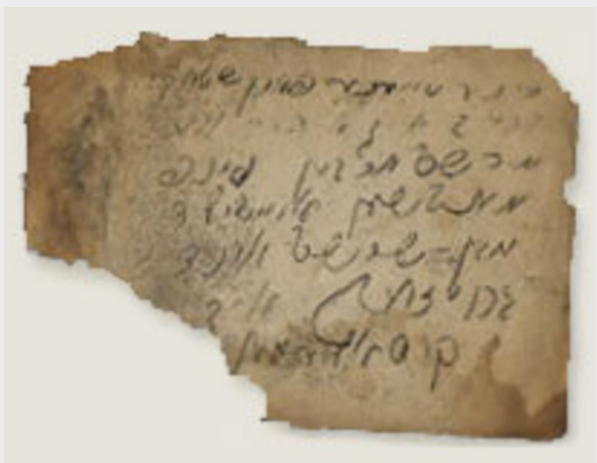


Introduction



Note Written in Yiddish from a Mass Grave near Antanase

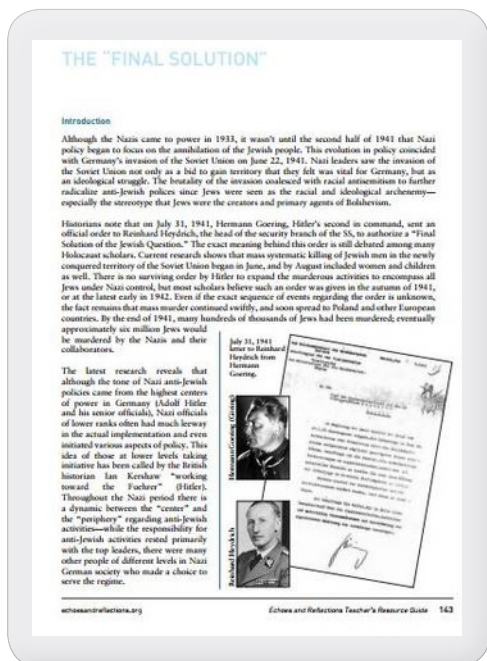
“My dearest,
Before I die, I am writing a few words,
We are about to die, five thousand innocent people,
They are cruelly shooting us,
Kisses to you all,
Mira...”

These words are all that remain of one victim of an Einsatzgruppen action near Antanase, Lithuania — one of the estimated 1.5 million victims of such actions throughout Eastern Europe.

- Discuss this note with a partner. Reflect on the content of the note, its style and the preliminary information that you gain from it.

Upon completing your reflection, summarize your response to the following question in the space below.

The Einsatzgruppen: An Overview



The “Final Solution to the Jewish Question” (aka the “Final Solution”) was a Nazi code phrase referring to their systematic plan to murder every Jewish man, woman, and child in Europe.

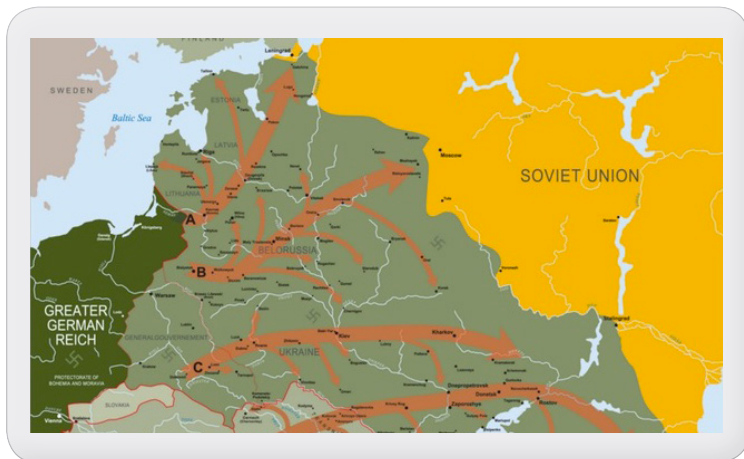
Initially believed to have been finalized at the Wannsee Conference in January 1942, historians now recognize the start of the “Final Solution” to coincide with the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. With the occupation of additional countries in Eastern Europe, nearly 3 million additional Jews came under Nazi control. The Nazis wanted to eliminate this group and initially turned to the use of Einsatzgruppen, or mobile killing squads, consisting of both Germans and local collaborators.

