**(Rough Translation- Interrogation of Erna Petri, BStU)**

*19 Sept 1961*

*Start of Interrogation: 8:00, 14:00, and 15:30*

*End of Interrogation: 13:30, 17:45 and 21:45*

Interrogation Report of the Accused

Petri, Erna

Born. 30 May 1920

Occupation: None

Address:

Concerning the Matter:

Question: In several testimonies of Soviet witnesses, which have been presented by the investigative agencies, it appears that you not only shot Jewish men but also Jewish children. Please explain yourself regarding this.

Answer: I admit that in the summer of 1943, about in September, I shot 6 Jewish children with my own hands.

Question: Where did these children come from?

Answer: From where exactly, I do not know where the children came. I assumed that these children were the ones who had broken out of the railway cars in the train station at Saschkow. I came to this conclusion because at that time all Jews residing in the area were placed in several camps and from there they were transported to the extermination camps. In these transports frequently Jews tried to break out at the railway station Saschkow and tried to save themselves. These Jews were all naked, so that they could be differentiated from the local Ukrainians and Poles, and would be better recognized.

The Jewish children whom I shot with my own hands were dressed only with rags on their bodies, and were otherwise naked, so I came to the view that these must be Jewish children who had broken out of the transport wagons.

Question: How old were these children?

Answer: The ages of the children were difficult to determine, since they were so poorly clothed and emaciated. As far as I can recall, the children were between 8 and 12 years old.

[….]

Question: Why did you take these children to the SS-Manor Grzenda?

Answer: I took theses children with me because in those days all Jewish people who (through whatever means) had escaped the transports and showed up in the area were to be captured/trapped and shot. So that these children would also be shot, I took them with me to the SS Manor Grzenda.

[…]

Question: How did you come to the idea that the Jewish children should be killed with a bullet to the neck?

Answer: During a conversation, which was being led by my husband with his SS colleagues, I heard one time how they spoke about the shooting of Jewish persons and they revealed that in this case/task, that it was best to do the shot in the back of the neck, since the persons were immediately dead through this kind of shot. For this reason I shot all children in the back of the neck.

Question: How did the children behave as you shot them?

Answer: When I shot the first 2 children, they were in the first moment shocked and immediately began to cry. Then they stopped crying and started instead to wimper/wail. However I did not allow myself to be moved by this and shot the others until they all lay in the gully. None of the children attempted to run away, since, as I could see from their appearance, they had been in transit for several days and were totally exhausted.

[…]

Question: Why did you shoot the Jewish men and children?

Answer: In those days, when I carried out the shootings, I was only 23 years olds, still young and inexperienced. I lived only among men, who were in the SS and carried out shootings of Jewish persons. I seldom had contact with other women, so in the course of time I became more hardened. Not wanting to stand behind the SS men, I wanted to show them that I, as a woman, could conduct myself like a man. So I shot 4 Jews and 6 Jewish children. I wanted to prove myself to the men. Besides in those days in this region, everywhere one heard that Jewish persons and children were being shot, which also caused me to kill them.

Question: How was it possible that you, yourself a mother of 2 small children, could shoot innocent Jewish children?

Answer: I am unable to grasp at this time how in those days I was in such a state as to conduct myself so brutally and reprehensibly- shooting Jewish children. However earlier I had been so conditioned to fascism and the racial laws, which established a view toward the Jewish people. As was told to me, I had to destroy the Jews. It was from this mindset that I came to commit such a brutal act.

**Essential Unit Question: *How do individuals respond in the presence of extraordinary circumstances?***

**Previewing the Text:**

1. What are the features of this text?
2. Where does this text come from? Why is this important?
3. What do the dates and times tell readers?
4. How is the text constructed?
5. How do the ellipses, which represent gaps in the testimony, potentially affect the conclusions a reader might draw?

**Guiding Questions:**

1. How does Erna say she identified the children as Jewish?
2. What rationale does Erna provide for bringing the children to Grzenda and then killing them?
3. How does Erna say she was conditioned to shoot the Jewish “men and children?”

**Text Dependent Questions:**

1. How does the absence of visual and auditory information affect the reader’s understanding of the testimony?
2. How do Erna’s words betray her biases and motivations? What leads you to this conclusion?
3. What does the intent of the questioner appear to be? How does the phrasing of the questions or choice of words reveal the questioner’s intent?
4. How does Erna Petri’s interrogation complicate our understanding of the events and people of the Holocaust?

**“Bigger Picture” Question:**

Both the men in Reserve Police Battalion 101 and Erna Petri had choices that could have been made when confronted with whether to shoot individuals. Based on the testimony provided in both passages, what conclusions may a reader draw about the motivation to engage in violent actions? What role does anti-Semitism seem to have played?