 1941, and his influence had expanded further upon his appointment as Kube’s personal “man of confidence” in June 1942.<sup>150</sup> At the same time, Kube named Ermachenko as the “supreme commandant” of several newly created, irregular anti-partisan units organized along the lines of the *Freikorps* of post-WWI Germany.<sup>151</sup> Ermachenko’s ambitions were so great that he “saw himself as no less than the future leader of Byelorussia,” but the ascendant career of “Herr Jawohl” came to an

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<sup>147</sup> “Internal Security Report on George Sabolewski, December 20, 1951,” 3-4.

<sup>148</sup> “Office Memorandum on George Sabolewski, from SAC, New York to Director, FBI, October 18, 1951,” 1, NARA, RG 65, FBI, Sobolewski, George, E A1-136AB, B 129; Good, “Changed: George Sabolewski, was: Alexanderovitch Sokolowski, Alexei Sokolovsky, August 2, 1951,” 11, NARA, RG 65, FBI, Sobolewski, George, E A1-136AB, B 129.

<sup>149</sup> Good, “Changed: George Sabolewski, was: Alexanderovitch Sokolowski, Alexei Sokolovsky, August 2, 1951,” 6.

<sup>150</sup> Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns*, 148-49.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 295.

abrupt end the following year.<sup>152</sup> In spring 1943 Ermachenko was arrested and tortured in the cellars of the SD headquarters in Minsk for accusations of corruption and high treason.<sup>153</sup> Although Ermachenko had made no secret of the fact that he had thrown lavish parties, sent money to his family abroad, and “done whatever he pleased” with the funds raised by the Byelorussian aid organization, he was eventually released under the condition that he return to his home in Prague and retire from political activity of any kind.<sup>154</sup> Meanwhile, the Byelorussian anti-partisan units created under Ermachenko had grown to a reported 15,000 volunteers due to the recruiting and organizing work of energetic and efficient collaborators such as Boris Ragula and Francizek Kushel, the chief of the Byelorussian police forces in Minsk.<sup>155</sup>

Like Sobolewski, Ragula claimed that he escaped from a Soviet prison in June 1941 without help from the German authorities.<sup>156</sup> After the war, none of the members of the BCC wished to admit that the German forces had released them from prison in order to collaborate with the Third Reich. In September 1938, Ragula received notice that he had been drafted as a reservist in the Polish Army.<sup>157</sup> He applied himself with zeal and graduated from the reserve officers’ training course in June 1939, becoming a lieutenant in command of a platoon of approximately sixty soldiers.<sup>158</sup> In his memoirs, Ragula described his capture by German forces in mid-September 1939 and how favorably

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 144, 151.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 148, 151.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 295.

<sup>156</sup> “Belorussian Émigré Organizations: Major Boris Ragula, February 7, 1951,” 3, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Ragula, Boris, E ZZ-18, B 104, 1 of 2.

<sup>157</sup> Boris Ragula, *Against the Current: The Memoirs of Boris Ragula* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005), 17.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 19-22.

impressed he had been by his first encounter with a German officer: “To my surprise, he shook my hand and offered me a cigarette. When he learned that I was a Belarusian national he asked me why I was fighting the Germans, who supported the Belarusian people. I had no answer.”<sup>159</sup>

Ragula claimed that he escaped from German custody, evaded the Soviet border guards, and made his way back to his hometown of Navahrudak, approximately 150 kilometers west of Minsk.<sup>160</sup> The young man had learned German in high school and was able to obtain a position teaching German at the local *Gymnasium*. However, he was arrested by the NKVD on suspicion of subversive activities in January 1941.<sup>161</sup> Like Sobolewski, Ragula claimed that he escaped without German assistance and somehow managed simply to “get behind the German lines.”<sup>162</sup> In reality, the invading German forces freed many political prisoners of the Soviet authorities who became crucial collaborators during the German occupation.<sup>163</sup> After his release, Ragula traveled back to Navahrudak, where he immediately began working as the interpreter and liaison officer between the German military administration and the local officials selected by Ostrowski in mid-July 1941.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 35-41.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 46, 48.

<sup>162</sup> “Belorussian Émigré Organizations: Major Boris Ragula, February 7, 1951,” 3.

<sup>163</sup> Bert P. Stickler, “Internal Security Report: Changed: George Bartaschewic, Was. George Bartaschewich, George Bartashevick, Georg (Jurij) Bartaschewitz,” June 10, 1953, 3, NARA, RG 65, FBI, Bartaschewicz, George, E A1-136AB, B 44.

<sup>164</sup> “Belorussian Émigré Organizations: Major Boris Ragula, February 7, 1951,” 3; Ragula, *Against the Current*, 64.

Intelligent and ambitious, the multilingual Ragula quickly ingratiated himself to his German boss and “developed an easy working relationship” with him.<sup>165</sup> He received many special privileges and favors as a result of his eager cooperation. Ragula and Traub, his German supervisor, frequently traveled the region together, and the young Byelorussian became responsible for interrogating local citizens suspected of Communist sympathies or activities.<sup>166</sup> Ragula even accompanied his chief on a trip through Germany in April 1942. He recalled that on this trip, Traub “granted me unlimited freedom to explore the cities at which we stopped to rest.”<sup>167</sup> Ragula even was permitted to take a car and drive around the German countryside unescorted.<sup>168</sup> Ragula also taught German at the Navahrudak *Gymnasium*, where he enthusiastically organized Byelorussian youths and trained them in the “military arts.”<sup>169</sup>

Meanwhile, Kushel had become the highest-ranking local police leader in German-occupied Byelorussia.<sup>170</sup> Although Kushel had only held the official title of “chief military advisor” to Ermachenko for the Byelorussian *Freikorps*, it was he who had handled the military affairs of these underequipped and poorly trained Byelorussian anti-partisan units.<sup>171</sup> One of the few survivors of the massacre of thousands of Polish officers by Soviet forces in the Katyn forest in 1940, Kushel had been released from imprisonment in NKVD headquarters in Moscow in June 1941. When he returned to Minsk, becoming the Byelorussian chief of the city’s local police force and the rector of

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<sup>165</sup> “Boris Ragula/Boris Rahulia,” October 27, 1948, 1, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Ragula, Boris, E ZZ-18, B 104, 1 of 2; Ragula, *Against the Current*, 64.

<sup>166</sup> Ragula, *Against the Current*, 68.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> Munoz and Romanko, *Hitler’s White Russians*, 449.

<sup>171</sup> Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns*, 352.

the city's Byelorussian police school after the German invasion.<sup>172</sup> In summer 1943, SS-Gruppenführer und Generalleutnant der Polizei Kurt von Gottberg promoted Kushel, making him the chief of the entire Byelorussian auxiliary police force.<sup>173</sup> Ostensibly, Kushel now exercised control over every aspect of the Byelorussian police, but these auxiliary forces remained under the control of German police officials.<sup>174</sup> Kushel's main task in his new position was actually the dissemination of German propaganda.<sup>175</sup>

1943 became an important year for the opportunistic and competitive Byelorussian nationalists. Escalating partisan warfare in Byelorussian territories and the enormous German losses at Stalingrad months earlier caused German planners to consider relying on Byelorussian nationalists on a greater scale.<sup>176</sup> After Ermachenko's arrest, Sobolewski became the head of the Byelorussian aid committee, and on June 27, 1943, a newspaper announcement proclaimed the creation of a new anti-partisan military organization called the Byelorussian Regional Defense (Belaruskaja Krajovaja Abarona, or BKA) and a new council of trusted collaborators (*Vertrauensrat*).<sup>177</sup> Sobolewski, Stankievich, and Ragula all joined the *Vertrauensrat*, created by Kube.<sup>178</sup> The growing threat from the Soviet partisans was the primary reason for the creation of the *Vertrauensrat* and the BKA, but Sobolewski's first months serving as the leader of Generalkommissar Kube's new advisory committee and the head of the aid organization

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<sup>172</sup> Munoz and Romanko, *Hitler's White Russians*, 449.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>177</sup> Munoz and Romanko, *Hitler's White Russians*, 29.

<sup>178</sup> Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns*, 184f.



coincided with increasing violence behind the German lines and more brazen attacks upon German administration authorities in Minsk.<sup>179</sup>

On September 22, 1943, Yelena Mazanik, a young Byelorussian partisan posing as a housemaid in Generalkommissar Kube's home, placed a small time bomb under his bed. The device exploded that night, killing Kube while he slept.<sup>180</sup> In the last months of his life, General Commissioner for Byelorussia Wilhelm Kube had sponsored the creation of a small Byelorussian advisory body as well as the Byelorussian Regional Defense. An ardent Nazi since the 1920s, Kube had little if any sympathy for the nationalist aspirations of the Byelorussians. However, the deteriorating military situation, the growing partisan threat, and the shortage of manpower caused by the casualties of the front lines caused Kube and other German policy makers to pragmatically consider the expansion of local auxiliary forces. Following Kube's assassination, Hitler appointed SS General Kurt von Gottberg as General Commissar for Byelorussia. Rosenberg had wanted to appoint another candidate of his own choosing, but the machinations of Gottlob Berger, the head of the political department of the Ostministerium and "Himmler's man," succeeded in convincing Hitler to name Gottberg as Kube's successor instead.<sup>181</sup> Gottberg's appointment as acting Generalkommissar meant that the SS and police leader was now also the head of the civilian administration, which put Byelorussia completely under the control of the SS. Faced with increasing manpower shortages, a rapidly deteriorating military situation, and the escalating partisan threat, Gottberg

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<sup>179</sup> Ivan S. Lubachko, *Belorussia: Under Soviet Rule, 1917-1957* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1972), 157.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.; Martin Kitchen, *The Third Reich: Charisma and Community* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2008), 257; Henry Sakaida, *Heroines of the Soviet Union, 1941-1945* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2003), 51-52.

<sup>181</sup> Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns*, 167.

formulated plans to exploit Byelorussian nationalist impulses further than his predecessor by creating a local puppet regime that could appeal directly to the population.

Although the Byelorussian collaborators had hoped to take advantage of the German invasion of the USSR as the first step towards an autonomous and ethnically homogenous Byelorussian state built from the ashes of war, German authorities only granted minimal concessions to Byelorussian nationalist aspirations until the tide of the war turned against Germany in 1943. The Byelorussian collaborators had eagerly facilitated the invasion, identified political and racial enemies of the Reich for liquidation, and made themselves complicit in innumerable atrocities during the first years of the German occupation. However, their ambitions remained frustrated. Only after the Red Army regained the offensive and partisan warfare seriously compromised the security of the rear areas of German-occupied Soviet territories did the German authorities consider supporting limited Byelorussian nationalist aspirations in order to mobilize the Byelorussian population for the German war effort. The racial ideology of National Socialism held the Slavic Byelorussians in only slightly less contempt than their Russian cousins, and German policy makers intended to use these men merely as pawns in order to relieve their administrative burdens and facilitate the brutal exploitation planned for the conquered territories. However, the ambitious collaborators took advantage of every opportunity to expand their power, and for decades after the war these men cited their appointments by the SS to validate their claims to represent a legitimate government-in-exile.

### **PART 3**

#### **“WE WERE WILLING TO COLLABORATE”: THE BEGINNING OF THE BYELORUSSIAN CENTRAL COUNCIL, 1943-1944**

The appointment of SS and police leader Kurt von Gottberg as Generalkommissar for Byelorussia after the assassination of Kube marked a turning point in the relationship between the forces of the German occupation and its Byelorussian collaborators. The exigencies of the war caused Gottberg to call for the creation of an ostensibly autonomous Byelorussian governing body, which would transmit German edicts to the population and execute German policies as if they had formulated them independently. Gottberg created the Byelorussian Central Council in December 1943, and although its members publicly espoused Byelorussian nationalist sentiments to the population, their obsequious behavior toward their German sponsors undermined their claims to autonomy and independence. The Byelorussian collaborators eagerly acceded to Gottberg's proposal, accepted his complete control of their organization, and energetically began propagandizing and mobilizing the population in support of the German war effort. The members of the BCC continued ingratiating themselves to their German sponsors until the Reich crumbled, when they abandoned their erstwhile benefactors in order to save themselves and preserve the nominally independent governing body they had formed under the sponsorship of the SS.

Appointed to combat the escalating threat from the growing partisan movement responsible for the assassination of his predecessor, Gottberg immediately expanded the use of auxiliary Byelorussian paramilitary forces to combat the partisans. Shortly after Gottberg's appointment, Gebietskommissar Traub in Navahrudak requested that Ragula

meet him at his home to discuss the increased German interest in utilizing Byelorussian paramilitary forces to counter the growing partisan threat. Traub explained that Generalkommissar Gottberg had decided to create a volunteer Byelorussian cavalry unit of approximately 150 men stationed in Navahrudak, which would be known as the Eskadron (squadron).<sup>182</sup> Ragula was thrilled, for he had been putting his students through military training in the hopes that they might form the nucleus of an independent Byelorussian army in the future. The charismatic young teacher knew that he would have no trouble organizing the necessary volunteers from among his students. He recalled how “within a week, we had 150 men ready to join the Belarusian Eskadron. Our soldiers wore grey German uniforms with the Belarusian insignia (a double cross) and the red-and-white flag emblazoned on the collars and sleeves.”<sup>183</sup> These volunteers would soon form the core of a larger Byelorussian military force created by Gottberg for absorption into the German military apparatus.

Although Gottberg had earned a reputation for cruelty during his career and believed in simply “quelling resistance with iron and blood,” he chose to assume a conciliatory posture with the Byelorussian collaborators in order to cultivate support for the harsh and unpopular German occupation.<sup>184</sup> In the weeks following his appointment as Generalkommissar, Gottberg began meeting with Sobolewski in order to discuss the possibilities of expanding cooperation between the SS and the ambitious Byelorussian nationalists. Although Gottberg believed that the Byelorussian people did not truly exist as a nation and were merely “the invention of Berlin armchair politicians,” in December

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<sup>182</sup> Ragula, *Against the Current*, 74-75.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>184</sup> Lubachko, *Belorussia*, 157. Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns*, 166.

1943 he decided to create a Byelorussian puppet government in order to act as a mouthpiece for German propaganda and facilitate the mobilization of Byelorussian military volunteers to aid in the foundering German war effort.<sup>185</sup>

On the evening of December 19, 1943, Sobolewski sent an urgent telegram to Ostrowski in Baranovichi, where he had fled after watching the Red Army reoccupy the territories of eastern Byelorussia he had recently organized for the German administration. Although the telegram did not specify the reason, it urged Ostrowski to come to Minsk immediately. Ostrowski later wrote, "I was struck by the fact that the telegram had been received through the District Commissariat and brought to me by an official of the Commissariat, Mr. Michke. This was at 11 at night."<sup>186</sup> Michke contributed to the sense of mystery and urgency. He did not reveal Sobolewski's reason for summoning the former professor to Minsk, but when Ostrowski declared that he would be able to take the next passenger train out of Baranovichi at noon the following day, Michke replied that he had already arranged a place for him on a German military train passing through Baranovichi at three o'clock in the morning and volunteered to send a car to take Ostrowski to meet the train.<sup>187</sup>

The following morning at eight o'clock Ostrowski was standing in Sobolewski's apartment in Minsk, where he learned about the recent discussions with Gottberg for the first time. The two proceeded to a meeting of the leading Byelorussian collaborators, the chief of the Minsk SD, and the head of personnel for the German administration in the

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<sup>185</sup> Kurt von Gottberg, in Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns*, 188f; Good, "Changed: George Sabolewski, was: Alexanderovitch Sokolowski, Alexei Sokolovsky, August 2, 1951," 6.

<sup>186</sup> Ostrowski, "The Belorussian Central Rada (Council): Past and Present," 5.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

offices of the Byelorussian Vertrauensrat.<sup>188</sup> There they listened to an address by Nikolai Shkelenok, a lawyer who had been a member of the Byelorussian central committee in Berlin before returning to Minsk with the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941.<sup>189</sup> Shkelenok explained that he and Sobolewski had been discussing the deteriorating situation in Byelorussia with Gottberg, and the Generalkommissar had finally decided that it was in the administration's interest to cultivate limited Byelorussian nationalist aspirations by reorganizing the advisory council into the Byelorussian Central Council. The BCC would assume minor administrative functions and was expected to nurture anti-Soviet Byelorussian nationalism in the population in order to mobilize support for the Third Reich's war effort.

