

The Auschwitz Protocol

The Vrba-Wetzler Report

[Transcribed from the original O.S.I report of the US Department of Justice & the War Refugee Board Archives]

(Photos added to enhance the text)



Rudolf Vrba



Alfred Wetzler

I. AUSCHWITZ AND BIRKENAU

ON THE 13TH April, 1942 our group, consisting of 1,000 men, was loaded into railroad cars at the assembly camp of SERED. The doors were shut so that nothing would reveal the direction of the journey, and when they were opened after a long while we realized that we had crossed the Slovak frontier and were in ZWARDON.

The train had until then been guarded by Hlinka men, but was now taken over by SS guards. After a few of the cars had been uncoupled from our convoy, we continued on our way arriving at night at AUSCHWITZ, where we stopped on a sidetrack.



The reason the other cars were left behind was apparently the lack of room at AUSCHWITZ. They joined us, however, a few days later. Upon arrival we were placed in rows of five and counted. There were 643 of us. After a walk of about 20 minutes with our heavy packs (we had left Slovakia well equipped), we reached the concentration camp of AUSCHWITZ.

We were at once led into a huge barrack where on the one side we had to deposit all our luggage and on the other side completely undress and

valuables behind. Naked, we then proceeded to an adjoining barrack where our heads and bodies were shaved and disinfected with Lysol. At the exit every man was given a number which began with 28,600 in consecutive order

With this number in hand we were then herded to a third barrack where so-called registration took place. This consisted of tattooing the numbers we had received in the second barrack on the left side of our chests. The extreme brutality with which this was effected made many of us faint. The particulars of our identity were" also recorded.

Then we were put in groups of a hundred into a cellar, and later to a barrack where we were issued striped prisoners' clothes and wooden clogs. This lasted until 10 a.m. In the afternoon our prisoners' outfits were taken away from us again and replaced by the ragged and dirty remains of Russian uniforms. Thus equipped we were marched off to BIRKENAU.

AUSCHWITZ is a concentration camp for political prisoners under so-called "protective custody." At the time of my arrival, that is in April of 1942, there were about 15,000 prisoners in the camp, the majority of whom were Poles, Germans, and civilian Russians under protective custody. A small number of prisoners came under the categories of criminals and "work-shirkers."

AUSCHWITZ camp headquarters controls at the same time the work camp of BIRKENAU as well as the farm labor camp of HARMENSE. All the prisoners arrive first at AUSCHWITZ where they are provided with prisoners' matriculation numbers and then are either kept there, sent to BIRKENAU or, in very small numbers, to HARMENSE.

The prisoners receive consecutive numbers upon arrival. Every number is only used once so that the last number always corresponds to the number of prisoners actually in the camp. At the time of our escape, that is to say at the beginning of April, 1944, the number had risen up to 180,000. At the outset the numbers were tattooed on the left breast, but later, due to their becoming blurred, on the left forearm.

All prisoners, irrespective of category or nationality, are treated the same. However, to facilitate identification, they are distinguished by various colored triangles sewed on the clothing on the left breast under the matriculation number. The first letter indicates the nationality of the prisoner.

This letter (for instance "P" for Poles) appears in the middle of the triangle. The colored triangles have the following meaning:

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- red triangle -political prisoners under protective custody
 - green triangle -professional criminals
 - black triangle -"dodgers" (labor slackers), "anti-socials" (mostly Russians)
 - pink triangle -homosexuals
 - violet triangle -members of the religious sect of "Bibelforscher"
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The Jewish prisoners differ from the Aryan prisoners in that their triangle (which in the majority of cases is red) is turned into a David's star by adding yellow points.

Within the enclosure of the camp of AUSCHWITZ there are several factories: a war production plant, Deutscher Aufrüstungswerk (DAW), a factory belonging to the KRUPP works and one to the SIEMENS concern. Outside the boundary of the camp is a tremendous plant covering several square kilometers named "BUNA." The prisoners work in all the aforementioned factories.

The prisoners' actual living quarters, if such a term may at all be used, inside the camp proper cover an area of approximately 500 by 300 meters surrounded by a double row of concrete posts about 3 meters high which are connected (both inside and outside) with one another by a dense netting of high-tension wires fixed into the posts by insulators. Between these two rows of posts, at intervals of 150 meters, there are 5 meters high watchtowers, equipped with machine guns and searchlights.

In front of the inner high-tension circle there is further an ordinary wire fence. Merely touching this fence is answered by a stream of bullets from the watchtowers. This system is called "the small or inner chain of sentry posts." The camp itself is composed of three rows of houses. Between the first and second row is the camp street, and between the second and third there used to be a wall.



Section of electrified fence at Auschwitz - Birkenau

The Jewish girls deported from Slovakia in March and April, 1942, over 7,000 of them, lived in the house separated by this wall up to the middle of August, 1942. After these girls had been removed to BIRKENAU, the wall between the second and third row of houses was removed.

The camp entry road cuts across the row of houses, while over the entrance gate, which is of course always heavily guarded, stands the ironic inscription: "Work brings freedom." At a radius of some 2,000 meters the whole camp is encircled by a second line called "the big or outer chain of sentry posts" also with watchtowers every 150 meters. Between the inner and outer chain of sentry posts are the factories and other workshops.

The towers of the inner chain are only manned at night when the high-tension current is switched into the double row of wires. During daytime the garrison of the inner chain of sentry posts is withdrawn, and the men take up duty in the outer chain. Escape through these sentry posts-and many attempts have been made is practically impossible.

Getting through the inner circle of posts at night is completely impossible, and the towers of the outer chain are so close to one another (one every 150 meters, i.e., giving each tower a sector with a 75-meter radius to watch) that approaching unnoticed is out of the question. The guards shoot without warning. The garrison of the outer chain is withdrawn at twilight, but only after it has been ascertained that all the prisoners are within the inner circle. If the roll call reveals that a prisoner is missing, sirens immediately sound the alarm.

The men in the outer chain remain in their towers on the lookout, the inner chain is manned, and a

systematic search is begun by hundreds of 55 guards and bloodhounds. The siren rings the whole surrounding countryside to a state of alarm, so that if by miracle the escapee has been successful in getting through the outer chain he is nearly certain to be caught by one of the numerous German -police and SS patrols.



The deportation of Slovak Jews

The escapee is furthermore handicapped by his clean-shaven head, his striped prisoner's outfit or red patches sewn on his clothing, and the passiveness of the thoroughly intimidated inhabitants.

The mere fact of neglecting to give information on the whereabouts of a prisoner, not to speak of extending help, is punished by death.

Provided that the prisoner has not been caught sooner, the garrison of the outer chain of sentry posts remains on the watch for three days and nights after which delay it is presumed that the escapee has succeeded in breaking through the double circle. The following night the outer guard is withdrawn.

If the escapee is caught alive, he is hanged in the presence of the whole camp; but if he is found dead, his body wherever it may have been located-is brought back to camp (it is easy to identify the corpse by means of the tattooed number) and seated at the entrance gate, a small notice clasped in his hands, reading: "*Here I am.*"

During our two years' imprisonment many attempts to escape were made by prisoners but, with the exception of two or three, all were brought back dead or alive. It is not known whether the two or three escapees who were not caught actually managed to get away. It can, however, be asserted that among the Jews who were deported from SLOVAKIA to AUSCHWITZ or BIRKENAU we are the only two who were lucky enough to save ourselves.

