

A Quantitative Study of Collaboration: Mennonites in Nazi-Occupied Ukraine

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Abstract: The lack of quantitative data has marked discussions of the involvement of Mennonites with Nazism. However, in the specific case of Mennonite collaboration during the Nazi occupation of Ukraine, there are records that allow us to make some statistically valid estimates. The *Einwanderer Zentralstelle* (Immigrant Center Office) documented persons who retreated westward with the German army in 1943, including thousands of Mennonites. Taking into account the inherent imprecision of the categories “Mennonite” and “collaborator,” a random sample of Mennonite EWZ files provides us with concrete information about Mennonite roles under the Nazi occupation, which is the basis for calculating the number of Mennonite collaborators in that context.

Discussions about Mennonite involvements with Nazism have taken place almost entirely without quantitative data, which I have been suggesting for a long time.¹ In the absence of solid quantitative evidence, the state of our knowledge of European Mennonite collaboration is accurately summarized in a 2022 article by historian Aileen Friesen:

It should be noted that scholars can only identify several dozen of specific perpetrators, a far cry from Goossen’s tens of thousands of Mennonite collaborators, unless we are willing to define as collaborators all people living under Nazi occupation.²

This brief article is an attempt to begin correcting that lack.

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¹ John D. Thiesen, “Menno in the KZ or Münster Resurrected: Mennonites and National Socialism—Historiography and Open Questions,” in Mark Jantzen, Mary S. Sprunger and John D. Thiesen, eds., *European Mennonites and the Challenge of Modernity over Five Centuries: Contributors, Detractors, and Adapters* (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 2016), 324–25. Thanks to Dwight Krehbiel for statistics advice and to Mark Jantzen for reading and commenting on earlier versions of this present article.

² Aileen Friesen, “Screening Refugees: Mennonite Central Committee and the Postwar Environment,” *MQR* 96, no. 3 (July 2022), 383–84. The reference to Goossen is to a claim of “the collaboration of tens of thousands of European Mennonites with National Socialism” in Benjamin W. Goossen, “MCC and Nazism, 1929–1955,” *Intersections: MCC Theory and Practice Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (2021), 8.

There might be various, overlapping reasons for the lack of quantitative studies. The most likely is simply that it entails a lot of tedious work to count and categorize. It might perhaps feel like less progress is being made than when reading through regular textual documents. A second consideration is what seems like a general disdain among historians (with some exceptions) for quantitative evidence and a preference for narrative or qualitative studies. It would seem that there is an unjustified mistrust for quantitative conclusions and a fear that hard quantitative data will disrupt existing narratives. This is a case where quantitative evidence can provide an informative baseline for questions of Mennonite involvements with Nazism, and specifically Mennonite involvement in Ukraine during the Nazi occupation.

DEFINITIONS

What do we mean by “Mennonite” and “collaborator?” As is the case with most other linguistic categories, there is no way to create a logically, mathematically precise definition of these terms.³ Mennonite historiography is overflowing with fruitless arguments over who is a “real” Mennonite or “real” Anabaptist. These categories are not set theory—they are not binary categories where one is either in or out. They are more like spectra—a person or a group might in some ways be thought of in a certain category and in other ways not. They also have a chronological or process dimension—a person or group might, at certain times or under certain circumstances, reasonably be thought of in a certain category, and at other times or under other circumstances not. It is obvious that in the present and the past there are and have been many incompatible understandings of what it means to be “Mennonite.” This does not require us to abandon the category, nor does it require us to draw arbitrary sharp boundaries around the category. It requires the opposite—to recognize that these categories are imprecise and contingent upon specific contexts, and to thoughtfully consider how any particular person fits or does not fit into the category “Mennonite” or “collaborator.”

³ Two classic treatments of the complexity of linguistic categories are Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 66–70, where he uses the category “games” as an example: “Don’t say: ‘There *must* be something common, or they would not all be called ‘games’ –but *look and see* whether there is anything common to all.–For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to *all*, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that . . . we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail” (quotation is from *PI* 66); and George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), which argues for “prototype-based categories defined by cognitive models” rather than classical categories defined by shared properties (p. 9).

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum defines collaboration primarily in terms of government officials and police, paramilitary, and military members.⁴ This seems to be a widely shared understanding, but also raises questions of who counts as a government official or what kind of activity might count as paramilitary. The category of “collaborator” can easily go beyond persons who personally and directly participated in killing people. I decided to count as collaborators everyone who contributed in some official way to keeping the Nazi occupation system functioning.⁵

Despite being imprecise, these categories do have intellectual content. The only point of studying these questions is that we might learn something interesting by looking at interactions between the category “Mennonite” and the category “collaborator” in that context. If we take a sort of trophy-hunting approach and simply go and find some Mennonite collaborators and stop there, then we have not really learned anything new. In that case, we did not need to do any historical inquiry in the first place because we already knew there were some Mennonite collaborators. What we want to understand is what kind of work the category “Mennonite” was doing in the context of the Nazi occupation and can we thus develop a better historical understanding of that category and of the context. Getting some hard numbers on Mennonite collaborators moves at least a small step in that direction. It shows, for example, that the category “Mennonite” is neither identical to nor completely disjoint from the category “collaborator.”

In addition, these categories lose their s if they are expanded indefinitely. For them to have any meaning, we need to be able to make a cogent argument that some people are Mennonite, more or less, and some people are collaborators, more or less, and others are not Mennonites or not collaborators, more or less. If everyone is a collaborator, or everyone in a particular village, say, is counted as a Mennonite, it short-circuits the process of historical understanding. There is no need for historical research because we already know the conclusion from the start; it degenerates into a matter of simplistic ideological polemics.

