

Yom HaShoah

Holocaust Remembrance Day

May 1, 2022

Additional Reading



Father Patrick Desbois

with Survivor Gabi Held

AJC Long Island
Holocaust Memorial and Tolerance Center of Nassau County
Nassau County Commission on Human Rights
Jewish Community Relations Council of Long Island
United Synagogues of Conservative Judaism
Voices for Truth and Humanity
Congregation Shaaray Shalom
Malverne Jewish Center
Valley Stream Jewish Center



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The Holocaust by Bullets – Yahad - In Unum

Between 1941 and 1944,

thousands of executions occurred in seven Soviet republics (Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia), in the lands from Eastern Galicia to the rivers of the Baltic, from the Muscovite Forests to the borders of Caucasus. If you consider solely the official territory of Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine, researchers estimate the number of Jews exterminated climbs up to at least 2.2 million.^[ES1] This number includes 1.6 million victims in Ukraine, at least 500,000 in Belarus and at least 120,000 in Russia. More than 80% of the victims were shot; the rest were deported and assassinated in the death camps or in gas-vans. Other extermination practices included poison as well as the practice of burying victims alive, or death of victims in the mines and wells.

Between August and September 1941,

the process of genocide carried out by the occupying German forces intensified. Men were no longer the only ones being shot, but now, women and children as well. For example, in Belaia Tserkov (Ukraine), 90 Jewish children were shot dead. On the 27th and 28th of August 1941, more than 23,000 Jews were executed by Nazis and their collaborators at Kamenets-Podolski (Ukraine).

The widespread and exhaustive extermination of Jews throughout the occupied territories was carried out by the Romanian Army and Gendarmes^[ES2], Hitler's allies. Hundreds of millions^[ES3] of Jews were assassinated in Bessarabia and Bucovina. The majority of them were murdered as early as July 1941, while the rest were concentrated into ghettos, in places like Czernowitz, or in camps, as is the case in Mărculești and Vapniarka.

Very often the shootings carried out by the Nazis occurred in broad daylight, on the brink of the town. The perpetrators regularly requisitioned locals to dig and fill the ditches, sometimes even to transport the victims or their belongings. NKVD (Narodnii Komissariat Vnoutrennikh Diél): People Commissariat for Internal Affairs. Political secret police during the USSR that was created in 1934 and replaced in 1946 by the MVD (Ministry of the Internal Affairs). The central office for the security of the Reich, abbreviated to RSHA was an organization located in Berlin and created the 27th of September 1939 by Heinrich Himmler whose primary task was to fight against the “enemies of the Reich” and “undesirable” people. Literally translates to “weapon of the protection squadron.”



One part of the military branch of the SS,

that consisted also of Allgemeine (SS) and Sicherheitsdienst (SD). She was created originally by Heinrich Himmler as a political army. [ES4] One of the most consequential shootings occurred in Kiev and obliterated one of the main Jewish communities of the USSR. On September 19th, 1941, the German troops entered Kiev as explosions rang through the city generated by far off retreating Soviet forces and a raging fire engulfing the city. The flames had just barely been extinguished when more than 33,000 Jews from Kiev were shot in the ravine of Babi Yar, the 29th and 30th of September 1941, by the Einsatzkommando 4a, police battalions and the local militia.

The *Einsatzgruppen* (task forces, special action groups) were units of the Security Police and SD (the SS intelligence service) that followed the German army as it invaded and occupied countries in Europe. Often referred to as “mobile killing squads,” they are best known for their role in the systematic murder of Jews in mass shooting operations on Soviet territory.

The massacres intensified in autumn of 1941,

as persecution persisted from the Baltic countries all the way to Crimea. The shootings were incessant on the outskirts of Kaunas, Minsk, and the Paneriai Forest (also known as Ponary) near Vilnius.

Thousands of German, Austrian, and Czech Jews were also deported to the ghettos of the North-East, and were victim to the same fate as the local Jews. Another one of the biggest Jewish massacres occurred in Bogdanovka, a small town in Southern Ukraine, where more than 40,000 Jews (mostly native to Odessa and Bessarabia) were executed by Romanian forces and German colonists in just 10 days.

Another method of extermination came about towards the end of 1941: [gas vans][ES5]. Soon, Jews were no longer the only victims of the *Einsatzgruppen* and other mobile killing units: communists, Soviet prisoners of war, partisans, “Gypsies,” mentally handicapped people, etc. In 1942, Jews living in Russia and, notably, thousands of Jews evacuated from Northern Caucasia were either shot or killed in gas vans.

