

THE **GAS CHAMBER** OF



**SHERLOCK HOLMES**

AND OTHER WRITINGS ON THE HOLOCAUST,  
REVISIONISM, AND HISTORICAL UNDERSTANDING

*by Samuel Crowell*

## The Gas Chamber of Sherlock Holmes



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And Other Writings on the Holocaust, Revisionism,  
and Historical Understanding

*Samuel Crowell*



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*In Memoriam!*



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## PREFACE

**T**HE WRITINGS IN THIS BOOK go back to the 1990s when I sought to defend the free speech rights of Holocaust revisionists, otherwise called Holocaust Deniers, after my discovery that many countries had criminalized Holocaust revisionism, and that there was a movement to do so as well in the English-speaking world. I could not see how this could be a good thing. While the taboo surrounding Holocaust revisionism had already led to violent incidents and threats of further violence, criminalization threatened to establish by law not only historical facts, but the interpretation of those facts. This would inevitably mean outlawing ordinary human skepticism.

The usual justification for the criminalization or violent suppression of Holocaust revisionism is that such measures are necessary to prevent the resurgence of National Socialism on the one hand and to protect the Jewish people from anti-Semitism on the other. I find both of these justifications vacuous. National Socialism, as an ideology of racial dominance, was thoroughly repudiated by defeat in the Second World War, and even if human nature determines that other doctrines of ethnocentric superiority will emerge and evolve in the future, such doctrines will not stand or fall on the contested factuality of some atrocity claim from the past, but rather on the credulity of common people and the willingness of educated elites to pander to common prejudice and fear. And while anti-Semitism still lingers, notably in the contentious crosscurrents of Israeli-Muslim relations, there seems little reason to believe that such sentiments can be dissipated or controlled by an active campaign to criminalize dissident speech and inquiry. Since emerging from the ghettos in the late eighteenth century the Jewish people have been among the most outspoken defenders of free speech, and with good reason; as a persecuted minority they well understand the risks that arise when facts, ideas, and beliefs are proscribed by law. In short, I could see nothing but negative consequences in allowing the taboo to continue, or in allowing the criminalization to expand. I felt an obligation to act.

Of course, underlying my defense of revisionists was my growing awareness that at least some of the historiographical issues they raised were valid, and that establishment historians had neglected to engage these issues themselves. This meant that I would have to explore the terrain myself, as well as I could, in an effort to normalize the discourse, weaken the taboo, and hence remove ordinary historical investigation and inquiry from the realm of the unspoken. Perhaps above all,

my project sought to advance the view that, regardless of ultimate conclusions, Holocaust revisionism made solid and reasonable arguments in its criticism of the received narrative of Nazi atrocity, and was substantially based on honest and reasonable doubts.

Beyond my opposition to censorship, there was also a self-interested aspect to my project. Having studied the Nazi period for several decades, I was aware that the complexities of the period were not represented in the relatively simplistic narrative that is usually offered in books or on television. I had questions myself that I wanted answered, and, because of the failure of the academy to address these questions, I had turned to the revisionists, and had learned much from them. Even so, I felt that revisionism had problems. The strident rhetoric frequently found in revisionist writings seemed at odds with an avowed commitment to disinterested historical investigation. To whatever extent, it was clear that many revisionists were themselves motivated by a political or ideological agenda. In addition, I did not find all revisionist interpretations persuasive. Yet I felt that revisionists, far more than their counterparts, were employing the tools of critical analysis and document discovery that academic historians are trained to use. Thus by embarking on this project I not only gave myself the challenge of pursuing revisionist themes in a more restrained and less combative manner than others, but I also gave myself the opportunity to answer my own questions for myself.

It seemed to me that the main accusation against revisionists was that they were arguing in bad faith, which in turn helped justify the taboo and censorship that had followed. I could not accept that accusation, since I had doubts about the standard history, and I knew that my doubts were sincere. Therefore my original plan was to try to write a narrative about the mass gassing claim, since it is the mass gassing claim that most clearly distinguishes the divergent views of Holocaust historians and Holocaust revisionists. In early 1997, I sketched out a three-page treatment of an essay that would make a plea for revisionist doubt about the gas chambers. This was the conceptual origin of “The Gas Chamber of Sherlock Holmes.”

At the time, I have to say I was not sure if revisionist doubts—or my own doubts—would hold up to scrutiny. I was, however, confident that if I found some documents or other evidence that tended to prove the standard historical account of mass gassings, such evidence would be sufficiently obscure to justify revisionist doubts. So I turned to researching the gassing claim as well as I could.

Early on, it struck me that the mass gassing claim needed to be looked at chronologically, since several later accounts seemed to be repeating motifs from earlier accounts and were therefore possibly derivative. I felt that I should start with the first Allied liberation of German camps, because the information available at that time would be crucial. However, I also had to entertain the idea that the gassing claim had non-empirical foundations, and in fact I thought there might be a fictional, or culturally facilitated, basis for at least some of the claims. Consequently, I resolved

to treat all gassing claims as literary “texts.” In other words, I would endeavor to put them into historical context, compare narratives, seek effects in later narratives, read the narratives for internal consistency, and so forth. These are all standard methods for literary criticism and that is why from the beginning I approached my essay as a kind of a “literary analysis.”