Immediately after the end of the war, the Allied powers created the Berlin Document Center to support the Nuremberg trials of the major

⁴United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Collaboration,” *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/collaboration>.

⁵Mykola Borovyk, “Collaboration and Collaborators in Ukraine during the Second World War: Between Myth and Memory,” in Gelinada Grinchenko and Eleonora Narvselius, eds., *Traitors, Collaborators and Deserters in Contemporary European Politics of Memory: Formulas of Betrayal* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 287. After discussing various weaknesses of the term “collaboration,” Borovyk ultimately uses a working definition of “participation in the operation of local administrative structures of occupation regimes, as well as in the activities of police and military forces established by the occupants.”

Nazi leaders. It included a variety of biographical files, such as Nazi Party and SS membership records. Of particular connection to Mennonites who had lived under German occupation in Ukraine during 1941–1943 were the case files of the *Einwanderer Zentralstelle* [Immigrant Central Office, usually abbreviated EWZ], which registered and documented people who were brought westwards with the retreating German army in 1943.

In 1994, when the Berlin Document Center was turned over to the German Federal Archives, its contents were microfilmed and are available through the US National Archives.⁶ Several Mennonite archives have sets of microfilms of the sections of the overall EWZ record series which seemed likely to contain “Mennonite names.”

The case files vary widely in their quality and completeness, but usually include a *Personalblatt* [personal information form] and an *Einbürgerungsantrag* [citizenship application]. These forms were not filled out by the families themselves but by office workers, with the citizenship application being signed by the family head. The personal information form was always typed, while the citizenship application form had spaces for handwritten responses but was filled in by the office workers. Files could also sometimes contain other documents, such as Soviet or German identity documents brought from Ukraine, photos, and a brief *Lebenslauf* [life sketch]. These forms are usually dated in early-to-mid-1944, after the families had arrived in occupied Poland from Ukraine. The files provided basic demographic data about the family unit, such as names and birth dates and places and religious affiliation. Also included, in most cases, is an evaluation of the family unit’s suitability for German citizenship, which includes ancestry, of course, but also information on the family members’ education, occupation, and political or military participation (under Tsarist, Soviet, and Nazi systems). Considering the situation of these refugees, caught between the two waves of mass political violence of the Nazis and the Soviets, the EWZ process was clearly coercive. If anyone could have refused the offer of German citizenship, or even refused just the process of filling out forms, the alternative would at best have been transportation into Germany as forced labor or at worst abandonment to the Soviets. There would have been every incentive for people to fully report their activities during the Nazi occupation, to make themselves look more favorable to Nazi bureaucrats. It is hard to imagine any motivation for under-reporting any kind of collaboration.

The ideal model for the EWZ files was that a family unit was present for processing and was represented together in the file. In practice, a family unit could sometimes just be an individual person, and actual

⁶ US National Archives Microfilm Publication A3342, *Einwandererzentralstelle*, Series EWZ-50, Applicants from USSR/Soviet Union.

families might end up as separate units in the EWZ files. The forms that were filled out included many people who were not actually present. Since the purpose of the filtering process was to bar the presence of people with ancestry that was undesirable under Nazi ideology, especially Jewish ancestry, people had to document their broader families. Ancestors who were no longer living are documented, but the forms also contain parents, adult children, and even siblings who were living and were often documented separately in their own EWZ files, and some who had died or been *verschleppt* [taken away, disappeared] in recent years.

The forms that were filled out as part of the EWZ processing contained questions about religious affiliation in several places. Unfortunately, we know very little about how the persons providing the information understood the answers they provided. We should be careful to neither overvalue nor undervalue these religious affiliations. It seems highly implausible that all or most of the tens of thousands of Protestants, Catholics, Mennonites, and others who labeled themselves on these forms were deeply pious or deeply identified with their confessional labels. For many, it seems likely that religious confession was simply a box to fill in on a form, with little more significance than height or age or birthplace. At the same time, they were in fact willing to give these labels as self-identifications, rather than reject them, so it meant at least something to them.

One might hypothesize that some might have wished to hide or downplay their Mennonite identification for fear that it would disadvantage them with the Nazi bureaucracy, but this option seems extremely implausible given the thousands who openly labeled themselves as Mennonites and were granted German citizenship without question.

A few apparently specifically rejected a Mennonite identification; this is hinted at by a teacher by the name of Hans Görzen who gave his religion as *gottgläubig*⁷ (his wife is identified as Mennonite). Heinrich Wiebe, a driver with the SS Sonderkommando R⁸ also labeled himself as *gottgläubig* but identified his parents, wife, and parents-in-law as Mennonite. One other young man, Jakob Franz, gave his religion as *ohne* [without or none].⁹ These cases of religious rejection were very rare.

A considerable minority of cases were ambiguous. A good example is Paul Nomerwoski (G002, 1334). He is identified racially as 100% Ukrainian,

⁷ A term used in Nazi Germany (although the word itself predates the Nazis) to reject existing Christianity while claiming to still retain some kind of vague belief in God or divinity. Görzen is on reel C020, frame 1666 of the EWZ microfilms.

⁸ Reel J013, frame 1864. Sonderkommando R was an SS unit that dealt with ethnic German affairs in occupied Ukraine.

⁹ Reel B074, frame 1812. Franz was an adoptive name.

and the family religion is Byzantine-rite (“Greek”) Catholic. He had been in a *Schutzmannschaftsbataillon der deutschen Polizei* [defense battalion of the German police]. The family was granted citizenship apparently without question. His wife’s parents (family name Teichgröb) were identified as Mennonite.

Despite the various uncertainties and qualifications, their self-identifications can be taken seriously. At a certain time and place, when asked, these people did or did not label themselves as Mennonite, whatever that might have meant to them.

