

That afternoon an additional group of guards arrived at the cavalry school to reinforce the unit taking the prisoners to the barn. They were young soldiers from the nearby Luftwaffe base. Among the guards was a group of Volkssturm members, apparently from the armed group sent from Kloster-Neuendorf, and a group of DAF men in green uniforms. Together with some 30 camp guards and 20 prisoners who agreed to bear arms, the guard unit now consisted of some 80 men. Several of the SS soldiers had guard dogs.⁸⁵ Just before 5 p.m. another telephone call was received from the Kreisleitung. This time it was Walter Pannwitz, one of the Volkssturm company COs, who asked Kuhn if he had sufficient men to carry out the murder assignment and if the prisoners had already left the stables. Kuhn said that they were being taken out at that very moment and were lining up for transfer to the barn. He added that it would be better if the crime was not committed as planned.⁸⁶

The death march of the Mittlebau-Dora and Hanover-Stöcken camp prisoners set out on its last journey.

The Barn

Between 4 and 5 p.m. the 1,100 prisoners in the stables of the cavalry school at Gardelegen were ordered to line up in groups of 100 on the large parade ground in the center of the base. There were eight such groups, consisting of 100 to 120 prisoners each. Simultaneously, three horse- and tractor-drawn carts were brought in, and the 180 prisoners who were too feeble to march the mile walk to the barn were loaded onto them.⁸⁷ In addition, a small truck set out from the barracks to the barn, carrying barrels of gasoline and crates of ammunition, including about 1,500 bullets. This ammunition had been brought from the Luftwaffe base, probably together with the small group of soldiers sent from there.⁸⁸ During the preparations for the transfer of the prisoners to the barn, Thiele himself arrived in order to supervise but did not stay long, since he saw that the prisoners were starting to leave.⁸⁹

From early Friday morning the prisoners sensed that something was about to happen. The information that trickled down to them was that they were about to be transferred elsewhere, and there were even rumors that they were to be taken to Hamburg.⁹⁰ There were also counter-rumors to the effect that there was something ominous about the planned move to the barn. The Polish prisoner, Romuald Bąk, heard several guards joking and saying that there was going to be a pogrom like the pogroms in the Polish ghettos.⁹¹ Karl Semmler related that there was unease over the fact that barrels of gasoline had been brought along and that the prisoners who brought them from the Kreisleitung heard the guards saying that the barrels were to

be taken to the barn.⁹² In any event, the column of prisoners covered the short distance to the barn in an hour and a half. The last groups of the column arrived there between 6 and 7 p.m. Tepy went with the barracks guards. He positioned his men in a close chain around the prisoners, between 6 and 12 for every 100 prisoners.⁹³ This time the guards were careful to ensure that nobody escaped, and, in fact, almost none succeeded in making their getaway. There were no killings along the way to the barn.⁹⁴ The groups that set out first stopped to wait for the others to catch up with them, to prevent a long wait before they were all assembled at the barn. It was no less important to ensure that the gasoline and ammunition would already be there when the prisoners arrived. After about half an hour, at 6 p.m., when the tractor carrying the equipment passed them, the groups resumed their march to the barn.⁹⁵ When they reached it, Tepy beat a hasty retreat and returned to the cavalry school.⁹⁶ The short route to the barn passed through cultivated fields, and a prisoner found several potatoes scattered on the track and put them in his pocket. One of the guards burst out laughing and said: "You won't be needing potatoes any more" (*Kartoffeln brauchst Du nicht mehr.*)⁹⁷

The red-brick barn to which the prisoners were led was 27 yards (25 meters) long, about 9 yards (8 meters) wide, and 4.4 yards (4 meters) high. There were two identical wooden double-winged doors facing one another on the longer sides. These doors were about 3.3 yards (3 meters) high, enough to enable the passage of a medium-sized truck or a tractor. There were two narrower entrances on the shorter sides. The floor was concrete with a concrete base about 20 inches (50 centimeters) high at each corner, which held the wooden beams that supported the entire structure. There were also beams embedded in the floor, branching up into wide-angled triangles in order to provide further support for the columns holding up the roof.⁹⁸ Outside the southwestern wall of the barn was a small wooden storehouse, where the fuel and ammunition crates that arrived with the prisoners were stored.⁹⁹