In course, I decided to research other areas where the notion of killing people with poison gas would likely arise, and it was at this point that my attention turned to German disinfection literature and German civil defense literature. As my study deepened, it occurred to me that presenting an argument rooted in this literature, and posted on a revisionist website, could also be an effective way of defending revisionism against criminalization. By pursuing a line of argument that tended to challenge interpretive assumptions shared among many revisionists, I hoped to force the point that the censorship of revisionism entailed the censorship of historical investigation itself, which was my primary concern. Over a period of roughly three years beginning in March 1997, I wrote several articles that sought to develop and advance what came to be known as the “bomb shelter thesis.” My final essay on this theme, written in June 2000, was entitled “Bomb Shelters in Birkenau.”

Because I was initially distracted by my discovery of the bomb shelter thesis, I didn’t get around to writing “The Gas Chamber of Sherlock Holmes” until the last few weeks of 1997. The essay was then posted to the same revisionist website where I had posted my earlier bomb shelter articles. The text was revised in early 1999 when Bradley Smith of the Committee for Open Debate on the Holocaust approached me with the idea of sending copies to various historians and opinion makers. It was again revised in late 2000 when the French publisher Jean Plantin asked to publish several chapters in translation. These revisions mainly involved adding more materials and references that kept cropping up in the course of my studies.

For the present publication I have avoided the temptation to engage in large scale revisions of either “The Gas Chamber of Sherlock Holmes” or “Bomb Shelters in Birkenau” (although both show evidence of haste), since they have been available on the Internet for so many years. But while the versions presented here are not far different from prior versions, I have tried as much as possible to correct mistakes and update references.

Because it has been many years since I first engaged this topic in any detail, I was asked by my publisher to write an essay summarizing the trend of Holocaust scholarship (and its revisionist counterpoint) over the past decade. I have fulfilled this request in two ways. A postscript to “Bomb Shelters in Birkenau” reviews the responses to that article, as well as evidence that has emerged in recent years. In addition, I have written a concluding essay, “The Holocaust in Retrospect,” which touches on developments in the field, as well as many other matters that were tangential to my main theme.

As for my personal views, they remain what they have been for thirty years or more. There certainly was a Holocaust in the sense that Nazi Germany persecuted and massacred many Jews, and I think it is likely that this massacre ran into the millions. However, I continue to believe that the details of that destruction are a legitimate subject for investigation and debate. My intent has been to hold the door open for future students who would be able to investigate the topic and publish their results without having to overcome not only the force of taboo but also the onerous and ill-conceived criminal laws that were enacted to defend the prevailing point of view.

Looking back on what I wrote many years ago I find few instances where I would change my thinking on a given topic. I do not claim certainty for my conclusions, since it is my view that doubt and therefore modesty are intrinsic properties of the human condition. I do not know if my writings have had any of the positive effects I originally sought, but I do know that the movement to put revisionists in jail seems to have abated, at least in the English-speaking world, even if the discussion rarely proceeds with the kind of orderliness, respect, and collegiality that I would prefer. I also know that there have been many writings in the past fifteen years that are more consonant with my own thinking. While legal prohibitions against revisionism remain in force in many countries, such as France and Germany, the writings in the last decade of non-revisionists such as Fritjof Meyer make it clear that the application of laws prohibiting Holocaust revisionism are becoming less aggressive. I am grateful for this outcome.

While I leave it to others to gauge the value of the writings presented here, there seems little reason to question the accuracy of my conclusions in a very general sense; the only question concerns the extent of their accuracy. In other words, everyone knows that numerous Holocaust testimonies and confessions contain inaccuracies and cannot be considered reliable. Without descending into accusatory rhetoric, “The Gas Chamber of Sherlock Holmes” merely provides a scheme for understanding why and how this was the case. My argument cannot prove that mass gassings did not take place.

With regard to the bomb shelter thesis, there is no question in my mind that the gastight fixtures at Auschwitz Birkenau that have been the target of so much speculation—as well as the gastight fixtures at many other camps—are rooted in German civil defense concerns, especially gas warfare protection and decontamination procedures. However, this does not contradict the fact that many other gastight fixtures were used for ordinary fumigations. The bomb shelter thesis also cannot prove that mass gassings did not take place.

One purpose of the writings in this compilation has been to present and discuss documents that have never been discussed elsewhere and to engage issues that are not typically engaged in the currents of traditional or revisionist Holocaust scholarship. It is my hope that this approach will stimulate thinking among readers

who may come to the text with differing views. I have also attempted to provide a fair and useful summary of revisionist positions, since most major revisionist arguments are referenced. While I find many revisionist arguments compelling, I tend to state my conclusions modestly and with some ambiguity. There is a reason for this: I am not interested in “proving” or “disproving” the Holocaust; I am only interested in talking about it, and preventing others from being put in prison for talking about it. If my potential reader can grant me that one point of freedom, then everything else will flow out of it eventually. On the other hand, if we allow ourselves to dam up free expression in this area, we will only be asking for trouble. Of that I remain convinced.