Ostrowski later described how the SS authorities at this meeting then casually drafted the statutes for this "independent Belorussian agency."<sup>190</sup> These consisted of several main points, many of which specifically reserved for Gottberg and the German authorities the ultimate responsibility for the direction of the council, its military forces, and its membership. The charter provided that the president of the BCC could be "assigned and/or removed from his post by the General Commissioner," and although the council's president held the power to appoint the other members of the BCC, this could only be done "with the approval of the General Commissioner."<sup>191</sup> The charter stated that the mission of the BCC would be "to mobilize all the manpower available from the Byelorussian people for the annihilation of the communists," and any other

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 5. Munoz and Romanko, *Hitler's White Russians*, 446; Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns*, 96.

<sup>190</sup> Ostrowski, "The Belorussian Central Rada (Council): Past and Present," 5.

<sup>191</sup> "Statute of the Byelorussian Central Council," in Munoz and Romanko, *Hitler's White Russians*, 30.

administrative tasks would have to be accomplished “within the framework of German rule.”<sup>192</sup> Although Ostrowski claimed that the “authoritative” and “independent” Byelorussian Central Council had “incomparably greater authority” than the advisory body that preceded it, the German authorities had drafted the statutes of the BCC to express the subservient position of the nascent puppet government to the Third Reich with no room for misunderstanding whatsoever.<sup>193</sup>

The German officers instructed the Byelorussian collaborators to choose a candidate for Gottberg to consider for the leadership of the new council. A meeting to finalize the arrangements for the creation of the BCC had been scheduled with the Generalkommissar at noon that very day. The small group of ambitious Byelorussian collaborators gathered hastily by the SS in the Minsk offices of the Byelorussian Vertrauensrat could not agree amongst themselves, but they narrowed the choices to Ostrowski, Sobolewski, or Shkelenok.<sup>194</sup> The final decision on a candidate for the presidency of the council was postponed until noon, when these three Byelorussian leaders were to meet with Gottberg in order to hear the Generalkommissar read them his final draft of the BCC charter.<sup>195</sup> While they waited for Gottberg to arrive, the German authorities and the Byelorussian collaborators discussed the deteriorating situation in the region and the potential for the council. Ostrowski took the opportunity to upbraid the Germans for not exploiting the potential of local collaboration more extensively earlier, telling them that “their proposal had come two years late.” After complaining that closer collaboration between the Third Reich and his cadre of Byelorussian nationalists had not

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Ostrowski, “The Belorussian Central Rada (Council): Past and Present,” 5.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 5-7.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 6.

come soon enough, Ostrowski quickly agreed to the German officials' suggestions for increased cooperation. He also made this relationship unmistakably clear to American officials years later: "We were willing to collaborate," Ostrowski stated plainly to American intelligence agents in the early 1950s.<sup>196</sup>

Gottberg had been detained, and the German authorities pressed Ostrowski, Sobolewski, and Shkelenok to suggest which one of them should assume leadership of the council. According to Ostrowski, the others proposed his name for this post, happily accepting the offices of the vice presidency for themselves.<sup>197</sup> Ostrowski later depicted this event as yet another moment in which he reluctantly shouldered the burden of leadership against his own inclinations. He claimed that although the Germans "willingly accepted my candidature," he initially refused for "reasons of health."<sup>198</sup> Ostrowski's own account of events attempts to create the impression that his rival collaborators and the German authorities practically begged him to accept the nomination. Ostrowski wrote:

It is true that I was looking well at the time, and they said that they only wished they had my health at my age. I advanced a further argument, that I worked at the front all of the time...and that I would not be able to work with the...persons in the civil administration.... In reply to this I was promised that I would not have to have anything to do with the [civilian administration] and that I would deal exclusively with...servicemen in the Eichergeistdienst [sic] (Gestapo Security Service).<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>197</sup> Good, "Changed: George Sabolewski, was: Alexanderovitch Sokolowski, Alexei Sokolovsky, August 2, 1951," 8; Ostrowski, "The Belorussian Central Rada (Council): Past and Present," 6.

<sup>198</sup> Ostrowski, "The Belorussian Central Rada (Council): Past and Present," 6.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.



Ostrowski still harbored resentment towards the representatives of the German civilian administration for favoring Ermachenko upon his arrival in Minsk in the autumn of 1941, and he remained unwilling to work with them. However, after establishing that the council would operate under the auspices of the SS rather than the civilian administration, Ostrowski agreed that “it was my duty to my people to accept this position.”<sup>200</sup> In reality, however, Ostrowski and his fellow collaborators were acceding to the will of the German authorities rather than the Byelorussian people, as they claimed.

The trio finally met with Gottberg in his office late that evening, where he read the final charter of the BCC to its newly appointed leaders. Although the statutes of the charter explicitly stated that the council’s primary purpose was the mobilization of the Byelorussian population in order to assist the German war effort against the Soviet Union, Ostrowski asserted that after Gottberg had “read aloud to us the [BCC] statutes...I again brought up the question of Belorussian armed forces and he agreed to my demand.”<sup>201</sup> This is self-aggrandizing, however, for Gottberg and the German authorities had only considered the creation of the council for this very purpose, and the Byelorussian nationalists were hardly in a position to demand a thing from their German sponsors. Gottberg saw the BCC merely as “an organ that can be used to influence the population....especially for fighting partisan bands.”<sup>202</sup> Although Ostrowski presented himself as a staunch and fearless advocate of Byelorussian nationalist interests, the BCC was simply a creation of the SS intended for the exploitation of Byelorussian nationalist

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>202</sup> “Über die Besprechung mit dem stellvertretenden Generalkommissar von Weissruthenien, SS-Gruppenführer v. Gottberg, am 1.3.1944,” March 10, 1944, 6-7. Translated by the author. Institut für Zeitgeschichte: Munich, Germany (hereafter IfZ), MA 545, Gottberg, Kurt von.

sentiments in order to improve German-Byelorussian cooperation and mobilize Byelorussian recruits for anti-partisan paramilitary forces under German command.

On the following day, December 21, 1943, improvised fanfare accompanied the public declaration of the Byelorussian Central Council.<sup>203</sup> Generalkommissar Gottberg announced the creation of the council, decreed the beginning of a massive recruiting drive for the BKA, and read the statutes of the charter to the gathered crowd. Only then did he introduce President Ostrowski. At the time of the hastily organized declaration, Ostrowski, Sobolewski, and Shkelenok comprised the entire membership of the BCC, but they quickly began selecting individuals to join them.<sup>204</sup> One of the first of the posts to be filled was the head of the military section of the council. Ostrowski, Sobolewski, and Shkelenok invited Francizek Kushel to join the council and to mobilize Byelorussian forces for incorporation into the German war effort.<sup>205</sup> Kushel had much practical experience with this role, having recruited and organized irregular anti-partisan units for the Germans in the summer of 1942.

Organizing the fifteen-member council and its regional representatives took the men approximately one month. On January 22, 1944, the council held a public meeting, which was attended by Byelorussian civilians, Orthodox clergy, and German officials.<sup>206</sup> At this meeting, Ostrowski publicly announced the membership of the council and called for the organization of a Byelorussian army to support the Wehrmacht in its fight against the Red Army.<sup>207</sup> Besides the president and the two vice presidents, the BCC consisted of

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<sup>203</sup> Ostrowski, "The Belorussian Central Rada (Council): Past and Present," 7.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

offices such as “economy and cooperation” and “culture and enlightenment.”<sup>208</sup> Other members oversaw health and medicine, state building, and propaganda.<sup>209</sup> Trusted men were appointed to serve as the regional representatives of the council, such as Stankievich in Baranovich and Ragula in Navahrudak.<sup>210</sup> From the Germans’ point of view, however, the most important office of the newly-created council was certainly the military.

In fact, increasing the use of Byelorussian military forces was the fundamental reason Gottberg created the BCC. As the head of the military office of the council, Kushel wasted little time beginning the mobilization of volunteers for the expansion of the Byelorussian Regional Defense (Belaruskaja Krajovaja Abarona, or BKA). He started organizational work as soon as he was appointed to the council in January 1944, and Gottberg issued an official order to the BCC to begin recruiting men for induction into the BKA at the end of February.<sup>211</sup> Responsibility for this recruitment drive was relegated to the newly-created council in order to exploit the propagandistic value of a Byelorussian governing body issuing the mobilization order for an ostensibly autonomous Byelorussian military.<sup>212</sup> However, even Kushel realized that any propaganda encouraging aspirations of Byelorussian nationalism was actually “nothing more than a political maneuver on the part of the Germans to get the support of the Byelorussian masses.”<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Munoz and Romanko, *Hitler’s White Russians*, 30.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns*, 173; “Memorandum for the Record: Byelorussia (Litsva) Source of Information: General Frantisek Kushal,” October 17, 1952, 3-4, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Kushel, Francis, E ZZ-18, B 76.

<sup>212</sup> Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns*, 173.

<sup>213</sup> “Memorandum for the Record: Byelorussia (Litsva) Source of Information: General Frantisek Kushal,” 3-4.

At the beginning of March, all of the arrangements had been made with the German authorities, and Ostrowski faithfully issued the council's official order for mobilization according to Gottberg's instructions.<sup>214</sup> Under Kushel's direction, the registration of these auxiliary military forces proceeded through regional officers, such as Ragula in Navahrudak and Sobolewski and Shkelenok in Minsk.<sup>215</sup> Conceding that the BCC had no real authority to compel men to enlist, Ostrowski later stated falsely that the council had relied instead upon "the good will of the people" in its recruitment drive for the BKA.<sup>216</sup> In reality, however, Kushel's mobilization efforts depended upon coercion rather than good will. In order to recruit as many enlistees as possible while simultaneously registering potential political opponents with military training, Ostrowski officially ordered the compulsory registration of all former Polish and Red Army officers as well as the total mobilization of Byelorussian men between twenty and thirty-six years; noncompliant citizens and their family members were either jailed or compelled to join at gunpoint.<sup>217</sup> Ostrowski claimed that he and the BCC had stunned their German sponsors with the number of men they quickly enrolled:

The Germans were very skeptical about our undertaking and when I predicted that we could count on the enlistment of 10,000 soldiers, von Gottberg said he did not think the number would exceed 2 to 3 thousand. What was their surprise, when within three days 28,000 people had shown up for induction? Gen. Gottberg congratulated me but asked where he was to find arms and ammunition, inasmuch as he had been counting on 3,000 recruits and had not made preparations for more than 5,000. Where was he to get hold of uniforms? Food? It is true that the difficulties were stupendous, but....forty battalions were organized and disposed of

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<sup>214</sup> Ostrowski, "The Belorussian Central Rada (Council), Past and Present," 7.

<sup>215</sup> Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns*, 355, 384f.

<sup>216</sup> Ostrowski, "The Belorussian Central Rada (Council)," 7.

<sup>217</sup> Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust*, 67. Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns*, 355.

in the areas that were considered to be the most threatened by Red partisans.<sup>218</sup>

The coercive and intimidating methods used by the BCC in their recruiting drive produced results, but they also alienated large sections of the population from the council, whose first decrees had been as brutal many of their German sponsors' edicts. Kushel also bragged about the numbers of enlistees registered by these merciless tactics, claiming that over forty battalions were organized totaling approximately 40,000 men.<sup>219</sup> Although the exact figures remain obscure, Kushel's estimate appears to correctly reflect the initial numbers of men counted at the various regional induction centers. However, Gottberg cited the difficulty of outfitting and equipping such a large force in order to keep some semblance of Byelorussia's industrial productivity alive. When the organization of the BKA was completed at the end of April 1944, more than 20,000 officers and men were divided into 34 battalions.<sup>220</sup> A month later five of Kushel's Byelorussian police units were also transferred into the BKA, but "the core" of the new military force was drawn from the volunteers of the anti-partisan Byelorussian Eskadron organized by Ragula in the Navahrudak region.<sup>221</sup>

Despite the successful mobilization drive in March and April 1944, problems of training and equipping the new recruits remained. Kushel himself acknowledged that although they had registered several thousand troops, there were too few experienced Byelorussian officers available.<sup>222</sup> According to Kushel, the officers and regional heads

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<sup>218</sup> Ostrowski, "The Belorussian Central Rada (Council), Past and Present," 7-8.

<sup>219</sup> "Memorandum for the Record: Byelorussia (Litsva) Source of Information: General Frantisek Kushal," 3-4.

<sup>220</sup> Munoz and Romanko, *Hitler's White Russians*, 53.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>222</sup> Francizek Kushel, in Munoz and Romanko, *Hitler's White Russians*, 55.

of the BKA were either young men with little training or experience, or seasoned and well-trained older men lacking the necessary vigor.<sup>223</sup> Moreover, the new recruits had only undergone brief training and possessed inadequate and insufficient arms. Initially, the BKA's German sponsors supplied each battalion with only one hundred used Italian rifles, or one weapon for every five or six men.<sup>224</sup> The German authorities only properly armed the BKA at the end of April 1944.<sup>225</sup>

Although the BCC portrayed the BKA as the beginning of an autonomous Byelorussian army, in reality these forces remained completely at the disposal of the Germans. Kushel claimed that the mobilization in March and April 1944 represented "the first instance in history when the Byelorussian people were called to form a Byelorussian Army by Byelorussian leadership."<sup>226</sup> Munoz and Romanko explain that although the battalions of the BKA developed "a strongly pronounced Byelorussian national character," these forces remained "entirely at the disposal of the German police."<sup>227</sup> The initiative for the creation of the BKA came directly from Gottberg, and the BCC merely executed his order to begin the recruiting drive. Moreover, the BKA remained subservient to the German command throughout its existence.<sup>228</sup> Organized to meet the escalating partisan threat, few battalions ever actually saw such combat. The formations of the BKA were mostly used for agricultural work and guard duty, and desertions occurred on a large scale. In spite of the utter dependency of the BKA on the Germans and the poor performance of the battalions, the propaganda value of the BKA "influenced

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 52, 55.

<sup>224</sup> Munoz and Romanko, *Hitler's White Russians*, 56.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid. 57.

<sup>226</sup> Kushel, in Munoz and Romanko, *Hitler's White Russians*, 61-62.

<sup>227</sup> Munoz and Romanko, *Hitler's White Russians*, 50.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

the growth of a national consciousness in many Byelorussians even years after the end of the war.<sup>229</sup>

The Byelorussian Central Council worked hard to convince the population of their legitimacy and autonomy, staging specious celebrations of independence and convening a national congress. However, even these efforts showed deference to the German authorities. Programs for the celebrations of independence in March 1944 were printed in German for the event's sponsors, and so many personal invitations had to be sent to German officials that a German-language invitation was printed on the stationery of the president of the Byelorussian Central Council.<sup>230</sup> In June 1944, as the Germans prepared to retreat in the face of the advancing Red Army, approximately 1,000 hand-picked Byelorussian collaborators met in the Minsk Opera House, under the supervision of the SD and with "the thunder of thousands of Soviet artillery guns" echoing in the background.<sup>231</sup> This was the highly mythologized farce known as the Second All-Byelorussian Congress, which members of the BCC would misrepresent to depict themselves as the legitimate and democratically elected Byelorussian government-in-exile after the war. Here these delegates (selected by the members of the BCC and approved by their German sponsors) met to declare their support for the Byelorussian Central Council and reiterate their commitment to the Third Reich in spite of the imminent collapse of the German military in Byelorussia. The congress had been convened with every bit of pomp and ceremony possible in the face of the deteriorating situation in the Byelorussian capital. The Minsk Opera House had been festooned with

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 61-62.

<sup>230</sup> "Einladung des Präsidents des Weissruthenischen Zentralrates." Translated by the author. IfZ, MA 545, Gottberg, Kurt von.

<sup>231</sup> Munoz and Romanko, *Hitler's White Russians*, 399.

bunting, and nationalist orchestral music dramatically punctuated the ceremony. The members of the BCC delivered speeches on the great strides taken for Byelorussian nationalism and independence under the beneficent sponsorship of the German occupation. Although Soviet artillery could be heard as the Red Army approached Minsk, Ostrowski and his lieutenants pontificated upon the magnificent performance of the recently created Byelorussian military forces in their heroic struggles against Soviet partisan forces.<sup>232</sup>

Ostrowski took full advantage of the opportunity afforded him by the convocation of this congress. He surprised his German sponsors, telling the gathered delegates, “I consider that the [BCC] has carried out its mission successfully, and now the future fate of Belorussia is in your hands.”<sup>233</sup> Before the German authorities could protest, the congress voted unanimously to reorganize the council and to reinstate Ostrowski as its president. A biography of Ostrowski (published from his own home and almost certainly ghostwritten by Ostrowski himself) states, “it is not surprising that Prof. Ostrowski was nominated for this high and important post.”<sup>234</sup> It certainly is not surprising in the least, considering that Ostrowski and the BCC hand-selected the delegates and his was the only name they nominated.<sup>235</sup> Ostrowski and the BCC used this poor imitation of democracy to portray themselves as the justly elected government of Byelorussia. The congress triumphantly declared that the reconstituted BCC was now “the only legal representative

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<sup>232</sup> Ostrowski, “The Belorussian Central Rada (Council): Past and Present,” 8-9.