The EWZ forms also contain occupations and other major activities. The vast majority of people were labeled as *Landarbeiter/in* [farm worker]. *Hausfrau* [housewife] is also a frequent occupational term for adult women. A handful of men reported other rural or village occupations such as blacksmith or shoemaker. There are many other roles of varying importance and most of these I have included in my “collaborator” category. There were a large number of translators, both men and women, and sometimes it is unclear with what agency or entity. In addition, we find a *Rayonchef* [district head] in Pjatichatki, Klaus/Isaak Peters,¹⁰ Peter Unger with the *Bankpolizei* [bank guard?],¹¹ Gerhard Warkentin as a “*Lagerwalter . . . bei der deutsche Regierung*” [storekeeper for the German government],¹² Gerhard Wiebe as the *Bezirksbürgermeister* [district mayor] for the town of Marienburg in the Nikolayev district (apparently not a Mennonite settlement).¹³ A couple of men reported that they were originally with the Red Army and then, after capture, served in the Wehrmacht (for example, David Hildebrand).¹⁴ One woman, Marie Klassen, was a kindergarten teacher.¹⁵ Another, Martha Wölke, was a *DRK Helferin* [German Red Cross helper].¹⁶

TWO PREVIOUS STATISTICAL CLAIMS

During the immediate postwar period, Mennonite collaboration was intensely debated as the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) attempted to move Mennonite refugees out of Europe. Two brief glimpses of attempts

¹⁰ Reel G030, frame 1110. Peters had changed his name from Isaak to Klaus “because in my work I was constantly in contact with Wehrmacht and civil administration officials, and the name often sounded strange and gave rise to surprised remarks.”

¹¹ I068, 2284.

¹² I087, 2380. He describes his role in the context of talking about a collective farm so it is somewhat ambiguous what his work really was.

¹³ J013, 1410.

¹⁴ D003, 1062.

¹⁵ E008, 2884.

¹⁶ J028, 528.

at statistics from that period seem to be the only previous attempts to estimate the percentage of collaborators before this article.

In an 11 March 1949 memo to MCC administrator C. F. Klassen, MCC worker Peter Dyck reported that,

Some time ago I submitted through headquarters of Entries and Exits, Bad Salzuflen, a list of 147 names of our Mennonite refugees from the British Zone, picked at random, to the Berlin records for clearance. Among your mail you will find a copy of this letter.

On the 28th of February the Berlin records returned its findings, of which I attach a copy. It appears that only half of those submitted were cleared with negative results. The other "positive" results make interesting reading.

Copies of this correspondence, as well as letters have been kept strictly confidential. Akron has not received any of it and I see no need for submitting the findings to them at this time.¹⁷

The list Dyck sent to Klassen had 74 names, as close as one could get to exactly half of his original list. There were 35 men and 39 women. Twenty-two people on the list (30%) had the annotation "Identity cannot be established" because of discrepancies in birth dates or birth places, which would seem to throw the credibility of the list into serious question. Eight on the list reported some kind of military, paramilitary, or governmental role during the Nazi occupation of Ukraine, for which I am using the label "collaborator." One man was "burgomaster" of Konteniusfeld;¹⁸ another was burgomaster of Einlage;¹⁹ a woman had been a cook with the Wehrmacht;²⁰ a man was with the SD for exactly a week;²¹ two men were in the Wehrmacht and at least one of those had come directly from the Red Army;²² a woman was a translator with the Wehrmacht and then head of a German school in "Sabiesnaka;"²³ a woman was a clerk with the *Organisation Todt Verpflegungslager* and in March 1943 *Kammervoerwalterin* with the *Wehrmacht-Bekleidungs-lager*.²⁴ An additional man was listed as a

¹⁷ Folder 1/74 "C. F. Klassen Files - Refugee Migration - Dyck, Peter and Elfrieda 1947-49," series IX-19-9, MCC archives, Akron, Pennsylvania.

¹⁸ Peter Becker, born 1914.

¹⁹ Kornelius Loewen, born 1909.

²⁰ Helene Wilms, born 1906. She was a case labeled "identity cannot be established."

²¹ Wilhelm Friesen, born 1904.

²² Peter Isaak, born 1905, and Hans Janzen, born 1911. Janzen was a case of "identity not established."

²³ Margarethe Unruh, born 1918, "identity not established."

²⁴ Agathe Lepp Wiens, born 1910. *Organisation Todt* was a large Nazi civil and military engineering and construction group, sort of a corps of engineers. The *Verpflegungslager* was

Nazi Party member—the only one on the list—but with no indication of any other kind of activity.²⁵ One man had been conscripted into the Waffen-SS in July 1944²⁶ and two women had husbands who had been conscripted into the Waffen-SS in July 1944.²⁷ Two women on the list had apparently been refused German citizenship and were still listed as Russian citizens.²⁸ One man was in police custody and his EWZ file was no longer at the Berlin Document Center.²⁹

This list has been widely misinterpreted, including by Peter Dyck himself, as incriminating a large percentage of Mennonite refugees. Dyck included as “positive” cases even those who had been denied citizenship by the Nazis. The list actually shows about 5% of the total adults having some kind of collaborationist role (probably about 7% of the men and 4% of the women, assuming the proportion of men and women was the same among the unlisted 73 persons).