The death of Soviet Jews is not called the “Holocaust by Bullets” for nothing. This criminal “methodology” of murder by shooting, was used during the entirety of the Holocaust in the East regardless of the victim count; whether it be for the extermination of a Jewish family in a small town, or tens of thousands in a large Soviet occupied city.

Throughout the summer of 1941,

just as later in 1944, the perpetrators followed the same process: extermination of a Jewish population by shooting men, women and children, often just outside a village or town. On the 22nd of June, 1941, Hitler began Operation Barbarossa, the attack on the Soviet Union. The war carried out in the East by the Third Reich was an ideological battle, conquering of a *Lebensraum* (or living space), a war about total extermination of “Judeo-Bolshevism.” Right from first days of the invasion, the pogroms were in full swing the Baltic countries, in Eastern Galicia – notably in Lviv – in Volhynia (Ukraine), often in response to the discovery of an assassination of local nationalists from NKVD prisons. The first victims of the *Einsatzgruppen* were Jewish men, in places like Tarnopol or Jitomir. The rest of the Jewish population, the women, children, and elderly, were confined to ghettos with abysmal living conditions leaving the Jews to starve, to freeze and fall ill – as they had, for example, in the Minsk ghetto in Belarus, created on the 20th of July 1941, or all the small Jewish neighborhoods scattered throughout the countryside.

At the same time, in Belarus and in Ukraine, the ghettos were “liquidated,” a word used by Nazis to describe the extermination of all Jews that were not considered useful as laborers. Up until spring 1944, the shootings

would occur throughout the occupied Soviet territories, specifically for the Jews interned in labor camps and Jewish families that were caught by local police while in hiding.

The perpetrators were part of different German units. The most infamous are the Einsatzgruppen, “Intervention groups” that executed at least 500,000 Jews [ES6]within the borders of the occupied Soviet lands.



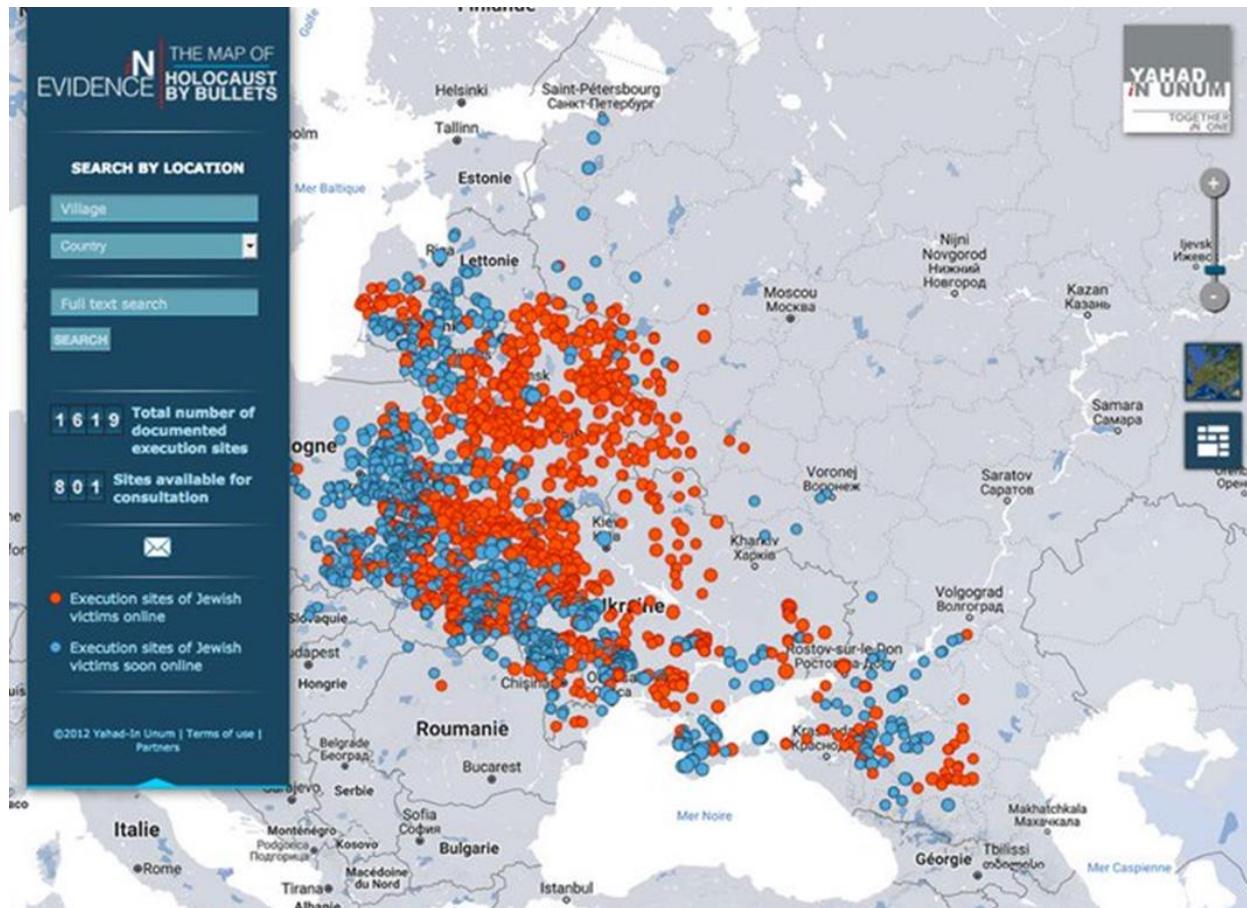
On June 22nd, 1941, following the directive of the Reichssicherheitshauptamt, four Einsatzgruppen set-off eastwards. Comprising 2,800 to 3,000 men in total, the Einsatzgruppen were paramilitary units that included: men from criminal police and the Gestapo as the leaders of each division, assisted by a unit of Waffen SS, as well as a reserve battalion of ordinary policemen.