<sup>233</sup> Ostrowski, “The Belorussian Central Rada (Council): Past and Present,” 8.

<sup>234</sup> A. Warawa, in Kalush, *In the Service of the People*, 78-79.

<sup>235</sup> Ostrowski, “The Belorussian Central Rada (Council): Past and Present,” 8; Kalush, *In the Service of the People*, 52-53.



of the Belorussian people.”<sup>236</sup> Postwar propaganda echoed the words of this resolution, declaring that the BCC and its president represented “the only legal representative of the Byelorussian people and their country.”<sup>237</sup>

Describing the closing of the day’s events, Ostrowski undermined all declarations of independence that had just been issued: “At the conclusion the orchestra played the Belorussian anthem, and of course it was decided to send a telegram to Hitler, since that was required procedure at the time.”<sup>238</sup> This telegram personally assured Hitler that “...all Belarusian people and BKA military formations will unflinchingly fight alongside the German troops against the common enemy – Bolshevism.”<sup>239</sup> The very next day the Red Army was beginning its advance on Minsk, and German forces began to retreat.<sup>240</sup> The BKA did not fight “unflinchingly” as Ostrowski had pledged, but fled westward with the retreating German forces before being reincorporated as a unit of the Waffen-SS and deployed in France. Provisions were made by the SD for the evacuation of the council members, their regional representatives, and Kushel’s auxiliary police forces. On June 29 a special train carried 800 Byelorussian collaborators and their families to Berlin, where they continued to work for the Third Reich until its final weeks.<sup>241</sup>

In the three years of German occupation, the German authorities and the Byelorussian nationalists had both sought to exploit one another for their own ends. The

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<sup>236</sup> Ostrowski, “The Belorussian Central Rada (Council): Past and Present,” 9.

<sup>237</sup> Niko Nakashidze, *The Truth About A.B.N.* (Munich: 1960), 54.

<sup>238</sup> Ostrowski, “The Belorussian Central Rada (Council): Past and Present,” 9.

<sup>239</sup> “Drugi Usebelarusky Kangres,” in Olga Baranova, *Nationalism, Anti-Bolshevism or the Will to Survive: Forms of Belarusian Interaction with the German Occupation Authorities, 1941-1944* (Saarbrücken, Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2010), 205.

<sup>240</sup> Ostrowski, “The Belorussian Central Rada (Council): Past and Present,” 9.

<sup>241</sup> Baranova, *Nationalism, Anti-Bolshevism or the Will to Survive*, 205.

collaborators had cooperated closely and eagerly with their sponsors and had deeply involved themselves in many of the most egregious atrocities committed during the years of the Third Reich. While the German authorities toyed with the nationalist aspirations of these collaborators and played them against one another, the Byelorussians seized opportunities to further their own initiatives and ambitions. The foundation of the Byelorussian Central Council was the culmination of this relationship, and its members served their German sponsors well while advancing their own interests. They mobilized thousands of recruits for incorporation into the German military apparatus and faithfully propagandized on behalf of the Third Reich. The BCC remained in the service of the SS even after the advancing Red Army forced the Germans to retreat from Byelorussian territory and the dream of establishing an independent Byelorussian state after a German victory had evaporated completely. The members of the BCC fled to Germany with their sponsors, and they continued to operate the council in the ruins of Berlin in 1944-45 and in the Displaced Persons camps of the postwar period. Although the goals of the Byelorussian nationalists had often conflicted with National Socialist philosophy and German occupation policy, they shared with the Nazis a virulent hatred of the Soviet Union. Anti-Communist fervor in the West would soon enable the Byelorussian collaborators to escape justice for their crimes.

**PART 4**  
**“TO ORGANIZE A ‘CRUSADE’ AGAINST RUSSIA”:  
NAZI COLLABORATORS IN THE ASHES OF EUROPE, 1944-1950**

As the Red Army bombed Minsk on June 29, 1944, hundreds of Byelorussian collaborators and their families scrambled for a place on a special train to Berlin arranged by Sturmbannführer Sepp, chief of the city’s SD.<sup>242</sup> After arriving in Germany, the members of the Byelorussian Central Council competed for their hosts’ attentions. They undertook the dissemination of Nazi propaganda and assisted in the deployment of Byelorussian guerrilla parachutists behind the advancing Soviet lines. From the Reich capital, Ostrowski and his colleagues tried to preserve the national character of the Byelorussian Regional Defense (BKA) by preventing its absorption into other multinational armed forces. However, the remnants of the BKA soon became incorporated into the Waffen-SS. Sensing that the Third Reich was crumbling around them, the anti-Communist leaders of the BCC sought to preserve their authority while avoiding capture by the rapidly advancing Red Army. In the spring of 1945, the Byelorussian units marshaled by the SS surrendered to the American military, and the leaders of the Byelorussian Central Council disappeared from the capital of the crumbling Reich. Attempting to distance themselves from the Nazis, the members of the BCC met in several Displaced Persons (DP) camps in Germany after the war’s end in order to rename their organization and declare its commitment to democratic principles of government. Several prominent collaborators assumed positions of leadership in these DP camps, while others found employment as translators, teachers, physicians, and

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<sup>242</sup> Ostrowski, “The Belorussian Central Rada (Council): Past and Present,” 9.

informants. Eager to continue their struggle for independence against the Soviet Union, the opportunistic Byelorussian Nazi collaborators sought new sponsors in their crusade for an independent Byelorussia free from Soviet hegemony. Some Byelorussian collaborators wanted as war criminals developed close relationships with American intelligence operatives, and although top officials were well aware of allegations of criminal collaboration with the Nazis leveled at these men, they continued to work with them and helped them to immigrate to the United States. Most of the leadership of the Byelorussian Central Council came to the US within five years after the end of the war, as American intelligence hoped to exploit the Third Reich's Byelorussian collaborators in the covert struggles of the Cold War.

After evacuating Minsk in July 1944, the leaders of the BCC established themselves in Berlin. They immediately began portraying themselves as a legitimate government-in-exile entitled to diplomatic privileges and dignified receptions. Reflecting the self-aggrandizing tendencies of the BCC, Sobolewski was indignant that no official reception from the leaders of the Third Reich awaited the council members when they disembarked from their train in July 1944, and the men were further disappointed to find that their hotel reservations had not been made for them.<sup>243</sup> However, the members of the BCC soon found opulent accommodations, establishing themselves at the luxurious Hotel Excelsior.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns*, 177.

<sup>244</sup> Hugh Thomas Forsha, "Internal Security Report: Changed: George Bartaschewic, was: George Bartashevich, Georg Bartashevich, Georg Bartaschewic, Georgi Bartaschwich, Georgij Bartischeiwich," May 13, 1953, 8, NARA, RG 65, FBI, Bartaschewicz, George, E A1-136AB, B 44.

When its members had settled in the bomb-ravaged German capital, the BCC continued its activities amid the internecine quarrels of their German sponsors. The SS had gained paramount control of Byelorussia during the final nine months of the German occupation, but after the retreat from Minsk, Rosenberg and the Ostministerium reasserted their authority over Germany's policy in eastern Europe once again. Dallin describes how Rosenberg, "in a move designed to checkmate Himmler's sudden intrusion into Eastern émigré politics," officially received Ostrowski as the recognized head of state of the legitimate Byelorussian government-in-exile.<sup>245</sup> In October 1944, Rosenberg issued instructions to the BCC prioritizing several assignments for the council. The first and most pressing task was to aid in "the struggle against Bolshevism."<sup>246</sup> To this end, the BCC was instructed to marshal Byelorussian military and guerrilla forces and to disseminate Nazi propaganda among the Byelorussian diaspora living in Germany.

Kushel, the leader of the BKA and the Byelorussian auxiliary police, estimated that over 10,000 Byelorussian soldiers fled before the onslaught of the Soviet war machine with the retreating German forces in June 1944.<sup>247</sup> The German military command reorganized the remnants of these Byelorussian forces, and as Kushel himself attested, "those going west were reformed into the Byelorussian SS Waffen Division."<sup>248</sup> Sensing the need to distance themselves from their German sponsors in the last months of the war, Ostrowski had opposed the dissolution of the BKA and its new designation as a

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<sup>245</sup> Dallin, *German Rule in Russia*, 620.

<sup>246</sup> Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns*, 176.

<sup>247</sup> "Memorandum for the Record: Byelorussia (Litsva) Source of Information: General Frantisek Kushal," 4.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*

more transparently “Nazi-sponsored” force.<sup>249</sup> However, control of the Byelorussian auxiliary forces had never been fully vested in the puppet council. Ultimately the command of these military and police units resided with the SS, which had ordered their creation in the first place. Ostrowski petitioned the German command to permit the organization of a “Byelorussian legion,” but in July 1944, SS Sturmbannführer and Police Major Hans Siegling ordered all Byelorussian auxiliary police officers and members of the BKA to assemble outside of Warsaw, where they were reorganized into a brigade of Schutzmannschaft with units of Ukrainian auxiliary troops.<sup>250</sup> At the end of the month, Heinrich Himmler transformed the newly created Schutzmannschaft Brigade Siegling into the 30th Waffen-Grenadier Division der SS.<sup>251</sup> The nationalist character of the BKA no longer pervaded this unit composed of German, Byelorussian, Polish, and Ukrainian soldiers. Kushel admitted that while the division had been placed under his nominal leadership, “actual command” remained with Siegling and the SS.<sup>252</sup> Siegling’s liaison officer with Kushel was Boris Ragula, the founder of the Eskadron and the regional representative of the BCC in Navahrudak.<sup>253</sup> Ragula was also appointed as the commander of the Byelorussian officer’s school established by the German authorities at the military training facilities in Grafenwöhr outside Nuremberg.<sup>254</sup> Ragula led the newly incorporated Waffen-SS division as they were deployed to Poland that

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<sup>249</sup> Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns*, 178, 368.

<sup>250</sup> The Schutzmannschaft, or Schuma, were the auxiliary police forces comprised of local collaborators. Munoz and Romanko, *Hitler’s White Russians*, 64. Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns*, 367.

<sup>251</sup> Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns*, 367.

<sup>252</sup> “Memorandum for the Record: Byelorussia (Litsva) Source of Information: General Frantisek Kushal,” 4.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

<sup>254</sup> Munoz and Romanko, 449; “Boris Ragula/Boris Rahulia,” 1.

summer, but waves of desertions caused the German command to order their withdrawal to East Prussia in early August.<sup>255</sup>

While the Byelorussian Waffen-SS unit withdrew from Poland, Stanislaw Stankievich, Vitaut Tumash, and other members of the BCC embarked on a propaganda campaign to raise support for the foundering German war effort among the Byelorussian diaspora living in Germany. In August 1944, Stankievich became the chief editor of a Byelorussian periodical known as *Ranitsa* (“The Morning”), which an American intelligence operative described as “a pro-Nazi, anti-Allied publication printed in Berlin.”<sup>256</sup> Afraid to admit his involvement with an organ of Nazi propaganda published during the war, Stankievich later referred to it simply as “a Belorussian weekly newspaper.”<sup>257</sup> Tumash also found a job at this weekly paper published by Rosenberg’s ministry. He conceded that “German intelligence may have had some influence on the policy of the Byelorussian language anti-communist newspaper he was editing, but it was never a direct intervention.”<sup>258</sup> In reality, however, the paper remained under the “full control of the German authorities” during the BCC’s years in Berlin.<sup>259</sup> *Ranitsa* promoted Byelorussian nationalism, but this was only permitted in order to mobilize recruits for incorporation into the Waffen-SS.

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<sup>255</sup> Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns*, 371. “Rahula, Borys,” July 14, 1949, 1, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Ragula, Boris, E ZZ-18, B 104, 1 of 2.

<sup>256</sup> “Extract from HICOG Despatch 2617, March 17, 1953.”

<sup>257</sup> Stanislaw Stankievich, “Brief Biography,” 2, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Stankievich, Stanislaw, E ZZ-16, B 50.

<sup>258</sup> “Personal Record Questionnaire,” 8.

[http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document\\_conversions/1705143/TUMASH%2C%20VITAUT\\_0003.pdf](http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/1705143/TUMASH%2C%20VITAUT_0003.pdf). Accessed March 29, 2015.

<sup>259</sup> “Extract from HICOG Despatch 2617, March 17, 1953.”

Due to their experience in anti-partisan campaigns on the eastern front, Siegling's SS Division was deployed against the Maquis (French resistance movement) in southern France. This came as an "unexpected blow" to the leaders of the BCC in Berlin, who were lobbying the Reich authorities to restore the national character of the division and redeploy Byelorussian forces in "the struggle against Bolshevism" in the East.<sup>260</sup> Continued desertions to the Maquis made the unit untrustworthy in battle, and in November it was withdrawn to Germany.<sup>261</sup> Ironically, the poor conduct of the division soon caused the imperatives of the German command and the wishes of the BCC to coincide. The division was officially disbanded in December, but discussions between the SS recruiting office and the leaders of the BCC continued, eventually resulting in the creation of the Waffen-Grenadier Brigade der SS (weissruthenien No.1) on March 9, 1945.<sup>262</sup> The Germans agreed that the unit would be composed entirely of Byelorussian soldiers, the language of command would be Byelorussian, and the new brigade would only be employed on the eastern front.<sup>263</sup> However, the BCC agreed that the unit would remain under the ultimate control of the German authorities.<sup>264</sup> As the war in Europe was drawing to its final stages, the brigade was deployed, under Kushel's command, to the Czech border near Austria.<sup>265</sup>

In late March 1945, as the situation in Germany was deteriorating, Ostrowski met with Kushel, Ragula, and other officers of the brigade in order to discuss surrendering to

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<sup>260</sup> Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns*, 176.

<sup>261</sup> Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns*, 375.

<sup>262</sup> Munoz and Romanko, *Hitler's White Russians*, 73; Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns*, 376.

<sup>263</sup> Munoz and Romanko, *Hitler's White Russians*, 73.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> "Memorandum for the Record: Byelorussia (Litsva) Source of Information: General Frantisek Kushal," 4.



the forces of the Western Allies rather than the Red Army.<sup>266</sup> Ostrowski later recalled how, at a meeting east of Nuremberg near the Czech border, he issued “a secret order to establish contact with the allied command.”<sup>267</sup> Because so many of the leaders of the BCC had been complicit in atrocities committed on Byelorussian soil, the representative chosen to approach the American forces had to be selected carefully. The BCC elected to send Stanislaw Hrynkievich, a young man who had spent the war in Berlin studying medicine and representing Byelorussia in the Deutsch-Ausländischer Akademiker Verein (German-Foreign Academic Association) of the National Socialist Students League.<sup>268</sup> Since he had traveled no further east than Warsaw during the German occupation, Hrynkievich was innocent of any participation in atrocities committed on Byelorussian soil. On April 18, 1945, he approached American forces at the northeastern Bavarian town of Hof on the Czech border, and the young Byelorussian collaborator naively expected to avoid incarceration: “I have never served in German Army or civil service,” Hrynkievich objected as he was arrested, “I am physician.”<sup>269</sup>

Held by the 90th detachment of the U.S. Army Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC), Hrynkievich carefully obscured the extent of the relationship between the BCC and the Third Reich.<sup>270</sup> He even withheld the true name of the council, describing himself as a “deputy” of Ostrowski, the “chief of the White Ruthenian Committee for Mutual

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<sup>266</sup> Ostrowski, “The Belorussian Central Rada (Council), Past and Present,” 9.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

<sup>268</sup> “Extract from Interrogation Report No. 2, Third US Army,” 4.

<sup>269</sup> “Arrest Report: Hrynkievitsch, Stanislaus,” April 18, 1945; “Third US Army and Eastern Military District Screening Center: Summary Report Internee Hrynkievitsch, Stanislaus,” 26 October, 1945, 2, NARA, RG 319, IRR, Hrynkievich, Stanislaw, E A1-134B, B 318.

<sup>270</sup> Third US Army and Eastern Military District Screening Center: Summary Report Internee Hrynkievitsch, Stanislaus,” 2.

