



A Serial Killer in Nazi Berlin: The Chilling True Story of the S-Bahn Murderer

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As the Nazi war machine caused death and destruction throughout Europe, one man in the Fatherland began his own reign of terror.

This is the true story of the pursuit and capture of a serial killer in the heart of the Third Reich.

For all appearances, Paul Ogorzow was a model German. An employed family man, party member, and sergeant in the infamous Brownshirts, he had worked his way up in the Berlin railroad from a manual laborer laying track to assistant signalman. But he also had a secret need to harass and frighten women. Then he was given a gift from the Nazi high command.

Due to Allied bombing raids, a total blackout was instituted throughout Berlin, including on the commuter trains—trains often used by women riding home alone from the factories.

Under cover of darkness and with a helpless flock of victims to choose from, Ogorzow's depredations grew more and more horrific. He escalated from simply frightening women to physically attacking them, eventually raping and murdering them. Beginning in September 1940, he started casually tossing their bodies off the moving train. Though the Nazi party tried to censor news of the attacks, the women of Berlin soon lived in a state of constant fear.

It was up to Wilhelm Lüdtkke, head of the Berlin police's serious crimes division, to hunt down the madman in their midst. For the first time, the gripping full story of Ogorzow's killing spree and Lüdtkke's relentless pursuit is told in dramatic detail.

A Serial Killer in Nazi Berlin: The Chilling True Story of the S-Bahn Murderer Details

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Glenn Wright says

With my keen interest in Germany, and the WWII period in general, this book should have been "right up my alley." The author, however, spent so much time trying to impress his reader with the enormity of research he'd done in preparation for writing the book, that he lost me in nauseating detail. I didn't need to know the entire history of the various police organizations (KriPo, OrPo, etc.) and their organizational charts to understand the challenges they faced in tracking down the S-Bahn killer. Cutting down on these unnecessary details and the repetition of other facts in the book could have reduced the length of the audiobook greatly. This is the one time I wished the book would have been abridged greatly.

Judy says

There was lots of historical detail in this book that were as interesting to me as the deeds of serial killer, Paul Ogorzow. I learned about the living conditions and day to day concerns of average citizens as well as the political climate and ambitions of those in the party during wartime. These conditions help Paul Ogorzow commit his crimes. Mostly Ogorzow is a run of the mill serial killer with some notable exceptions in that he was a married man who was gainfully employed and a member of a dominant social class (the party) and for awhile he was able to gratify his sexual urges by throwing women off a moving train. I found it interesting that even back in 1941` the detectives were trying to complete a profile on their killer and eventually set up his interrogation room like profilers would do today with case files and evidence on display. Also, Ogorzow didn't have to languish on death row too long since he was executed the next day. Interesting to note that his wife was billed for the wear and tear on the guillotine that was used to behead him. Do you think she paid?

Mary says

Interesting case

A serial killer in Nazi Berlin--talk about coals to New Castle. It's a very interesting story.

The author explained and re-explained things just way too much. It's like a history report, not a true crime book. He gets high marks for research and a great topic.

Kandi says

This book had all the makings of a good read for me: true crime story based in Berlin in WW2. Little did I know that a book about a serial killer could be so boring!! More than that, the writing is poor and the author repeats minor details over and over and over and over and Well, you get the idea. I found myself skimming pages and skipping sections, looking for key facts. I wanted to like this book but just could not get past that it read like a high school research paper written the night before the assignment was due.

Kristin says

Shockingly shoddy.

Selby tells you at the outset that he wanted to limit his endnotes and so included nothing from the original police files, but then drops huge chunks of unnecessary quotations into the text. There are infuriatingly tedious digressions on topics that could have been single sentences, endnotes, or omitted completely: An entire page on the origin of the name S-Bahn (It's an abbreviation for the German "Stadtschnellbahn"), a paragraph on the hyoid bone, a detailed description of *the nazi flag*, in case anyone was unfamiliar.

Erik Larson, Harold Schechter, and others historical crime authors inject detailed information to add layers to their stories but the school essay quality of writing on display here(Complete with spelling errors) is less like Selby trying to paint a picture of the timeframe and more like someone desperately trying to hit a minimum page count.

Briana says

Interesting subject matter but written at a fifth-grade level.

Chris says

Good history of a killing spree in Nazi Germany. Selby includes details about transportation and living conditions.

Cerisaye says

So far I am not impressed by this book. The writing is unbelievably clunky for a published piece of historical research, filled with repetition and re-statement in a way reminiscent of the kind of modern TV documentary that assumes viewers suffer from goldfish memory and need constant reiteration of facts and opinions lest attention drift to another channel or mobile phone. This very quickly becomes annoying and makes me doubt Selby's qualifications as a serious writer of history.