These heterogeneous groups were completed with drivers, translators, cooks, and other personal staff. The units were completely motorized which allowed them to react quickly while in the field.

The Einsatzgruppen were divided into Einsatzkommandos and Sonderkommandos. They had to follow the troops to the front to invest in Soviet administrative buildings, uncover important documents and identify local communist leaders. They were also in charge of systematic checks on the population, arrests, or raid of Jews and their extermination.



In Evidence - Holocaust by Bullets



Holocaust by Bullets

Interview

April 24, 2009

BOB ABERNETHY, anchor: Finally, this week of Holocaust Remembrance Day, the story of Father Patrick Desbois, a French Catholic priest whose grandfather's World War II legacy led to what became for Father Desbois a sacred mission to seek out the aging witnesses of the Nazi massacre of Jews in Ukraine. They told him what they had seen as children, and what they had even been forced to assist with. Then they led him to the mass graves.

Father PATRICK DESBOIS (Yahad-In Unum):

I began by Ukraine because, in the beginning, it was a private story. I wanted only to find back the memory of my grandfather, and also where was the corpses of the Jews, and to bury them with dignity. And suddenly I discovered it was an extermination — not camp, but a continent of extermination.



In East, they shot the Jews in public. Holocaust was in public. Secret was from West, but no secret in East. All the village was watching; all the neighbors were watching.

They were poor people, and the Nazis, they used the Soviet system of requisition to force them to work. They were forced to dig the grave, to carry the Jews in carts with horses from the village to the mass grave, to fulfill the mass grave at night, to bring back the furniture of Jewish houses and to sell them, etc.

And all these people, who have been children forced by the Nazis, they want to speak today before to die.

(From Video of Ukrainian Witnesses):

UNIDENTIFIED MALE WITNESS # 1: The people were put in a line, completely undressed. I saw this with my own eyes.

INTERVIEWER: Could you show us where the graves are?

UNIDENTIFIED MALE WITNESS # 2: They're over there. Seeing those people who were still moving inside the grave, I felt sick.



Fr. DESBOIS: You know, 60 years after they still remember the last words of the dead people. They kept this secret. One woman told me, "Father, I was dreaming all my life to find somebody to say that."

(From Video of Ukrainian Witnesses):

UNIDENTIFIED MALE WITNESS # 3 (sitting with woman): They had rifles with bayonets. The bayonets were used to push the people in the grave.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE WITNESS # 4: We cried when we said goodbye. They were my friends, my schoolmates, David and Gricha.

Fr. DESBOIS: They know I don't come to judge. I come to know the truth, to establish the evidences because of the deniers, and also to find back the corpses so they will receive a prayer and the dignity. If I don't do it, who will do it?

DAVID MARWELL, PhD (Director, Museum of Jewish Heritage): Many will say it took a Catholic priest to travel all the way to the Ukraine and to unlock these memories and to locate and identify these graves. There are literally millions of people who are unnamed and whose graves are unmarked for whom Patrick Desbois has carried out a kind of sacred mission to identify their final resting place.