Help.”<sup>271</sup> The young doctor explained that he had been “selected by his organization to contact the Allies to continue the fight against Communism.”<sup>272</sup> Hrynkievich’s interrogators wrote, “in one way or another he has always voiced his hatred of ‘Bolshevism’ and he came to the Americans in the hope of helping us ‘see’ the evils of this ‘ism’.”<sup>273</sup> He told CIC agents that his group “intended to organize a ‘crusade’ against Russia from the territories occupied by the Western Powers.”<sup>274</sup> Despite his best efforts to disguise the BCC and its Nazi ties, Hrynkievich was “charged with being a security threat” and was held at a prison camp near Nuremberg.<sup>275</sup>

As Ostrowski’s emissary languished in American custody, the president of the BCC went into hiding in the British-occupied zone of Germany. Preoccupied with the possibility of repatriation to Byelorussia to face prosecution for his collaboration with the Third Reich, Ostrowski reconstituted the BCC under a slightly altered name: “I called a plenary meeting...and proposed that all overt activity of the [BCC] be suspended in view of the American policy of handing over collaborators to the Bolsheviks, and that a new organization be formed at the same time – the Belorussian National Center. The proposal was adopted and such a center was founded in Regensburg.”<sup>276</sup> After the BCC “liquidated itself,” Ostrowski settled in the small town of Höxter and busied himself establishing

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<sup>271</sup> Warga, “Civilian Internment Cap No. 91 Darmstadt: Preliminary Interrogation Report: Hrynkievitsch, Stanislaus,” 2.

<sup>272</sup> “Political and Case History,” NARA, RG 319, IRR, Hrynkievich, Stanislaw, E A1-134B, B 318.

<sup>273</sup> Third US Army and Eastern Military District Screening Center: Summary Report Internee Hrynkievitsch, Stanislaus,” 2.

<sup>274</sup> Warga, “Civilian Internment Cap No. 91 Darmstadt: Preliminary Interrogation Report: Hrynkievitsch, Stanislaus,” 2.

<sup>275</sup> “HRYNKEVITCH, STANISLAUS,” September 30, 1946, NARA, RG 319, IRR, Hrynkievich, Stanislaw, E A1-134B, B 318.

<sup>276</sup> Ostrowski, “The Belorussian Central Rada (Council): Past and Present,” 10.

contacts with the British authorities there.<sup>277</sup> Ostrowski's protégé, Vitaut Tumash, followed his former teacher into the British zone, working as a physician in the DP camps in the employ of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) and the International Refugee Organization (IRO).<sup>278</sup>

Although the Americans detained Hrynkievich when he approached them to offer the services of the BCC, surrendering to the Western Allies was still preferable to capture by the Red Army and repatriation to Byelorussia to stand trial in a Soviet court for collaboration with the Third Reich. In order to be intercepted by American forces, Kushel ordered his troops to fight their way through a German SS division. The Byelorussian Waffen-SS forces surrendered to American troops in late April 1945 in the picturesque ski town of Zwiesel, where Kushel complained that his troops were "promptly interned as prisoners of war."<sup>279</sup> Kushel claimed that he had been following the directives of an American officer and his Waffen-SS units should not have been taken prisoner.<sup>280</sup> Ostrowski was also upset that the Byelorussian Waffen-SS unit was taken prisoner after its surrender, but he claimed falsely that these troops had "occupied a Rhein crossing and opened the way to the allies. For this service our division was taken prisoner by the Americans, and those who did not escape were later turned over to the Bolsheviks."<sup>281</sup> However, this assertion was a fabrication. According to Ostrowski himself, he had met with the commanders of the 30th Waffen-Grenadier Brigade der SS (weissruthenien

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<sup>277</sup> "Memorandum for the Record: Byelorussia (Litsva) Source of Information: General Frantisek Kushal," 4; Ostrowski, "The Belorussian Central Rada (Council): Past and Present, 10.

<sup>278</sup> "Personal Record Questionnaire," 4.

<sup>279</sup> "Memorandum for the Record: Byelorussia (Litsva) Source of Information: General Frantisek Kushal," 4; Munoz and Romanko, *Hitler's White Russians*, 449.

<sup>280</sup> "Memorandum for the Record: Byelorussia (Litsva) Source of Information: General Frantisek Kushal," 4; Munoz and Romanko, *Hitler's White Russians*, 449.

<sup>281</sup> Ostrowski, "The Belorussian Central Rada (Council): Past and Present, 9.

Nr.1) in Hirschau on March 25, 1945.<sup>282</sup> Kushel and his men surrendered nearby on the Czech border on April 28, 1945, approximately five hundred kilometers away from the Rhine River.<sup>283</sup> Other Byelorussian recruits still training at Grafenwöhr were captured later by the US Third Army, and the division was reunited inside a prisoner-of-war (POW) camp outside of Regensburg in Bavaria.<sup>284</sup> During the war, Regensburg had been the site of a huge German POW camp that contained Australian, English, Italian, and Soviet prisoners.<sup>285</sup> After the war ended in May 1945, this became the site of a large DP camp, and the members of the 30th Waffen-Grenadier Brigade der SS were reclassified as POWs. Francizek Kushel, the Third Reich's Byelorussian chief of police and the commander of the 30th Waffen-Grenadier Brigade der SS, eventually became the camp commandant at the Regensburg and Michelsdorf DP camps.<sup>286</sup>

The BCC was comprised of highly-educated, multilingual members of the Byelorussian intelligentsia who used their talents to thrive in the chaotic postwar camp system. Posing as Poles in order to avoid repatriation to the USSR, the members of the BCC reinvented themselves in these Bavarian DP camps after the war as conservative anti-Communists staunchly in support of democratic values, whitewashing their Nazi pasts as they competed with rival factions for Allied sponsorship. Several notorious Byelorussian collaborators ascended to prominent positions in the UNRRA camp network of postwar Europe. Stanislaw Stankievich, “the arch-butcher” responsible for the

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

<sup>283</sup> Munoz and Romanko, *Hitler's White Russians*, 449.

<sup>284</sup> Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns*, 376.

<sup>285</sup> Harold J. Goldberg, *Europe in Flames: Understanding World War II* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2010), 237.

<sup>286</sup> “Memorandum of Information Concerning Franzishak Kushel, A-7 497 237, C-7 514 221,” 1, NARA, RG 85, INS, Kushel, Francis, E P3, B 5; “Operational: Kuszal or (Kuszal),” August 8, 1950, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Kushel, Francis, E ZZ-18, B 76.

brutal massacres of thousands at Borissow in 1941, became a camp leader at the Osterhofen camp, located between Regensburg and Passau.<sup>287</sup> First entering the camp system in May 1945 in Amberg, Stankievich soon found work as a teacher in the Regensburg and nearby Michelsdorf camps.<sup>288</sup> He primarily resided in Regensburg until the end of 1946, when he became the commandant of the DP camp at Osterhofen.<sup>289</sup> He also continued his work as a propagandist in the years after the war, becoming the editor-in-chief of the Byelorussian nationalist newspaper *Backauseyna* (“The Fatherland”).<sup>290</sup>

On October 31, 1947, the United Nations formally adopted a resolution introduced by the delegate from the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic naming Stankievich “as a war criminal wrongfully harbored by the United States.”<sup>291</sup> Nevertheless, Stankievich remained in his position as the leader of the Osterhofen DP camp until May 1950.<sup>292</sup> When he left Osterhofen, he was neither arrested nor deported to the Soviet Union, but instead became the “Language Training Supervisor” for the International Refugee Organization (IRO) in Munich.<sup>293</sup> Stankievich applied for a visa to the United States under his own name, and although the US Displaced Persons

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<sup>287</sup> Riley, *Kim Philby*, 42; “Secret: Stankievitch, Stanislaw,” March 2, 1954, 1, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Stankievich, Stanislaw, E ZZ-16, B 50.

<sup>288</sup> “Extract from HICOG Despatch 2617 on Stankiewicz, Stanislaw,” March 17, 1953, 1, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Stankievich, Stanislaw, E ZZ-16, B 50; “Summary of CIC Reports on Siems (or Siem), Nina nee Litwintschzk,” May 2, 1951, 5, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Stankievich, Stanislaw, E ZZ-16, B 50.

<sup>289</sup> “Summary of CIC Reports on Siems (or Siem), Nina nee Litwintschzk,” 5.

<sup>290</sup> “Extract from HICOG Despatch 2617 on Stankiewicz, Stanislaw,” 1; “Summary of CIC Reports on Siems (or Siem), Nina nee Litwintschzk,” 3.

<sup>291</sup> “Stankevich, Stanislaw AKA: Stankiewicz, Stanislaw; Stankiwych, Stanislaw; Stankievic, Stanislaw,” 1.

<sup>292</sup> “American Committee for Liberation from Bolshevism: Application for Employment,” 3, NARA, RG 263, Stankievich, Stanislaw, E ZZ-18, B125.

<sup>293</sup> “Biographical Information: (Info Taken from Application Filled out in 1954),” 1, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Stankievich, Stanislaw, E ZZ-16, B 50.

Committee (DPC) was ignorant of his role in the Borissow Massacre, the committee found that Stankievich had “admitted to being the editor of a newspaper which was a German propaganda organ. It was the opinion of the US DPC,” the report continued, “that Stankiewicz was an out-and-out opportunist who changed his politics and allegiance without other thought than personal gain.”<sup>294</sup> Stankievich was considered a security risk, and his application was rejected. He unsuccessfully appealed this decision, trying to explain that he had only supported National Socialism against the Soviet Union because it had been “the lesser of the two evils.”<sup>295</sup>

Other members of the BCC were more careful to obscure their identities. An American intelligence report from 1951 concluded that “almost all of the officers of the Byelorussian Administration used aliases at one time or another while residing in the different allied zones of Europe immediately after the end of World War II.”<sup>296</sup> Emanuel Jasiuk and Juri Sobolewski, for instance, both initially lived under assumed names after the war. Jasiuk, Stankievich’s deputy in Einsatzgruppe-B and the former burgomaster of Kletsk, lived as “Edward Jasinski” in the French zone of occupied Germany immediately after the war.<sup>297</sup> After moving to the American zone in western Bavaria, Jasiuk taught science courses at an improvised Byelorussian college.<sup>298</sup> Although he began to use his real name again, he continued to obscure his identity and lie about his past, deciding that

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<sup>294</sup> “Extract from HICOG Despatch 2617, on Stankiewicz, Stanislaw,” 2.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

<sup>296</sup> Lewczyk, “Emanuel (Max) Jasiuk, was. Edward Jasinski, Maj, Mike,” 13.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.; Stanley A. Lewczyk, “FBI Internal Security Report: Emanuel (Max) Jasiuk,” 1, NARA, RG 65, FBI, Jasiuk, Emanuel, E A1-136 Z, B 76.

<sup>298</sup> Lewczyk, “Emanuel (Max) Jasiuk, was. Edward Jasinski, Maj, Mike,” 11.

it was in his interest to respond to the nicknames “Maj,” Mike,” or “Max” instead of Emanuel.<sup>299</sup>

Jasiuk arrived in Stuttgart on August 24, 1948 and began to do “work of a highly confidential nature for an American Agency.”<sup>300</sup> This was only five days after the US National Security Council confirmed the appointment of Office of Special Services (OSS) veteran Frank G. Wisner to lead the newly created Office of Policy Coordination (OPC), a nebulous department with little oversight that drew its resources from the CIA but nominally answered to the State Department.<sup>301</sup> The OPC was created in order to wage a propaganda and covert action campaign against the USSR and attempt to resist the spread of Communism. Jasiuk began working for this agency immediately after its creation. Ostensibly, Jasiuk began working as an interviewer for the Displaced Persons Commission under the supervision of US Vice Consul Cleveland Collier in Stuttgart.<sup>302</sup> In reality, however, Jasiuk was an informant of Collier and his chief investigator Arendt Wagenaar.

Wagenaar also worked for the US Army Counter Intelligence Corps and was secretly a valuable informant for the new Office of Policy Coordination.<sup>303</sup> Evidently, Wagenaar’s lack of productivity in his official consular duties raised eyebrows.<sup>304</sup> When questioned about his activities and the identities of his informants, Wagenaar was

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<sup>299</sup> Ibid., 13-14.

<sup>300</sup> “Jasiuk, Emanuel. Re: War Criminals,” 2.

<sup>301</sup> Peter Grose, *Operation Rollback: America’s Secret War Behind the Iron Curtain* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 110.

<sup>302</sup> “Confidential from John Edgar Hoover to Mr. Lonald L. Nicholson by Special Messenger: Emanuel (Max) Jasiuk, Was Edward Jasinski, Maj, Mike,” September 28, 1951, 1, NARA, RG 65, FBI, Jasiuk, Emanuel, E A1-136 Z, B 76.

<sup>303</sup> Cleveland E. Collier, “Statement by Cleveland E. Collier,” December 13, 1951, 1, NARA, RG 65, FBI, Jasiuk, Emanuel, E A1-136 Z, B 76; “Jasiuk, Emanuel. Re: War Criminals,” 4.

<sup>304</sup> Loftus, *America’s Nazi Secret*, 185-186.

reluctant to provide US officials with information. He allowed only that a “Mr. J” had once provided “secret Russian documents” to an unidentified American intelligence agency.<sup>305</sup> Wagenaar refused to give Mr. J’s full name, nor would he name the intelligence agency for which he worked.<sup>306</sup> This Mr. J was, of course, Jasiuk. Officially, Jasiuk was a card-carrying informant for the Air Force Counter Intelligence Unit until July 1949.<sup>307</sup> However, he only wore Air Force uniforms and worked for the consulate as a cover for his work as the OPC’s pipeline into the vast reservoirs of Byelorussian Nazi collaborators, who strove to continue their crusade against the Soviet Union in postwar Europe. Outwardly, Jasiuk’s job was to provide the State Department and the Air Force with intelligence on “Communist and Nazi activities” in postwar Europe.<sup>308</sup> However, he spent his time with the consulate connecting Wagenaar and the OPC with his fellow Byelorussian Nazi collaborators in the DP camp network. Despite doing little real work for the consulate, Collier later stated that he believed Jasiuk was his “second best informant” and paid for his services directly out of his own pocket.<sup>309</sup> Jasiuk’s contacts in the State Department and the OPC helped him to obtain a visa of his own, and he arrived in New York City on June 8, 1949.<sup>310</sup>

The vice president of the BCC, Juri Sobolewski, also lived under an assumed name until settling among his compatriots in the Michelsdorf DP camp. When Allied bombing campaigns against Berlin destroyed the Hotel Excelsior in April 1945,

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<sup>305</sup> “Jasiuk, Emanuel. Re: War Criminals,” 4.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid.

<sup>307</sup> John Weckerling, “Letter to J. Edgar Hoover,” January 2, 1951, 1, NARA, RG 65, FBI, Jasiuk, Emanuel, E A1-136 Z, B 76.

<sup>308</sup> Lewczyk, “FBI Internal Security Report: Emanuel (Max) Jasiuk,” 1.

<sup>309</sup> Cleveland E. Collier, “Statement by Cleveland E. Collier,” 1.

<sup>310</sup> Lewczyk, “Emanuel (Max) Jasiuk, was. Edward Jasinski, Maj, Mike,” 7.



Sobolewski had been forced to evacuate the capital and flee to the southwestern German state of Baden-Württemberg, where he remained until the end of the war in May.<sup>311</sup> Sobolewski lived in a series of DP camps after the war under the name “Alexei Sokolovsky” before settling at the Michelsdorf camp in 1947.<sup>312</sup> Postwar FBI investigations revealed that like Stankievich, Sobolewski published a paper in Michelsdorf, “which denounced the IRO administration and Displaced Persons Camp leaders” as Communists or communist sympathizers.<sup>313</sup> A 1951 memorandum from the New York office of the FBI to director J. Edgar Hoover concluded that during his time at the Michelsdorf DP camp, Sobolewski had also penned “anonymous” and “false denunciatory letters” to the American camp authorities about members of opposing Byelorussian factions applying for entry to the United States.<sup>314</sup> Sobolewski stayed at the Michelsdorf camp until he applied for entry to the United States in 1950 and followed Jasiuk to America.<sup>315</sup> Upon his arrival in July 1950, agents of the Central Intelligence Agency warned the Federal Bureau of Investigation that the Byelorussian Nazi collaborator might “undermine patriotic Byelo-Russian groups in U.S,” but since he had displayed “no evidence of procommunist or pro-Soviet activity,” the FBI determined that it had “no current interest in Sobolewski.”<sup>316</sup> Sobolewski and many other collaborators

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<sup>311</sup> Good, “Changed: George Sabolewski, was: Alexanderovitch Sokolowski, Alexei Sokolovsky,” 5.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

<sup>314</sup> “Office Memorandum on George Sabolewski, from SAC, New York to Director, FBI, October 18, 1951,” 3; Good, “Changed: George Sabolewski, was: Alexanderovitch Sokolowski, Alexei Sokolovsky, August 2, 1951,” 9.