No amount of revisionism will overturn the moral calculus as it pertains to the German mistreatment and massacre of the Jewish people, nor will any amount of revisionism overturn the sharp break in Jewish history that the Holocaust represents; for by the end of the Second World War the thousand year long history of Ashkenazi Jewry in Eastern Europe had effectively come to an end. All fair minded people should respect and honor these moral and meta-historical judgments. A painful chapter in Jewish history will not be rewritten or revised in an antagonistic or threatening atmosphere.

Nevertheless, history, if it makes claim to be an academic discipline, should never lead with moral judgments. To do so creates the risk of distorting history to make it comport with our preferences. Any kind of ideology that heightens distinctions among groups of human beings, that extols the virtues of one group while demeaning the humanity of another group, will rob an individual human being, somewhere, of his or her unique dignity. Therefore I hope we can agree that racism, anti-Semitism, chauvinist nationalism, or group hatreds of any kind are incompatible with a just and life-affirming approach to our brief and contingent human existence. Even so, these negative aspects of human thought are not kept in check by carefully crafted historical narratives, or by laws, or by the police. They are only defeated by their opposite, which manifests itself in a libertarian and egalitarian mood, which respects and tolerates difference, and which recognizes the dignity of the individual human being, who has the right to think, to speak, and even the right to be wrong.



PART I

THE GAS CHAMBER  
OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

An Attempt at a Literary Analysis  
of the Holocaust Gassing Claim



## **1. INTRODUCTION**

*Original nature of the gassing claim in 1945-1946. —Criticism of the claim since then. —Current calls for censorship. —The need for free speech and free expression in this domain. —Methodology: literary analysis, or a chronological and comparative method.*



IT IS COMMONLY BELIEVED that the National Socialist government of Germany carried out a secret policy of mass exterminations, chiefly using extermination gas chambers, during the Second World War. The policy is said to have been ordered by Adolf Hitler, and to have involved the gassing of millions of human beings, who were subsequently burned either in crematoriums or in huge pits so that scarcely a trace of their bodies remained.<sup>1</sup>

The claim of mass gas extermination has been questioned ever since the late 1940s, but only by a few people, and very much on the fringe of public discourse.<sup>2</sup> In the early 1970s several new critics of the gas extermination claim emerged, and over the past two decades they have been joined by many others, so that now there are at least several dozen who have written on the subject.<sup>3</sup> These researchers consider themselves heir to the tradition of those historians who sought in the 1920s to revise, and depoliticize, our understanding of the First World War, and so consider themselves historical revisionists. But the skepticism of these researchers toward mass gassing is usually accompanied by a desire to reevaluate the Holocaust in its entirety, and as a result they are more normally called Holocaust revisionists or “Holocaust deniers.”<sup>4</sup>

The response of traditional historiography to the challenge of the revisionists has not been what one would expect. Normally, when someone challenges a historical orthodoxy, a minute analysis of the material and documentary record ensues, and the record is correspondingly revised. But nothing of the sort has happened here: instead,

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1 The present essay in its research phases gave rise to several specialist articles, particularly concerning German civil defense; all of these articles, including relevant reviews, are listed in the bibliography, and versions can also be found at the website of the Committee for Open Debate on the Holocaust (CODOH) at [www.codoh.com](http://www.codoh.com). I am aware that several of my articles have been cut and pasted elsewhere on the Internet; I do not acknowledge these versions, nor do I automatically acknowledge all translations, because in some cases they have been edited or bowdlerized. Full citations for books and articles cited hereunder are given in the bibliography.

2 The first revisionists include two survivors of Nazi persecution, Paul Rassinier, a French socialist, and Josef Ginsburg (aka J. G. Burg), a Romanian Jew who lived in Munich after the war. The main revisionists are two professors: Arthur Butz, of Northwestern, author of *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century*, and Robert Faurisson, of the University of Lyon 2 in France, whose various writings over three decades, largely publicistic and polemical in nature, have been compiled in four volumes of essays. Both Butz and Faurisson have been active since the 1970s. Several dozen revisionist writers have been active since the early 1990s.

3 Of particular note are the research and writings of Carlo Mattogno, Germar Rudolf, Fritz Berg, Jürgen Graf, Fred Leuchter, and John Ball. Rudolf was recently released from prison in Germany after serving several years for his revisionist activities. I should also mention Thomas Dalton, whose recent *Debating the Holocaust* (2009) is an excellent introduction to the subject with many original features.