As stated previously, we were transferred from AUSCHWITZ" to BIRKENAU on the day of our arrival. Actually there is no such district as BIRKENAU. Even the word BIRKENAU is new in that it has been "adopted" from the nearby Birch Forest (BRZEZINSKI). The district now called BIRKENAU was, and is still, called "RAJSKA" by the local population.

The existing camp center of BIRKENAU lies 4 kilometers distant from AUSCHWITZ. The outer control zones of both BIRKENAU and AUSCHWITZ meet and are merely separated by a railway track. We never found anything out about NEW BERUN, probably about 30 to 40 kilometers away which, odd I enough, we had to indicate as postal district for BIRKENAU,

At the time of our arrival in BIRKENAU we found there one huge kitchen for 15,000 people and three stone building, two of which were completed and one under construction. The buildings were surrounded by an ordinary barbed wire fence (The prisoners were housed in these buildings and in others later constructed.

All are built according to a standard model: A house is about 30 meters long and 8 to 10 meters wide. Whereas the height of the walls hardly exceeds 2 meters, the roof is disproportionately high-about 5 meters- so that the house gives the impression of a stable surmounted by a large hayloft.

There is no inner ceiling, so that the room reaches a height of 7 meters in the center; in other words the pointed roofing rests directly on the four walls. The room is divided in two by a partition running its whole length down the middle and fitted with opening to enable communication between the two parts thus separated.



Along both sidewalls, as well as along the middle partition, two parallel floors, some 80 centimeters apart, have been built which are in turn divided into small cells by vertical partitions.

An aerial reconnaissance photograph of the Auschwitz concentration camp showing Auschwitz 1

Thus there are three floors: the ground floor and the two built in the sidewalls. Normally three people live in each cubicle. As can be judged from the dimensions indicated, these cubicles are too narrow for a man to lie stretched out and not high enough for him to sit upright.

There is no question of having enough space to stand upright. In this way 400 to 500 people are accommodated in one house or "block," as they are also called.

The present camp of BIRKENAU covers an area of some 1,600 by 500 meters which is surrounded-similar to AUSCHWITZ by a so-called small or inner chain of sentry posts. Work is now proceeding on a still larger compound which is to be added later (In to the already existing camp). The purpose of this extensive planning is not known to us.

Within a radius of 2 kilometers, as with AUSCHWITZ, BIRKENAU is also surrounded by an other chain of sentry posts with the same type of watch system as at AUSCHWITZ.

The buildings we found on our arrival had been erected by 12,000 Russian prisoners of war brought there in December, 1941. In severe winter weather they had to work under inhuman conditions as a result of which most of them, with the exception of a small number employed in the kitchen, died of exposure.

They were numbered from 1 to 12,000 in a series which had no connection with the ordinary camp numbering system previously described. Whenever fresh convoys of Russian prisoners arrived, they were not issued the current AUSCHWITZ prisoner numbers, but received those of deceased Russians in the 1 to 12,000 series.

It is, therefore, difficult to estimate how many prisoners of this category passed through the camp. Apparently

Russians were transferred to AUSCHWITZ or BIRKENAU on disciplinary grounds from regular prisoners-of-war camps. We found what remained of the Russians in a terrible state of destitution and neglect living the unfinished building without the slightest protection against cold or rain. They died "en-masse". Hundreds and thousands of their bodies were buried superficially, spreading a stench of pestilence. Later we had to exhume the corpses and burn them.



SS men at the dedicaton of a new SS hospital in Auschwitz

A week before our arrival in AUSCHWITZ the first group of Jews reached the camp: (the women were dealt with separately and received numbers parallel to those of the men; the Slovak women received serial numbers from 1 to 8,000) 1,320 naturalized French Jews from Paris. They were numbered from 27,500 onwards.

It is clear, therefore, that between this French group and our convoy no other men arrived in AUSCHWITZ, since we have already pointed out that our numbers started with 28,600. We found the 700 French Jews who were still alive in terrible condition, the missing 600 having died within a week after their arrival.

The following categories were housed in the three completed buildings:

I. The so-called "prominencia": professional criminals and older Polish political prisoners who were in charge of the administration of the camp.

II. The remainder of the French Jews, namely some 700. III. The 643 original Slovak Jews to whom were added a few days later those who had been left at ZWARDON.

IV. Those Russians who were still alive and housed in the unfinished building as well as in the open air and whose numbers diminished so rapidly that as a group they are scarcely worth mentioning.

Together with the remaining Russian prisoners the Slovak Jews worked at the construction of buildings, whereas the French Jews had to do spade work. After three days I was ordered, together with 200 other Slovak Jews, to work in the German armament factories at AUSCHWITZ, but we continued to be housed in BIRKENAU. We left early in the morning returning at night and worked in the carpentry shop as well as 011 road construction. Our food consisted of one liter of turnip soup) at midday and 300 grams of bad bread in the evening.

Working conditions were inconceivably hard, so that the majority of III weakened by starvation and the inedible food, could not stand it. The mortality was so high that every day our group of 200 had 30 to 35 dead. Many were simply beaten to death by the overseers-the "Capos"-during work, without the slightest provocation.

The gaps in our ranks caused by these deaths were replaced daily by prisoners from BIRKENAU. Our return at night was extremely painful and dangerous, as we had to drag along over a distance of 5 kilometers our

tools, firewood, heavy caldrons, and the bodies of those who had died or had been killed during the working day. With these heavy loads we were forced to maintain a brisk pace, and anyone incurring the displeasure of one of the "Capos" was cruelly knocked down, if not beaten to death.

Until the arrival of the second group of Slovak men some 14 days later, our original number had dwindled to 150. At night we were counted, the bodies of the dead were piled up on flat, narrow-gauge cars or in a truck and brought to the Birch Forest (BRZEZINSKI) where they were burned in a trench several meters deep and about 15 meters long.



A column of prisoners walks to or from a work assignment in Auschwitz

Every day on our way to work we met a working party of 300 Jewish girls from Slovakia who were employed on ground work in the vicinity. They were dressed in old Russian uniform rags and wore wooden clogs. Their heads were shaven and, unfortunately, we could not speak to them. Until the middle of May, 1942, a total of four convoys of male Jews from Slovakia arrived at BIRKENAU and all received similar treatment to ours.

From the first and second transports 120 men were chosen (including myself) and placed at the disposal of the administration of the camp of AUSCHWITZ, which was in need of doctors, dentists, intellectuals, and clerks. This group consisted of 90 Slovak and 30 French Jews.

As I had in the meantime managed to work my way up to a good position in BIRKENAU -being in command of a group of 50 men, which had brought me a considerable advantage-I at first felt reluctant to leave for AUSCHWITZ. However, I was finally persuaded to go and left.

After eight days, 18 doctors and attendants as well as three further persons were selected from this group of 120 intellectuals. The doctors were used in the "sick building" or "hospital" at AUSCHWITZ, while we three were sent back to BIRKENAU.