Read the piece, “The Final Solution”, available on pages 9–12. As you read, consider the role of the Einsatzgruppen during the war. Additionally, identify the basic structure of the units and their operations in Eastern Europe.

- Once you complete the reading, discuss the structure of the Einsatzgruppen and their role from June 1941 onward with a classmate.

Finally, summarize your discussion below.

The Routes of Einsatzgruppen Killing Units



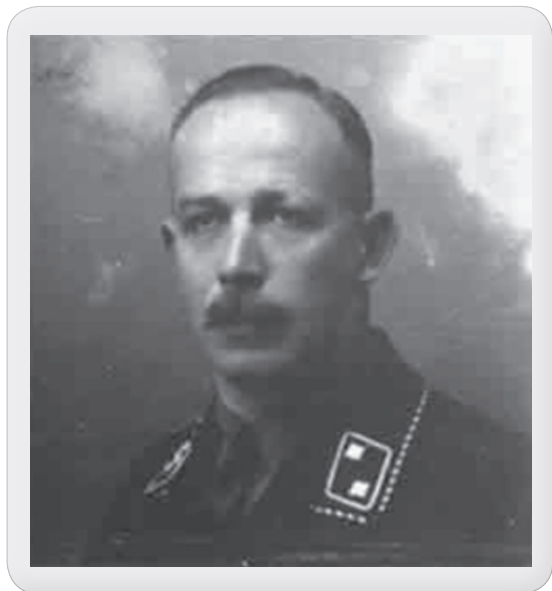
The map to the left shows the overall region where the actions of the Einsatzgruppen took place.

Investigate the map by considering the following:

- Map title
- Geographic regions
- Symbols
- Captions

- Collect three (3) examples of information you learned from this map that support the information you learned from the previous section.

Primary Source: “The Jaeger Report”



The Einsatzgruppen kept detailed records of their actions. One example is the “Jaeger Report”, authored by Commander Of Einsatzkommando 3 Karl Jaeger.

On pages 13 and 14, you can read an excerpt from his December 1941 report discussing actions against Lithuanian Jews.

How does the “Jaeger Report” deepen your understanding of the Einsatzgruppen?
To answer this question, analyze this primary source, by considering the following elements:

- 1. Who is the author of this document? What is their role in the situation they are describing?
2. What is the document’s purpose?
3. What do you already know about the events being described in this document?
4. What can you infer from this document?
5. What questions does this document raise in your mind? Where could you find answers to these questions?

Actions in the East



Survivor Witnesses

Between June 1941 and Summer 1943, approximately 1.5 million people perished in Einsatzgruppen actions. The vast majority of victims were Jews; however, Soviet political commissars, the disabled and communists were also killed.

Eyewitness accounts from intended victims are rare but occasionally occurred when these individuals were able to escape or were mistaken for dead. These individuals spread the word about the Einsatzgruppen actions to those in surrounding communities. For some, this is the only knowledge they have regarding the fate of family members.

Moses Kantorowitz and Irvin Miller, two surviving witnesses, describe what happened during these actions in the East. To learn more about them, read their biographies on page 16.



As you watch their clips of testimony, collect as many details as you can about what they saw and list them below.

Gather Your Thoughts



Action Site in Kalevi-Liiva, Estonia

Now that you have reviewed a variety of primary and secondary sources related to the Einsatzgruppen, consider what you learned about their role and context in the Final Solution. Using the Einsatzgruppen – Venn Diagram PDF (available on page 15), review and compare what you learned from each of the sources.

Then, answer the essential question below.

- What was the role of the Einsatzgruppen in the implementation of the “Final Solution?”

Action in Ivangorod, Lithuania



Reflective Journal

After reviewing the information you learned about the Einsatzgruppen, write a reflective journal that shares the information you have learned from these sources as well as your reflections on this new information. Be sure to consider the following questions.

- How did the different sources, including the photographs you have seen, inform you about the actions of the Einsatzgruppen?
- What pieces of information reinforced your prior learning about the Holocaust, particularly within the topic of the Final Solution?
- What piece of information learned in this activity surprised you the most? Why?

Gallery Walk



Share your journal with your classmates by posting it on the wall.

Next, move around the room on a “Gallery Walk” to see the work of your classmates.

Select two (2) pieces of work that you feel offered a different perspective on the actions of the Einsatzgruppen.



For each piece you have chosen, write a short comment below.

Consider what the piece clarified, what questions it raised and whether it changed your view and why.