4 Michael Shermer, *Why People Believe Weird Things*, provides a definition of revisionist positions, or as he calls it, “Holocaust Denial”: revisionism is disposed to denying (1) intentional genocide on racial grounds; (2) a “highly technical, well-organized” program, using gas chambers and crematoriums, (3) between five and six million dead. Shermer’s 2000 *Denying History*, written with Alex Grobman of the Simon Wiesenthal Center of Los Angeles, is based on the same materials and involves much personal matter not directly relevant to the subject. In terms of the overall stance of Shermer, et al., I do not know of any other historical event for which specific facts are set as preconditions to the concept; furthermore, not all revisionists give equal weight to each of the three “conditions.” In the present case, while I have doubts about the extent of (1) and (3), I do not consider them historiographically interesting. On the other hand, I am certain that (2), at least as stated, is false.

the arguments of the revisionists have been ignored and they have been reviled.<sup>5</sup>

In recent years, the expression of revisionist skepticism has been criminalized in several European countries, leading to heavy fines and prison terms, particularly in Germany and France.<sup>6</sup> In Canada, two major trials have been held with the intention of silencing a gas chamber critic.<sup>7</sup> In recent years the prime minister of Great Britain, during his initial candidacy, repeatedly promised to ban revisionist writings about the Holocaust.<sup>8</sup>

The further erosion of free speech on this matter must be considered intolerable by anyone who takes the intellectual life seriously. Therefore the purpose of this essay will be to deliberately review the gassing claim, with the object not to prove that gassings did or did not take place, but rather to investigate whether there is a plausible basis for revisionist doubt. If we find that the traditional gassing narrative contains sufficient errors or lacunae to justify doubt, then we must allow doubt. On the other hand, if we find that the traditional gassing narrative has an irrefutable documentary or material base, then we must note this also. The result should be, in the first case, due recognition of revisionist contributions to the ongoing process of modern historiography, or, in the second case, a further marginalization of revisionist thinking, which should render its influence harmless and thus unobjectionable. But in any case we cannot maintain the current situation in which revisionists are dismissed as not serious even as many of them are punished with quite serious fines and prison terms.

The method we shall use is largely determined by the inherent problems of the subject, specifically the problems concerning text and source criticism. Even if charitably inclined, anyone with minimal historical training cannot fail to notice how traditional Holocaust scholars take a generally uncritical, selective, and anachronistic position with regard to their evidence. From a mass of materials that support, or seem to support, their position, they simply select heavily edited excerpts here and there.<sup>9</sup> Rarely is an attempt made to explain the theoretical underpinnings of the selection or verification process for testimonies or affidavits. Rarer still are attempts to place the frequently ambiguous evidence in a wider documentary context. When the original sources contain errors or data inconsistent with the traditional interpretation, no attempt is made to explain the source or significance of these errors and inconsistencies.

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<sup>5</sup> Typical are the descriptions of revisionists that one finds in Deborah Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust*; I note in particular the preface to the paperback edition, where revisionist “deniers” are characterized as plague-spreading rats.

<sup>6</sup> Revisionism is thus outlawed in Germany, France, Switzerland, Poland, Hungary, and Israel, among other countries.

<sup>7</sup> Two trials were carried out against Ernst Zündel, a German activist living in Canada, in 1985 and 1988; Barbara Kulaszka prepared a digest of the transcripts of the second trial, printed as Kulaszka, ed., *Did Six Million Really Die?* This included digests of the second trial transcripts, as well as a digest of the testimony of Raul Hilberg at the 1985 trial. Zündel was recently released after serving five years in prison in Germany for his revisionist activities.

<sup>8</sup> Tony Blair’s promises in news reports, October, 1996, and January 30, 1997 (*Independent*, UK, online edition), and see Geoffrey Wheatcroft op-ed in the *New York Times*, October 12, 1998.

<sup>9</sup> This is evident, for example, in Raul Hilberg’s *Destruction of the European Jews* (1st ed.), which, on the subject of gas exterminations, restricts itself to heavily edited testimonies of two Nazis (Rudolf Höss and Kurt Gerstein), taken under vastly different circumstances; two ambiguous documents, the *Vergasungskeller* note and the *gasdichte Türme* letter, both discussed at length in Samuel Crowell, “Bomb Shelters in Birkenau: A Reappraisal,” elsewhere in this volume, and a number of postwar memoirs of former concentration camp inmates (Gisella Perl, Olga Lengyel, et al.).

Finally, traditional Holocaust scholars pay no attention to the chronological evolution or even the circumstances of gassing claims, even though it should be obvious that earlier statements, widely publicized, have a strong potential for influencing later permutations of a claim. This last is a particularly glaring omission, since the vast majority of Holocaust evidence is gleaned from testimonial or affidavit narratives. In short, the overall impression created by the traditional school's method is one of simply selecting data that supports what everyone already knows.

The revisionist approach has its own strengths and weaknesses. Its greatest strength has been its willingness to subject the standard evidentiary texts to rigorous criticism. But even here, there has been a tendency to confuse debunking with historical explanation. It is not enough to say that this or that affidavit contains several errors and is therefore suspect, nor, for that matter, is it enough to carry out forensic studies and show the extreme unlikelihood of specific gassing claims. There have been important contributions in this latter area in the past decade, and the researches of Faurisson, Berg, Rudolf, and Mattogno have gone a long way to define the physical limits against which testimonies and affidavits must be tested.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, to show with a fair degree of probability that the mass gasings were impossible is not the same thing as explaining why everyone believes they took place.