The guards told the prisoners to sit down outside the southwestern entrance to the barn, for the other three apertures were closed.¹⁰⁰ The guards were dispersed around the group and the building to await the arrival of the last groups and the unloading of the sick prisoners from the carts. The equipment was unloaded from the tractor-drawn cart.¹⁰¹ By about 6:30 p.m. all the prisoners were assembled there. Just then a group of about 20 soldiers from the local paratroopers camp also arrived, two of them riding motorcycles. They were very young, 18 to 20 at most, and brought with them a considerable quantity of weapons for the task they were about to carry out. They had automatic rifles, a crate of hand grenades, several Panzerfäuste, and one or two flamethrowers.¹⁰² This was the main task force

that Thiele had wanted to assemble, but he had failed until that day because of the objections of local senior military officers. The arrival of the 20 young paratroopers with their weapons permitted the final stage of the liquidations to begin. Shortly after these soldiers went into action, Tepy and other older guards from the detachment of veteran camp guards left the area.¹⁰³ During their brief wait outside the barn, the prisoners saw the guards taking in the barrels of fuel. They could not have known then that this gasoline was being poured onto the straw and the potato sacks scattered over the floor of the barn.¹⁰⁴ The floor was covered with a 24-inch (60-centimeter) layer of straw, which in some places was 59 inches (a meter and a half) high.¹⁰⁵ While the preparations were under way, an American plane flew overhead and fired a few bursts at the site. Both prisoners and guards panicked, and the prisoners began to flee into the barn to hide. In the ensuing confusion, the guards fired at the prisoners in order to hurry them into the barn. This marked the beginning of the massacre, between 6:30 and 7 p.m. on April 13, 1945.¹⁰⁶

At this stage Tepy was still on the spot. The guards soon saw that the 1,000 or so prisoners jammed into the building were making attempts to get out. He described the event:

Question: What was done to keep the prisoners from opening the door?
What did you do?

Tepy: When I left the door was half-way open.

Question: What was it that stopped the prisoners from escaping through the open door?

Tepy: The guard chain was standing there and I guess the door was closed later on.¹⁰⁷

The prisoners could smell the gasoline as it soaked into the straw covering, and tried to get out of the building.¹⁰⁸ The soldiers and guards reacted with bursts of automatic fire at the entrance. It was quite dark inside the barn. Only faint predawn light filtered in through the cracks in the walls and the open door. For 20 to 30 minutes the trapped prisoners heard the guards walking around outside but were afraid to continue their efforts to break out for fear of being shot.¹⁰⁹ After another 20 minutes or so, at about 7 a.m., one of the guards came in through the door the prisoners had used and threw a lighted cigarette or match at the straw. A giant flame erupted from the gasoline-soaked straw within seconds, and the prisoners began to beat at it with the potato sacks or the blankets they had brought from the cavalry school. They soon succeeded in extinguishing the flames.¹¹⁰ All this time, the guards continued to fire at the entrance to deter the prisoners from trying to make a getaway. After a short time, another guard came in and

threw a firebrand or burning rag at the straw, which rekindled the flames with great force.¹¹¹ This time as well, the trapped prisoners succeeded in damping down the flames before they could spread.¹¹²

The prisoners now understood that if they did not break out of the barn as fast as possible they were doomed to be burned alive. Several Russian prisoners tried to break down the northeastern double door, opposite the door through which they had entered. They succeeded in bursting it open by pressure from within.¹¹³ There were shouts of encouragement as prisoners urged their comrades to break out and try to overcome the guards, since they were doomed if they remained inside. Then all hell broke loose. The guards reacted to the escape attempts with heavy automatic gunfire. They had apparently decided to force the prisoners to try to escape, so as to liquidate them at the entrance.¹¹⁴ At least 50 grenades were thrown into the barn, killing dozens of prisoners and intensifying the desperate efforts to break through the doors. Very soon a pile of corpses was heaped high at the two entrances, preventing any possibility of further escape.¹¹⁵ In addition, the hand grenades helped to ignite the straw faster. The fire spread and caught the straw and the wooden beams. The 180 or so feeble and starving prisoners who had been brought along on carts, and were now lying on the straw, were the first to be burned alive.¹¹⁶ Many of the prisoners lost consciousness and dropped to the burning floor because of the fire, the smoke, and the heat. The smoke rose high and could be seen throughout the district and in Gardelegen itself. Teply saw it when he arrived back at the cavalry school after leaving the site of the massacre several minutes before it began:

I saw the smoke when I was down there, but I don't know who did it. Only one of these young people could have done it. This was nothing but smoke and I saw it but I was far away. In the morning I went to the medic and asked for some tablets.¹¹⁷

The inferno in the burning barn, the frantic scurrying from corner to corner, and the cruel death of their comrades were described by the few survivors in their postwar testimony. Edward Antoniak said:

I went in the south west door and to the east end. There was an odor of gasoline on the straw which was piled about two feet deep. I believe the fire was started by grenades. The flames were about twelve feet high. I ran to the north east corner to escape the flames. I was wounded in the head by a grenade thrown by an SS man. I next ran out the north east door. One guard fired at me and missed. I fell down and the guard believing me dead did not fire again.

The firing lasted all night until daylight. Bodies were piled about five feet high in front of the door.¹¹⁸

Romuald Bąk remembered that

fire was burning all around. People started weeping, screaming, sobbing, calling for help, cursing. And all the time shots were being fired from rifles and machine guns on either side through the entrances. . . . People were sprawled in the fire. They begged to die.¹¹⁹

There were screams for help in different languages: Russian, Polish, French, Hungarian, and Dutch. From inside the burning barn, there rose the sound of the Marseilles being sung by French prisoners, most of them members of the French Resistance who had been interned at Mittelbau-Dora; the Internationale sung by Soviet POWs; and the Polish national anthem.¹²⁰

The flames and the shootings that began after 6:30 p.m. continued until close to 10 p.m. At one stage the soldiers used flamethrowers they had brought with them, and at about 8 p.m. several bombs were fired into the barn from the Panzerfäuste.¹²¹ At about 10 p.m. the young paratroopers saw that their mission had been completed and left. However, armed men from the groups of guards continued to move around outside the barn, checking if any surviving prisoners might be trying to escape under cover of darkness. Shots were heard until about 2 or 3 in the morning. Several of the murderers, apparently local civilians, continued to patrol the site in search of living prisoners. When they found them, they shot them mercilessly.¹²² It was only toward morning, at 3 or 4 a.m., that silence reigned again for several hours.¹²³

Escape from the inferno was a matter of chance and of resourcefulness, and few managed it. First, it was necessary to survive the murderous onslaught on the helpless prisoners inside the barn, and then to wait until it was completely dark outside. Evgeny Katev succeeded:

I was thrown by the explosion to the north side of the barn and there was about 8–10 men on top of me. They were killed by the explosion. I couldn't move and was there the whole night.¹²⁴

Romuald Bąk succeeded similarly in saving himself. "I lay on the floor protected by many corpses of those who had tried to save themselves, dead people, wounded people."¹²⁵ Vassili Mitofanovic Mamoshuk was saved by playing dead and lying motionless beside several of his slaughtered comrades until night fell.¹²⁶ Several prisoners in better physical condition succeeded in climbing the support beams inside the barn and clung to the wooden triangles that held up the ceiling. In this fashion, they evaded the bullets of the killers and the flames that consumed the straw below them.¹²⁷

When darkness fell, several prisoners succeeded in slipping out of the barn. One of them was Szobel Aurel, a Jewish glove manufacturer from Budapest:

About 21:00 hours April 13th I was with two other prisoners and we crawled out through a hole we had dug under the door in the southeast corner of the barn. A Polish man was fired and a police dog came along and barked at him. Then a German soldier came over and shot the Polish man. The soldier and dog then went toward the back of the barn in the north side. I crawled toward the southeast . . . one other man followed me.¹²⁸

The young Pole, Mieczysław Kołodziejski, a 23-year-old from a small village in the Opoczno district,¹²⁹ managed to stay with his father throughout the evacuation from Mittelbau-Dora and up to the incarceration in the barn. They tried to stay together and to escape through one of the doors:

We tried to get out the N.E. door and my father was shot at the door. I was able to get out and heard the guards say they were running short of ammunition. I saw a German soldier with a pistol shooting the man near the barn and I went back into the barn. . . . I then crawled out the N.E. door and saw a machine gun on the ground firing toward the barn. The fire has been starting again inside the barn and smoke was very heavy. I escaped to the S.E. to some woods. I stayed there in the woods for two days.¹³⁰

A 22-year-old Polish student from Lvov, Włodzimierz Wośny, managed to slip out of the barn in the dark in similar fashion:

I dug a hole near the S.W. door to get fresh air. In the meantime machine guns were being fired through the doors killing many people. Some tried to get out the door and were killed by machine guns or rifle fire. I stayed by the door until 23:00 hours when I escaped through the S.W. door and crawled along the south side of the barn toward the south east, . . . I was wounded on left side above the hip and twice on the back. Outside I was hit by a bullet on the outside of the upper left arm . . . between elbow and shoulder.¹³¹

Between 25 and 27 fortunate prisoners made their getaway in almost miraculous fashion. Karl Semmler stated that 22 prisoners succeeded in emerging alive from the barn: 16 Poles, 2 Hungarian Jews, and a Czech.¹³² However, the actual number of survivors was slightly higher. Several prisoners escaped the bitter fate during the commotion when the U.S. plane flew overhead. At least two French prisoners were able to escape and were not included in Semmler's statistics.¹³³

When the massacre was over, the barn looked like a scene from Dante's *Inferno*. Near the southeastern door lay at least 30 bullet-ridden corpses. Nearby were another 10 or so corpses of prisoners who had succeeded in getting out but were shot a few feet from the door. In the southeastern corner of the barn lay another 80 bodies, and by the northeastern door a similar

number. The most gruesome sight, at the northwestern entrance, were about 150 corpses, many shattered by hand grenades. Dozens more were scattered at various distances from the entrances. These were prisoners who had succeeded in breaking out but had been shot before going far. Clouds of smoke were still rising inside the barn, although the flames died down after midnight. An acrid odor of burnt flesh hung in the air.¹³⁴

When the murderers left, and before the task of obliterating the traces of the crime began, several prisoner-guards remained behind, their task being to prevent prisoners from escaping. Nobody was interested in them now, and they had no idea what they were expected to do. Several of them went off to sleep in a small hut near the barn, and two or three continued to patrol among the corpses and even went into the barn in order to shoot dying prisoners who still displayed signs of life. Several other prisoner-guards, who had not taken an active part in the massacre and did not fear for their fate, went back to the cavalry school. They returned the weapons they had not used and awaited the Americans.¹³⁵

Before midnight Thiele launched the final stage of the Gardelegen massacre. The aim was to cover up what had happened, insofar as possible, before the arrival of the Americans, who were expected the following day. At 11 p.m. he telephoned Hans Debrodt, the loyal Volkssturm commander, and told him that the prisoners had been liquidated in the barn and that it was impossible to leave the site as it was. He insisted that Debrodt immediately go to the barn and check if enough fuel remained to burn the building and the remaining corpses. Debrodt objected and told Thiele that he could not start rounding up the Volkssturm and transporting fuel in the middle of the night. Thiele was livid and said he would deal with the matter himself with the help of several soldiers.¹³⁶

Thiele knew precisely what had happened in the barn, and by midnight he realized that it was unthinkable to leave the site in its present condition. He had not been there during the massacre and apparently did not go there at midnight to see for himself what had happened, but he was well aware of the details. He probably received the information from the murderers themselves, from one of the Volkssturm men, or from the soldiers who reported to him. At about 2 or 3 a.m. on April 14 he telephoned the acting mayor of Gardelegen, Karl Lepa, roused him, and demanded that he immediately dispatch the local firefighter brigade and its technical unit to the barn to bury the corpses. He told Lepa what had happened, and the mayor realized that it would be best to keep his distance from this affair. He told the Kreisleiter to do his own dirty work and cut off the conversation. He then reported to Ringstmeyer what Thiele had said.¹³⁷

Thiele did not give up. He stressed that he needed a large number of men to bury the dead and try to obliterate all traces. On that night (between

April 13 and 14); he telephoned heads of local party branches (*Ortsgruppenleiter*) in the neighboring villages and demanded that they report to the barn with their Volkssturm units.¹³⁸ The cover-up operation now became a wider regional project.