My two comrade, Ladislav Braun from Trnava and Gross from Vrbove' , both of whom have since died, were sent to the Slovak block while I was ordered to the French section where we were employed collecting "personal data" and at "nursing" the sick. The remaining 99 prisoners were sent to work in the gravel pit where they all died within a short time.



The main gate at Auschwitz

Shortly thereafter a so-called "sick-building" (Krankenbau) was set up. It was destined to become the much dreaded "Block 7" where at first I was chief attendant and later administrator. The chief of this "infirmary" was a Pole. Actually this building was nothing else than an assembly center for death candidates. All prisoners incapable of working were sent there.

There was no question of any medical attention or care. We had some 150 dead daily and their bodies were sent for cremation to AUSCHWITZ. At the same time the so-called "selections" were introduced.

Twice weekly, Mondays and Thursdays, the camp doctor indicated the number of prisoners who were to be gassed and then burned. These "selections" were loaded into trucks and brought to the Birch Forest. Those still alive upon arrival were gassed in a big barrack erected near the trench used for burning the bodies.

The weekly "draft" in dead from "Block 7" was about 2,000, of whom 1,200 died of "natural death" and about 800 through "selection." For those who had not been "selected" a death certificate was issued and sent to the central administration at ORANIENBURG, whereas for the "selectees" a special register was kept with the indication "S.B." ("Sonderbehandelt" -special treatment).

Until January 15, 1943, up to which time I was administrator of "Block 7" and therefore in a position to directly observe happenings, some 50,000 prisoners died of "natural death" or by "selection,"

As previously described, the prisoners were numbered consecutively so that we are able to reconstruct fairly clearly their order of succession and the fate which befell each separate convoy on arrival.

The first male Jewish transport reaching AUSCHWITZ for BIRKENAU was composed, as mentioned, of 1,320 naturalized French Jews bearing approximately the following numbers:

27,400-28,600

28,600-29,600 In April, 1942 the first convoy of Slovak Jews (our convoy).

29,600-29,700 100 men (Aryans) from various concentration camps.

29,700-32,700 3 complete convoys of Slovak Jews

32,700-33,100 400 professional criminals (Aryans) from Warsaw prisons.

33,100-35,000 1,900 Jews from Cracow.

35,000-36,000 1,000 Poles (Aryans)-political prisoners.

36,000-37,300 In May, 1942-1,300 Slovak Jews from LUBLIN MAJDANEK.

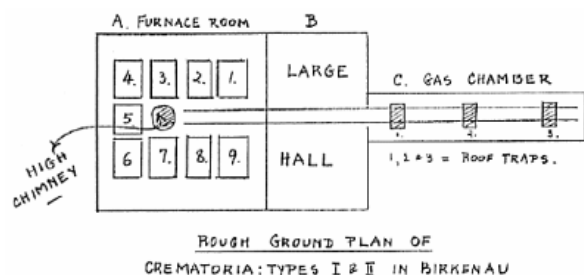
37,300-37,900 600 Poles (Aryans) from RADOM, amongst them a few Jews

37,900-38,000 100 Poles from the concentration camp of DACHAU

38,000-38,400 400 French naturalized Jews who arrived with their families.

This whole convoy consisted of about 1,600 individuals of whom approximately 200 girls and 400 men were admitted to the camp, while the remaining 1,000 persons (women, old people, children as well as men) were sent without further procedure from the railroad siding directly to the Birch Forest, and there gassed and burned.

From this moment on all Jewish convoys were dealt with in the same manner. Approximately 10 percent of the men and 5 percent of the women were allotted to the



Rudolf Vrba's sketch of the Crematorium at Birkenau

camps and the remaining members were immediately gassed.

This process of extermination had already been applied earlier to the Polish Jews. During long months, without interruption, trucks brought thousands of Jews from the various "ghettos" direct to the pit in the "Birkenwald."

38,400 - 39,200 800 naturalized French Jews, the remainder of the convoy was-as previously described, gassed.

39,200 - 40,000 800 Poles (Aryans), political prisoners. 150 Slovak Jews with their families.

40,000 - 40,150 Slovak Jews with their families. Outside of a group of 50 girls sent to the women's camp, all other members were gassed in the Birch forest. Among the 150 men who came to the camp, there was a certain "Zucker", and Sonnenschein, Viliam, both from eastern Slovakia.

40,150 - 43,800 Approximately 4,000 French naturalized Jews, almost all were intellectuals; 1,000 women were

directed to the women's camp, while the balance of about 3,000 persons were gassed in the usual manner.

400 Slovak Jews from LUBLIN, including Matej Klein and No. 43820, Meiloch Laufer from Eastern Slovakia. This convoy arrived on June 30, 1942.

200 Slovak Jews. The convoy consisted of 1,000 persons. A number of women were sent to the women's camp, the rest gassed in the Birch Wood. Among the prisoners sent to camp were: Jozef Zelmanovic -Snina, Adolf Kahan -Bratislava, Walter Reichmann -Sucany, AND Esther Kahan from Bratislava.

2,000 Frenchmen (Aryans), communists and other political prisoners, among whom were the brother of Thorez and the young brother of Leon Blum. The latter was atrociously tortured, then gassed and burned.

500 Jews from Holland, in the majority German emigrants. The rest of the convoy, about 2,500 persons, gassed. About 300 so-called Russians under protective custody.



320 Jews from Slovakia. About 70 girls were transferred to the women's camp, the remainder, some 650 people, gassed in the Birch Wood. This convoy included about 80 people who had been handed over by the Hungarian police to the camp of SERED.

Others from this convoy were: Dr. Zoltan Mandel (since deceased)-Holz (Christian name unknown), butcher from Piestany, Miklos Engel, from Zilnia and Chaim Katz from Snina, (his wife and 6 children were gassed).

Sonderkommando engaged in open-air cremations

15,000 naturalized French, Belgian and Dutch Jews. This figure certainly represents less than 10 percent of the total convoy. This was between July 1 and September 15, 1942. Large family convoys arrived from various European countries and were at once directed to the Birch Wood.

The special squad ("Sonderkommando") employed for gassing and burning worked in day and night shifts. Hundreds of thousands of Jews were gassed during this period.

64,800-65,000

200 Slovak Jews. Out of this transport about 100 women were admitted to the camp, the rest of them gassed and burned. Among the newly arrived were: Ludwig Katz, Zilina-Avri Burger, Bratislava-Poprad (wife dead) Mikulas Steiner, Povazska Bystrica-Juraj Fried, Trencin-Buchwald-Josef Rosenwasser, Eastern Slovakia-Julius Neuman, Bardejov-Sandor Wertheimer, Vrbove-Misi Wertheimer, Vrbove -Bela Blau, Zilina.

65,000-68,000

Naturalized French, Belgian, and Dutch Jews. Not more than 1,000 women were "selected" and sent to the camp. The others, at the lowest estimate 30,000, were gassed.

71,000-80,000

Naturalized French, Belgian, and Dutch Jews. The prisoners brought to the camp hardly represent 10 percent of the total transport. A conservative estimate would be that approximately 65,000 to 70,000 persons were gassed.