Therefore we begin at the beginning with the simple proposition that the gassing claims are either true or not true. If they are true, then the historian should be able to establish how the claims came to be known, and at what point the fugitive claims of wartime crossed the threshold of fact. On the other hand, if the claims are false it should be possible to explain how they emerged, how they were constituted, and why they were believed. In short, the problem requires a chronological method.

In general the tendency in most writings on the Holocaust has been to ignore the difference between rumor and fact: the traditional school considers all rumors fact, the revisionists consider all facts rumor.<sup>11</sup> It is precisely at this juncture, then, that we seem to have a promising point of departure, in that all parties, traditional or revisionist, agree that the gassing claims began as vague, anonymous, and unverifiable reports, that is, as rumors.

Fact is a reflection of empirical reality; but rumor expresses a reality all its own, however difficult it is to define, since the world that rumor describes is itself the expression of an inner world of unspoken assumptions, associations, and projections that characterize a human culture at a specific historical moment. Attempting to describe the parameters and nature of these unspoken worlds of human existence,

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<sup>10</sup> The forensic approach is largely the brainchild of Robert Faurisson, who was the first researcher to actually investigate the physical basis of the mass gassing claim on site.

<sup>11</sup> Walter Laqueur's *The Terrible Secret* sought to respond to the question of why the Allies failed to interdict the operation of the "extermination camps" by showing that, while information about the camps was freely available throughout the war, it was not generally believed. However, in reconstructing the scope of Allied "knowledge," Laqueur is compelled to accept every rumor as a reflection of fact, although the factuality of any of these rumors could only have been established by the late summer of 1944 at the earliest, when the Majdanek camp was liberated. This is not only anachronistic but makes it impossible for Laqueur to critically evaluate any of the claims he repeats.

which in some ways are more real than the empirical world, at least in terms of determining our perception and our judgment, has been a main project among intellectual historians and literary critics at least since the early 1960s.<sup>12</sup>

By way of a simple example: in 1976 a literary detective named Samuel Rosenberg wrote a book entitled *Naked Is the Best Disguise: The Death and Resurrection of Sherlock Holmes*. Rosenberg closely analyzed the Holmes stories in order to argue that Conan Doyle was expressing in his work a great number of late Victorian concerns: evolution, Nietzsche's theories, German secret societies and bellicose nationalism, the White Man's Burden, and so forth. While we can debate his success in mapping out Conan Doyle's specific intellectual concerns, his book did succeed in placing the stories firmly within a specific cultural context, thus helping to explain their content.

We want to pursue a similar path here, and hence propose a literary analysis in a chronological format. That is, while skeptical of the gassing claims, we are not setting as our primary objective to prove or disprove any specific gassing claim. Instead we will have a simple narration of the gassing claims, from the spring of 1942 through the end of the Nuremberg and Auschwitz trials in 1947. The analysis shall be "literary" because it will focus on the themes, motifs, tropes, and story elements that comprise the gassing claims. To put it another way, the gassing claims will be laid out, viewed as narratives or as "texts," arranged in order, and analyzed separately and in combination. Literary analyses usually involve several different steps. One is simply the breakdown of a text into its parts along with a discussion of these. In the present case this will involve the isolation and tracking of some of the gassing-claim story elements. A second step involves a textual analysis, in which the text is arrayed with similar texts that may have influenced it or which may have been influenced by it. Precisely for this reason, judgment on the veracity of claims will be suspended, in favor of investigating whether a given narrative shows textual links with prior or later texts. A third approach places the text in a broader social and cultural context, in order to see how it relates to, or expresses, its culture. In the present case the emerging story elements will be placed in the context of known historical and cultural crosscurrents, most of which have been undervalued or ignored by traditional historians of this subject. By putting these

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12 In writing these words, I had in mind the year 1959–1960, which featured the publication of the original versions of *Madness and Civilization* by Michel Foucault and *Truth and Method* by Hans-Georg Gadamer, but of course the proper grounding of the underlying issues of what I might call "perspectivism" in criticism would take us far afield. Let it be felt that such considerations are not germane to the present discussion, it is important to understand how Holocaust revisionism has been portrayed by some critics. For example, both Deborah Lipstadt and Richard Evans have taken the position that "Holocaust denial" is a reflection of "postmodernist" trends in academia, and that these trends involve nothing less than "relativism" with regard to the past, which clearly reveals that they are confusing historical understanding with moral instruction, in addition to not understanding the course of Western intellectual history over the past two centuries. The melodrama such critics evoke could almost be summed up in the title *The Killing of History*, were it not for the fact that Keith Windschuttle's summary of current historiographic fashions is much more reasonable than his title. If anything, however, the skepticism of Holocaust revisionism is hyperempirical in nature, and owes nothing to "relativistic" currents derived either from linguistic theory, hermeneutics, or Hegelian/Marxist analysis, let alone the modified sociology of knowledge and traditional literary criticism I have employed here. For the attempt to link revisionism with postmodernism, see Richard J. Evans, *In Defense of History*, 208.

materials in context, it will be possible to see the extent to which the gassing claim was, or was not, peculiar to its time.