At 4 a.m. on Saturday, April 14, 61-year-old Paul Scherinkau, commander of the local firefighting unit, was awakened by a telephone call. He was told to report immediately to the police station in the town and to bring his men, equipped with spades. When he arrived, 15 firefighters were already there. They set out immediately for the barn and reached it shortly after 5 a.m. Fifty local residents were already gathered there, farmers from Kloster-Neuendorf and Berge, who had been ordered by Thiele to come. The Kreisleiter was also present, and it was he who instructed this group of civilians where to begin digging the graves. Thiele also said that if they could not make progress, the best way to cover up all traces would be to pour large quantities of gasoline into the barn and try to destroy the corpses that way. However, Scherinkau was not willing to be involved.¹³⁹

At about the same time August Bomm, the 49-year-old owner of the local laundry, who was in charge of the municipal technical unit, was told to bring his staff to the police station. This unit was responsible for maintenance of the municipal water system and electrical network, as well as for various technical repairs. They brought various tools, spades, and other equipment that could be used to dig burial trenches in order to obliterate signs of the crime. Ten men reported for duty and set out for the barn, which they reached before 6 a.m.¹⁴⁰

At 6 a.m. Debrodt came to the home of Hermann Holtz, the CO of Volkssturm Company 1, woke him, and told him to mobilize his men within the hour; they should bring food and water with them for the next few hours, he said. Debrodt told Holtz that hundreds of prisoners had been murdered in the barn and that the corpses needed to be buried. Holtz ordered several of his men to round up the others.¹⁴¹ One of these was 59-year-old Gustav Palis, a local clerk. Palis asked what had taken place, but Holtz told him only that they were to report for duty with spades in order to dig a large pit for dead prisoners. He refused to give details about the identity of the murderers.¹⁴² At about 7:30 a.m. some 25 Volkssturm men made their way to the barn. Holtz had not been told by Debrodt what precisely they were to do there, since Debrodt had said that he would receive detailed instructions on the spot. Holtz and his men reached the barn at about 8 a.m. There were several soldiers there, commanded by an elderly sergeant. He told Holtz that he and his men were leaving, and left behind weapons and a small amount of ammunition. Holtz did not understand the purpose of this equipment. To the north of the barn, the firefighter unit and the technical unit personnel were already busy digging burial trenches.

Thiele arrived again, dressed in the uniform of a Wehrmacht soldier, as Holtz's men were preparing to join the grave-diggers. Holtz asked the Kreisleiter for instructions as to what his men were to do. Thiele said that the murdered prisoners had been dangerous criminals, and so, if any of them were left alive, they were to be shot without hesitation; the corpses were all to be buried. Holtz informed his men that the Kreisleiter's order was to bury the corpses and they were to do so without hesitation.

At 9 a.m., just as the firefighters and the men of the technical unit were preparing to leave, 60 Volkssturm men from Company 2 arrived with their CO, Wilhelm Becker, and men of Walter Pannwitz's Company 3, although Pannwitz himself did not accompany them. Gustav Palis, who was in this group, described what happened after he arrived:

When we reached the barn I saw that four Volkssturm men were on guard . . . there was a group of firefighters with their vehicle, about 20–25 of them, and 20 men from the technical unit who had buried the burnt bodies. Beside the barn they had dug a trench 30 meters long, two meters wide and 3 meters deep, and they were throwing the bodies in and covering them with soil. The firefighters group and the technical unit had been working since 6 am, and Holtz's Volkssturm group started digging pits and burying the corpses . . . among the burnt bodies was one who was still alive, and one of the firefighters, Runge, who lives in the town, called one of the Volkssturm, who was armed, to murder him. The man, Franz König, fired one shot from his rifle at the burnt man but didn't kill him, only wounded him in the shoulder. So I took König's rifle and shot one of the burnt men and he was killed. It was a German.¹⁴³

Holtz and Becker discussed what had occurred and agreed that the Kreisleiter's order to the Volkssturm to carry out this dirty job was inappropriate. However, they had little choice at this stage. Thiele was already on his way east in an effort to make his getaway before the Americans arrived. The Volkssturm men, all local residents, were left with the flagrant evidence of an appalling crime of mind-numbing savagery, and with hundreds of corpses lying on their doorstep. The only thing that could be done was to try to inter them all that morning. They continued to dig the burial trenches and to bury the bodies, which were lying scattered inside and outside the barn. It was not easy to persuade the elderly Volkssturm men to drag the charred and bullet-ridden corpses out of the barn and stack them in the trench. Becker, in any event, managed to slip away from the area after a short time and left Holtz in charge of the Volkssturm.¹⁴⁴

Although 12 hours had elapsed since the massacre began there were still dying and injured prisoners at the site, who pleaded for an end to their suf-

fering. When Holtz went into the barn, which was still thick with smoke, he encountered one of them. He knew that the Kreisleiter had ordered that the prisoner, who was pleading for his life, was to be shot. Holtz called one of his men and ordered him to kill the wounded prisoner. The man refused. Holtz could see that his men were losing patience and were no longer capable of digging the graves since they could hear the groans and calls for help of the wounded. He picked up his rifle and shot the prisoner. Immediately afterward another prisoner was discovered lying injured at the northeastern end of the barn. Palis shot the poor wretch in the head.

