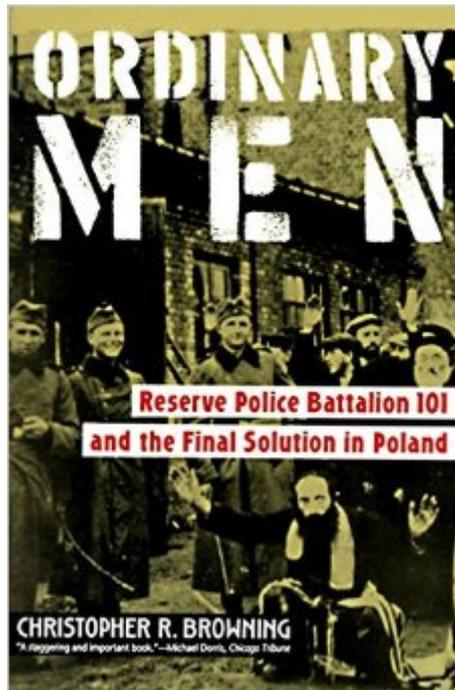


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# Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 And The Final Solution In Poland



## Synopsis

The shocking account of how a unit of average middle-aged Germans became the cold-blooded murderers of tens of thousands of Jews.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Ordinary Men" chronicles the rise and fall of Reserve Police Battalion 101, one of several units that took part in the Final Solution to the Jewish Question while in Poland. During the course of their stay, they were responsible for the shooting of 38,000 Jews, while also deporting 45,200 to the Treblinka Concentration Camp. The book argues that the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101, and other units like it, were comprised of ordinary men. It begs the question: How did ordinary men become the cold-blooded killers of the Holocaust? Author Christopher R. Browning does a tremendous job of covering the ground. He also presents a strong case that these people were indeed ordinary men, who came from ordinary backgrounds, only to end up being transformed into the murderers of thousands. However, the book also stresses that some of the men, including several officers, could not be considered "ordinary," as they were trained in Hitler's Nazi organizations from youth. Browning also does something nearly impossible: He humanizes these people without excusing their horrendous actions. Their defense that "they were just following orders" just doesn't fit the bill, as some refused to take part in the actions, and asked to be relieved. If a few men could get themselves relieved from doing the killings, why did so many more not? That is the main question the book gives. "Ordinary Men" is an extraordinary book that chronicles just one unit that took part in the murder of innocent Jews, while also presenting a good case of how

ordinary men can become killers. I highly recommend this book to all students of the Holocaust. Grade: A+

Browning's book came as a welcome relief after trudging through much of Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners*. It is interesting that he and Goldhagen approached Battalion 101 from diametrically opposite directions. Browning does not try to assess blame, but rather focus on the circumstances which led to the notorious killing spree of this battalion in Poland. Well researched with some very interesting case studies, Browning illustrates how ordinary men can be made into seemingly ruthless killers. Stalin used many of the same tactics in the Soviet Union, pitting one ethnic group against another, knowing that there would be little identification between ethnic groups in times of war. Browning provides the background of the men that comprised the battalion and the early vacillation and indecision that took place before finally being used as an execution squad in the months leading up to the Final Solution. He takes the readers through the horrific scenes, showing just how easy it was to succumb to the dictates being handed down through a long chain of command. Browning sees it is a fault-line that runs through humanity and is not specific to any one racial or ethnic group, but is an outgrowth of the devastating conditions of war.

Christopher Browning describes how the Reserve Police Battalion 101, like the rest of German society, was immersed in a deluge of racist and anti-Semitic propaganda. Browning describes how the Order Police provided indoctrination both in basic training and as an ongoing practice within each unit. Many of the members were not prepared for the killing of Jews. The author examines the reasons some of the police members did not shoot. The physiological effect of isolation, rejection, and ostracism is examined in the context of being assigned to a foreign land with a hostile population. The contradictions imposed by the demands of conscience on the one hand and the norms of the battalion on the other are discussed. *Ordinary Men* provides a graphic portrayal of Police Battalion 101's involvement in the Holocaust. The major focus of the book focuses on reconstruction of the events this group of men participated in. According to Browning, the men of Police Battalion 101 were just that--ordinary. They were five hundred middle-aged, working-class men of German descent. A majority of these men were neither Nazi party members nor members of the S.S. They were also from Hamburg, which was a town that was one of the least occupied Nazi areas of Germany and, thus, were not as exposed to the Nazi regime. These men were not self-selected to be part of the order police, nor were they specially selected because of violent characteristics. These men were plucked from their normal lives, put into squads, and given the

mission to kill Jews because they were the only people available for the task. Surprisingly, these ordinary men proved to be completely capable of killing tens of thousands of people. In fact, their capacity to murder was so great, they overwhelmingly surpassed the expectations of even the Nazi leaders. This book was very informative and compelling as it showed a believable depiction of the atrocities of genocide throughout the Holocaust. The book revealed truths such as these policemen were given many opportunities to get out of killing Jews. However, many did not take the opportunity to walk away and instead committed themselves to becoming specialized experts in the "resettlement" of Jews. I would recommend this book to anyone interested in the Holocaust and the reasons why many of these men became killers. Walter S. Zapotoczny Jr. Freelance Writer Author of *For the Fatherland*

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