After discussion of the various story elements of the emerging gassing claim, three facts should become clear. First, the mass gassing narratives have a strong family resemblance among them and even to texts that predated the supposed gas exterminations by twenty years or more. Second, the unique characteristics of the gassing process can be traced, in the broader context of European social and cultural history, to completely ordinary procedures, albeit procedures which were the source of significant social and cultural anxiety. Finally, it should become plain that there is no documentary or material evidence that unambiguously supports the mass gassing claim: those documents that are said to bear even remotely on the gassing claim are, in context, completely benign, and for the most part refer back to the anxiety-producing procedures just discussed. These conclusions will not prove that there were no mass gassings. They will, however, vindicate revisionist doubt.

It will of course be impossible to indefinitely withhold a final judgment on the source or character of the gassing claims. But we can take guidance from two cautionary remarks of Conan Doyle's Baker Street sage. "How often have I said to you that when you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth?" said Sherlock Holmes to Dr. Watson in *The Sign of the Four*. To be sure, the historian must always be willing to face uncomfortable truths. "I should have more faith," Holmes remarked in *A Study in Scarlet*, "I ought to know by this time that when a fact appears opposed to a long train of deductions it invariably proves to be capable of bearing some other interpretation." Indeed, it is precisely to the reasonable possibility of "some other interpretation" that all historical investigation must be dedicated.

Yet no one can authoritatively deny the existence of something that most everyone else accepts as true. Therefore categorical denials of mass gassing are not possible. One can, however, try to explain how the gassing claim could have arisen quite naturally given the characteristics and concerns of early twentieth century social and cultural life. It will be shown that the gassing claim, as a form of the more general extermination claim, comprises elements of specific concern to East European Jews since the early nineteenth century. It will also be shown that the traditional extermination scenario, featuring a shower-gas-burning sequence, is rooted in profound European and American concerns over disease and disease prevention, the use of poison gas and other mysterious weapons of mass destruction, and finally anxiety and fear over the recent reappearance of cremation as a means of disposal of the dead.

In short, it will be possible to see that the generation of a delusion of mass gas extermination did not require a conspiracy or a hoax, nor much conscious effort at all, but only a social and cultural climate that would facilitate such claims, at a time

of war, hatred, and social anomie. We will see that such claims, reinforced here and there by a little helpful fraud, but above all by a simple willingness to believe the worst about one's enemies, would allow dark rumors to be stated as fact and become themselves part of that social and cultural landscape of which we are only half-consciously aware.

A few caveats are probably in order. Many people still feel that to question the mass gassing claim, or for that matter, any other aspect of the Holocaust, is tantamount to dismissing the enormous suffering and loss of life experienced by the Jewish people in the Second World War, and that it is even "wicked" to pose questions that may cause survivors any further suffering.<sup>13</sup>

As to the first point, it is only because of the emphases of recent historiography that the mass gassing claim has come to be so exclusively associated with the Jewish people and the Holocaust. In 1945, it was commonly claimed that ten million or more had been exterminated at the same half-dozen camps where today three million Jews alone are said to have been gassed,<sup>14</sup> which strongly implies that at the time it was believed that more non-Jews than Jews had in fact been exterminated with poison gas.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, according to the current interpretation, mass gassing was applied first to insane and disabled non-Jewish Germans in the course of the euthanasia campaign. Therefore, skepticism concerning the mass gassing claim intersects, but does not embrace, the totality of the Holocaust.

As to the second point: the argument that we must spare the feelings of survivors is essentially an appeal to compassion. For many years, we were swayed, and even troubled, by this argument, but we have seen in recent times that this compassion has been invoked to justify persecution and censorship. So now the value of compassion has been placed at odds to the free reason of the individual. But in fact all compassion, and all human action, can only flow from the reasoned choice of free human beings. We conclude, therefore, that the most positive end is served by insisting on the right of free people to speak their minds.

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<sup>13</sup> Walter Laqueur, *Fascism: Past, Present, Future*, 141.

<sup>14</sup> Soviet Special Commissions and contemporary reports had established death tolls as follows: Treblinka, 3–3.5 million; Auschwitz Birkenau, at least 4 million; Majdanek, 1.5 million; Sobibor, Chelmno, several hundreds of thousands; Belzec, 600,000. For a survey of death estimates as of early 1946, including some even higher than the above, consult Eugene Aroneanu, *Inside the Concentration Camps*, 143–144.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* The implication that more non-Jews than Jews were gassed is contradicted by one of Aroneanu's witnesses who stated that the Jewish component always comprised 90 percent of the total number exterminated at any camp, whatever that number might be. This seems arbitrary and illogical. Meanwhile, the reduction in non-Jewish deaths at these camps over the past sixty years rebuts the notion that the Nazis had a policy of exterminating non-Jews.

