

Darmstadt, 31 May 1965

Investigative judge IV. at the District Court

Present:

District Court councillor Wagner as investigative judge

Court clerk [REDACTED]

Note:

Length of questioning: from 10 a.m. to 5.15 p.m.

In the pre-trial hearings against Kuno Callsen and others, the defendant August H. was brought before the judge.

He declared:

1. Personal details:

2. On the matter in question:

Add to person:

I was born on 31. 1. 1912 in Mellingen. In August 1941 I moved with my parents to Schw.-Hall. In Schw.-Hall I first attended elementary school and then the vocational school. I graduated from there with the so-called leaving certificate. After leaving school I learnt the cooper trade from my father August H ä f n e r. My father already had his own business there, which I run today. I have a sister, her name is [REDACTED], resident in [REDACTED], Schw.-Hall district.

I married on [REDACTED], to Ms [REDACTED]. I have two children from the marriage, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. Both are married and have their own family status.

[...]

Whether it was personally or by telephone, I can't remember. In any event, the Field Commander again ordered me to shoot the Jews. In reply to my objections he declared that there was an order stating that all Jews had to be shot and it is expressly stated that the commandos [Einsatzkommandos] are to carry out the order. The 500 Jews were brought back to the yard and I dismissed them again. The Field Commander telephoned Blobel. Blobel came to B.Z the next day. He asked me about the incident and I explained to him that I had no reason and no order to execute the Jews. I opposed this undertaking as long as possible and argued with Blobel. Blobel said that the Jews will be shot and I should carry it out. I told him that trained criminal officers were not needed for such shootings, so as just to shift on what could be shifted on. He decided that the Armed SS [Waffen-SS] platoon under SS Oberscharführer Jäger was to shoot the Jews. This was to occur in direct agreement with the Field Commander and his people. The Jews were executed close to the shooting stand of a firing range, in the lane. The firing range was part of a barracks area. I can no longer recall if it was fenced in or not. I was at the firing range twice, but not present at any shooting. The men were shot first. I cannot say how many exactly. It must have been more than 500 however. After that the Field Commander called me or said it to me personally, that all the men are now shot, even if I had resisted so firmly. Now the women were next. I said to him: "Lieutenant Colonel, if I can give you some good advice, don't get involved!" The Armed SS platoon then had to shoot the women as well. And so it came about that the children were without parents.

Question: Who carried out the shooting of the first group of children?

Answer: I assume that these children were also shot by the Armed SS. I'd driven away in the morning and returned in the evening. I wanted nothing to do with it.

Question: Did you talk with the Field Commander about shooting the children?

Answer: As he whinged that the children were now with him, and they wanted milk and he didn't have any, I said to him – or words to that effect –: "He should see to it that Ukrainians take in the children." In response he said that he'd already tried that, but the Ukrainians didn't want to take in the children. I said to him basically: "Lieutenant Colonel, you haven't followed my advice, now you have to see to it that you manage to deal with the children." I only became concerned with this affair again as I was summoned to the General of the 295th Infantry Division.

Question: What was the name of Reichenau's special representative, who delivered the order?

Answer: That was Captain Lulay.

Question: Who was the order delivered to?

Answer: Discussions were held.

Question: Who took part?

Answer: Captain Luley as special representative of the Commander-in-Chief, the Field Commander, xxxxx the IA from the 29th Infantry Division as well as the orderly officer, Blobel and myself

Question: What was the subject of the discussions?

Answer: I set out the facts, just as I did here. There were no objections to what I said.

Then Captain Luley, acting on orders from the Commander-in-Chief, explained to the Ia officer of the 295th Infantry Division:

The General should not become involved in things which don't concern him. He knows the basic orders in any case. He has noticed that the level of training in his division is lousy and he should attend to this on the double. After the IA had swallowed that, the Field Commander asked what was to happen to the children. Blobel and myself looked at each other and the officers of the 29th Infantry Division looked at one another. Then Luley spoke. He said words to the effect that the Commander-in-Chief has ordered that in his command area the orders given with respect to the Jews are to be fully and exhaustively carried out. Blobel then gave me the order to carry out the shootings of the children. I asked who was to actually carry it out. He answered: "The Armed SS". I objected. I said to him: "They're all young men; how can we give them the responsibility for shooting small children." He replied: "Then use your men." And again I said: "How are they supposed to do that, they're got small children of their own." This tug of war lasted about 10 minutes. The situation became more and more precarious, because the delegate of the Commander-in-Chief was there. Blobel jumped up and banged his fist on the table, yelled at me and said: "You're aware that refusing to obey an order is punishable by death! Do you want to carry out the order of the Commander-in-Chief, yes or no?" I said to him: "Colonel [Standartenführer], permit me to make one last suggestion." He assented. I proposed that the Ukrainian militia of the Field Commander shoot the children. No one from either side objected to this proposal.