<sup>315</sup> Good, “Changed: George Sabolewski, was: Alexanderovitch Sokolowski, Alexei Sokolovsky, August 2, 1951,” 6, 9.

<sup>316</sup> “Cablegram to Legal Attache, Bonn, from Director FBI, February 13, 1958,” NARA, RG 65, FBI, Sobolewski, George, E A1-136AB, B 129.

came to the United States in the summer of 1950, when American intelligence officials were consumed with the outbreak of the Korean War and the spread of Communism.<sup>317</sup>

Despite their Nazi pasts, several other well-known members of the Byelorussian Central Council successfully made their way to the United States in 1949 and 1950. Initially deemed a “security threat” who “could cause considerable embarrassment [sic]...by his activities among the Ukrainian and [Byelorussian] DPs,” Stanislaw Hrynkievich had been incarcerated for nineteen months after he approached American authorities in April 1945.<sup>318</sup> However, Hrynkievich arrived in New York City in October 1949. Jan Avdziej arrived in New York on April 4, 1950, even though the Polish underground press had denounced him as “a murderer of innocent people,” and Polish and Soviet radio broadcasts announced that the authorities “were seeking him as a war criminal.”<sup>319</sup> Francizek Kushel, the leader of the 30th Waffen-Grenadier Division der SS, received immigration visas for himself and his wife as displaced persons in Munich on May 18, 1950.<sup>320</sup> They arrived in New York on June 15.<sup>321</sup> Former mayor of Minsk Vitaut Tumash, whose signature had appeared on the order to construct the Minsk ghetto in 1941, departed for the United States from the Hamburg area on October 20, 1950.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>317</sup> James L. Stokely, *A Short History of the Korean War*, (New York: W. Morrow, 1988), 14.

<sup>318</sup> “HRYNKEVITCH, STANISLAVS”; Warga, “Civilian Internment Cap No. 91 Darmstadt: Preliminary Interrogation Report: Hrynkievitsch, Stanislaus,” 2; “Political and Case History.”

<sup>319</sup> “Petition for Naturalization: John Awdziej,” January 22, 1959, NARA RG 85, INS, Avdziej, John, E P3, B 1; Schwartz, “Report of Investigation: Awdziej, Jan,” 3.

<sup>320</sup> “Memorandum of Information Concerning Franzishak Kushel, A-7 497 237, C-7 514 221,” 1.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

<sup>322</sup> “Nominal Roll of Persons Departing from 12/59 DPACOS Wentorf Near Hamburg 20th October 1950,” October 17, 1950, International Tracing Service Files (hereafter ITS), Tumash, Vitaut: Bad Arolsen, Germany.

The most notorious members of the BCC, however, did not yet immigrate to the United States. As noted above, Stanislaw Stankievich's first visa application to the US was rejected.<sup>323</sup> Instead of traveling to America, in June 1950 Stankievich went to Edinburgh, Scotland, where he represented the Byelorussian Central Council at a convention of the Anti-Bolshevik Block of Nations (ABN).<sup>324</sup> Stankievich was a member of the Central Committee of the ABN, which was secretly sponsored by the CIA.<sup>325</sup> After the ABN convention, Stankievich returned to Germany, where he became the chairman of the CIA-sponsored Learned Council of the Institute for the Study of the USSR.<sup>326</sup>

Ostrowski, whose name was most frequently connected with the Byelorussian Nazi puppet regime, fled to Argentina to escape arrest and prosecution.<sup>327</sup> Under President Juan Peron, Argentina had become a haven for Nazi war criminals in the years following the war.<sup>328</sup> Ostrowski obtained a visa from the Argentine consulate in 1950, but before he left Europe he traveled to the United Kingdom.<sup>329</sup> Ostrowski visited London in the summer of 1950 in order to establish the Byelorussian Liberation Movement (BLM), an underground guerrilla army sponsored by British intelligence designed to be

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<sup>323</sup> "Extract from HICOG Despatch 2617, on Stankiewicz, Stanislaw" 2.

<sup>324</sup> "Stankievitch, Stanislav," 1.

<sup>325</sup> "Research Aid: Cryptonyms and Terms in Declassified CIA Files: Nazi War Crimes and Japanese Imperial Government Records Disclosure Acts," 1, Central Intelligence Agency Website, accessed June 2015. <http://www.archives.gov/iwg/declassified-records/rg-263-cia-records/second-release-lexicon.pdf>.

<sup>326</sup> "Stankevich, Stanislaw AKA: Stankiewicz, Stanislaw; Stankiwych, Stanislaw; Stankievic, Stanislav," 1.

<sup>327</sup> "Emigration to the Argentine: Lists of Libre Disembarco Holders," 1950, 2, ITS, Ostrowski, Radoslaw, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (hereafter USHMM): Washington, DC.

<sup>328</sup> On the immigration of Nazi officials and their collaborators to Argentina, see Uki Goni, *The Real Odessa: Smuggling the Nazis to Peron's Argentina* (London: Granta Books, 2002).

<sup>329</sup> "Emigration to the Argentine: Lists of Libre Disembarco Holders," 2.

subordinate to Ostrowski and the Byelorussian Central Council.<sup>330</sup> However, he garnered little support for this organization from the Byelorussian émigrés in London, and the British commitment to the project wavered.

In the first years following the collapse of the Third Reich, the leadership of the BCC successfully evaded capture and prosecution by Soviet authorities and successfully established contacts with the intelligence agencies of the Western Allies. They remained active in postwar Europe's Displaced Persons camps, published propaganda, and whitewashed their Nazi pasts. The members of the BCC courted new sponsors in the tense climate of the rapidly escalating Cold War, and by 1950, many of the most influential personalities from the Byelorussian puppet regime of the SS had immigrated to the United States. While Ostrowski sought to organize a liberation movement with British sponsorship, his lieutenants in the US cemented their relationships with American operatives with the Office of Policy Coordination, the CIA, and the FBI. These American intelligence agencies would soon become the ultimate benefactors of the Byelorussian Nazi collaborators, harboring them in the United States and protecting them from extradition and prosecution for their wartime crimes.

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<sup>330</sup> "Report on Antonovich-Zarechnyi," 1-2, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Ostrowski, Radoslaw, E ZZ-18, B 98.

## PART 5

### **“IT IS UNIMPORTANT THAT WE WERE COLLABORATORS”: BYELORUSSIAN WAR CRIMINALS IN THE UNITED STATES**

The members of the Byelorussian Central Council manipulated the rising distrust between the former Allies in the early Cold War in order to evade extradition to the Soviet Union to face prosecution for their wartime crimes. Ostrowski, Kushel, and others presented the remnants of their Nazi-sponsored military and espionage organizations to western intelligence agents, exaggerating their influence and significance as valuable “resources in the struggle against bolshevism.”<sup>331</sup> In exchange for safe haven from justice, the members of the BCC began working closely with multiple American intelligence agencies. Several members of the council had already arrived in the US by 1950, and the expansion of American covert operations against the Soviet Union provided the members of the BCC with a golden opportunity. In the early 1950s, members of the BCC and American intelligence agents made arrangements for joint American-Byelorussian espionage operations into the Soviet Union, and the Byelorussians presented American agents with a quid pro quo. In exchange for their cooperation in the covert war against the Soviet Union, they asked for assurance that their cadre would be protected from prosecution for war crimes. The leadership of the BCC was allowed to settle comfortably in the United States, where they formed the center of anti-Communist espionage, propaganda, and paramilitary networks sponsored and protected by the CIA in the name of national security. However, these networks were infiltrated by Soviet double agents, the intelligence produced by the members of the BCC

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<sup>331</sup> Ostrowski, “The Belorussian Central Rada (Council): Past and Present,” 17.

proved to be largely outdated or fabricated, and the paramilitary operations launched in Soviet Byelorussia ended in disaster. Nevertheless, for decades American agents facilitated the emigration and naturalization of these Nazi collaborators and protected them from the threat of extradition.

The fickle loyalties and self-interest displayed by the opportunistic Byelorussians split the leadership of the BCC in the postwar period. The members of the council eagerly aligned themselves with whomever seemed best poised to advance their own interests at the moment, whether the Third Reich or the United States. Many of these men worked briefly with French and British intelligence, while others worked simultaneously for multiple American agencies. Jasiuk, for instance, kept the FBI informed of the developing relationship between the BCC and Frank Wisner's Office of Policy Coordination (OPC). Ostrowski's notoriety as the president of the puppet regime caused him to flee Europe for Argentina at the same time that many members of the BCC were immigrating to the United States. While he remained absent from the centers of activity in New York and New Jersey, Ostrowski's influence waned, and several of his most trusted lieutenants joined another faction of Byelorussian émigrés. Kushel, Ragula, Stankievich, and Tumash all began working with Mikola Abramchik, Ostrowski's chief rival for the political leadership of the nationalist Byelorussian diaspora.<sup>332</sup>

Like many other Byelorussian collaborators, Abramchik was a member of the intelligentsia with nationalist political beliefs and an advanced education. As a teenager, Abramchik attended school in Minsk, where he had been an important member of the Komsomol (Communist Youth League) before adopting anti-Soviet nationalist political

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<sup>332</sup> ““Research Aid: Cryptonyms and Terms in Declassified CIA Files: Nazi War Crimes and Japanese Imperial Government Records Disclosure Acts,” 8.

ideals and moving to Prague, where he obtained multiple university degrees.<sup>333</sup>

Abramchik worked with German authorities during the Second World War, but briefly and much less successfully than the members of the BCC. After the German invasion of Poland in 1939, Abramchik went to Berlin in order to work on *Ranitsa*, the Byelorussian propaganda publication sponsored by Rosenberg's Ostministerium.<sup>334</sup> Although Abramchik allegedly worked secretly for the Gestapo, his German supervisors removed him from this position due to his lack of journalistic ability and transferred him to the Byelorussian committee in Berlin.<sup>335</sup> This appointment did not last long either, as Abramchik became entangled in a scandal involving the misuse of the committee's funds.<sup>336</sup> He returned to Prague, where in 1943 he declared himself to be the successor to the recently deceased president of the Byelorussian People's Republic established by the German army in March 1918. However, Abramchik had little support for his scheme to revive the short-lived German-sponsored government of 1918 until after the war. His organization became known as the Byelorussian National Rada (BNR), and Abramchik cited his connection to the defunct Byelorussian People's Republic to bolster his claims to legitimacy and authority.

Although Abramchik had also worked for the Germans during the Second World War, his position had been much more obscure than Ostrowski's and his reputation had not been sullied by his brief and unsuccessful association with the Third Reich. Unlike Stankievich, he had not been denounced in the United Nations. Therefore, although he

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<sup>333</sup> "Mikola Abramtchik," NARA, RG 263, CIA, Abramtchik, Mikola, E ZZ-18, B 1.

<sup>334</sup> "Operational/REDWOOD/AEQUOR: Transmittal of Reports: Attachment A," March 5, 1957, 3, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Abramtchik, Mikola, E ZZ-18, B 1.

<sup>335</sup> Riley, *Kim Philby*, 39.

<sup>336</sup> "Operational/REDWOOD/AEQUOR: Transmittal of Reports: Attachment A," 3.

had little influence over the vestiges of the BCC's military and espionage resources, Abramchik became a more acceptable candidate to become the figurehead for the Byelorussian anti-Communist nationalist émigré community. After the war Abramchik found work with the intelligence agencies of multiple states. While working for French intelligence in Paris, Abramchik was also recruited by Kim Philby, a British intelligence officer in charge of covert operations behind the Iron Curtain.<sup>337</sup> Philby was also a Soviet double agent, and he eventually defected to the USSR in 1963 after having passed Abramchik's heavily infiltrated Byelorussian network to his American counterparts.<sup>338</sup> Consequently, Abramchik's CIA file reveals that he "began working for the Agency in April 1950....as a Principal Agent Recruiter, Spotter and Adviser."<sup>339</sup> Philby's identity as a Soviet double agent may not have been revealed until he defected in 1963, but American agents reported that Abramchik's Byelorussian National Rada had been "successfully and fairly deeply penetrated by Soviet and satellite agents in Europe" before they began working with the CIA in 1950.<sup>340</sup> Abramchik had worked as a Nazi propagandist during the war in Berlin and led an organization infiltrated by Communist double agents, but American intelligence officials like Wisner, Dulles, and their cadre of hard-line anti-Communist agents in the Office of Policy Coordination and the CIA were desperate to destabilize the USSR and roll back Soviet hegemony in eastern Europe.

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<sup>337</sup> Riley, *Kim Philby*, 40.

<sup>338</sup> Kim Philby, *My Silent War* (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 6; David Cesarani, *Justice Delayed: How Britain Became a Refuge for Nazi War Criminals* (London: William Heinemann, 1992), 158; Riley, *Kim Philby*, 40.

<sup>339</sup> Memorandum of June 17, 1957," 3, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Abramchik, Mikola, E ZZ-18, B 1.

<sup>340</sup> "Memorandum for Chief, Contact Division: Colonel Kushal (Kuszal)," June 19, 1950, 1, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Kushel, Francis, E ZZ-18, B 76, 2 of 2.



When it became clear that American intelligence was supporting Abramchik's BNR, several of Ostrowski's erstwhile supporters abandoned him for his better-funded rival. The two groups competed for the popular support of the Byelorussian nationalist emigration as well as the financial support of the United States. Many members of the Abramchik faction settled in New York City, while Ostrowski's supporters in the BCC established themselves in Passaic and South River, New Jersey.<sup>341</sup> With Abramchik living in Paris and Ostrowski in Argentina, the leadership of their rival factions in the United States fell to their deputies. Juri Sobolewski immigrated to the United States in July 1950, where he assumed the leadership of the BCC on American soil.<sup>342</sup> However, in 1951 he informed the FBI that his advancing age limited his activities with the council, and that he was by then only in nominal control of this organization.<sup>343</sup>

The true leader of the BCC in the United States in the 1950s was Emanuel Jasiuk, the first prominent Byelorussian Nazi collaborator to work with American intelligence and the first to immigrate to the US.<sup>344</sup> Ostrowski officially designated Jasiuk as the chairman of the BCC in the US at the end of 1949.<sup>345</sup> He registered the organization with the office of the Attorney General and helped fellow collaborators to come to the United States.<sup>346</sup> As the acting head of the BCC in the United States, Jasiuk became crucial to the immigration and naturalization process of innumerable Byelorussian collaborators. Jasiuk found them homes and jobs, often opening his own home to members of the BCC

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<sup>341</sup> "Internal Security Report on George Sabolewski, December 20, 1951," 14.

<sup>342</sup> Good, "Changed: George Sabolewski, was: Alexanderovitch Sokolowski, Alexei Sokolovsky, August 2, 1951," 6, 9.

<sup>343</sup> "Internal Security Report on George Sabolewski, December 20, 1951," 5.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid.

<sup>345</sup> Lewczyk, "Emanuel (Max) Jasiuk, was. Edward Jasinski, Maj, Mike," 8.

<sup>346</sup> "Internal Security Report on George Sabolewski, December 20, 1951," 5.

recently arrived in the US and securing work for them at his own place of employment.<sup>347</sup>

Jasiuk had found a job with the Thomas Electronics Company in Passaic, New Jersey soon after he arrived in the US, and he arranged employment for Sobolewski and approximately a dozen other members of his cadre when they arrived. In 1951, their supervisor at Thomas Electronics informed the FBI that these men were “industrious, conscientious workers” and he believed “they would all make good loyal citizens.”<sup>348</sup>

Jasiuk also worked zealously to legitimize the council, gain the support of American politicians, and deepen the BCC’s ties with American intelligence. Convinced that war between the US and the Soviet Union was imminent, Jasiuk brazenly forwarded a resolution of the BCC to President Harry S. Truman and General Dwight D. Eisenhower in November 1949, offering the United States “any aid that the organization might be able to render even to the point of bearing arms against the USSR.”<sup>349</sup> He also spoke at the Ukrainian American Congress in Washington, DC at the end of 1949, sharing a podium with future Vice-President Richard M. Nixon.<sup>350</sup>

At this time, the BCC in the US was poorly funded and weak compared to the Abramchik faction, and so Jasiuk eagerly pursued a closer relationship with American intelligence in order to increase the BCC’s financial support and influence among the Byelorussian emigration. When he arrived in the United States in 1949, Jasiuk already had extensive ties with several American intelligence offices, having worked as an informant for Air Force intelligence and the US consulate in Stuttgart while

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<sup>347</sup> Lewczyk, “Emanuel (Max) Jasiuk, was. Edward Jasinski, Maj, Mike,” 5.