## **2. THE FIRST REPORTS**

*The first reports emanate from Polish Jewish underground newspapers in the winter and spring of 1942. —Conveyed to England, widely publicized from the summer of 1942. —The first BBC broadcasts. —Concept of a feedback loop for developing and legitimizing rumors. —Nature of rumors. Extermination in a bathhouse by: steam, electricity, a vacuum, a hammer, or poison gas. —Evolution of the typical shower-gas-burning sequence. —The Katyn Forest massacre: a model of forensic investigation. —Soviet response: gas vans in Krasnodar, massacre at Babi Yar. —Possible origins of rumors: German secret weapons technology, German experiments with cyanide gas after discovery of Soviet plans to use it in 1941, analogy with Western execution techniques (electrocution, gas) and disinfection procedures.*



MOST HOLOCAUST RESEARCHERS begin their analysis of the gassing claims in the spring of 1942, so we shall follow that custom here.<sup>16</sup> We are not concerned with recording every single enumeration of a gassing claim; we are concerned above all with recording characteristic changes in how the story is reported. Throughout 1942, 1943, and well into the summer of 1944, all claims of mass gassing must be considered as uncorroborated rumors because of their origin in anonymous and unverifiable reports. Therefore, after briefly covering the evolution of the story, we must pause and attempt to provide other possible explanations for these rumors that are not keyed to the assumption that they reflect reality. To that end, we will duly note a few other rumors pertaining to alleged German National Socialist activities that are generally conceded to be untrue today, that is, rumors that assumed a life of their own during the Second World War.

It should be pointed out here that in the spring of 1942 the National Socialist government of Germany began to systematically deport all Jewish persons in Europe to Poland, and, according to their claims, to points farther east. There is no denying that these deportations were cruel, or that they involved the unjust seizure of wealth and belongings, or that many Jews were done to death one way or another during this process. Virtually everyone, revisionist and non-revisionist, agrees about this aspect of the National Socialist persecution of the Jewish people.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Compare Butz, *Hoax*; Martin Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies*. Also useful to this section are: Gilbert's article, "What Was Known and When," in Yisrael Gutman and Michael Berenbaum, eds., *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp*; James J. Martin, *The Man Who Invented Genocide*; Lucy Dawidowicz, ed., *A Holocaust Reader*; and Laqueur, *Terrible Secret*.

<sup>17</sup> The deportations generally involved, in 1942, moving Jews from western Europe to Poland, and, beginning in 1942 as well, deporting the Jewish population from Poland into occupied Russia or to labor camps in southern Poland. The dispute between revisionists and non-revisionists concerns the motive and the result of these deportations. The traditional school holds that the deportees were sent to three (or four) camps on a north-south axis of easternmost Poland (Treblinka, Sobibor, Belzec, and sometimes Majdanek) as part of "Aktion Reinhard," an action supposedly named after Himmler's deputy Reinhard Heydrich (assassinated in late May 1942). This interpretation further holds that the deportees were gassed and burned at these three or four camps, and that the sole purpose of the deportations was to kill them. This school further maintains that beginning in 1943 all subsequent deportations were sent to Auschwitz Birkenau for the purpose of exterminating the deportees with poison gas at that facility.

The revisionist position is that while the Korherr Report (April 1943) makes it clear that close to two million were sent through the "Reinhard" camps by the end of 1942, the purpose of these camps was for the delousing and disinfection of the deportees, their division into labor groups, and above all the seizure of their wealth and other belongings. Afterwards, the revisionists hold, the deportees continued on to ghettos, camps, and work camps in Southern Poland and occupied Russia where doubtless many died or were killed. In this interpretation there was no "Aktion Reinhard" but rather "Aktion Reinhardt," named after the German state secretary of finance, Fritz Reinhardt, whose policies of appropriating deportee belongings were established even before the war.

In our opinion there is no doubt that "Aktion Reinhardt" is the correct spelling and that it reflects the wealth seizure aspect of the deportations. This fact tends to be obscured for a few reasons. One is that while the existing correspondence usually refers to "Aktion Reinhardt," there are occasional misspellings as "Reinhard" or even "Reinhart"—probably due to the fact that final voiced consonants (e.g., "d" is voiced, while "t" is unvoiced) are unvoiced in German. Another factor is that advocates of the "Reinhard" interpretation, and thus the extermination interpretation, routinely "correct" the spelling of "Reinhardt" documents to "Reinhard" in their books: see for example the Polish communist compilation, Tatiana Berenstein, et al., eds., *Faschismus, Getto, Massenmord* (1960), as well as Yitzhak Arad, *Belzec, Treblinka, Sobibor: The Operation Reinhard Death Camps* (1987). A further factor that prevents understanding in this area is that, having committed themselves to an extermination interpretation, historians ignore the wealth seizure interpretation, although it is rather clearly revealed in the testimony and documents presented at the Nuremberg Military Tribunal (NMT) from 1946 through 1948: see Case 4, the

There is also agreement that in the subsequent course of the war hundreds of thousands of Jews were dragooned into the German labor system, particularly into the armaments industry, working largely out of concentration camps, and several types of labor camps, and that the death rate in these camps was very high, particularly at the end of the war, when disease control measures and provisioning completely broke down. The question is whether, in the course of these concentrations in Poland and subsequent deportations farther east, the German National Socialists were also carrying out a policy of deliberate extermination of Jewish people, specifically using poison gas.