Somewhere far away the Army had to dig the grave. A heavy vehicle from a bridge engineering battalion, which was on the location, was to bring the children to the execution site, this is what the negotiations set out.

Question: Who gave the order to fire at the execution site?

Answer: I don't know.

Question: Were you there, where the children were shot?

Answer: No. I was only at the shooting stands twice, where the adults and the first contingent of children were shot. One of my men had prompted me to go there the first time, because at the execution site fountains of a fluid comprising water and blood sprayed upwards in certain intervals.

Question: You say that the Ukrainians shot the children. Someone must have given the Ukrainians the order?

Answer: The Field Commander

Question: How many children were shot?

Answer: I think the number named during the discussions was 26.

Question: Was Callsen there in B.-Z.?

Answer: I know definitely that at this point in time Callsen was not with this commando in B.-Z.. It was the commando that was later deployed in Kiev. Everything was over by the time Janßen arrived. If someone says that a non-involved witness has recognised Callsen on several photos taken by different persons as a man present at the execution site, then I have to say that I know nothing about it. At the outside, it must have been that Callsen was there during the day, but that remained unbeknown to me.

Question: Was there any mention during the discussion where Captain Luley was present that the troop who snoops around should carry out the shootings?

Answer: I can't recall such a remark. If it's said to me that Blobel said something similar, then that can be true, but I can't say for certain.

Question: How was it ascertained that the second contingent of children was in fact shot?

Answer: I was present myself at the shooting of the 26 children.

Question: Who gave the order at the execution site?

Answer: I didn't say a word at the execution site. I only had the assignment to supervise the shooting. Blobel had given me the assignment, and that was the time he thrust the knife against my chest and said that I knew that anyone refusing orders will be shot.

I said to him at the time, under the pressure Blobel put on me, that if the children have to be shot, then I would do it because I didn't want to impose the burden on my men. No one from the Armed SS and from my men are to be added. I request the Ukrainians do it. I went to the woods all alone. The Army had already dug a grave. The children were brought along in a half-track vehicle. I had nothing to do with this technical procedure. The Ukrainians were standing around trembling. The children were taken down from the vehicle. They were lined up along the top of the grave and shot so that they fell into it. They were shot where they were shot. They fell into the grave. The wailing was indescribable. I shall never forget the scene as long as I live. I find it very hard to bear. I particularly remember an incident with a small fair-haired girl, who took me by the hand. She, too, was shot later. That shook me up the most. After the children had been shot I drove away. The grave was close to the woods. It was not near the firing range. The execution must have taken place in the afternoon, at about 3:30 – 4:00. The execution took place the day after the discussion with the Field Commander. It must have been in August. After this discussion the officers of the 295th Infantry Division turned full circle. The Lieutenant even said goodbye with a handshake. The

Lieutenant asked me if we have to do things like this all the time. I said to him that we always had to do things like this. I asked him if he didn't want to swap with me. He answered that he'd rather croak it at the front than have to do something like that.

Question: Who was the leader of the Ukrainians?

Answer: I don't know. The leader gave the direct order to fire.

Question: Were any rounds fired to put them out of their misery?

Answer: No. I didn't fire any. Some of the children were hit 4 to 5 times before they were dead. It was awful.

Question: How old were the youngest children and how old the eldest?

Answer: The children were all between 2, 6 and 8 years of age.

Question: The arrest warrant accuses you of having ordered the shooting of a 12 year-old boy before Kiev, saying 'ha, we'll bump him off'.

Answer: I know nothing about that.

Allegation:

Vol. IX, p. 2037 is read to the red marking.

The accused declares: I can't remember anything of the sort. I didn't speak Swabian back then.

Read, altered, approved and signed

Häfner

Note:

During questioning on 31 May 1965 as to events in Bjelaja-Zerkov, Häfner was so upset that he was close to weeping. It is believable that these events still haunt him. He burst out in fits of rage on many occasions because he has reproached the proceedings against the members of the task forces [Einsatzgruppen] with ignoring investigations against members of the German Army [Wehrmacht]. The German Army also ordered the execution of Jews.

In an informational discussion Häfner conceded knowing about the execution by hanging of 402 Jews in Zhytomyr by [REDACTED].

Together with a field judge of the German Army he undertook action as the soldiers had blindly beaten the Jews with truncheons on the way to the execution site.

In addition, he wishes to consult his lawyer regarding the mass killings in the Babi Yar ravine. But he had conceded that he had been in contact with the City Commandant in Kiev with respect to events there.

The Criminal Investigation Chief Officer SAUERWEIN and Criminal Investigation Officer HERRSCHEL, who brought Häfner before the judge, were present.

I permitted Häfner to smoke cigarettes and drink a Coca-Cola during questioning.