THE “FINAL SOLUTION”

Annotation Directions

As you read, consider the role of the Einsatzgruppen during the war by:

- Identifying, highlighting, and making notes in the margins about the basic structure of the units
- Identifying, highlighting, and making notes in the margins about their operations in Eastern Europe

Introduction

Although the Nazis came to power in 1933, it wasn't until the second half of 1941 that Nazi policy began to focus on the annihilation of the Jewish people. This evolution in policy coincided with Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. Nazi leaders saw the invasion of the Soviet Union not only as a bid to gain territory that they felt was vital for Germany, but as an ideological struggle. The brutality of the invasion coalesced with racial antisemitism to further radicalize anti-Jewish policies since Jews were seen as the racial and ideological archenemy—especially the stereotype that Jews were the creators and primary agents of Bolshevism.

Historians note that on July 31, 1941, Hermann Goering, Hitler's second in command, sent an official order to Reinhard Heydrich, the head of the security branch of the SS, to authorize a “Final Solution of the Jewish Question.” The exact meaning behind this order is still debated among many Holocaust scholars. Current research shows that mass systematic killing of Jewish men in the newly conquered territory of the Soviet Union began in June, and by August included women and children as well. There is no surviving order by Hitler to expand the murderous activities to encompass all Jews under Nazi control, but most scholars believe such an order was given in the autumn of 1941, or at the latest early in 1942. Even if the exact sequence of events regarding the order is unknown, the fact remains that mass murder continued swiftly, and soon spread to Poland and other European countries. By the end of 1941, many hundreds of thousands of Jews had been murdered; eventually approximately six million Jews would be murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators.

The latest research reveals that although the tone of Nazi anti-Jewish policies came from the highest centers of power in Germany (Adolf Hitler and his senior officials), Nazi officials of lower ranks often had much leeway in the actual implementation and even initiated various aspects of policy. This idea of those at lower levels taking initiative has been called by the British historian Ian Kershaw “working toward the Fuehrer” (Hitler). Throughout the Nazi period there is a dynamic between the “center” and the “periphery” regarding anti-Jewish activities—while the responsibility for anti-Jewish activities rested primarily with the top leaders, there were many other people of different levels in Nazi German society who made a choice to serve the regime.

July 31, 1941
letter to Reinhard
Heydrich from
Hermann
Goering.

Hermann Goering (Göring)



Reinhard Heydrich



Einsatzgruppen

When “Operation Barbarossa” (German code name for Germany’s invasion of the Soviet Union) began, the Einsatzgruppen, special SS killing units, followed the German army, the Wehrmacht. Their job was to search for opponents of the Reich, including Communists and all Jews—and execute them. There were four units of Einsatzgruppen; the largest unit was composed of 1,000 men. These groups alone did not carry out the destruction of Soviet Jewry—wherever they went, ordinary German soldiers, German police units, and local collaborators were active participants. By spring 1943, the Einsatzgruppen and their collaborators had murdered 1.5 million Jews and hundreds of thousands of others, including Soviet prisoners of war and Sinti-Roma.

The Einsatzgruppen killed their victims—men, women, and children—by gathering them along the edges of ravines, mines, ditches, or pits dug specifically for this purpose. First, they would force Jews to hand over their possessions and remove their clothing. Then they would shoot them and throw the bodies into ditches that often had been dug beforehand by Jews themselves. In this way many Jewish communities were destroyed entirely.

Among the bloodiest massacres was that which occurred at Babi Yar, just outside of Kiev, Ukraine in late September 1941. There, close to 34,000 Jewish men, women, and children were murdered over the course of two days.



About Photos

Left: Einsatzgruppen about to shoot Jews on the outskirts of Kovno, 1941–1942.

Right: A German policeman searching through clothes of murdered Jews, Babi Yar, Ukraine, October 1941. Courtesy of Hessisches Hauptstaatsarchiv

The Extermination Camps

The mobile killing squads proved to be problematic for the Nazi leaders. They required large numbers of executioners, the men suffered from psychological repercussions, and it was difficult to conceal the killing from the surrounding populace. A new method was therefore devised, aimed at solving a number of these issues. First, instead of the killer coming to the victims, the victims would now be brought to “killing centers.” The new system of murder by gassing served to reduce the direct contact between the killers and their victims, making the murderers’ task easier.