A bit later in 1949, the minutes of an MCC workers meeting in Frankfurt reported on a decision by the International Refugee Organization (IRO) on July 19th to stop processing the emigration of Mennonite displaced persons. There seemed to be some amount of bureaucratic infighting among the various agencies involved, but one reason for the IRO decision was explained in the minutes as follows:

Dr. Ettinger, the IRO eligibility officer who has interviewed Mennonites in the American Zone, and whose hatred of Mennonite refugees as well as of MCC personnel he has never attempted to conceal, had submitted to Geneva detailed reports on Mennonite DP's based chiefly on information gathered from the Berlin records and the American Zone CIC. Included in Dr. Ettinger's report were detailed lists of Mennonites serving in the SS, as well as in the Einsatzkommando and Sicherheitsdienst. Dr. Ettinger has screened between 1,200 and 1,500 Mennonites in the American Zone of whom, he asserted, between thirty and forty percent had served in the

some kind of food warehouse. The *Wehrmacht-Bekleidungs-lager* was some kind of army clothing warehouse. A *Kammverwalterin* would have been a facility administrator.

²⁵This was a Johann Warkentin, born at Schoenau on 28 June 1897, who joined the Party on 1 June 1943. His occupation was listed as “Arbeiter.” Since he did not have an EWZ file, it seems likely he was not from Ukraine but rather from the Danzig region. His date of joining the Party is very late and must conceal some kind of unusual story.

²⁶Gerhard Heidebrecht, born 1915.

²⁷Anna Dueck, born 1914 (“identity not established”) and Anna Neufeld Sawatzky, born 1910.

²⁸Agnes Teichroeb, born 1895, and Maria Wiebe Huebert, born 1899 (“identity not established”).

²⁹Jakob Klassen, born 1902. The note says “Subject was with the police. This particular file is no longer in the custody of this Center.” This leaves some ambiguity as to whether Klassen was in police custody, or whether he was employed by the police.

German Wehrmacht. Brother [C. F.] Klassen of course refuted this high figure (the percentage of men in the necessary age-range for Wehrmacht service is not even this high).³⁰

There was, in fact, a Marcin Ettinger employed by the United Nations, born July 16th, 1905, in what is now Lviv, Ukraine.³¹ His doctoral degree in law came from the University of Vienna in 1929. In 1947 he was an Assembly Center Executive with UNRRA Area Team 1001 in Ettlingen, Germany.³² The United Nations Archives do not seem to contain any report by Ettinger about Mennonite refugees or any other reports by him. The MCC archives contain only a list of 28 persons (22 men, six women) titled "SELECTED MENNONITE CASES with information provided by the Berlin Documents Centre (Selected from lists in the possession of Mr. Ettinger, U.S. Zone, Germany)."³³ Of the 28, at least three are not Mennonite. Sixteen served in some collaborative role during the Nazi occupation of Ukraine. Another two were conscripted into military roles in 1944 after leaving Ukraine. There is no indication of who compiled this list or on what basis the selection of 28 was made. So there is a certain apocryphal nature to the Ettinger story. No other evidence seems to be available to provide any first-hand account from Ettinger or any other details.

The description of the Ettinger's claim in the minutes leaves considerable room for ambiguity. Was the claim that 30–40% of adult men had served in the Wehrmacht? Or 30–40% of all adult Mennonite refugees? Or 30–40% of the total number of Mennonite refugees? Was the claim really about the Wehrmacht strictly speaking or did the percentages include those who were in the Waffen-SS or other military and paramilitary formations? And did the group of refugees consist mostly of those who had fled from Ukraine or did it include many who had been elsewhere during the war? The nature of Ettinger's claim would be substantially different depending on the answers to these questions. In any case, the numbers of Mennonite displaced persons whom MCC was assisting was

³⁰ "Minutes, Meeting of MCC Refugee Section Workers, Germany, held in Frankfurt, 30 July 1949," folder 2/1 "C. F. Klassen Files - Refugee Migration - Gronau July 1948–Dec 1949," series IX-19-9, MCC archives. Historian Frank H. Epp mentioned the Ettinger allegation in his book *Mennonite Exodus: The Rescue and Resettlement of the Russian Mennonites since the Communist Revolution* (Altona, MB: D. W. Friesen & Sons for the Canadian Mennonite Relief and Immigration Council, 1962), 406.

³¹ Marcin Ettinger personnel file, UNRRA microfilm reel 18, frames 1110-1114, United Nations Archives, New York.

³² S-00436-0061-07-00001, "District 1 - Assembly Centers and Area Teams - Area Team 1001 - AC 703 - Aglasterhausen," 1946–1947, United Nations Archives.

³³ "SELECTED MENNONITE CASES with information provided by the Berlin Documents Centre (Selected from lists in the possession of Mr. Ettinger, U.S. Zone, Germany)," folder 1/78 "C. F. Klassen Files - Refugee Migration Gronau - June 1947–June 1948," series IX-19-09, MCC Archives, Akron, Pennsylvania. There is no overlap with the Dyck list of 147.

considerably reduced by mid-1949; the largest emigration movements to the Americas had already happened.

BETTER DATA

Richard Thiessen has prepared an “Index of Mennonites Appearing in the Einwanderer-zentralstelle (EWZ) Files” available on the Mennonite Genealogical Resources website.³⁴ He states that the 73,918 entries in his list include “all Mennonites identified in the EWZ files,” plus non-Mennonite family members in cases of Mennonites married to non-Mennonites. The list also includes a substantial number of people who neither identify as Mennonites nor are married to people identified as Mennonites. This includes some families with “Mennonite names” or who lived in geographic proximity to Mennonites. The list includes every person with a birth year in the selected EWZ files, so the number of people included is much larger than the actual number of refugees processed through the EWZ system. Many of the people listed in the index were not actually present at the EWZ processing sites and were often not even alive at the time of processing in late 1943 or early 1944.