<sup>348</sup> Lewczyk, “FBI Internal Security Report: George Sabolewski,” May 9, 1951, 5-6, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Jasiuk, Emanuel, E ZZ-16, B 27.

<sup>349</sup> Lewczyk, “Emanuel (Max) Jasiuk, was. Edward Jasinski, Maj, Mike,” 8.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid.

simultaneously acting as a recruiter for the covert operations of the enigmatic Office of Policy Coordination, which enjoyed a nebulous position in the American intelligence network and had little oversight. However, these relationships had not yet permitted him to expand the BCC's meager budget or its limited operations; nor had it allowed Jasiuk to be certain that he would not face extradition. In fact, when Brigadier General John Weckerling, the chief of the army's G-2 intelligence division, learned that Jasiuk had immigrated to the US, he wrote to FBI director J. Edgar Hoover to inform him that Jasiuk was wanted as a war criminal who had allegedly caused "the deaths of a number of people in Poland" during the German occupation by compiling lists of persons to be executed.<sup>351</sup> Although Weckerling provided the FBI with Jasiuk's address, agents did not arrest or detain him. Instead, they simply questioned him about the activities and aspirations of the BCC. Agents of the FBI's Newark office expressed interest in interrogating Jasiuk further about the activities of the members of the BCC in the US and the growing operational relationship between them and the OPC, and they noted that Jasiuk "expressed his willingness to cooperate in this matter."<sup>352</sup> Many meetings and interviews followed, and Jasiuk began to work as an informant for the FBI, adding yet another American intelligence agency to his growing list of employers.

In the course of Jasiuk's interrogations by the FBI, it quickly became apparent that many inconsistencies existed in his accounts of his activities during the Second World War. Hoover took a personal interest in the case, and the director wrote that Jasiuk

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<sup>351</sup> Weckerling, "Letter to J. Edgar Hoover."

<sup>352</sup> "To: Director, FBI, From: SAC, Newark: Emanuel (Max) Jasiuk," February 15, 1951, 1, NARA, RG 65, FBI, Jasiuk, Emanuel, E A1-136 Z, B 76.

obviously “lied with respect to his activities” during the war.<sup>353</sup> Subsequent interrogations eventually yielded confessions from Jasiuk that he had, in fact, falsified his past to the Displaced Persons Commission, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), the CIA, and the FBI. Presciently anticipating that American authorities would be reluctant to extradite any anti-Communist émigrés who could claim to be the victims of Soviet propaganda, Jasiuk explained that he had feared persecution and almost certain death if he were to be deported to the BSSR.<sup>354</sup> For this reason, Jasiuk had presented several different versions of his past over the years. The most innocent account claimed that he had spent the entire war as a “gardener’s helper” at a Benedictine abbey in Poland.<sup>355</sup> Jasiuk claimed that his supervisors in the Stuttgart consulate in the late 1940s, Cleveland Collier and Arendt Wagenaar, had knowingly corroborated this false personal history as “true and accurate.”<sup>356</sup> Although he finally admitted to FBI agents in September 1951 that he had served as the burgomaster in the Stolpce area during the war, he denied that this meant he had collaborated with the Germans. He asserted instead that the BCC had been an independent government and he had never executed the policies of the German authorities. Confronted with the revelation that Jasiuk had falsified his personal history and had in fact been “the Nazi mayor of Stolpce,” Collier sharply defended his trusted informant.<sup>357</sup> “Whether Mr. Jasiuk was ever mayor of Stolpce, I do not know,” said Collier, “and even if he was I cannot see that it has any bearing on the case. If his estate

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<sup>353</sup> “Confidential from John Edgar Hoover to Mr. Lonald L. Nicholson by Special Messenger: Emanuel (Max) Jasiuk, Was Edward Jasinski, Maj, Mike,” 1.

<sup>354</sup> Lewczyk, “Emanuel (Max) Jasiuk, was. Edward Jasinski, Maj, Mike,” 9.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid.; “Confidential from John Edgar Hoover to Mr. Lonald L. Nicholson by Special Messenger: Emanuel (Max) Jasiuk, Was Edward Jasinski, Maj, Mike,” 1.

was confiscated by the Russians and his family murdered by them, it does not appear to me to be abnormal that he should not cherish particularly kindly feelings toward them.”<sup>358</sup> In 1951, Jasiuk admitted to FBI agents that he had lied about his Nazi past in 1945 and again in 1949 in order to avoid being deported to Byelorussia, where he feared prosecution for his crimes as a collaborator.<sup>359</sup> However, his new American sponsors did not sever ties with Jasiuk once his past had come to light, and word began to spread among the Byelorussian Nazi collaborators that the Americans neither intended to prosecute them as war criminals nor to extradite them to Communist countries that wished to do so.<sup>360</sup>

Meanwhile, Francizek Kushel had abandoned the Ostrowski faction and settled in Brooklyn, serving as Abramchik’s chief representative on American soil and actively courting the sponsorship of US intelligence. Kushel had first initiated contact with the CIA in January 1950 while living in Munich. The former head of the Third Reich’s Byelorussian police forces and the commander of the Byelorussian Waffen-SS brigade petitioned the director of the anti-Communist, CIA-sponsored Voice of America radio propaganda project to broadcast Byelorussian-language transmissions. Kushel wrote, “Some words in this language could be heard by the White Ruthenian guerillas [sic] and encourage them in their fighting down the Communistic oppression [sic] in their native Country.”<sup>361</sup> Describing himself as a colonel and the leader of the Byelorussian veterans association as well as the chairman of the Byelorussian National Committee, Kushel

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<sup>358</sup> Cleveland E. Collier, “Statement by Cleveland E. Collier,” 1.

<sup>359</sup> Lewczyk, “Emanuel (Max) Jasiuk, was. Edward Jasinski, Maj, Mike,” 9.

<sup>360</sup> “From Munich to Special Operations, February 2, 1951,” NARA, RG 263, CIA, Ragula, Boris, E ZZ-18, B 104, 1 of 2.

<sup>361</sup> Kushel, “Broadcasts in Whiteruthenian (Byelorussian) Language,” January 22, 1950, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Kushel, Francis, E ZZ-18, B 76.

implied that he possessed a pipeline to Chorny Kot (Black Cat), a disorganized network of underground anti-Communist guerrilla cells in the Byelorussian Soviet BSSR described disparagingly by American intelligence agents as “a loose alliance of bandit groups with little strength as a controlled movement.”<sup>362</sup> CIA agents did not trust the reliability of Kushel’s claims. They questioned the quality and strength of Kushel’s supposed guerrilla army, and in March 1950 agents concluded that Abramchik’s entire organization had been infiltrated by Soviet intelligence agents.<sup>363</sup>

Nevertheless, American intelligence officials desperate to undermine the Soviet Union showed increasing interest in Kushel and Chorny Kot. While preparing to leave Europe, Kushel traveled frequently throughout the DP camps in order to organize the veterans of the Byelorussian SS units and the remnants of the Germans’ auxiliary police forces. In his final months in Germany, Kushel stayed in contact with an agent of the US Army Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC) in Regensburg through a Ukrainian liaison.<sup>364</sup> In 1950 Abramchik arranged for Kushel to meet directly with American agents.<sup>365</sup> A memorandum in Kushel’s CIA file dated September 7, 1950 notes that agents did not believe that Kushel was aware that his contact in the CIC in Germany also worked for an enigmatic intelligence office referred to only as “Subagency 18.”<sup>366</sup> Arendt Wagenaar, Jasiuk’s OPC contact in the Stuttgart consulate, was not the only American agent working for multiple agencies at cross purposes. While the CIC and the Displaced

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<sup>362</sup> “Untitled,” 3, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Ragula, Boris, E ZZ-18, B 104, 1 of 2.

<sup>363</sup> “Memorandum for Chief, Contact Division: Colonel Kushal (Kuszal),” June 19, 1950, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Kushel, Francis, E ZZ-18, B 76.

<sup>364</sup> “Operational: Kuszal or (Kuszal);” “Outgoing Classified Message: Central Intelligence Agency,” Sept 7, 1950, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Kushel, Francis, E ZZ-18, B 76.

<sup>365</sup> “Outgoing Classified Message: Central Intelligence Agency.”

<sup>366</sup> Ibid.

Persons Commission were ferreting out Nazis and war crimes suspects living in the DP camps, the Office of Policy Coordination (OPC) was recruiting them for their covert war on the Soviet Union. Ironically, Wagenaar worked simultaneously for both the Army CIC and the OPC, sabotaging the former's mission by recruiting Nazi collaborators for the anti-Soviet covert operations of the latter.

In 1950, Kushel's claim to have contact with an anti-Communist guerrilla underground in Soviet Byelorussia was precisely what Frank Wisner and his agents in the Office of Policy Coordination wanted to hear. Just four days after Kushel's arrival in New York in June 1950, the chief of the CIA's Contact Division received extensive and highly specific instructions for Kushel's initial debriefing on the current capabilities of Chorny Kot in the BSSR and Kushel's control of these alleged assets.<sup>367</sup> The results of Kushel's initial interrogation were promising, and agents concluded that if the reliability of his claims could be established, Kushel might be able to provide the OPC with a valuable intelligence pipeline into the USSR and a potential fifth column in the event of outright war between the United States and the Soviet Union.<sup>368</sup>

Kushel eagerly exploited this opportunity to persuade the Americans to sponsor the vestiges of the Byelorussian intelligence and military forces he had helped to create for the Third Reich. In October 1950, Kushel brought an estimate of the military potential of the Byelorussian diaspora to American agents.<sup>369</sup> He also described how he had planned and executed the illegal infiltration of two Byelorussian agents into the Soviet

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<sup>367</sup> "Memorandum of Information Concerning Franzishak Kushel, A-7 497 237, C-7 514 221," 1; "Memorandum for Chief, Contact Division: Subject: Colonel Kushal (Kuszal)," June 19, 1950, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Kushel, Francis, E ZZ-18, B 76.

<sup>368</sup> "Outgoing Classified Message: Central Intelligence Agency."

<sup>369</sup> "Confidential," October 23, 1950, 1, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Kushel, Francis, E ZZ-18, B 76.

Union in 1948. Kushel stated brazenly that further covert missions into the BSSR to establish contact with Chorny Kot “would be of great importance for the US,” not only for “immediate intelligence purposes,” but also “for military purposes in case of an East-West conflict.”<sup>370</sup> Kushel proposed to enlist and train Byelorussian expatriates for intelligence and paramilitary operations behind the Iron Curtain in the event of war. Agents’ initial analysis reveals that the former commander of the Byelorussian Waffen-SS hinted that cooperation between these forces and American intelligence would necessitate the immigration of many of his cadre to the United States: Kushel stated that in his opinion, “the continental US affords the only logical security protection for such a program.”<sup>371</sup> Kushel’s interrogators concluded their report quite favorably, the only “prerequisite” for working with the former Nazi collaborator raised in the document being that “the operation should be completely under US direction” and a “close liaison” ought to be arranged between Kushel, Abramchik, and “the proper US authorities.”<sup>372</sup>

Investigations into Kushel’s claims rapidly disproved many of his assertions about the strength of Chorny Kot and his ability to communicate with and control these forces. At the end of October 1950 American intelligence sources concluded that Kushel had exaggerated the capabilities of the resistance movement. Agents of the Gehlen Organization, the West German postwar intelligence apparatus headed by the Wehrmacht’s former expert on the Soviet Union, Reinhard Gehlen, conducted the interrogations of the men involved on behalf of Wisner’s Office of Policy

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<sup>370</sup> “Enclosure A - Liaise Mission to Byelorussian Partisans,” 4, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Kushel, Francis, E ZZ-18, B 76.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid.



Coordination.<sup>373</sup> Historian David Cesarani explains how Gehlen had offered his “mass of information” on the Red Army and the Soviet Union to American intelligence in exchange for his liberty and the preservation of his “entire wartime apparatus.”<sup>374</sup> Cesarani asserts that Wisner had been instrumental in recruiting Gehlen immediately after the war and relied on the Gehlen Organization (codenamed “Zipper”) to provide the OPC with its expertise on eastern and central European affairs.<sup>375</sup> In October 1950, Gehlen’s agents interrogated one of Kushel’s operatives and concluded that the story about covert Byelorussian agents illegally infiltrating the BSSR in 1948 was a complete fabrication. The interrogations revealed that Kushel, who was “intimately familiar with immediate postwar partisan activities,” had briefed his agent before dispatching him, but the agent remained in Poland and never crossed the Soviet border.<sup>376</sup> Upon his return to Germany in 1950, Kushel’s operative falsely claimed that his outdated information about the personalities, locations, and activities of the Chorny Kot was recent news obtained from direct contact with resistance cells in the BSSR in 1948-50. Zipper agents concluded that Kushel’s motivation for this fabrication was political ambition, and there could be “no doubt” that he had staged the ruse so that he could “boast of having direct contact to partisan groups behind the Iron Curtain.”<sup>377</sup> Gehlen’s agency concluded definitively that “there are no really organized full fledged partisan groups” in existence

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<sup>373</sup> Cesarani, *Justice Delayed*, 154; “To: Chief, Foreign Division M, from: Chief of Station, Karlsruhe: Operational: Antonij Luda,” October 30, 1950, 1, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Kushel, Francis, E ZZ-18, B 76.

<sup>374</sup> Cesarani, *Justice Delayed*, 154.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid.; “Research Aid: Cryptonyms and Terms in Declassified CIA Files: Nazi War Crimes and Japanese Imperial Government Records Disclosure Acts,” 63.

<sup>376</sup> “To: Chief, Foreign Division M, from: Chief of Station, Karlsruhe: Operational: Antonij Luda,” October 30, 1950, 1, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Kushel, Francis, E ZZ-18, B 76.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid.

in the BSSR, but Wisner and the OPC remained interested in exploiting the intelligence and black ops potential of the vestiges of the Third Reich's Byelorussian military forces.<sup>378</sup> Even though Kushel's fabrication had been revealed to be false, American intelligence operatives still eagerly continued to develop their relationship with Kushel, Abramchik, and the BNR.

In early 1951, Abramchik proposed the creation of a joint clandestine action group staffed by Byelorussian expatriates and sponsored by American intelligence in order to undermine the government of the BSSR. This proposal was well timed, for Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) Walter Bedell Smith had just appointed a vehemently anti-Communist former OSS operative with a passion for covert operations named Allen Welsh Dulles to oversee operations at the Central Intelligence Agency.<sup>379</sup> Months later Dulles became deputy director of the CIA, and in February 1953 newly sworn-in President Dwight D. Eisenhower appointed Dulles to replace Smith as Director of Central Intelligence.<sup>380</sup> Dulles' influence quickly infused the agency with his enthusiasm and his anti-Communist fervor, described by one historian of the Cold War as "political Manichaeism—the belief that the world is divided between good and evil."<sup>381</sup> Wisner also subscribed to this worldview, and these aggressively anti-Communist American intelligence officials concluded that any questionable actions that could undermine the USSR were completely justified, including the use of suspected war

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<sup>378</sup> Ibid.

<sup>379</sup> "A Look Back...Allen Dulles Becomes DCI," Central Intelligence Agency Website, accessed September 23, 2014, <https://www.cia.gov/news-information/featured-story-archive/allen-dulles-becomes-dci.html>.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid.

<sup>381</sup> Thomas Parrish, *The Cold War Encyclopedia*, Henry Holt and Company, NY, 1996, 88-90.

criminals. During the war, Dulles and Wisner had worked together in the enigmatic OSS, and Dulles had vouched for Wisner when he was nominated as a candidate for the leadership of the Office of Policy Coordination in 1948. The two men worked closely together and shared their intelligence assets, but a rivalry between these agencies grew as the expanding scope of the CIA's covert operations infringed on the purview of the OPC. In early 1951, however, Dulles had just arrived at the CIA and was eager to support Abramchik's proposal.