On December 17, 1942, the 200 young Slovak Jews, the so-called "special squad" employed in gassing and burning the condemned, were in turn executed at BIRKENAU. They were executed for having planned to mutiny and escape. A Jew betrayed their preparations. This frightful job had to be taken over by a group of 200 Polish Jews who had just arrived at camp from MAKOW.

The men belonging to the "special squad" lived separately. On account of the dreadful smell spread by them, people had but little contact with them. Besides they were always filthy, destitute, half wild and extraordinarily brutal and ruthless. It was not uncommon to see one of them kill another. This was considered by the others a sensation, a change. One simply recorded that number so-and-so had died.

Once I was an eyewitness when a young Polish Jew named Jossel demonstrated "scientific" murder on a Jew in the presence of an SS guard. He used no weapon, merely his bare hands, to kill his victim.

No. 80,000 marks the beginning of the systematic extermination of the Polish ghettos.

80,000-85,000

Approximately 5,000 Jews from various ghettos in MLJAWA-MAKOW-ZICHENOWLOMZA-GRODNO-BIALYSTOK. For fully 30 days truck-convoys arrived without interruption. Only



Jews selected for special work details at Birkenau

5,000 persons were sent to the concentration camp; all the others were gassed at once. The "special squad" worked in two shifts, 24 hours daily and was scarcely able to cope with the gassing and burning.

Without exaggerating it may be said that out of these convoys some 80,000 to 90,000 received "special treatment." These transports also brought in a considerable amount of money, valuables, and precious stones.

85,000-92,600

6,000 Jews from GRODNO, BIALYSTOK and CRACOW as well as 1,000 Aryan Poles. The majority of the Jewish convoys were directly gassed and daily about 4,000 Jews were driven into the gas chambers. During mid-January, 1943 three convoys of 2,000 persons, each from TERESIENSTADT arrived.

They bore the designations "CU," "CR" and "R" (The meaning of these signs is unknown to us). These markings were also stamped on their luggage. Out of these 6,000 persons only 600 men and 300 women were admitted to the camp. The remainder were gassed.

99,000-100,000

End of January, 1943 large convoys of French and Dutch Jews arrived; only a small portion of them reached the camp.

100,000-102,000

In February, 1943, 2,000 Aryan Poles, mostly intellectuals.

102,000-103,000

700 Czech Aryans. Later those still alive were sent to BUCHENWALD.

103,000-108,000

3,000 French and Dutch Jews and 2,000 Poles (Aryans). During the month of February, 1943, two contingents arrived daily. They included Polish, French, and Dutch Jews, who in the main, were sent to the gas chambers. The number gassed during this month can well be estimated at 90,000.

At the end of February, 1943 a new modern crematorium and gassing plant was inaugurated at BIRKENAU. The gassing and burning of the bodies in the Birch Forest was discontinued, the whole job being taken over by the four specially built crematoria.



The large ditch was filled in, the ground leveled, and the ashes used as before for fertilizer at the farm labor camp of HERMENSE, so that today it is almost impossible to find trace of the dreadful mass murder which took place here.

At present there are four crematoria in operation at BIRKENAU, two large ones, I and II, and two smaller

Jewish women & children wait in a clearing near the gas chambers at Birkenau

ones, III and IV. Those of type I and II consist of 3 parts, i.e.,: (A) the furnace room; (B) the large halls; and (C) the gas chamber. A huge chimney rises from the furnace room around which are grouped nine furnaces, each having four openings.

Each opening can take three normal corpses at once and after an hour and a half the bodies are completely burned. This corresponds to a daily capacity of about 2,000 bodies. Next to this is a large "reception hall" which is arranged so as to give the impression of the antechamber of a bathing establishment. It holds 2,000 people and apparently there is a similar waiting room of the floor below.

From there a door and a few steps lead down into the very long and narrow gas chamber. The walls of this chamber are also camouflaged with simulated entries to shower rooms in order to mislead the victims.

This roof is fitted with three traps which can be hermitically closed from the outside. A track leads from the gas chamber to the furnace room. The gassing takes place as follows:

The unfortunate victims are brought into hall where they are told to undress. To complete the fiction that they are going to bathe, each person receives a towel and a small piece of soap issued by two men clad in whites coats. They are then crowded into the gas chamber in such numbers there is, of course, only standing room.

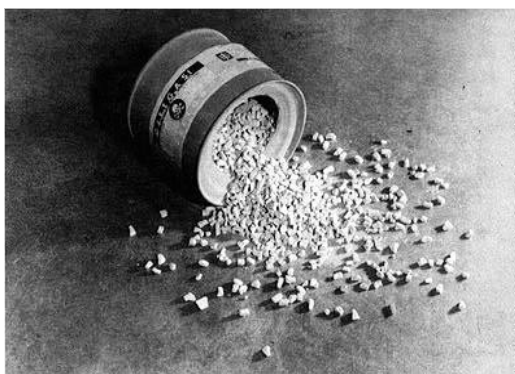
To compress this crowd into the narrow space, shots are often fired to induce those already at the far end to huddle still closer together. When everybody is inside, the heavy doors are closed. Then there is a short pause, presumably to allow the room temperature to rise to a certain level, after which 55 men with gas masks climb on the roof, open the traps, and shake down a preparation in powder form out of tin cans labeled "CYCLONE" "For use against vermin," which is manufactured by a Hamburg concern.

It is presumed that this is a "CYANIDE" mixture of some sort which turns into gas at a certain temperature. After three minutes everyone in the chamber is dead. No one is known to have survived this ordeal, although it was not uncommon to discover signs of life after the primitive measures employed in the Birch Wood.

The chamber is then opened, aired, and the "special squad" carts the bodies on flat trucks to the furnace rooms where the burning takes place. Crematoria III and IV work on nearly the same principle, but their capacity is only half as large. Thus the total capacity of the four cremating and gassing plants at BIRKENAU amount's to about 6,000 daily.

On principle only Jews are gassed; Aryans very seldom, as they are usually given "special treatment" by shooting. Before the crematoria were put into service, the shooting took place in the Birch Wood and the bodies were burned in the long trench; later, however, executions took place in the large hall of one of the crematoria which has been provided with a special installation for this purpose.

Prominent guests from BERLIN were present at the inauguration of the first crematorium in March, 1943. The



Cyclone B canister and crystals

"program" consisted of the gassing and burning of 8,000 Cracow Jews. The' guests, both officers and civilians, were extremely satisfied with the results and the special peephole fitted into the door of the gas chamber was in constant use. They were Lavish in their praise of this newly erected installation.

109,000-119,000

At the beginning of March, 1943, 45,000 Jews arrived form Salonika. 10,000 of them came to the camp, including a small percentage of women; some 30,000 however went straight to the cremating facility. Of the 10,000 nearly all died a short time later from a contagious illness resembling malaria. They also died of Typhus due to the general conditions prevailing in the camp.

Malaria among the Jews and typhus took such toll among the prisoners in general that the "selections" were temporarily suspended. The contaminated Greek Jews were ordered to present themselves and in spite of our repeated warnings many of them did. They were all killed by intra-cardial phenol injections administered by a lance-corporal of the medical corps.