A new phase in the reign of terror was reached when the “Final Solution” was formulated, and extermination camps were constructed with the expressed purpose of killing Jews. Unlike other enemies of the Third Reich, all Jews in Nazi-occupied territory were destined for extermination. In the words of Elie Wiesel, himself a former camp inmate, “While not all victims were Jews, all Jews were victims.”

Six camps were considered to be extermination camps. From across Europe, Jews were deported, most commonly like animals in cattle trains, to be slaughtered en masse at these sites. All of the camps—Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka, Auschwitz-Birkenau, and Majdanek—were in

occupied Poland which had the largest prewar Jewish community in Europe. For the most part, the Nazis tried to hide their activities from the local population.

With the exception of Auschwitz-Birkenau and Majdanek—which were also places of detention and labor—the camps had only one purpose: the Jews brought to the extermination camps were to be killed. Jews would arrive at the camp, usually after having spent several days in transit with little or no food or water, and within a few hours after reaching the camp, they would all be dead.

In Auschwitz-Birkenau and Majdanek some transports would go through a selection; however, the vast majority of the arrivals were sent directly to the gas chambers; few were selected for labor. The entire procedure was planned for the greatest possible efficiency. In order to prevent panic, which could impede the killing, the victims were deceived into believing that they were going to have showers. Their personal possessions were taken from them, and they undressed. After their deaths their possessions and even hair and gold fillings were used by the authorities for different purposes. The perpetrators created a system that functioned like an “assembly-line” procedure that has come to be known as industrialized mass murder.

There are few survivors of the four sites that were exclusively extermination camps, since most of the people who reached them were sent immediately to the gas chambers. In these camps, very few prisoners’ lives were spared in order to work in the crematoria and in other camp functions. More prisoners survived Majdanek and Auschwitz since, as slave laborers, they were not killed immediately. As a rule, the Nazi exploited slave laborers to the point of death, whereby they were either selected again, this time to be gassed, or died from exhaustion and related complications. Those who survived did so despite the Nazis’ murderous intentions. Those who did survive the extermination camps tell of the unimaginable horrors they experienced there every day.



About Photos

Left: Transfer from the deportation trains to cattle cars at the Kolo Station, Lodz, Poland. Yad Vashem Photo Archive (1602/270)

Right: A Magirus van found after the war, suspected as a gas van used for murder in Chelmno camp, Kolo, Poland. Yad Vashem Photo Archive (1264/2)

The Perpetrators

Hundreds of thousands of people were involved, either directly or indirectly, in implementing the “Final Solution,” the policy of systematically mass murdering Jews. Some actually engaged in murdering Jews. Others played a role in the bureaucratic process of ordering Jews from their homes to the sites of murder and arranging murder operations. Others became guards or transported Jews to the places where they would be killed. A great many people benefited from the worldly possessions left behind by the murdered Jews, and in this way they too became complicit in the murder process.

The core organizers and planners of the annihilation of European Jewry came from the ranks of the Nazi Party and the SS, who in general fervently believed in Nazi ideology. The driving force of the murders was the SS, among whom were commanders of killing units and Nazi camps; however, it is important to emphasize that the SS members were not the only ones who were actively involved in

carrying out the “Final Solution.” There were many groups involved from Germany, their allies in the war, and from the lands they occupied. In addition to the SS men, soldiers from the Wehrmacht, and the German police forces took part in these activities. Officials from the civil apparatus that the Germans maintained in the occupied lands also participated in implementing the “Final Solution.”

For a wide range of reasons, people from the nations that fell under Nazi domination or were allied with the Nazis also took part in the “Final Solution,” either directly or indirectly. Some were motivated primarily by their acceptance of Nazi ideology; others were of German heritage and willingly took up the offer by the Nazi authorities to become their partners; others collaborated with the Nazis in the hope that it would further their own national political agenda; others joined the Nazis in order to ameliorate their own or their family’s suffering under the brutal occupation; and still others joined the Nazis in order to escape almost certain death as prisoners of war on the Eastern Front. Regardless of how the door to collaboration swung open, many non-Germans became full and frequently enthusiastic participants in the mass systematic murder of European Jews.

Because of the broad spectrum of people involved in the murder of the Jews in one way or another, responsibility for the murder rests on society as a whole during this period.

