The German invasion of the Soviet Union during the Second World War was central to Nazi plans for territorial expansion and genocidal demographic revolution. To create “living space,” Nazi Germany pursued two policies. The first was the systematic murder of millions of Jews, Slavs, Roma, and other groups that the Nazis found undesirable on racial, religious, ethnic, ideological, hereditary, or behavioral grounds. It also pursued a parallel, albeit smaller, program to mobilize supposedly Germanic residents of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union – so-called Volksdeutsche, or ethnic Germans – as the vanguard of German expansion. This study examines the intersection of these two projects in Transnistria, a portion of southern Ukraine that, because of its numerous Volksdeutsche communities, became an epicenter of both Nazi Volksdeutsche policy and the Holocaust in conquered Soviet territory. It ultimately asks why local residents, whom German authorities identified as Volksdeutsche, participated in the Holocaust with apparent enthusiasm.

Eric C. Steinhart earned a PhD in history from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2010. His dissertation received the 2011 Fritz Stern Prize from the Friends of the German Historical Institute for best doctoral dissertation on German history written in North America. From 2009 until 2012, he worked as a historian, serving as the Curt C. and Else Silberman International Tracing Service Research Scholar for what is now the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.
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