Using a random number generator, I selected a sample of entries from Thiessen’s index, and then studied the family unit of which that person was a part. I divided these family units into three categories: Mennonite-identifying (the family head identifies as Mennonite), Mennonite-adjacent (the family head does not identify as Mennonite but a spouse—often *verschleppt*—or parents or parents-in-law are identified as Mennonite), and non-Mennonite (where no one in the file is identified as Mennonite). The Mennonite category makes up only 84% of the EWZ files in the index. The Mennonite-adjacent makes up 5%. The non-Mennonite category is 11% of the total number of family units. I wanted to have a random sample of 300 Mennonite-identifying families and so it was necessary to select a sample of 359 family units in order to get 300 Mennonite families.

DEMOGRAPHIC RESULTS

The age categories I used are adults (born before 1927, age 18 and up in 1944), youth (born 1927–1931, ages 13–17 in 1944) and children (born 1932–1944, ages zero to 12).

The Mennonite sample contained:

- 160 men
- 328 women
- 150 youth

³⁴https://mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/EWZ_Mennonite_Extractions_Alphabetized.pdf.

- 353 children
- 488 adults

991 total persons

The Mennonite sample averaged 3.3 people per family unit, which included:

- .5 men (16% of all people, 33% of adults)
- 1.1 women (33% of all people, 67% of adults)
- .5 youth (15% of all)
- 1.2 children (36% of all)

Children and youth made up 51% of the Mennonite sample.

The Mennonite-adjacent sample was small, 17 family units, and contained:

- 9 men
- 14 women
- four youth
- 20 children
- 23 adults

47 total persons

The Mennonite-adjacent sample averaged 2.8 people per family unit, which included:

- .5 men (19% of all people, 39% of adults)
- .8 women (30% of all people, 61% of adults)
- .2 youth (9% of all people)
- 1.2 children (43% of all people)

Children and youth made up 51% of the Mennonite-adjacent sample.

The non-Mennonite sample (42 family units) contained:

- 20 men
- 38 women
- 10 youth
- 46 children
- 58 adults

114 total persons

- 2.7 people per family unit
- .5 men (17% of all people, 34% of adults)
- .9 women (33% of all people, 66% of adults)
- .2 youth (9% of all)
- 1.1 child (40% of all)

Children and youth made up 49% of the non-Mennonite sample.

The Mennonite-adjacent and non-Mennonite family units were similar to each other, were noticeably smaller overall than the Mennonite sample, and also contained fewer adult women and substantially fewer youth.

NUMBERS OF COLLABORATORS

Because each EWZ file refers to people who were not actually present (as noted above), many people included in Thiessen's list appear more than once. A person might have their own file and also be mentioned in the files of a spouse, of parents, of adult children, or even of siblings. Older parents were often mentioned in the files of each of their adult children. I determined that each person in the list actually appears an average of 1.47 times.³⁵

This makes it more complicated to count collaborators than it might at first appear. It is relatively easy to account for the persons who were present at a particular EWZ appearance and are usually well documented on the forms. For others who were not present but were mentioned with some kind of collaborative activity, I determined whether their own EWZ file existed and left them out of my count if it did. This is because their own EWZ file had not been included in my random sample and including them would violate the randomness of the sample and bias it towards a higher-than-actual number of collaborators.³⁶ In addition, I found quite a few EWZ forms which mentioned male family members who had been conscripted into the military. The majority of these indicated that this happened in 1944 after leaving the Ukraine; these I left out of my count because I am focusing on collaboration during the occupation in Ukraine rather than afterward; it seems likely that every eligible male would have gone into some German military branch after EWZ processing.

There were also a number of persons listed with military service for whom no induction date was given. In some cases, I found the same person described in a different EWZ file which did include an induction date, and these were almost all in 1944. I suspect that most of the others with no induction date would also have been inducted in 1944, but it is possible some were earlier while in Ukraine. So, I counted a separate category of "no induction date" males.

Among the Mennonite family units, there are 13 men and eight women who fall into the collaborator category. This means that about 8.1% of the men could be called collaborators, 2.4% of the women, or 4.3% of the total

³⁵ I examined every 1000th entry in the list and counted how many times that person was listed. Some people were listed as many as four times.

³⁶ Double counting of collaborators would still be possible in rare cases—for example, if a collaborator who did not have their own EWZ file was listed in each of his parents' separate EWZ files.

number of adults. Seven of the men were in some kind of military role, which means that 54% of the male collaborators were military or police, or 4.4% of all the men or 1.4% of all adults were in such a military or police role.

In addition, there were seven men with some indication of military service but no induction date. If we make the blanket assumption (which is almost certainly incorrect) that all of these were in their military roles already in Ukraine, then we have 20 men in the collaborator category, which gives 12.5% of the men as collaborators with 5.7% of the adults being in that category, and increasing the military number to 14 men or 70% of the male collaborators, or 8.8% of all the men. These numbers would represent the maximum possible percentages of collaborators for the Mennonite sample.

If we look only at the Mennonite-adjacent sub-category, we find eight men and one woman as collaborators. Half of the men were in some kind of military, paramilitary, or police role. Collaborators are strongly over-represented among the Mennonite-adjacent men, comprising eight of the nine men (89%) in that sub-category. The one woman comprised 7% of the Mennonite-adjacent women. Collaborators made up 39% of the adult Mennonite-adjacent group.

Among the non-Mennonite family units, there were eleven men and four women who could be labeled as collaborators. Here, they made up 55% of the men and 11% of the women and 26% of the total group. Six of the eleven male collaborators (55%) were in military roles.