Related Reading

- THE HOLOCAUST BY BULLETS: A PRIEST'S JOURNEY TO UNCOVER THE TRUTH BEHIND THE MURDER OF 1.5 MILLION JEWS by Father Patrick Desbois
- IN BROAD DAYLIGHT: THE SECRET PROCEDURES BEHIND THE HOLOCAUST BY BULLETS by Father Patrick Desbois
- WAR AND GENOCIDE: A CONCISE HISTORY OF THE HOLOCAUST by Doris L. Bergen

Father Patrick Desbois: Quotes

“Killing a Jew was an insignificant, legitimate, authorized, and encouraged act that conformed with the directives of the Reich. Protecting a Jew led to capital punishment.”
— Patrick Desbois, The Holocaust by Bullets: A Priest's Journey to Uncover the Truth Behind the Murder of 1.5 Million Jews

“the more I realized that believing in the human race is a serious responsibility, and a position that needs to be consciously created and constructed. It is not enough to affirm or declare the truth; one must really commit oneself to the endeavor of developing a deep conscience, because, clearly from my own experience, a conscience is a fragile entity.”
— Patrick Desbois, The Holocaust by Bullets: A Priest's Journey to Uncover the Truth Behind the Murder of 1.5 Million Jews

“The smooth speeches of genocidal leaders most often portray killing as a clean, surgical act, necessary to remove a dangerous part from the human race. The supposed purity of genocidal discourse is nothing more than the uniform cloak of a murderer. It not only authorizes him but also justifies and encourages him. The supposed purity of murderers is part of the pretense of a just genocide. They call themselves pure to justify their duty to exterminate those they deem impure.”

— Patrick Desbois, In Broad Daylight: The Secret Procedures behind the Holocaust by Bullets

7 Lessons from the Holocaust

January 20, 2020 | by [Irwin Cotler](#)



- *While the Holocaust was “uniquely unique,” there are important universal lessons to be acted upon.*
- Whenever I write on the Holocaust – the Shoah – I do so with a certain degree of humility, and not without a deep sense of pain.
- For I am reminded of what my parents taught me while still a young boy — the profundity and pain of which I realized only years later — that there are things in Jewish history that are too terrible to be believed, but not too terrible to have happened; that Oswiecim, Majdanek, Dachau, Treblinka — these are beyond vocabulary. Words may ease the pain, but they may also dwarf the tragedy. For the Holocaust was uniquely evil in its genocidal singularity, where biology was inescapably destiny, a war against the Jews in which, as Nobel Peace Laureate Elie Wiesel put it, “not all victims were Jews, but all Jews were victims.”
- But while the Holocaust was “uniquely unique” as Holocaust scholar Yehuda Bauer put it, there are important universal lessons to be acted upon.

Lesson 1: The Importance of Holocaust Remembrance – The Responsibility of Memory

- The first lesson is the importance of *Zachor*, of the duty of remembrance itself. For as we remember the six million Jewish victims of the Shoah — defamed, demonized and dehumanized, as prologue or justification for genocide — we have to understand that the mass murder of six million Jews and millions of non-Jews is not a matter of abstract statistics.
- For unto each person there is a name — unto each person, there is an identity. Each person is a universe. As our sages tell us: “whoever saves a single life, it is as if he or she has saved an entire universe.” Just as whoever has killed a single person, it is as if they have killed an entire universe. And so the abiding imperative — that we are each, wherever we are, the guarantors of each other’s destiny.

Lesson 2: The Danger of State-Sanctioned Incitement to Hatred and Genocide — The Responsibility to Prevent

- The enduring lesson of the Holocaust is that the genocide of European Jewry succeeded not only because of the industry of death and the technology of terror, but because of the state-sanctioned ideology of hate. This teaching of contempt, this demonizing of the other, this is where it all began. As the Canadian courts affirmed in upholding the constitutionality of anti-hate legislation, “the Holocaust did not begin in the gas chambers — it began with words”. These, as the Courts put it, are the chilling facts of history. These are the catastrophic effects of racism.
- **The Holocaust did not begin in the gas chambers — it began with words.**
- As the UN marks the commemoration of the Holocaust, we are witnessing yet again, a state-sanctioned incitement to hate and genocide, whose epicentre is Ahmadinejad’s Iran. Let there be no mistake about it. Iran has already committed the crime of incitement to genocide prohibited under the Genocide Convention. Yet not one state party to the Genocide Convention has undertaken its mandated legal obligation to hold Ahmadinejad’s Iran to account.
- Related Article: Does the Holocaust Still Matter?