Extract From a Report by Karl Jaeger, Commander Of Einsatzkommando 3, on the Extermination Of Lithuanian Jews, 1941

Commander of the Security Police and the SD

Einsatzkommando 3

Kovno, December 1, 1941

Reich Secret Document

*Final Summary of Executions carried out in the operating area of EK
[Einsatzkommando] 3 up to December 1, 1941.*

...I can confirm today that *Einsatzkommando 3* has achieved the goal of solving the Jewish problem in Lithuania. There are no more Jews in Lithuania, apart from working Jews and their families.

These number:

in Shavli, about 4,500

in Kovno, about 15,000

in Vilna, about 15,000

I wanted to eliminate the working Jews and their families as well, but the Civil Administration (*Reichskommissar*) and the Wehrmacht attacked me most sharply and issued a prohibition against having these Jews and their families shot.

The goal of clearing Lithuania of Jews could only be achieved through the establishment of a specially selected Mobile Commando under the command of SS *Obersturmfuehrer* Hamann, who adopted my aims fully and who was able to ensure the cooperation of the Lithuanian Partisans and the Civil Authorities concerned.

The carrying out of such *Aktionen* is first of all an organizational problem. The decision to clear each sub-district systematically of Jews called for a thorough preparation for each *Aktion* and the study of local conditions. The Jews had to be concentrated in one or more localities and, in accordance with their numbers, a site had to be selected and pits dug. The marching distance from

the concentration points to the pits averaged 4 to 5 kms. The Jews were brought to the place of execution in groups of 500, with at least 2 kms. distance between groups... All the officers and men of my command in Kovno took an active part in the *Grossaktionen* in Kovno. Only one official of the intelligence corps was released from participation on account of illness.

I consider the *Aktionen* against the Jews of EK 3 to be virtually completed. The remaining working Jews and Jewesses are urgently needed, and I can imagine that this manpower will continue to be needed urgently after the winter has ended. I am of the opinion that the male working Jews should be sterilized immediately to prevent reproduction. Should any Jewess nevertheless become pregnant, she is to be liquidated....