Table 1: Collaborators in the Random Sample

Percentage	Men	Male collaborators in military role	Women	Total adults
Mennonites	8.1	54	2.4	4.3
Mennonites plus no-induction-date military	12.5	70	2.4	5.7
Mennonite-adjacent	89	50	7.1	39
Non-Mennonites	55	55	11	26

The differences among the Mennonite, Mennonite-adjacent, and non-Mennonite samples are striking. The percentage of collaborators is far higher in the Mennonite-adjacent and non-Mennonite samples. The size of the non-Mennonite sample, and especially the Mennonite-adjacent category, is too small to reliably conclude that these differences are really

representative; further sampling is needed. But the difference in collaboration is so large that it seems unlikely that it is just coincidental.

Quite a few interesting stories are hinted at in the files:

—The forms filled out by the refugees included a statement that “Ich versichere an Eides statt . . .” [I swear under penalty of law] that the statements given, especially about ancestry, were correct. Several persons crossed out this phrase and wrote in “Ich gelobe . . .” [I affirm]—a traditional German-language Mennonite substitute for a legal oath. I found seven cases among the sample of 300 Mennonite family units (none among the Mennonite-adjacent and non-Mennonites).

—Many Mennonites had Bible-derived first names, which to Nazi ears sounded Jewish. In a few cases, those names were changed to names that sounded more Germanic (Abraham to Heinrich, for example, or Sara to Irma). I found 16 cases among the Mennonite sample, but none among the Mennonite-adjacent and non-Mennonites. Given the rarity of name changes and the small size of the latter two samples, it probably is not surprising that none were found there. Arnold Neufeldt-Fast has recently brought this name change phenomenon to attention, and argues that there was pressure to change names.³⁷ If that was the case, the pressure was remarkably ineffective. Most Abrahams and Saras continued to be Abraham and Sara. This illustrates, by the way, how quantitative research can add nuance to narrative evidence.

—A Susanne Neufeld, born 1903 (F079, 2862), was accompanied by her child Alfred, born 1942. In her EWZ file it stated “Der Vater des Kindes Schellenberg Heinrich ist am 16.4.43 von dem Deutschen Kriegsgericht zum Tode verurteilt.” [The father of the child, Heinrich Schellenberg, was sentenced to death by the German military court, 16 April 1943]. She was granted citizenship anyway.

—A Dr. Harry Voth was a professor of zoology at the university in Dnepropetrovsk both under the Soviets and under the Nazis, when he was listed as “Verwalter” [administrator] of the university (I077, 96). He identified himself and his parents as Protestant and his wife’s family as Orthodox but indicated that his more distant ancestors were Mennonite.

³⁷ Arnold Neufeldt-Fast, “Mennonites, German Occupation, and the Elimination of Jews in the Ukraine,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 98, no. 1 (January 2024), 34–37.

SOME ADDITIONAL STATISTICS

Richard Thiessen's index to Mennonite EWZ files contains 73,918 entries. Since we have already determined that each person appears about 1.47 times, this means that the index actually represents about 50,284 unique persons. In my 359 family unit sample, adjusting for the different family makeup in each of the three sub-groups (Mennonite, Mennonite-adjacent, and non-Mennonite), we can determine that the overall average family size was about 3.2 persons.³⁸ Since the index includes ancestors and other family members who were not present for the EWZ process (the index includes every person named in the indexed EWZ files who had a birth date), we can similarly determine that each file in my sample showed an average of seven indexed persons,³⁹ meaning that over half of the names (3.7 per family unit, 53%) in the index were not processed in the EWZ case in which they are mentioned. This indicates that Thiessen's list represents about 7,180 family units and about 23,700 persons who were actually present for the EWZ registration (about 11,850 adults). About 6,000 of the family units would have identified as Mennonite, including about 19,800 people (about 9,900 adults).

We can do some rough approximations of the total number of collaborators in several ways, based on the proportions found in the Mennonite sample of 300 family units. One calculation is based on the Mennonite sample without the persons lacking a military induction date. Thiessen's index encompasses about 9,900 Mennonite adults, about 3,267 men and 6,633 women. Using the percentages we found in our sample, this gives us 265 male and 159 female collaborators, with 144 of the men being military collaborators. If we add in the proportion of men who had no military induction date and assume they were inducted already in Ukraine, we get an estimate of 408 male collaborators, 287 of them military.

Looking at the very small Mennonite-adjacent sub-group, we find only about 337 families including 546 adults (186 men and 360 women). But using the percentages found in our very small Mennonite-adjacent random sample, we find an outsize number of collaborators: 166 male (83 of those police/military) and 25 female.

³⁸ 83.6% of the families (the Mennonites) had a size of 3.3 persons, 4.7% (the Mennonite-adjacent) had a size of 2.8, and 11.7% (the non-Mennonites) had a size of 2.7. $(.836 * 3.3) + (.047 * 2.8) + (.117 * 2.7) = 3.2063$.

³⁹ 83.6% of the families (the Mennonites) had 7.2 indexed persons, 4.7% (the Mennonite-adjacent) had 6.1, and 11.7% (the non-Mennonites) had 5.5. $(.836 * 7.2) + (.047 * 6.1) + (.117 * 5.5) = 6.9914$.

Table 2: Rough Approximation of Number of Collaborators

	Male	Military	Female	Total
Mennonites	265	144	159	424
Mennonites plus no-induction-date military	408	287	159	567
Mennonite-adjacent	166	83	25	191
Totals	574	370	184	758

So our rough approximations give us a total number of collaborators (including everything from SS men to translators to Red Cross assistants to kindergarten teachers) ranging from a minimum of 424 to a maximum of 567. If we add in the Mennonite-adjacent approximation, this boosts the maximum to 758. The number of men in police/military roles ranges from 144 to 370.