Out of the 10,000 Greek Jews, some 1,000 men remained alive and were later sent, together with 500 other Jews, to do fortification work in Warsaw. A few weeks later several hundred came back in a pitiful state and were immediately gassed. The remainder presumably died in Warsaw.



SS guards walk the ramp at Birkenau

Alfred Kien and Alois Stahler, were punished for repeated murder and had to make written declarations I that they had killed so and so many prisoners.

Four hundred Greek Jews suffering from malaria were sent for "further treatment" to LUBLIN after the phenol injections had been stopped, and it appears that they actually arrived. Their fate is not known to us, but it can be taken for granted that out of the original number of 10,000 Jews not one eventually remained in the camp.

Simultaneously with the stopping of the "selections" the murdering of prisoners was forbidden. Prominent murderers such as: the Reich German professional criminals Alexander Neumann, Zimmer, Albert Haemmerle, Rudi Osteringer, Rudi Bechert, and the political prisoners

At the beginning of 1943 the political section of AUSCHWITZ, received 500,000 discharge certificates and we thought with ill concealed joy, that at least a few of us would be liberated. But the forms were simply filled out with the names of those gassed and filed away in the archives.

119,000-120,000

1,000 Poles (Aryans) from the PAWIAK prison in Warsaw.

120,000-123,000

3,000 Greek Jews, part of whom were sent to replace their comrades in Warsaw. The remainder quickly died off.

123,000-124,000

1,000 Poles (Aryans) from RADOM and TARNOW.

124,000-126,000

2,000 from mixed Aryan convoys.

In the meantime, ceaseless convoys of Polish and a few French and Belgian Jews arrived and, without exception, were dispatched to the gas chambers. Among them was a transport of 1,000 Polish Jews from MAJDANEK which included three Slovaks, one of whom was a certain Spira from Stropkow or Vranov.

The flow of convoys abruptly ceased at the end of July, 1943 and there was a short breathing space. The crematoria were thoroughly cleaned, the installations repaired and prepared for further use. On August 3 the killing machine again went into operation. The first convoys consisted of Jews from BENZBURG and SOSNOWITZ and others followed during the whole month of August.

132,000-136,000

Only 4,000 men and a very small number of women were brought to the camp. Over 35,000 were gassed. Of the aforementioned 4,000 men, many died as a result of bad treatment, hunger or illness; some were even murdered.



A manufacturer's warning about the effects of Zyklon-B

The responsibility for these tragedies lies with the criminal TYN (a Reich German) from the concentration camp of SACHSENHAUSEN and the Polish political prisoner No. 8516, Mieczyslaw KATERZINSKI, from Warsaw.

The "selections" were introduced again and this time to a murderous extent, especially in the women's camp. The camp doctor, an SS "Hauptsturmführer" and the son or nephew of the police president of Berlin (we forget his name) outdid all the others in brutality. The selection system has been continued ever since, until our escape.

137,000-138,000

At the end of August 1,000 Poles came from the PAWIAK prison and 80 Jews from Greece.

138,000-141,000

3,000 men from various Aryan Transports.

142,000-145,000

At the beginning of September, 1943 3,000 Jews arrived from Polish working camps and Russian prisoners of war.

148,000-152,000

During the week following September 7, 1943 family transports of Jews arrived from THERESIENSTADT. They enjoyed quite an exceptional status which was incomprehensible to us. The families were not separated and not a single one of them received the customary and "normal" gas treatment. Their heads were not even shaven, they were able to keep their luggage, and were lodged in a separate section of the camp, men, women and children together.

The men were not forced to work and a school was even set up for the children under the direction of Fredy HIRSCH (Makabi, Prague). They were allowed to correspond freely. The worst they had to undergo was mistreatment at the hands of their "camp eldest," a certain professional criminal by the name of Arno BOHM, prisoner NO.8. Our astonishment increased when we learned of the official indication given to this special treatment: "SB" -transport of Czech Jews with six months' quarantine.



SS guards direct new arrivals on ramp at Birkenau

who seemed to enjoy the full-confidence of his companions) that if our fears took shape they would organize resistance.

We very well knew what "SB" meant ("Sonderbehandlung"), but could not understand the long period of six months' quarantine and the generally clement treatment this group received. The longest quarantine period we had witnessed so far was only three weeks. Towards the end of the six months period, however, we became convinced that the fate of these Jews would be the same as that of most of the others, -the gas chamber.

We tried to get in touch with the leader of the group and explain their lot and what they had to expect. Some of them declared (especially Fredy HIRSCH

Thus some of them hoped to instigate a general revolt in the camp. On March 6, 1944 we heard that the crematoria were being prepared to receive the Czech Jews.

I hastened to inform Fredy HIRSCH and begged him to take immediate actions as they had nothing to lose. He replied that he recognized his duty. Before nightfall I again crept over to the Czech camp where I learned that Fredy HIRSCH was dying; he had poisoned himself with luminol.

The next day, March 7, 1944, he was taken, unconscious, along with his 3,791 comrades who had arrived at BIRKENAU on September 7, 1943 on trucks, to the crematoria and gassed. The young people went to their death singing, but to our great disappointment nobody revolted. Some 500 elderly people had died during quarantine. Of all these Jews only 11 twins were left alive. They are being subjected to various medical tests at AUSCHWITZ, and when we left BIRKENAU they were still alive.

Among the gassed was Rozsi FURST, from SERED. A week before the gassing, that is to say on March 1, 1944, everyone in the Czech group in the camp had been asked to inform his relatives about his well-being. The letters had to be dated March 23 to 25, 1944 and they were requested to ask for food parcels.

153,000-154,000

1,000 Polish Aryans from Pawiak Prison.

153,000-159,000

During October and November, 1943, 4,000 persons from various prisons and smaller transports of Jews from BENZBURG and vicinity, who had been driven out of their hiding places; also a group of Russians under protective custody from the MINSK and VITEBESK regions. Some more Russian prisoners of war arrived and, as stated, they as usual received numbers between 1 and 12,000.

160,000-165,000

In December, 1943, 5,000 men originating from Dutch, French, Belgian transports and for the first time, Italian Jews from FIUME, TRIESTE and ROME. Of these at least 30,000 were immediately gassed. The mortality among these Jews was very high and, in addition, the "selection" system was still decimating all ranks. The bestiality of the whole procedure reached its culminating point between January 10 and 24, 1944 when even young and healthy persons irrespective of profession or working classification-with the exception of doctors-were ruthlessly "selected."

Every single prisoner was called up, a strict control was established to see that all were present, and the "selection" proceeded under the supervision of the same camp doctor (son or nephew of the Police President of Berlin) and of the Commandant of BIRKENAU, SS "Untersturmfuhrer" SCHWARZHUBER. The "infirmary" had in the meantime been transferred from "Block 7" to a separate section of the camp where conditions had become quite bearable. Its inmates, nevertheless, were gassed to the last man. Apart from this group this general action cost some 2,500 men and over 6,000 women their lives.