The architect of Abramchik's plan for Byelorussian-American collaboration was Boris Ragula, the former liaison between the Byelorussian and German officers of the Byelorussian Waffen-SS unit and the leader of the Byelorussian Eskadron, the Byelorussian cavalry unit created under the SS in autumn 1943 in Navahrudak. Ragula began working for the United States while living in Belgium after the war. He received regular monthly payments of 15,000 Belgian francs, which were discreetly delivered by an American operative to his home in Louvain in exchange for his work as the primary recruiter and principal contact for "Operation Aequor."<sup>382</sup> Aequor involved sponsoring the anti-Soviet activities of Abramchik's Byelorussian National Republic (codenamed "Aecambista-1" or "Cambista-1") through the publication of propaganda in Munich and the illegal infiltration of Byelorussian agents into the BSSR in order to gather intelligence, create networks of safehouses and local operatives, and coordinate the activities of any remaining Chorny Kot resistance cells with their new American

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<sup>382</sup> "Classified Message to Director, CIA: RE: Muni 0579," October 23, 1952, 1. Ragula ZZ 18 Vol. 1, 2 of 2; "REDSOX/Financial: CAMBISTA 2 Expenditures," September 25, 1952, 1, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Ragula, Boris, E ZZ-18, B 104, 1 of 2.

sponsors.<sup>383</sup> Because the vast majority of the potential recruits for these covert operations had served the Third Reich just a few years earlier, Ragula sought some assurance that his men would be protected from prosecution for war crimes. Assurance appeared forthcoming, for a memorandum from an unidentified American intelligence operative in Munich in February 1951 stated that Ragula had recently been instructed to “spread word” among his comrades that the American authorities “do not intend trying German collaborators as war criminals.”<sup>384</sup>

Operation Aequor subsequently attracted men like Stankievich and Tumash, whose names were well known as accused war criminals for their role in the persecution of Byelorussia’s Jewish population.<sup>385</sup> Tumash provided the OPC with information on Byelorussia and the Soviet Union, and Stankievich edited the BNR’s Byelorussian-language propaganda newspaper published in Munich with OPC funds.<sup>386</sup> Once enough suitable candidates for covert operations into the BSSR had been recruited, OPC agents rushed to find a secure training facility for their small guerrilla army. For this purpose, agents selected a disused former SS barracks outside of Munich in the small town of Dachau, the site of the Third Reich’s first concentration camp.<sup>387</sup> In late September 1951 Wisner’s Office of Policy Coordination parachuted a single Byelorussian operative into the Soviet Union and prepared to continue to infiltrate single agents occasionally as

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<sup>383</sup> “Research Aid: Cryptonyms and Terms in Declassified CIA Files: Nazi War Crimes and Japanese Imperial Government Records Disclosure Acts,” 8.

<sup>384</sup> “From Munich to Special Operations, February 2, 1951.”

<sup>385</sup> “Research Aid: Cryptonyms and Terms in Declassified CIA Files: Nazi War Crimes and Japanese Imperial Government Records Disclosure Acts,” 8.

<sup>386</sup> “Memorandum: Nightwatch,” November 25, 1953, 4, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Ragula, Boris, E ZZ-18, B 104, 1 of 2; “Research Aid: Cryptonyms and Terms in Declassified CIA Files: Nazi War Crimes and Japanese Imperial Government Records Disclosure Acts,” 11.

<sup>387</sup> Grose, *Operation Rollback*, 161; “Secret: Background on AECAMPOSANTO/ 6,” March, 1995, 1, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Ragula, Boris, E ZZ-18, B 104, 1 of 2.

circumstances allowed.<sup>388</sup> Operation Aequor's first large-scale mission into the BSSR did not come until late August 1952. This was just a few weeks after Director of Central Intelligence Smith solved the growing rivalry between the OPC and the foreign intelligence division of the CIA by merging the two offices and incorporating Wisner's covert action department into the CIA as the Directorate of Plans.<sup>389</sup> Wisner's title changed to the Deputy Director of Plans, and his new department enjoyed a greatly expanded budget and the personal support of Allen Dulles, the agency's influential new deputy director.

However, Abramchik's group was heavily infiltrated by Soviet double agents, and the mission was an absolute failure. A CIA report decades later revealed that after being dropped into the BSSR "via a 'black' flight," the Aequor team buried their parachutes, made radio contact with headquarters in Germany, and hid themselves for three days before attempting to locate contacts in Ragula's hometown of Navahrudak.<sup>390</sup> When they arrived at their rendezvous point, the KGB and Soviet police and militia forces had surrounded the area. Of the eighteen agents dispatched into the BSSR, only one survived by becoming a double agent for the KGB.<sup>391</sup> Although analysts in the Directorate of Plans were not yet aware that Philby himself was a Soviet mole, it now became inescapably clear that Abramchik's faction had been infiltrated by double agents. The CIA's senior representative in Munich sent the Director of Central Intelligence a

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<sup>388</sup> "Project: AEQUOR," April 1, 1951, 1, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Ragula, Boris, E ZZ-18, B 104, 1 of 2.

<sup>389</sup> "A Look Back... Walter Bedell Smith Becomes DCI," Central Intelligence Agency Website, accessed May 13, 2015, <https://www.cia.gov/news-information/featured-story-archive/2008-featured-story-archive/walter-bedell-smith.html>.

<sup>390</sup> "Secret: Background on AECAMPOSANTO/ 6," 1.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid., 1-2.

memorandum listing other problems with Operation Aequor, including “lack of discipline, paucity [of] good local leaders, [and] limited screening possibilities.”<sup>392</sup> He therefore suggested that “no future agents” be selected from the ranks of the BNR and recommended that the time had come to “cut CAMBISTA 1 out ops traffic.”<sup>393</sup> The end of the BNR’s honeymoon with the CIA provided an opportunity for Ostrowski and his faction to win American sponsorship for their organization.

Although training continued at Dachau in anticipation of the infiltration mission in August 1952, American confidence in the Abramchik faction was rapidly dwindling. After the Aequor team had been ambushed, the lone surviving operative, who had been recruited as a Soviet double agent, transmitted radio signals to American agents at Aequor headquarters in Bavaria using “hostile control indicators” to let them know that the security of the mission had been compromised.<sup>394</sup> Once the fate of the Aequor team became known, the Directorate for Plans cut its ties with the membership of the BNR in an attempt to limit the blowback.<sup>395</sup> Agents then began meeting extensively with Ostrowski to ascertain if he and his group might hold the potential for more successful collaborative efforts against the USSR.

Ostrowski had returned to Europe from Argentina in May 1952 in order to further his relationship with British intelligence, but shortly after his arrival in West Germany he was contacted by American agents hoping to discuss “matters of operational interest”

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<sup>392</sup> “Classified Message to Director, CIA, from SR. REP. Munich: REDSOX AEQUOR,” November 26, 1952, 1, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Ragula, Boris, E ZZ-18, B 104, 1 of 2.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid.

<sup>394</sup> “Secret: Background on AECAMPOSANTO/ 6,” 1.

<sup>395</sup> “Research Aid: Cryptonyms and Terms in Declassified CIA Files: Nazi War Crimes and Japanese Imperial Government Records Disclosure Acts,” 8.

with the president of the BCC.<sup>396</sup> In September 1952, Ostrowski provided American agents with information about his own biography, the history of the Byelorussian Central Council, and the anti-Soviet Byelorussian diaspora throughout the world. He also brought a highly detailed proposal for a jointly operated American-Byelorussian Intelligence Group that would produce propaganda, provide intelligence, assume operational control over any remnants of Chorny Kot, and prepare a guerrilla cadre to assist in the invasion of the USSR in the event that the Cold War were to erupt in open hostilities between the United States and the Soviet Union.<sup>397</sup>

Ostrowski claimed to possess “very fresh news from behind the Iron Curtain” due to a network of trusted anti-Communist underground operatives who had infiltrated the secret police forces of the Soviet Union and Poland, but he was unwilling to hand over these alleged resources without some assurance that he and his cadre would be protected from prosecution for war crimes. Ostrowski asked his hosts to guarantee that the American authorities would not “send us into the cellars...and reward us with the gallows.”<sup>398</sup> The agents reported on the progress of these meetings with Ostrowski, and although Director of Central Intelligence Smith noted that the president of the BCC “appears at least opportunistic,” he registered no objections to using such a notorious Nazi collaborator for the proposed operations or to providing the members of his cadre with protection from prosecution.<sup>399</sup> In his depositions for the Directorate of Plans

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<sup>396</sup> “Operational Discussion with R. Ostrowski,” 1952, 1, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Ostrowski, Radoslaw, E ZZ-18, B 98.

<sup>397</sup> Ostrowski, “Plan for Organization of American-Byelorussian Intelligence Group,” 1952, 1, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Ostrowski, Radoslaw, E ZZ-18, B 98.

<sup>398</sup> Ostrowski, “The Belorussian Central Rada (Council): Past and Present,” 17.

<sup>399</sup> Walter Bedell Smith, “Classified Message,” 1952, 1, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Ostrowski, Radoslaw, E ZZ-18, B 98.

concerning the history of the BCC, Ostrowski wrote, “it is unimportant that we were collaborators during the war, and it is utterly unimportant with whom we collaborated – Germans or devils. What is important is that we were never collaborators of Stalin and that we have fought against him without interruption.”<sup>400</sup> Apparently, Ostrowski’s assumption that his past collaboration was unimportant to the CIA was correct, for Director of Central Intelligence Smith advised his agents only that he required “full...control of entire operation and agents [Ostrowski] may furnish.”<sup>401</sup> There was no doubt that Ostrowski and his faction had collaborated with the Nazis, but this did not prevent the top leadership of the CIA from approving the use of these men for sensitive covert operations.

The CIA also kept in contact with the leadership of the BNR in spite of grave concerns about the security of the organization and its infiltration by Soviet agents. CIA agents had concluded that Abramchik’s organization had been “successfully and fairly deeply penetrated by Soviet and satellite agents in Europe” as early as March 1950, *before* launching the disastrous joint operations into the BSSR.<sup>402</sup> However, they proceeded with the mission and continued to use the BNR’s leadership as intelligence resources for years after determining that this organization had been infiltrated by Soviet moles. Although American field agents warned that “caution should be exercised in dealing with any member of this group,” operational clearance was not rescinded for the leaders of the BNR.<sup>403</sup> Although Kushel’s previous information concerning Chorny Kot had been found to contain exaggerations and outright fabrications, agents believed his

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<sup>400</sup> Ostrowski, “The Belorussian Central Rada (Council): Past and Present,” 17-18.

<sup>401</sup> Smith, “Classified Message,” 1.

<sup>402</sup> “Memorandum for Chief, Contact Division: Colonel Kushal (Kuszal).”

<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.*



claims that the BNR still possessed intelligence resources that the CIA could not afford simply to throw away. The agents conducting his interrogations wrote that if Kushel's claims to possess a "counter-espionage apparatus" were substantiated, "this apparatus should be tapped by CIA." In addition, Kushel boasted that he also associated with accomplished scholars of the USSR who could write in English.<sup>404</sup> His interrogators recommended that the CIA exploit these academics for a myriad of detailed reports "in order to enlarge our knowledge of the BSSR as well as for post-war exploitation."<sup>405</sup> Believing that open hostilities between the Soviet Union and the United States were imminent, Wisner obtained Kushel's provisional operational clearance at the end of October 1952 and the CIA continued to utilize BNR resources.<sup>406</sup>

Foremost among the Byelorussian scholars about whom Kushel had bragged to the CIA was Stanislaw Stankievich, the former burgomaster of Borissow and Baranovichi, who at this time was editing *Backauseyna*, the OPC's Byelorussian propaganda organ in Munich. Upon Kushel's recommendation, Stankievich received a promotion to the chairmanship of the Learned Council of the Institute for the Study of the USSR, which produced intelligence and propaganda in Munich with CIA funds between 1954-62.<sup>407</sup> Field agents raised concerns that Stankievich was unsuitable for this position. His wartime collaboration was well-known to Soviet intelligence and he had also

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<sup>404</sup> "Byelorussian National Rada. Source of Info: General F. Kushal," October 20, 1952, 1, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Kushel, Francis, E ZZ-18, B 76.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid.

<sup>406</sup> "Secret: Security Information: Provisional Operational Clearance," October 31, 1952, 1, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Kushel, Francis, E ZZ-18, B 76.

<sup>407</sup> "Stankevich, Stanislaw AKA: Stankiewicz, Stanislaw; Stankiwych, Stanislaw; Stankievic, Stanislaw."

developed a reputation for “loving his liquor,” which made his discretion suspect.<sup>408</sup> He was allegedly overheard in his Munich offices boasting of his role in the mass murder of the Jewish population of Borissow, and agents openly wondered whether or not it was “advisable to have Stankievich connected with any of our activities.”<sup>409</sup> Although agents continued to protest that Stankievich’s excessive drinking might “result in his talking too much,” he retained the leadership of the Institute for the Study of the USSR until an argument with Abramchik finally led to his ouster in June 1962.<sup>410</sup>

Some agents continued to complain about the BNR’s amateur security measures well after their supervisors had decided to continue using the compromised organization. One agent concluded, “CAMBISTA 1’s defense mechanism against Soviet penetration is operationally absurd...based on personal evaluation of one CAMBISTA 1 member by another, e.g., if ‘Boris’ saw ‘Anton’ wearing an SS uniform in Minsk in 1943, ‘Anton’ must be one of the boys.”<sup>411</sup> Yet, the relationship between the CIA and the BNR continued despite the concerns raised by agents in the field. Operation Aequor itself was not officially terminated until 1956, when a series of articles appearing in the Soviet youth publication *Komsomolskaya Pravda* reported on the dismal fate of the Aequor team that had parachuted into the BSSR in August 1952.<sup>412</sup> Upon its termination, Operation Aequor was simply replaced by a similar project designated as Operation Aeprimer,

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<sup>408</sup> “Backauseyna’s New Editor-in-Chief,” 1, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Stankievich, Stanislaw, E ZZ-18, B 125.

<sup>409</sup> Riley, *Kim Philby*, 42; “Activities of Stankievich in Byelorussia in 1941,” July 20, 1954, 1, NARA, RG 263, Stankievich, Stanislaw, E ZZ-16, B 50.

<sup>410</sup> “REDSOX/Operational: AEQUOR/Transmittal of PRQ Part II - AECAMBISTA 17,” August 5, 1954, 2, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Stankievich, Stanislaw, E ZZ-18, B 125; “Untitled,” August 23, 1960, 1, NARA, RG 263, Stankievich, Stanislaw, E ZZ-16, B 50; “Stankevich, Stanislaw AKA: Stankiewicz, Stanislaw; Stankiwych, Stanislaw; Stankievic, Stanislaw,” 1.

<sup>411</sup> “Memorandum: Nightwatch,” 4.

<sup>412</sup> “Secret: Background on AECAMPOSANTO/ 6,” 2.

created to develop long-term assets within the Soviet Union from candidates suggested by Kushel and Abramchik.<sup>413</sup> The BNR leaders also participated in another project named Aeready, which was launched the same year in order to train a “Hot War” cadre of operatives to be used in the event of open hostilities.<sup>414</sup>

Despite the security risks posed by retaining the services of these unreliable Nazi collaborators, Wisner and his cadre honored their bargain, facilitating the immigration and naturalization of the members of the BCC and protecting them from prosecution or extradition. Several of these men obtained US citizenship in the mid-1950s. After several years living in the United States working with the CIA, Kushel filed his petition for naturalization in Brooklyn on November 2, 1955.<sup>415</sup> At the time of Kushel’s application, the FBI recommended that INS investigators consult the CIA’s records on the former Waffen-SS commander before they proceeded with the naturalization process.<sup>416</sup> Due to an unidentified “oversight,” however, Kushel’s CIA records never made it to the INS examiner responsible for reviewing them and he was naturalized as a citizen of the United States on December 27, 1955.<sup>417</sup> However, INS investigators continued to look into Kushel over the years, and in early 1963 the Confidential Records division reported that their request for intelligence on Kushel from the CIA had been blocked: “They can find nothing - No CIA report.”<sup>418</sup> The following month, Richard Helms, Bissell’s

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<sup>413</sup> “Research Aid: Cryptonyms and Terms in Declassified CIA Files: Nazi War Crimes and Japanese Imperial Government Records Disclosure Acts,” 8.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid.

<sup>415</sup> “Memorandum of Information Concerning Franzishak Kushel, A-7 497 237, C-7 514 221,” 1.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid.

<sup>418</sup> “Memorandum of Call to Mr. Burrows by Confidential Records,” January 4, 1963, 1, NARA, RG 85, INS, Kushel, Francis, E P3, B 5.

successor as the head of the Directorate of Plans, admitted that although CIA files actually contained “voluminous information concerning Subject...none of [it] is of a derogatory nature.”<sup>419</sup> Hoping to put the matter to rest, Helms enclosed a sanitized summary of Kushel’s biography.