We can also take a somewhat more rigorous statistical approach and calculate a 95% confidence interval. Since the random sampling was done by family unit rather than by individual, we would use the family unit as the basis for the calculation. Only one of the family units in the sample contained more than one collaborator. We can again consider three sets: the 300 self-identifying Mennonite family units, the same group with the additional military men lacking induction dates, and the same group with the Mennonite-adjacent group added. Based on a normal approximation of a binomial distribution,⁴⁰ for the Mennonite group we get a confidence interval of $.043 \pm .023$, which means we can be 95% confident that the true proportion of family units including a collaborator is between 2% and 6.6%, which would mean a count of Mennonite collaborators between 120 and 396.⁴¹ For the group including the men without military induction dates, we get $.057 \pm .026$, an interval of 3.1% to 8.3% or a count of 342 to 498. For the group of Mennonite-adjacent family units, we get $.39 \pm .23$, an interval of 16% to 62%⁴² or a count of 54 to 209.⁴³ Adding these numbers to the range from the Mennonite plus no induction date samples gives a range of 396 to 707. The numbers from our rough approximations in the preceding paragraphs tend to be at the high end of these 95% confidence intervals.

⁴⁰ The formula for the interval is $\pm 1.96\sqrt{\hat{p}(1-\hat{p})/n}$ where n is the sample size, \hat{p} is the proportion of collaborators found in the sample, and 1.96 is the number of standard deviations required to encompass 95% of the distribution.

⁴¹ Multiplying the estimated 6,000 Mennonite families by the percentages.

⁴² The range is so wide because of the very small number of family units, only 17, in our Mennonite-adjacent sample, making the statistics less reliable.

⁴³ Using the estimated total number of Mennonite-adjacent family units, 337.

Table 3: 95% Confidence Intervals

	low count	low %	high count	high %
Mennonites	120	2	396	6.6
Mennonites plus no-induction-date military	342	3.1	498	8.3
Mennonite-adjacent	54	16	209	62
Total	396		707	

THE REITERSCHWADRON ANOMALY

A tradition has circulated for decades among persons connected with the Ukrainian Mennonite experience of 1942–1944 of a cavalry squadron formed in the Molotschna colony in 1942 by the SS.⁴⁴ Estimates of membership have ranged widely from 500 to 1,000. Arnold Neufeldt-Fast has done the most complete research to date on this story, in a recent unpublished paper. The statistics drawn from the EWZ files pose catastrophic problems for the Reiterschwadron story as it has usually been told. The random sample examined here included about 5% of the Mennonite and Mennonite-adjacent family units in the EWZ files. If there were even 300 members of the Reiterschwadron, there should have been about 15 of them in the random sample. There was exactly one,⁴⁵ which would indicate that there were no more than about 20 Reiterschwadron members in the entire population of Mennonite and Mennonite-adjacent family units.

Neufeldt-Fast's research provided a list of 45 names of specifically identifiable persons (full names, birth dates, and sometimes birthplaces) who were alleged to have been Reiterschwadron participants.⁴⁶ I found 41 of these in the EWZ files (for the four not found, I suspect that at least two of them may have erroneous or confused names or birthdates). Out of the 41, I found 11 persons who were clearly not Reiterschwadron participants, twelve in military formations with no induction dates (and most of these are likely 1944 inductions), and 18 who were likely Reiterschwadron

⁴⁴See for example, Jacob A. Neufeld, *Path of Thorns: Soviet Mennonite Life under Communist and Nazi Rule*, ed. Harvey L. Dyck., trans. Harvey L. Dyck and Sarah Dyck (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 230–31, 260; Gerhard Lohrenz, *The Lost Generation and Other Stories* (n.p.: Lohrenz, 1982), 49–52; Horst Gerlach, "Mennonites, the Molotschna, and the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle* in the Second World War," *Mennonite Life* 41, no. 3 (September 1986), 4–9; and Arnold Neufeldt-Fast's blog post: Neufeldt-Fast, Arnold, "Easter and Molotschna's First Ethnic German Cavalry Regiment of the Waffen-SS, 1942," History of the Russian Mennonites, <https://russianmennonites.blogspot.com/2023/05/easter-and-molotschnas-first-ethnic.html>.

⁴⁵Gerhard Klassen, born 24 Mar 1910 in Pordenau (E005, 2022).

⁴⁶Gerhard Klassen was not one of these 45.

participants. The EWZ forms for the 18 in some cases gave a more formal designation instead of the colloquial "Reiterschwadron." Most use the term "SS Ergänzungsstelle Ukraine" (SS Recruitment Office); a few used the designation "Volksdeutsche Reiterregiment" (Ethnic German cavalry regiment—Gerhard Klassen's designation).

It is remarkable that less than 50 names have been remembered, if there were really 500 or more Reiterschwadron participants. And of those 50, less than half seem to have actually been in some kind of unit similar to the Reiterschwadron. How could so many people have been forgotten?

Several hypotheses could be proposed to explain the discrepancy between the traditional story and the hard numbers of the EWZ files.

1. It has been suggested that Reiterschwadron participation was not recorded in the EWZ files or that Reiterschwadron participants did not go through EWZ processing. The 41 cases noted above show this is false. Almost all of the alleged Reiterschwadron participants for whom we have identifying information are represented in EWZ files. It may be the case that some did not have their own EWZ file where they were the family head, but in order for them to be completely absent from the EWZ records, their parents, spouses, and siblings would also have to have been systematically excluded. EWZ files routinely give data about adult children, parents, and sometimes siblings of the family head who was responsible for signing the forms. The purpose was to demonstrate that there were no connections to Jewish persons or others racially unacceptable to the Nazis.