165,000-168,000

On December 20, 1943 a further group of 3,000 Jews arrived from THERESIENSTADT. The convoy was listed under the same category as the one which had reached the camp on September



Schwarzhuber

7, i.e., "SB"-transport, Czech Jews with six months' quarantine. On their arrival, men, women and children all joined the September group. They enjoyed the same privileges as their predecessors. Twenty-four hours before the gassing of the first group took place, the latest arrivals were separated from the rest and placed in another part of the camp where they still are at present. Their quarantine ends on June 20, 1944.

169,000-170,000

1,000 people in small groups, Jews, Poles, and some Russians and a small number of Yugoslavs.

170,000-171,000

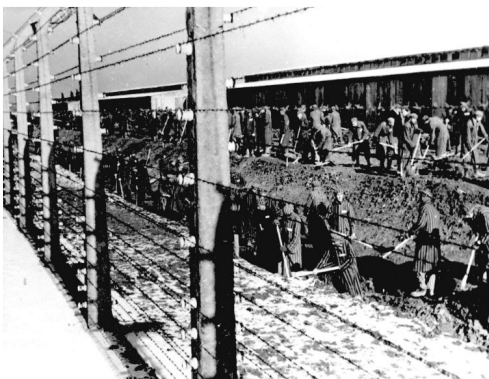
1,000 Poles, Russians and some more Yugoslavs.

171,000-174,000

At the end of February and beginning of March, 3,000 Jews from Holland, Belgium, and for the first time long-established French Jews (not naturalized) from VICHY, in France. The greater part of this transport was gassed immediately upon arrival.

Small groups of BENZBURGER and SOSNOWITZER Jews, who had been dragged from hiding, arrived in the middle of March. One of them told me that many Polish Jews were crossing over to Slovakia and from there to Hungary and that the Slovak Jews helped them on their way through.

After the gassing of the THERESIENSTADT transport there were no further arrivals until March 15, 1944. The effective strength of the camp rapidly diminished and men of later incoming transports, especially Dutch Jews, were directed to the camp. When we left on April 7, 1944 we heard that large convoys of Greek Jews were expected.



The camp of BIRKENAU consists of three building areas. At present only sections I and II are guarded by the inner chain of sentry posts, whereas section III is still under construction and uninhabited.

At the time of our departure from the camp (the beginning of April, 1944), the following categories of prisoners were in BIRKENAU:

SECTION I (Women's Concentration Camp)

View of the quarantine camp section 2b

| | <i>Slav. Jews</i> | <i>Other Jews</i> | <i>Aryans</i> |
|-----------|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|
| 1a and 1b | app.300 | app. 7,000 | app.6,000 |

Remarks :

In addition to the 300 Slovak Jewish girls, app. 100 are employed in the administration building of AUSCHWITZ

SECTION II (Men's Concentration Camp)

| | Slav. Jews | Other Jews | Aryans |
|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---------------|
| 2a quarantine camp 2 | | app.200 | app.800 |

Remarks :

One of the two Slovak Jews is Dr. Andreas MULLER from Podolinec (Block Eldest).

| | Slav. Jews | Other Jews | Aryans |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|
| 2b Jews from THERESIENSTADT | - app. 3,500 | | With a six month quarantine. |

2c -presently uninhabited.

| | | | |
|-----------------|----|-----------|-----------|
| 2d "Stammlager" | 58 | app 4,000 | app 6,000 |
|-----------------|----|-----------|-----------|

The Gypsy Camp -app 4,500 This is the reminder of some 16,000 gypsies. They are not used for work and die off rapidly.

No. 36,832 Walter SPITZER, block eldest from NEMSOVA, came to LUBLIN from BIRKENAU.

No. 29,867 Jozef NEUMANN, ("overseer" of the "corpse crew") from SNINA.

No. 44,989 Josef ZELMANOVIC, "staff" from SNINA. - Cham KATZ, "staff" from SNINA.

No. 33,049 Ludwig SOLMANN, "clerk" from KESMAREK.

No. 32,407 Ludwig EISENSTADTER, tattooist from KREMPACHY.

The internal administration of the camp of BIRKENAU is run by specially selected prisoners. The "blocks" are not inhabited according to nationalities but rather according to working categories. Each block is supervised by a staff of five, i.e., a



View of the "Family camp" where the Jews from Theresienstadt were held

block eldest, a block recorder, a male nurse, and two attendants.

The block eldest

He wears an arm band with the number of his block, and is responsible for order there. He has power over life and death. Until February, 1944, nearly 50 percent of the block eldest's were Jews but this was stopped by an order of BERLIN. They all had to resign with the exception of three Jews who, in spite of this order, were able to keep their posts.

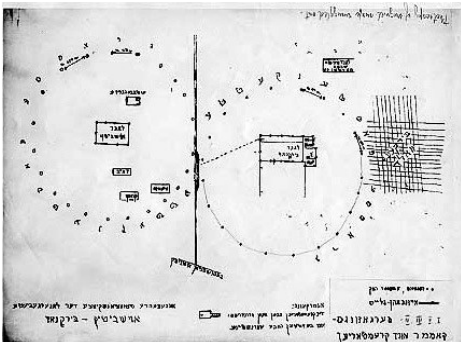
The block recorder

He is the block eldest's right-hand, does all the clerical work keeping the index cards and records. His work is of great responsibility and he has to keep his ledgers with painful exactitude as the index cards only indicate the number and not the name of the prisoners; errors are fatal. For instance, if the recorder has noted down a death by mistake and this often occurs with the unusually high mortality the discrepancy is simply straightened out by killing the bearer of the corresponding number. Corrections are not admitted. The block recorder occupies a key post which is often misused.

Nursing and "room" duties

They consist in keeping the inside of the barracks clean and carrying out small manual jobs in and around the block. Of course there is no question of really taking care of the sick. The camp eldest supervised the whole camp; he is also a prisoner. This post is at present held by:

Franz DANISCH, No. 11,182 a political prisoner, from KONIG-SHUTTE, Upper Silesia. He is undisputed master of the whole camp and has power to nominate or dismiss block eldest's and block recorders, hand out jobs, etc.



Rudolf Vrba's sketch of Auschwitz - Birkenau camp and surrounding districts

Further we have a "chief recorder" whose position is undoubtedly one of the most powerful in the camp. He is in direct contact with camp headquarters, receiving their orders and reporting on all matters. All camp recorders are directly subordinated to him and have to submit all their reports to him. The chief recorder of BIRKENAU is;

Kasimir GORK, No. 31,029, a Pole from WARSAW, a former bank clerk. The supreme control over the blocks lies in the hands of six to eight "block leaders," all SS men. Every night they hold roll call, the result of which is communicated to:

The Camp Leader, "Untersturmfuhrer" SCHWARZHUBER, from the Tyrol. This individual is an alcoholic and a sadist. Over him is the camp commander who also controls AUSCHWITZ where there is a second subordinate camp leader. The camp commander's name is; HOESS.

The Chief of the work squad or group is called the "Capo". During work the "Capo" has full authority over his group of prisoners and not infrequently one of these "Capo's" kills a man working under him, In larger squads there may be several "Capo's" who are then under the orders of a "Capo-in-chief."

