

Shooting Victims. Recording Terror: The August 1941 Libau/Liepāja film footage of Reinhard Wiener

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Beginning in June 1941, four units of Einsatzgruppen, perpetrated hundreds, if not thousands of individual massacres from the Baltic Sea to the Crimea. These Einsatzgruppen followed the German army into remote areas of Soviet territory to identify, round up, and murder their victims in open-air shootings. After the invasion on June 21, civilian-targeted killing escalated quickly. The single largest massacre took place at Babi Yar, a ravine on the outskirts of Kiev on September 29 and 30. A lesser known, but equally horrific massacre took place a few months earlier in the coastal town of Liepāja/Libau, Latvia. Although prohibited by SS leader Heinrich Himmler, some participants and witnesses photographed and filmed portions of these massacres, including a 22 year-old Kriegsmarine named Reinhard Wiener. Wiener was present in Liepāja during an execution and while many photographs of Einsatzgruppen massacre survive, his footage is of singular importance: it is the only known/surviving film of an Einsatzgruppen massacre.

As part of a larger project on the massacre, "Shooting victims. Recording terror," examines the film footage, and Wiener's testimony of it, given in Israel on September 27, 1981, approximately 40 years after the event. The paper has two goals. First, to contextualize the footage and second, to explain, as best as possible, the motivation of Wiener in filming this particular massacre. Ultimately, this paper forms part of a larger project that aims to move beyond using still pictures and moving images to illustrate an historical event. Rather, its goal is to interpret the context, content, and composition of the Wiener film footage to challenge existing perpetrator narratives of the victims' experiences as they explained them in courts of law and as I have written about them thus far.