Perhaps he is writing for a readership he presumes knows nothing about the Second World War (I know history as a subject receives short shrift from schools today but surely WWII is still covered extensively?), so, for e.g. he feels it necessary to introduce Heinrich Himmler as 'a very powerful top Nazi official'. There's ridiculously detailed description of the blackout, why it was necessary, what people had to do to comply with its regulations, all gone over again, and again. More information than anyone needs on class divisions on Germany's S-Bahn (railway) and why Orgorzow, who was a railway employee, targeted unaccompanied women in second class carriages, just in case you forgot what he wrote a few pages back. Did I mention the blackout and just how dark it was in wartime Berlin? This is a great pity because the story of Paul Orgorzow is undeniably fascinating, the 'serial killer in Nazi Berlin' hook of the title, yet the telling is just so BAD. I

will carry on, however.

The book makes interesting reading after David Thomas' *Ostland*, but, to be honest, you get about as much from Orgorzow's Wikipedia entry as you do reading this book. Another thing, there's a 'dramatised documentary' feel to the book which comes across as though Selby couldn't make up his mind whether to write a novel or a factual account of the S-Bahn murders.

Finished. Interesting story but a bad book, and worse, it's boring. So, not recommended unless you feel you really need to know the details of Orgorzow's case and can overlook poor writing and lack of analysis.

However, I did learn a few things of particular interest. Goebbels promoted a series of detective novels based on the successes of the *Kripo* (German Police) to boost public faith in the capabilities of the Nazi regime. The first novel, *Der Tod fuhr im Zug* (Death Rode the Train) written by Wilhelm Ihde, Head of the Reich Chamber of Writers, under the pseudonym Axel Alt was based on the Orgorzow case, and became a huge best seller. Georg Heuser, one of the lead detectives on the S-Bahn case who features in David Thomas' novel *Ostland*, went on to serve on the Eastern Front on *Sonderkommando 1b of Einsatzgruppe A*, one of the mobile killing squads that accompanied the Wehrmacht during the Russian campaign, and held various positions including head of the Gestapo in Minsk. As Selby points out, this meant Heuser was responsible for the deaths of more innocent civilians on a single day than Orgorzow during his entire killing spree. Which reminds me of a film I watched a while ago, *Der Verlorene*, with Peter Lorre as a serial killer, that makes more of the connection between individual murder and the culture and practice of violence and mass killing in Nazi Germany.

Jann Barber says

Paul Ogorzow was able to commit the crimes he did because during the years of his crimes, Germany was under blackout conditions at night, the government didn't alert the populace due to strong censorship (if word got out that a serial killer was still loose, it would make the Nazi party appear weak), and there was strong prejudice against non-Aryan people which made it easy to find scapegoats to blame.

Ogorzow was born to an unwed woman and was adopted at age 12 by a farm laborer. Ogorzow married and had two children. He could often be seen playing with his children and working in his garden. He worked on the railroad.

While the author did build the story and also added necessary details about historical events during the time of Ogorzow's activities, the structure of the book was disturbing. Selby, the author, repeated himself multiple times, as if the reader might forget. I could see how this would be helpful if the chapters ran in a weekly periodical, but as a book, this repetition was unnecessary. The language also seemed to be better suited to a middle school reader, although the material would not be appropriate for this age reader (in my opinion).

I did like the epilogue, as it referenced the fates of many of the players involved in the case, with some being Nazi names most readers would recognize. Ludtke, the police officer who handled the case, actually ended up working for the CIA after he retired from the police force. He was also captured by Russians while wearing his SS uniform (a requirement for police officers, regardless of whether or not they were involved in SS activities) and held for two months before being released.

I have not read any of Selby's other works, so do not know if this is his usual style. While interesting, the distractions worked against the intention of the book.

Clark says

The writing is very simple--probably early high-school level. This makes the text quite accessible. However, the book repeats nearly every single observation, fact, or point multiple times, often stating the same minor thing every few pages of a chapter. This constant repetition of facts gets... repetitive.

The book also notably is flawed by authorial conjecture where crime scenes are presented as nearly fictionalized narratives; the interior thoughts of murder victims, for example, are occasionally offered, as is the motivation and interior thoughts of the murderer. This goes well beyond what I would consider typical (or, really, acceptable) for non-fiction. It does make the book more exciting and immediate, I suppose, but it's very out of place in what purports to be a 'chilling true story'.

The background of WW2 is explored somewhat, but primarily only to explain why things were blacked out, why women were working in factories, and why working shifts often ended late at night. The epilogue does note that many (most?) of the police officers involved in the investigation to catch the murderer later themselves participated in direct acts of genocide. The book has an unfortunate tendency to climb the ranks of Nazi party famous people so there is frequent discussion of Himmler, Heydrich, and even Goebbels--the repeated focus in the book on this chain of command is rather silly given their very light actual involvement.