At first there were many Jewish "Capos," but an order from BERLIN prohibited their being employed. Supreme control over work is carried out by German specialists.

II. MAJDANEK

ON JUNE 14, 1942 we left NOVAKY, passed ZILINA and arrived at ZWARDON toward 5 o'clock in the evening. We were assembled, counted, and SS men took over our convoy. One of these guards voiced his surprise at the fact we made the journey without water by shouting:

"Those Slovak barbarians, give them no water!"

The journey continued and we reached LUBLIN two days later. Here the following order was issued:

"Those fit for work aged between 15 and 50 are to leave the cars. Children and old people remain." We struggled out of the freight car and discovered that the station was surrounded by Lithuanians in SS uniforms, all armed with automatic pistols. The cars containing the children and old people were immediately closed and the train moved on. We do not know where they went and what happened to them



The SS troop leader in command informed us that we had a long way ahead of us, but that whoever wanted to take his luggage with him could do so. Those who preferred to put it on a truck would certainly receive it later. So some of us dragged along our luggage, whereas others loaded it on the truck.

Behind the town stood a clothing factory called the "Bekleidungswerke." In the courtyard waiting for their noon meal some 1,000 prisoners in dirty striped clothing, obviously Jews, were lined up and the sight of them was none too encouraging. Arriving on a small hill we suddenly sighted the vast barrack camp of MAJDANEK surrounded by a 3-meter-high barbed wire fence.

No sooner had we gone through the entrance gate than I met a prisoner who warned me that all our personal belongings would be taken away. Around us stood Slovak Jews in a wretched condition, their heads shaven,

in dirty prison clothes and wooden clogs or simply barefooted, many of them having swollen feet.

They begged us for food and we gave them what we could spare, knowing very well that everything would be confiscated anyway. We were then conducted to the stockroom where we had to leave everything we possessed. At double time we were herded into another barrack where we had to undress, were shaved, and given a shower. After this we were issued convict outfits, wooden clogs and caps.

I was assigned to "working section NO.2" as the whole camp was divided into three such sections separated by wire fences. Section NO.2 was occupied by a number of Slovak and Czech Jews. For two full days we were taught how to remove and put on our caps when we met a German. Then in the pouring rain we practiced roll call for hours.

The barrack accommodations were quite original to say the least. Three long tables (nearly as long as the barrack itself) had been placed one on top of the other. These comprised our "bunks" (4 floors of them, that is ground floor plus the three tables). A small passage was kept open along the walls.

Our food consisted of a fairly thick "soup" early in the morning which had to be eaten with the hands. We got the same soup again at lunch. The evening meal consisted of a brew called "tea," 300 grams of bad bread and some 20 to 30 grams of marmalade or artificial fat of the worst quality.

Great importance was attributed during the first few days of the learning of the "camp song." For hours we stood singing:

From the whole of Europe came We Jews to Lublin

Much work has to be done And this is the beginning.

*To manage this duty Forget all about the past For in fulfillment of duty
There is community.*

Therefore on to work with vigor

Let everyone play his part

Together we want to work

At the same pace and rhythm.

Not all will understand Why we stand here in rows Those must we soon

force To understand its meaning.

Modern times must teach us Teach us all along

That it is to work

And only to work we belong.

Therefore on to work with vigor Let everyone play his part Together we want to work

At the same pace and rhythm.

(This is a literal translation of the song).

Working section No. 1 was occupied by Slovak Jews

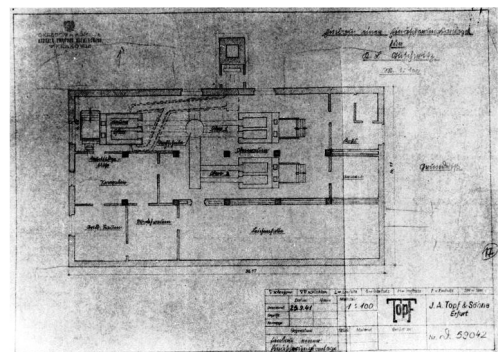
Working section No. 2 was occupied by Slovak and Czech Jews

Working section No. 3 was occupied by Partisans

Working section No. 4 and 5 was being constructed by the Jews of sections 1 and 2

The Partisans in section III were locked up in their barracks without having to work and their food was thrown at them as if they had been dogs. They died in great numbers in their overcrowded barracks and were shot at the slightest excuse by the guards who did not dare venture too near them.

The "Capo's" were Reich Germans and Czechs; whereas the Germans were brutal, the Czechs helped wherever they could. The camp eldest was a gypsy from SERED by the name of GALBAY.



German blueprint of the gas chambers in Birkenau

His adjutant, a Jew from SERED called MITTLER, certainly owed his post to his brutal actions. He took full advantage of the power conferred upon him to torment the Jews who, as it was already had their full share of hardships. The evening roll call brought us more brutal treatment from the SS men and for hours we had to stand in the open after a hard days work and sing the "camp song."

A Jewish orchestra leader was forced to conduct from the roof of one of the barracks. This was the occasion of much hilarity among the SS men. During these "concert parties" the SS guards were very generous with blows and physical punishment. A tragic end befell Rabbi ECKSTEIN from SERED who was suffering from

dysentery and once came a few minutes too late for the role call. The group leader had him seized and dipped head first into one of the latrines, then poured cold water over him, drew his revolver and shot him.

The crematorium was located between working sections I and II and all the bodies were burned there, With an effective strength of 6,000 to 8,000 men per working section, the mortality was about 30 a day. This figure later increased five and six fold. In other instances 10 to 20 inmates were removed from the sick room, brought to the crematorium and burned, after having been put to death in a manner which I have not been able to find out. This crematorium was electrically heated and the attendants were Russians.

Illnesses increased as a result of the bad food and intolerable living conditions. Serious stomach troubles and a seemingly incurable foot disease spread throughout the camp, The feet of the victims swelled up to the point where they could not walk. More and more of the sick were not being taken to the crematorium and when on June 26, 1942 the number thus treated rose to 70, I decided to take an opportunity which was offered to me and applied for a transfer to AUSCHWITZ.



One of the Auschwitz HQ buildings in Oswiecim

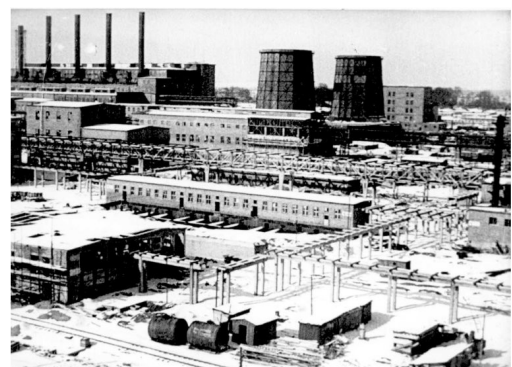
On June 27, 1942 I discarded my prisoner's outfit and travelled to AUSCHWITZ in civilian clothes. After a journey of 48 hours during which we were cooped up in freight cars without food or water, we arrived III AUSCHWITZ half dead. At the entrance gate the huge poster "Work brings freedom," greeted us. As the courtyard was clean and well kept, and the brick buildings made a good impression after the dirty and primitive barracks of LUBLIN, we thought that the change was for the best.