One month after Kushel had received his United States citizenship in December 1955, Wisner personally sent a memorandum to the commissioner of the INS replying to a request for information on Emanuel Jasiuk, who had also filed a petition for naturalization. Although the OPC (now the Directorate for Plans) had been using Jasiuk as an informant and recruiter since 1948, Wisner falsely claimed that “the files...reveal no pertinent identifiable information on Subject.”<sup>420</sup> He suggested contacting the FBI instead. The few files FBI agents were willing to disclose to the INS still indicated that Jasiuk “collaborated with the German occupation forces” and provided “names of Poles...who were later shot by the Germans.”<sup>421</sup> Despite this incriminating information, Jasiuk became a naturalized citizen in Hackensack, New Jersey in December 1956.<sup>422</sup> He was working for both the CIA and the FBI at the time he filed his naturalization petition, but these agencies withheld many of their records containing the most damning allegations against their informants, cast unnecessary aspersions on the sources of their

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<sup>419</sup> “Letter to W.T. Flagg, Chief Intelligence Officer, Field Inspection and Security Division, from Deputy Direct, Plans: Kushel, Franzishak (or Francis),” February 8, 1963, 1, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Kushel, Francis, E ZZ-18, B 76.

<sup>420</sup> “Confidential: Subject: Emanuel Jasiuk,” January 30, 1956, 1, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Jasiuk, Emanuel, E ZZ-16, B 27.

<sup>421</sup> “Memorandum for File: Emanuel Jasiuk,” Aug 4, 1955, NARA, RG 85, INS, Jasiuk, Emanuel, E P3, B 4, 1 of 2.

<sup>422</sup> “Certificate of Naturalization: Emanuel Jasiuk,” Dec 3, 1956, NARA, RG 85, INS, Jasiuk, Emanuel, E P3, B 4, 1 of 2.

intelligence, and disingenuously submitted sanitized biographies of the Byelorussian collaborators to the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

Although American intelligence agencies were facilitating the immigration of several members of the BCC, the most notorious Byelorussian Nazi collaborators did not immigrate to the United States until the early 1960s. As other members of the BCC received their United States citizenship, Stankievich remained in Munich working for the CIA, accepting promotions, and burnishing his resume. Stankievich had become the chairman of the Learned Council of the CIA-sponsored Institute for the Study of the USSR, the vice president of the Presidium of the Scientific Council of this institute, the head of its Byelorussian section, the editor-in-chief of multiple Byelorussian-language propaganda publications, the president of the Byelorussian Institute of Arts and Sciences in Munich, and Abramchik's vice-president in the BNR.<sup>423</sup> Stankievich first visited the United States in March 1958 on a limited visa, but he provided a "non-existent address" and overstayed his visa by more than a month.<sup>424</sup> Once again, Wisner's staff interceded with the INS in order to facilitate the immigration process for one of their covert operatives. In early November 1958, a letter to the district director of the INS explained that the Directorate for Plans "required" Stankievich's presence for their business in Munich as well as the United States, and that the directorate consequently "would appreciate your assistance in expediting the request for [his] re-entry permit."<sup>425</sup> In 1960,

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<sup>423</sup> "Stanislau Stankievic," NARA, RG 263, CIA, Stankievich, Stanislaw, E ZZ-18, B 125; Morris Riley, *Philby: The Hidden Years*, 42.

<sup>424</sup> "To Director of FBI: Stanislaw Stankiewicz," Oct 7, 1958, NARA, RG 65, FBI, Stankievich, Stanislaw, E A1-136AB, B 71.

<sup>425</sup> Robert T. Pearsall, "Letter to Mr. John L. Murff, District Director of the Immigration and Naturalization Service," November 6, 1958, 1, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Stankievich, Stanislaw, E ZZ-18, B 125.

the CIA's Munich office revealed that the Munich files contained "voluminous traces" on Stankievich's Nazi past and his unreliable character, but in March 1961 CIA officials nevertheless granted approval for the "covert use" of the accused war criminal.<sup>426</sup>

Although the Soviet press continued to denounce Stankievich, his wartime crimes, and his postwar propaganda work in Munich, the former burgomaster of Borissow and Baranovichi traveled frequently between the United States and West Germany before becoming a naturalized citizen of the United States in March 1969.<sup>427</sup>

As Stankievich began working for the CIA-sponsored institute in Munich and Kushel and Jasiuk filed their naturalization petitions in the States, Ostrowski prepared to leave West Germany for England. In 1954, Ostrowski's record with the International Tracing Service (ITS) was mysteriously expunged and the leader of the BCC moved to London to live with his son.<sup>428</sup> Although Ostrowski had originally expected to move to the United States in the early 1950s, his notoriety had hindered his immigration until his daughter became an American citizen in 1960. In early April 1961, the INS rapidly approved her petition to grant her father an immigrant visa.<sup>429</sup> In September 1961, Richard Bissell, Frank Wisner's successor as the Deputy Director for Plans, responded to a request for information on Ostrowski from the director of the Office of Security at the

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<sup>426</sup> "Name Trace Reply," August 23, 1960, 1, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Stankievich, Stanislaw, E ZZ-16, B 50; "Memorandum for: Chief, IO Division, from: Deputy Director of Security (Investigations and Operational Support)," March 29, 1961, 1, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Stankievich, Stanislaw, E ZZ-18, B 125.

<sup>427</sup> "Attacks on Dr. Stankievich in the Soviet Press," March 6, 1963, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Stankievich, Stanislaw, E ZZ-16, B 50; Riley, *Kim Philby*, 42-43.

<sup>428</sup> The International Tracing Service is an organization created by the Red Cross in order to track the whereabouts of refugees, Displaced Persons, and war criminals. "Ostrowski, Radoslaw," 1954, 2, ITS, Ostrowski, Radoslaw, USHMM: Washington, DC.

<sup>429</sup> Lewczyk, "Emanuel (Max) Jasiuk, was. Edward Jasinski, Maj, Mike," 13; "Petition to Classify Status of Alien for Issuance of Immigrant Visa," 1961, 1, NARA, RG 85, INS, Ostrowski, Radoslaw, E P3, B 7.

State Department. Bissell forwarded a summary of the contents of Ostrowski's CIA file without including any of the most incriminating allegations. He also cast unnecessary aspersions on the reliability of the information and dismissed any damning depositions as fabricated slander from "Subject's political opponents."<sup>430</sup> Bissell even massaged his summary of Ostrowski's own testimony in order to obscure the most incriminating passages. During the review of Ostrowski's petition for naturalization in 1971, the INS requested all derogatory information from the FBI concerning Ostrowski's past. However, FBI agents merely referred the INS to the CIA.<sup>431</sup> Receiving the request for information on Ostrowski, the Directorate for Plans simply sent along another copy of Bissell's whitewashed report of October 1961.<sup>432</sup>

Active covert operations involving Byelorussian Nazi collaborators had ceased by the time the last of the members of the BCC finally became naturalized citizens of the United States. Nevertheless, multiple intelligence agencies continued to harbor and protect these wanted war criminals. American intelligence officials had provided a safe haven for the members of the BCC in exchange for fabricated intelligence reports, paramilitary forces heavily infiltrated by Soviet double agents, and an influx of radically right-wing, antisemitic new citizens. Knowledge of their wartime collaboration was deliberately and repeatedly kept from INS agents, enabling the Third Reich's Byelorussian collaborators to settle comfortably in the United States with little fear that

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<sup>430</sup> "Letter to Director, Office of Security, from Deputy Director, Plans (CIA)," October 9, 1961, NARA, RG 263, CIA, Ostrowski, Radoslaw, E ZZ-18, B 98.

<sup>431</sup> "FBI Response to INS Request," 1971, NARA, RG 85, INS, Ostrowski, Radoslaw, E P3, B 7.

<sup>432</sup> "Deputy Director of Plans to Commissioner, INS," 1971, NARA, RG 85, INS, Ostrowski, Radoslaw, E P3, B 7.

their pasts would ever catch up with them. Their sponsors in the CIA and the FBI continued to protect them long after their lies and exaggerations had been exposed and their usefulness to the United States had been exhausted. Serious investigations into the harboring of Nazi war criminals did not begin until the mid-1970s, and intelligence officials continued to hinder these efforts for decades until the accused had died of natural causes. Ultimately, not a single Byelorussian Nazi collaborator who immigrated to the United States ever faced prosecution for his crimes.



## CONCLUSION

The opportunistic collaborators of the Byelorussian Central Council had seized every opportunity provided by the rise of the Third Reich, the German invasion of the Soviet Union, and the German occupation of Byelorussia to advance their nationalist aspirations and their own personal ambitions. They participated in many different aspects of the German occupation, became complicit in atrocities, and attempted to ingratiate themselves to their German sponsors in order to win German concessions to Byelorussian nationalist goals and further their own careers. During the war, men such as Kushel and Ostrowski energetically organized Byelorussian police forces, militias, and bureaucracies to facilitate the German occupation of their homeland. Other collaborators, such as Avdziej and Jasiuk, identified political and racial targets of Nazi ideology among the Byelorussian civilian population who were then targeted for persecution and death. In positions of authority, men like Tumash and Stankievich ordered the construction of ghettos and the mass murder of the Jewish populations of the regions under their control. Byelorussian collaborators were crucial in identifying Jews, Communists, and other targets of the regime's grandiose and brutal plans to recreate eastern Europe according to National Socialist ideology. The extensive collusion of local collaborators who organized thousands of police and anti-partisan military forces for the SS allowed the German authorities to avoid diverting German military personnel from service on the front in order to secure the Byelorussian territories behind the German lines.

The war against the Soviet Union ground on much longer than confident German planners had anticipated, and the growing partisan threat, the stiffening resistance of the

Red Army, and the German authorities' growing need for auxiliary personnel presented an opportunity for expanded cooperation between the Byelorussians and the SS. When Generalkommissar Gottberg created the Byelorussian Central Council in December 1943 in order to mobilize Byelorussian soldiers for the flagging German war effort, its members eagerly agreed to Gottberg's conditions for the newly created puppet regime and raised a paramilitary force of thousands of Byelorussian soldiers for incorporation into the military apparatus of the Third Reich. Although the authority of the BCC relied completely on their German sponsors and Gottberg exercised complete control over its functions, the members of the BCC attempted to cultivate Byelorussian nationalism in the population and portrayed themselves as an autonomous Byelorussian government. The Byelorussian collaborators evacuated Minsk with their sponsors as the Nazi dream of an eastern empire crumbled, fleeing first to Berlin and then into Europe's network of Displaced Persons camps after the end of the war. Wanted in the Soviet Union as war criminals, they portrayed themselves as innocent refugees from Stalinism and successfully traded the remnants of the Third Reich's Byelorussian military and espionage resources to American intelligence in exchange for safe haven in the United States.

The members of the Byelorussian Central Council retired comfortably in the US, and not one Byelorussian collaborator sponsored by American intelligence ever faced prosecution for his crimes. They took advantage of the dichotomous worldview of American intelligence officials at the height of the Cold War, according to which all enemies of the Soviet Union, including Nazi war criminals, were viewed as potential allies in the struggle against the spread of Communism. One senior CIA official

responsible for gathering intelligence on the Soviet Union in Munich in the early 1950s explained that the agency used “any bastard as long as he was anti-Communist” to fill the enormous gaps in intelligence on the USSR.<sup>433</sup> Another CIA agent concurred, stating plainly that they used “any man who [would] help us defeat the Soviets—any man no matter what his Nazi record was.”<sup>434</sup> American intelligence officials overlooked the criminal pasts of those who might be of use in their covert struggle against the Soviet Union, no matter how closely they had collaborated with the Third Reich in the prosecution of the war against the Allies, in the brutal pacification of their homeland, or in the mass murder of civilian targets of the Nazi regime.

For decades, the members of the Byelorussian Central Council lived in the United States in relative obscurity. For years, a dedicated handful of journalists, prosecutors, and politicians attempted to draw public attention to the presence of Nazi war criminals in the United States, but with little success. In 1979, congressional agitation finally led to the creation of the Office of Special Investigations (OSI), dedicated to the deportation of Nazi war criminals so that they would face justice for their crimes.<sup>435</sup> Although OSI prosecutors began to build cases on several Byelorussian collaborators living in the US, none were ever brought to trial. Many of the aging members of the BCC died of natural causes before charges could be leveled against them. Radoslaw Ostrowski, Francizek

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<sup>433</sup> Harry Rositzke, in Lichtblau, *Nazis Next Door*, 30.

<sup>434</sup> In Lichtblau, *Nazis Next Door*, 30

<sup>435</sup> Elizabeth B. White, “Unfinished Business,” *Draft Working Paper* (Central Intelligence Agency. Accessed April 19, 2014, [http://foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document\\_conversions/1705143/CIA%20AND%20NAZI%20WAR%20CRIM.%20AND%20COL.%20CHAP.%202011-21,%20DRAFT%20WORKING%20PAPER\\_0005.pdf](http://foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/1705143/CIA%20AND%20NAZI%20WAR%20CRIM.%20AND%20COL.%20CHAP.%202011-21,%20DRAFT%20WORKING%20PAPER_0005.pdf)), 3-17.

Kushel, and Emanuel Jasiuk all died of natural causes before the creation of the OSI.<sup>436</sup> A case against Stankievich was compiled by OSI prosecutor John Loftus, but the notorious former burgomaster of Borissow died peacefully in his home in Jamaica, Queens, a mere two weeks before charges were to be filed.<sup>437</sup> Younger Byelorussian collaborators, such as Vitaut Tumash and Boris Ragula, avoided prosecution as well. Ragula enjoyed a successful career as a physician after immigrating to Canada, and Tumash published nationalist Byelorussian historical works and ran the Slavic-language desk at the New York Public Library.<sup>438</sup> Loftus retired from the OSI in frustration, wrote a sensationalistic but unsubstantiated account of his findings, and conducted an extensive media campaign to expose the presence of these Nazi collaborators in the United States. However, the only Byelorussian collaborator ever to face any threat from the Office of Special Investigations was Jan Avdziej, who was permitted to relinquish his US citizenship voluntarily in March 1984 rather than stand trial for his wartime crimes. Avdziej was allowed to move to West Germany, where United States authorities quickly lost track of his whereabouts.<sup>439</sup>

Although American intelligence agents quickly determined that the anti-Soviet

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<sup>436</sup> “Obituary of Radoslaw Ostrowski” *The Herald-Palladium of Benton Harbor-St. Joseph, Michigan*, October 18, 1976, Archives.com, accessed August 6, 2012, <http://www.archives.com/member/Default.aspx?act=HistoricNewspaperPage&FullName=Radoslaw%20Ostrowski&Country=United%20States%20Of%20America&collectionID=142>; “Deaths Elsewhere: Franciscak Kushel,” *The Washington Post*, May 28, 1968, B8; “U.S. Social Security Death Index: Emanuel Jasiuk,” NARA, Social Security Death Index Master File, Jasiuk, Emanuel, Social Security Administration: Washington, DC.

<sup>437</sup> Loftus and Aarons, *The Secret War Against the Jews*, 507. “Obituary: Stanislaw Stankevich,” *New York Times*, Nov 8, 1980, 28.

<sup>438</sup> Loftus and Aarons, *The Secret War Against the Jews*, 507.

<sup>439</sup> Robert L. Jackson, “N.J. Draftsman with Wartime Nazi Ties Expelled from U.S.,” *Los Angeles Times*, Oct 20, 1984, A15.

Byelorussian émigré organizations they were interested in were riddled with Nazi collaborators and Soviet double agents, top officials in multiple American agencies approved the use of these dubious and unreliable figures. During the early Cold War, the preoccupation with the struggle to contain the spread of Communism eclipsed concerns about the Nazi pasts or wartime crimes of those who could be exploited in this crusade against the Soviet Union. The members of the Byelorussian Central Council benefited greatly from this situation. They escaped arrest and prosecution in the Soviet Union, and for decades American officials obstructed official investigations into the presence of these wanted war criminals in the United States. This phenomenon was not limited to Byelorussian Nazi collaborators. On the contrary, recently declassified intelligence documents reveal that American intelligence sponsored many other Nazi collaborators, including groups of Ukrainian, Latvian, Lithuanian, and Russian war criminals who had worked with the Third Reich. The story of the postwar relationships of these groups with American intelligence has only recently emerged, and the case of the Byelorussian Central Council is but one example of how American intelligence knowingly sponsored Nazi collaborators in the Cold War. The full story of these events still remains to be told.

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