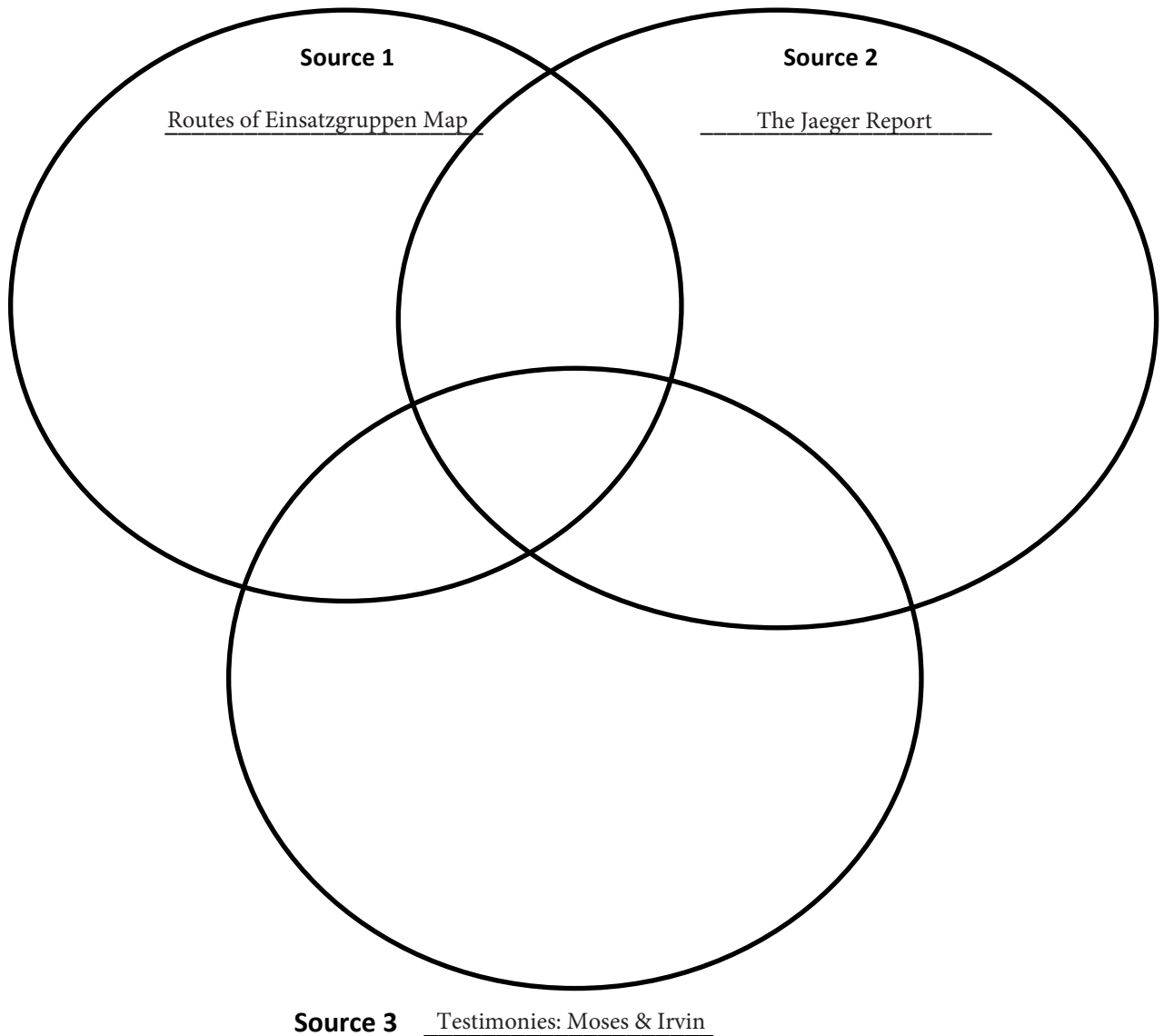
Jaeger

SS Standartenfuehrer

Source: Y. Arad, Y. Gutman, A. MarGaliot (Eds.), *Documents on the Holocaust. Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland and the Soviet Union*, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem 1981, Document no. 180, pp. 398- 400.



Essential Question: What was the role of the Einsatzgruppen in the implementation of the "Final Solution"?



What do these three sources help you understand about the event?

How does each source help you to answer the essential question?

Source 1) Routes of the Einsatzgruppen Killing Units Map:

Source 2) The Jaeger Report:

Source 3) Testimonies:

A) Moses:

B) Irvin:

Einsatzgruppen: The Firing Squads of the Holocaust

Interviewee Biographies



Moses Kantorowitz was born on February 6, 1923 in Szereszów, Poland to Isaac and Esther Kantorowitz. Growing up in large family with multiple brothers and sisters, Moses' childhood was further bolstered by the presence of a large extended, Orthodox family. The German invasion of Eastern Poland in 1941 altered the path of Moses' life drastically.

Throughout the war, Moses would encounter many different aspects of the horrors of the Holocaust. His family was relocated following an Einsatzgruppen action in a neighboring town to replace the labor services of the murdered Jews in Chomsk. He then ended up in the Pruzana ghetto with both of his parents. From there, he was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1943. Moses spent a period of time in Birkenau, before being transferred to Auschwitz-I. From there, he spent additional time in Sosnowitz (Poland) before being sent to Mauthausen. Moses was ultimately liberated in the Gusen (Austria) concentration camp by the United States Army.

Following liberation, Moses went to the Bari Reception Camp, a displaced persons camp in Italy. He spent additional time in two other Italian DP camps hoping to immigrate to Israel. Instead, with the assistance of an uncle he immigrated to Ontario, Canada in 1948 where he met and married his wife, Ruth. They had three children. At the time of his interview in 1995, Moses was still living in Ontario.



Irvin Miller was born on July 12, 1929 in Targowicz (Wolyn), Poland to Yehudah and Channa Miller. He was one of five boys in the family. His brothers were Abraham, Benzion, Sergei and Zindel. Growing up in an Orthodox household, Irv's world changed forever when the German army invaded his region of Poland in 1941.

Shortly after the occupation began, an Einsatzgruppen action in his town targeted most of the adult men. One of his cousins survived thanks to the quick thinking of Irv's father and returned to tell the story. Scared for her son's life, Irv's mother encouraged him to flee in a horse-drawn wagon shortly after the action and he found himself alone, at 12 years old, wandering into the Ukraine. He moved from location to location, occasionally encountering individuals who were willing to temporarily shelter him. In 1944, the Russian army moved into the area and Irv followed his liberators. He remained in Russian-occupied Poland, before eventually making his way to Germany.

Irv immigrated to the United States in 1948. He completed school and joined the United States Army in 1951. He was subsequently stationed in Germany. He eventually married and adopted a son and daughter. Irv worked for Lazarus Department Store for 37 years. At the time of his interview in 1996, he was living in Columbus, Ohio.