Becker, who also came to tour the site, told Holtz that other prisoners, with varying degrees of injury, were lying in the area farther away from the entrance to the barn. Holtz told him that the Kreisleiter had ordered that all of them be liquidated, and ordered him to take his car and drive to the Kreisleitung to ensure that someone would take responsibility for carrying out this assignment. He refused to order his own men to do it, partly because he was afraid that they would refuse.

It is impossible to estimate the number of prisoners murdered in the last round of the Gardelegen massacre, in which the Volkssturm played the active part. Holtz declared at his interrogation several weeks after the massacre that there were quite a few victims, and that some were not severely injured and could easily have been given first-aid treatment, and left to await the arrival of the Americans. Palis and several other Volkssturm men undertook to deal with the prisoners on the left side of the barn. Some prisoners still tried to escape when they realized that they were to be liquidated. They were shot instantly by the Volkssturm, and their corpses were thrown into the trench.

At about 11 a.m. Wilhelm Becker, who had gone to the Kreisleitung to find a solution to the problem of liquidating the surviving prisoners, returned to the barn. With him were two or three men in Luftwaffe uniforms, one of them a junior officer. They began to deal with the wounded prisoners, who were still lying in the smoking barn. When the soldiers entered they immediately encountered two prisoners, who staggered out, followed by another two. Three of the four were shot immediately. The soldiers then went over to the burial trench on the southern side of the barn, and there they shot one or two prisoners lying inside the trench who were still showing signs of life. After about 45 minutes they left.¹⁴⁵ From the place where he was lying, among the charred corpses of his comrades, the French prisoner Georges Crétin watched the scene:

From inside I hear the sound of spades and hammers. I can see civilians digging a pit and beginning to pull out the corpses of my friends with the aid of

hooks and pitchforks and drag them to the pit. From time to time there are shots, apparently in order to liquidate those who are still alive. At noon I hear from afar cannon-fire. I see the civilians listening. I think they are going off to eat but after that I don't see them again.¹⁴⁶

The murders and the burial continued until nearly noon. Then Palis left and returned to town in order to look for Thiele and tell him that his men were tired and could not continue the exhausting work. After all, he said, they were elderly men, not young enthusiastic soldiers, and the strenuous physical labor, together with the emotional pressure, had worn them out. "My men were shattered after several hours in the barn,"¹⁴⁷ he claimed after the war.

At noon, Holtz understood that he would not succeed in completing the task, particularly since his men were gradually slipping away. The Americans would be arriving in a few hours, and the last thing he wanted was to be caught at the scene of the crime with his men. He ordered them to collect the weapons left at the site and take them to the cavalry school. At 3 p.m. Debrodt came to his house and asked if the job had been completed. Holtz told him that they had not managed to bury all the corpses and that at least 200 were still scattered in the barn and around it.¹⁴⁸ Debrodt made a further effort to complete the chore. At 3 p.m. another 30 Volkssturm men were sent to the barn, and worked there until 5:30. Debrodt went with this group and, once they had started work, he mounted his bicycle and rode home. When he reached his house, he heard that the town was due to surrender to the Americans at 7 p.m. He immediately sent one of the Volkssturm men to tell the men in the barn to hurry home.¹⁴⁹ "Night fell and there were several injured Russians and Poles inside the barn . . . dragging themselves out from among the corpses. It was clear that nobody was supervising us any more and everyone who could move, left the macabre place," George Crétin said. Total silence now reigned. Inside the barn lay several wounded and burned prisoners, whom chance had left alive after 24 hours in hell.¹⁵⁰

The next day, April 15, when the Americans had occupied the town but had not yet discovered the atrocity that had been perpetrated nearby, Holtz met Pannwitz in the street. Pannwitz asked him why he had not escaped like some of the other people implicated in the massacre. Holtz was astonished: "I had no reason to escape. What I did, was done in the framework of my obligation as a soldier to obey orders, and I have no connection with the massacre."¹⁵¹