There would have been every incentive to demonstrate one's German loyalty during the EWZ paperwork process and participation in a military unit like this would have been an ideal demonstration of loyalty. One's own participation, or having Reiterschwadron family members, would have increased the credibility of the persons going through EWZ processing.

2. Perhaps many were killed in combat? This would have to be a fatality rate in the neighborhood of 85–90% which would be remarkably high. In addition, the same objections apply as above. Not only the Reiterschwadron members themselves, but also their family members, would have to disappear somehow.

3. Was Reiterschwadron participation deliberately concealed? Here we move into the realm of conspiracy theories. There is no plausible reason for concealing participation, and obvious reasons for reporting it. Again, the same objections apply here; the family members' data would also have to have been concealed.

The story of a Reiterschwadron made up of several hundred Mennonites from the Molotschna region is simply not supported by the evidence. That leaves the question of how the mythology became detached from reality.

The most likely answer is suggested by the sample of 41 alleged Reiterschwadron participants. A good number of the men in that list who were clearly not in the Reiterschwadron were men who had joined the Wehrmacht or SS in 1944 after leaving Ukraine. In addition, there were many in the list of 41 for whom their military induction date was not given and, as stated earlier, many of these cases are likely to be men who joined in 1944. Over the course of postwar memory drift, Mennonites from Ukraine who were known to have been in the SS or Wehrmacht at some point during the war, even after leaving Ukraine, were simply assumed to have been in the Reiterschwadron. There might have also been a sort of dark glamor factor involved. In the postwar refugee community (both Mennonites and others), it might have been a matter of some kind of personal prestige or mystique to be known as someone who had been in the Reiterschwadron. In our random sample, if we add together all of the men who had any kind of police, paramilitary, or military activity at any time, whether in Ukraine or later, we get a count of 25 (29 if we include the Mennonite-adjacent). Since the sample represents about 5% of the Mennonites who left Ukraine, we get about 500 such persons. However, this would include not just cavalry members from Molotschna, but everyone from any area under occupation who went into any military or quasi-military branch. This number, being somewhat in the same magnitude as the stories of the Reiterschwadron, lends credence to the idea that the Reiterschwadron mythology results from lumping together all the Mennonite military participants and (mis)remembering them as Reiterschwadron.

Another consideration, which is very hard to document given the lack of any kind of muster roll for the Reiterschwadron, is the possibility that the vast majority of participants were not Mennonite or Mennonite-adjacent, but were Protestant or Catholic ethnic Germans, or even ethnic Ukrainians. When I began systematically sampling non-Mennonite EWZ files to begin work on a large non-Mennonite sample to compare to the sample discussed in this article, I found a Volksdeutsche Reigerregiment participant in the fourth file I examined,⁴⁷ implying that they could be quite common. The case of Paul Nomerowski mentioned above also lends support to the idea that many participants in such units were not Mennonites, and some were not even ethnic Germans.

⁴⁷Friedrich Albrecht, A007, 12. He identified himself as Lutheran and had no Mennonites among his reported ancestors.

CONCLUSIONS

The statistical exploration in this article allows us for the first time to put a hard number on one major aspect of Mennonite involvement with Nazism. We explore the number of collaborators among Mennonites who were residents of the Soviet Union and experienced the Nazi occupation and then fled along with the retreating German forces, as well as the number of persons who had some kind of active role in the administration of the Nazi occupation, ranging from translators in seemingly non-governmental settings such as collective farms to militarized roles in police and militias. Erring on the side of over-estimation by including the Mennonite-adjacent cases, we can fairly confidently state that there were about 500–600 such collaborators, of whom perhaps a quarter would have been in some kind of military role, out of a total of around 6,400 Mennonite and Mennonite-adjacent family units (around 11,000 adults).

The EWZ files would facilitate an obvious follow-up to this study—to create a similar random sample from non-Mennonites in the files and measure the number of collaborators. I have already started to work on such a sample.

Other statistical questions we might ask about Mennonite involvement with Nazism are not nearly as easy to answer because of the absence of records comparable to the EWZ files. It might be possible to get some approximation of what percentage of Mennonites were Party members, but this would be a larger effort than the EWZ records, requiring travel funding to Washington or Berlin where the Party membership records are available. I hope to be able to work on this sometime in the future.

As stated earlier, the point of investigating the relationship of the categories “Mennonite” and “collaborator” is the possibility of learning something new about what happened during the Nazi occupation of Ukraine; the possibility of finding something that is not just random and capricious. A range of numbers gives us rather limited insight into how the participants might have understood the categories into which we have sorted them and what work the categories “Mennonite” and “collaborator” did in the context of the Nazi occupation of Ukraine. The fact that the proportion of collaborators seems rather small might mean that there was a certain incompatibility between the two categories, but since we do not yet have a very reliable estimate of the proportion of collaborators among non-Mennonites, this small proportion may well be misleading.

Three types of information derived from the EWZ files give some slight hints about how at least a few persons thought about the category “Mennonite” under the conditions of Nazi occupation. First, among the Mennonite-adjacent sample—people whom we might have expected to self-identify as Mennonite—collaborators and especially military

collaborators are over-represented. This might imply that some of these persons felt a sense of incompatibility between their support of the Nazi occupation and their Mennonite connections. Second, in the small Mennonite-adjacent sample we find two men who label themselves “gottgläubig” but who have Mennonite parents. This again implies that they felt some tension with a Mennonite identification. Third, at least seven persons in the Mennonite sample wrote in “gelobe” in the signature block of their forms, indicating some continuing adherence to the traditional Mennonite reluctance to swear oaths. Given the small numbers and the fact that we have no easy way to further investigate any of these individual cases, these indications have to remain tentative for now, just hints rather than firm conclusions.