We were taken to a cellar and received tea and bread. Next day, however, our civilian clothes were taken away, our heads were shaved, and our numbers were tattooed on our forearms in the usual way. Finally, we were issued a set of prisoner's clothes similar to those we had worn in LUBLIN and were enrolled as "Political Prisoners" in the concentration camp at AUSCHWITZ.

We were billeted in "Block 17" and slept on the floor. In an adjoining row of buildings separated from ours by a high wall, the Jewish girls from Slovakia, who had been brought there in March and April of 1942 were quartered. We worked in the huge "BUNA" plant to which we were herded every morning about 3 a.m.

At midday our food consisted of potato or turnip soup and in the evening we received some bread. During work we were terribly mistreated. As our working place was situated outside the large chain of sentry posts, it was divided into small sectors of 10 x 10 meters, each guarded by an SS man, Whoever stepped outside these squares during working hours was immediately shot without warning for having "attempted to escape." Often it happened that out of pure spite an SS man would order a prisoner to fetch some given object outside his square. If he followed the order, he was shot for having left his assigned place.

The way to and from work had to be covered at a brisk military trot; anyone falling out of line was shot. On my arrival about 3,000 people, of whom 2,000 were Slovak Jews, were working on this emplacement. Very few could bear the strain und



The Buna-Werke facility

although escape seemed hopeless, attempts were made every day. The result was several hangings a week.

After a number of weeks of painful work at the "BUNA" plant a terrible typhus epidemic broke out. The weaker prisoners died in hundreds. An immediate quarantine was ordered and work at the "BUNA" stopped. Those still alive were sent, at the end of July, 1942, to the gravel pit but there work was even still more strenuous. We were in such a state of weakness that, even in trying to do our best, we could not satisfy the overseers. Most of us got swollen feet. Due to our inability to perform the heavy work demanded on us our squad was accused of being lazy and disorderly. Soon after a medical commission inspected all of us; they carried out their job very thoroughly.

Anyone with swollen feet or particularly weak was separated from the rest. Although I was in great pain, I controlled myself and stood erect in front of the commission, 200 were found to be unfit and immediately sent to BIRKENAU and gassed. I was then detailed for work at the DAW (Deutsche Aufrüstungswerke) where we had to paint skis.

The prescribed minimum to be painted each day was 120. Anyone unable to paint this many was thoroughly flogged in the evening. It meant working very hard to avoid this punishment. Another group was employed at making cases for hand grenades. At one time 15,000 had been completed but it was found that they were a few centimeters too small. As punishment several Jews were shot for sabotage.

Somewhere around the middle of August, 1942 all the Jewish girls from Slovakia who lived next to our quarters, on the other side of the wall, were transferred to BIRKENAU. I had the opportunity to talk to them and was able to see how weak and half-starved all of them were. They were dressed in old Russian uniform rags and wore wooden clogs. Their heads were shaven clean. The same day we again had to undergo a strict examination and those suspected of having typhus were removed to the Birch Wood.

The remainder were shaved afresh, bathed, issued a new set of clothes and finally billeted in the barracks the girls had just left. By chance I learned that there was an opening in the "clearance squad" and I handed in my application. I was detailed to this task. This squad consisted of about a hundred Jewish prisoners.



We were sent to a far corner of the camp, away from all our comrades. Here we found huge sheds full of knapsacks, suitcases, and other luggage. We had to open each piece of baggage and sort the content into large cases specially prepared for each category of goods, i.e., combs, mirrors, sugar, canned food chocolate, medicines, etc. The cases were then stored away. Underwear, shirts and clothes of all kinds went to a special barrack, where they were sorted out and packed by Jewish girls.

Prisoners at "Canada" sorting the belongings of murdered Jews Old and worn clothes were addressed to the "TEXTILE FACTORY" at MEMEL, whereas the useable garments were dispatched to a collecting center in BERLIN. Gold, money, bank notes, and precious stones had to be handed over to the political section. Many of these objects were, however, stolen by the SS guards or by prisoners.

A brutal and vile individual who often struck the women is commander of this squad. He is SS "Scharfuhrer" WYKLEFF. Every day the girls who came to their work from BIRKENAU described to us the terrible conditions prevailing there. They were beaten and brutalized and their mortality was much higher than among the men. Twice a week "selections" took place, and every day new girls replaced those who had disappeared.

During a night shift I was able to witness for the first time how incoming convoys were handled. The transport I saw contained Polish Jews. They had received no water for days and when the doors of the freight cars were open we were ordered to chase them out with loud shouts. They were utterly exhausted and about a hundred of them had died during the journey. The living were lined up in rows of five. Our job was to remove the dead, dying, and the luggage from the cars. The dead, and this included anyone unable to stand on his feet, were piled in a heap.

Luggage and parcels were collected and stacked up. Then the railroad cars had to be thoroughly cleaned so that no trace of their frightful load was left behind. A commission from the political department proceeded with the "selection" of approximately 10 percent of the men and 5 percent of the women and had them transferred to the camps.

The remainder were loaded on trucks, sent to BIRKENAU, and gassed while the dead and dying were taken directly to the furnace. It often happened that small children were thrown alive into the trucks along with the dead. Parcels and luggage were taken to the warehouses and sorted out in the previously described manner.

Between July and September, 1942 a typhus epidemic had raged in AUSCHWITZ, especially in the women's camp of BIRKENAU. None of the sick received medical attention and in the first stages of the epidemic a great many were killed by phenol injections, and later on others were gassed wholesale.

Some 15,000 to 20,000, mostly Jews, died during these two months. The girls' camps suffered the most, as it was not fitted with sanitary installations, and the poor wretches were covered with lice. Every week large "selections" took place and the girls had to present themselves naked to the "selection committee," regardless of weather conditions.

They waited in deadly fear whether they would be chosen or given another week's grace. Suicides were frequent and were mostly committed by throwing oneself against the high tension wires of the inner fence. This went on until they had dwindled to 5 percent of their original number.



Corpses of dead Jewish women in Block 11

Now there are only 400 of these girls left and most of them have been able to secure some sort of clerical post in the women's camp. About 100 girls hold jobs at the staff building in AUSCHWITZ where they do all the clerical work connected with the administration of the two camps. Thanks to their knowledge of

languages they are also used as interpreters.

Others are employed in the main kitchen and laundry. Of late these girls have been able to dress themselves quite well as they have had opportunities to complete their wardrobes which, in some cases, even include silk stockings. Generally speaking they are reasonably well off and are even allowed to let their hair grow. Of course this cannot be said of the other Jewish inmates of the women's camp. It just so happens that these Slovak Jewish girls have been in the camp the longest of all. But if today they enjoy certain privileges, they have previously undergone frightful sufferings.

I was not to hold this comparatively good job with the "clearance squad" for long. Shortly afterwards I was transferred to BIRKENAU on disciplinary grounds and remained there over a year and a half. On April 7, 1944 I managed to escape with my companion.

Sources:

War Refugee Board at the F.D. Roosevelt Library, New York, NY

Holocaust Historical Society

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