Lesson 3: The Danger of Silence, The Consequences of Indifference — The Responsibility to Protect

- The genocide of European Jewry succeeded not only because of the state-sanctioned culture of hate and industry of death, but because of crimes of indifference, because of conspiracies of silence.
- We have already witnessed an appalling indifference and inaction in our own day which took us down the road to the unspeakable — the genocide in Rwanda — unspeakable because this genocide was preventable. No one can say that we did not know. We knew, but we did not act, just as we knew and did not act to stop the genocide by attrition in Darfur.
- Indifference and inaction always mean coming down on the side of the victimizer, never on the side of the victim. Indifference in the face of evil is acquiescence with evil itself.

Lesson 4: Combating Mass Atrocity and the Culture of Impunity — The Responsibility to Bring War Criminals to Justice

- If the 20th Century — symbolized by the Holocaust — was the age of atrocity, it was also the age of impunity. Few of the perpetrators were brought to justice; and so, just as there must be no sanctuary for hate, no refuge for bigotry, there must be no base or sanctuary for these enemies of humankind. Yet those indicted for war crimes and crimes against humanity — such as President Al-Bashir of Sudan — continue to be welcomed in international fora.

Lesson 5: The *Trahison des Clercs* — The Responsibility to Talk Truth to Power

- **If the Holocaust proved anything, it is that a person can both love poems and kill children”.**
- The Holocaust was made possible, not only because of the “bureaucratization of genocide”, as Robert Lifton put it, but because of the *trahison des clercs* — the complicity of the elites — physicians, church leaders, judges, lawyers, engineers, architects, educators, and the like. Indeed, one only has to read Gerhard Muller's book on “Hitler's Justice” to appreciate the complicity and criminality of judges and lawyers; or to read Robert-Jan van Pelt's book on the architecture of Auschwitz, to be appalled by the minute involvement of engineers and architects in the design of death camps, and so on. Holocaust crimes, then, were also the crimes of the Nuremberg elites. As Elie Wiesel put it, “Cold-blooded murder and culture did not exclude each other. If the Holocaust proved anything, it is that a person can both love poems and kill children”.

Lesson 6: Holocaust Remembrance — The Responsibility to Educate

- In acting upon the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, states should commit themselves to implementing the Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust, which concluded: “We share a commitment to encourage the study of the Holocaust in all its dimensions... a commitment to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust and to honor those who stood against it... a commitment to throw light on the still obscured shadows of the Holocaust... a commitment to plant the seeds of a better future amidst the soil of a bitter past... a commitment... to remember the victims who perished, respect the survivors still with us, and reaffirm humanity's common aspiration for mutual understanding and justice.”

Lesson 7: The Vulnerability of the Powerless — The Protection of the Vulnerable as the Test of a Just Society

- The genocide of European Jewry occurred not only because of the vulnerability of the powerless, but also because of the powerlessness of the vulnerable. It is not surprising that the triage of Nazi racial hygiene — the Sterilization Laws, the Nuremberg Race Laws, the Euthanasia Program — targeted those “whose lives were not worth living”; and it is not unrevealing, as Professor Henry Friedlander points out in his work on “The Origins of Genocide”, that the first group targeted for killing were the Jewish disabled — the whole anchored in the science of death, the medicalization of ethnic cleansing, the sanitizing even of the vocabulary of destruction.
- And so it is our responsibility as *citoyens du monde* to give voice to the voiceless, as we seek to empower the powerless — be they the disabled, the poor, the refugee, the elderly, the women victims of violence, the vulnerable child — the most vulnerable of the vulnerable.
- We remember — and we trust — that never again will we be silent or indifferent in the face of evil. May this International Day of Holocaust Remembrance be not only an act of remembrance, but a remembrance to act.

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About the Author

Irwin Cotler

Irwin Cotler is a member of Parliament and the former minister of justice and attorney general of Canada. He is Emeritus Professor of Law at McGill University, and has written extensively on the Holocaust, genocide and international humanitarian law.

The Pyramid of Hate

The Pyramid shows biased behaviors, growing in complexity from the bottom to the top. Although the behaviors at each level negatively impact individuals and groups, as one moves up the pyramid, the behaviors have more life-threatening consequences. Like a pyramid, the upper levels are supported by the lower levels. If people or institutions treat behaviors on the lower levels as being acceptable or “normal,” it results in the behaviors at the next level becoming more accepted. In response to the questions of the world community about where the hate of genocide comes from, the Pyramid of Hate demonstrates that the hate of genocide is built upon the acceptance of behaviors described in the lower levels of the pyramid.