The book totally and entirely lacks any analysis (or commentary) of the moral contradictions of the Nazi empire condemning a serial killer while simultaneously perpetrating genocide. This could be viewed as staying strictly on topic, but the book contains so much other apparently incidental or extraneous material that this singular lack of commentary is bizarre. Even the back-cover blurb by Howard Blum suggests this contradictory paradigm.

Overall a fascinating case file, easily read, fairly engaging, but not very polished and with a decidedly unfinished feeling.

Miriam says

Fast read. Disturbing but interesting.

Fishface says

This was an interesting case -- about one of the many "blackout killers" of WWII -- but the book was in dire need of a rewrite before it went to press. The author explained the same thing over and over, sometimes more than once in a single paragraph, and a lot of the details had nothing to do with the story at all, like the nearly 2 pages of history on the S-Bahn logo design. It was overall worth wading through because some of the details were very interesting and pertinent indeed.

Katherine Addison says

First things first: Paul Ogorzow was a German railroad worker (on the S-Bahn, Berlin's commuter rail system) who attacked at least fourteen women, and murdered eight of them, between 1939 and 1941. Seven of these women (including five of the women who died) were attacked on the S-Bahn at night, beaten unconscious, and thrown off the train. (Remarkably, two of these women survived.) The women not attacked on the S-Bahn were attacked in a neighborhood of garden allotments, also at night during the blackout, and were beaten, beaten and raped, or beaten, raped, and murdered. The police put massive amounts of manpower into finding Ogorzow, hampered by Goebbels' refusal to allow them to publicize the investigation, and finally caught him because another railroad employee had once seen him climbing a fence to sneak off the job. (And it wasn't even to murder someone. It was to visit his mistress.) They realized that this meant Ogorzow's alibi was as full of holes as a whiffle-ball, and the police commissioner in charge of the case, Wilhelm Lüdke, in interrogation, tripped Ogorzow up once and from there, baby step by baby step, got a full confession out of him. Ogorzow put forward every excuse he could think of (the gonorrhea made him do it; the Jewish doctor who maliciously mis-treated the gonorrhea made him do it; insanity made him do it, but none of them held water. He was indicted the 23rd of July, 1941, tried the 24th, and executed (by guillotine) the 25th.

There are two particularly Nazi-esque ironies that stung me: (1) Ogorzow's heirs (his wife and two children, who had known NOTHING of Daddy's extracurricular activities, including his non-homicidal affairs with other women) were billed for wear and tear on the guillotine.

(2) Although Goebbels wouldn't allow the police to publicize the fact that they were trying to catch a serial killer, he *did* have a bright idea for protecting potential victims: a late-night escort service, where men could volunteer to accompany women on the S-Bahn and see them safely to their homes. The system was quite intelligently run: the women had to request an escort formally, and the details were entered in a log book. But the criteria for being allowed to volunteer to protect the fair flower of German womanhood? (a) You had to be a Party member and (b) you had to be a member of the *Sturmabteilung* (SA)--more familiarly known as Brownshirts.

As if that weren't bad enough, Paul Ogorzow was a Party member and a Brownshirt. He volunteered for escort duty and did in fact see all his charges safely home, protecting them vigilantly from himself.

I found the book intensely frustrating because Selby writes and uses primary sources like a lawyer rather than a historian, but he's not presenting a *case*, just the basic, convoluted narrative of Ogorzow's career as a serial killer. This creates a muddle of nonfiction genre conventions and basically leaves me with the feeling like there was no book in this book. YMMV.

As far as I know, it is the only book in English about Paul Ogorzow.

Kirsten says

This is a really interesting case, and I really enjoyed the amount of historical detail; I loved learning more about what life was like in Berlin during the blackout. However, the writing here was just incredibly

pedestrian. Sections almost read like they were written for an elementary school reading level -- very short declarative sentences, simple vocabulary, etc. It sapped quite a bit of the tension from the book, and it ended up being a bit dry and rather slow-going instead of the exciting manhunt it was.

Manchester Military History Society (MMHS) says

You sort of forget that during wartime the crimes of peacetime still carry on.

Using the original police files the author pieces together the story of this killer and the subsequent police investigation.

I'm not normally a fan of "true crime" and at times I felt the book was padded out, particularly the lengthy explanation of Nazi blackout regulations. However the process and the techniques that resulted in the murderers capture kept my attention as did the issue of trying to make public appeals for information when Goebbels Propaganda Ministry wants to keep it quiet.