The first claim of mass gassing pertaining to Jewish people that received wide circulation was contained in the so-called Bund Report, which was smuggled to the Polish government-in-exile, located in London, in the third week of May 1942.<sup>18</sup> The report contained two gassing rumors: the first that a special automobile (a gas chamber) was being used to gas 90 persons at one time.<sup>19</sup> Since the victims were supposed to have dug their graves before being gassed, it follows that this was more a gas chamber that could be moved from place to place than a gas van (normally conceived as a vehicle that would drive victims to a grave while they died from gas inhalation on the way).<sup>20</sup> The second rumor pertains to actions in Warsaw: it is said that Jews were being experimented upon with poison gases.<sup>21</sup>

The Bund Report, in turn, appears to be a composite of at least two documents that had come from Warsaw during the spring of 1942. The first of these was an underground communication from the Jewish Labor Bund, in Warsaw, dated March 16, 1942, which described German activities in western Poland as follows:

*In a number of villages the Jews were put to death by gas poisoning. They were herded in a horrible way into hermetically sealed trucks transformed into gas chambers, in groups of fifty, entire families, completely nude ....*<sup>22</sup>

This report further alleged that “gas poisoning” was being carried out in Lodz.<sup>23</sup> The second document that contributed to the Bund Report was a lead article in *Der*

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<sup>18</sup> “Concentration Camp Case,” and Case 11, the “Wilhelmstrasse Case”; Fritz Reinhardt testified at the latter. A further relevant document may be found in Crowell, “Bomb Shelters,” document #16, which clearly shows (a) that Reinhardt was frequently misspelled, (b) that it referred to the wealth seizure aspect of the deportations, and (c) that it was applied to contexts outside of the three or four “Reinhardt” camps. Consult also the expert report of the American historian Christopher Browning, prepared for the Irving v. Lipstadt libel trial.

<sup>19</sup> Gilbert, *Auschwitz*, 40. For reasons that will become clearer, it does not seem absolutely certain that the entirety of the Bund Report was composed in Warsaw. The entire text is reproduced in Dawidowicz, ed., *Holocaust Reader*, 316-318. Priority claims for the first gassing story antedate this appearance: Robert Faurisson has referenced a report of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin, from Stockholm, December 22, 1941, as follows: “More than 1,000 victims of spotted fever [i.e., typhus] in the densely crowded Warsaw ghetto have been put to death by gas [...], it is learned today from reliable sources,” quoted in Germar Rudolf, ed., *Dissecting the Holocaust*, 9n. However, this account is no longer credited by the traditional narrative. Laqueur, *Terrible Secret*, passim, cites many other reports from early 1942 that circulated in Poland in various underground newspapers, in letters, etc.

<sup>19</sup> Gilbert, *Auschwitz*, 40-42.

<sup>20</sup> Compare Ohlendorf’s testimony in the Einsatzgruppen Trial, excerpted in Whitney R. Harris, *Tyranny on Trial*, 352ff.

<sup>21</sup> Gilbert, *Auschwitz*, 43. This rumor is clearly indebted to the claim from December.

<sup>22</sup> Dawidowicz, ed., *Holocaust Reader*, 215.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

*Veker*, April 30, 1942, at a time of internecine struggle between Jewish resisters and collaborators in the Warsaw Ghetto.<sup>24</sup> This article is the source of most of the numerical totals in the Bund Report, but neither of these documents indicate seven hundred thousand total dead. The April 30, 1942, *Der Veker* article also specifies Chelmno as the site of poison gassings, without giving details, but it is worth noting that from the March 16 communication there is an implied connection between bathing (the enforced nudity) and gassing, although, as we shall see, it will be some months before either element becomes dominant in the recitation of atrocities.

Two of the members of the Polish National Council-in-exile were Jewish: Zygielbojm and Szwarcbart, and they could be expected to be particularly interested in what was being alleged about their coreligionists several hundred miles away under German military occupation, and in spreading these allegations as a means of getting support for their people.<sup>25</sup> The Bund Report was thus extensively publicized in the media.

On June 24, 1942, the Bund Report was summarized on the BBC.<sup>26</sup> The following day, the *Daily Telegraph* ran a major story on the report, with two headlines of note: "Germans Murder 700,000 in Poland," and "Travelling Gas Chambers."<sup>27</sup> On the 26th, Zygielbojm delivered a broadcast over the BBC, summarizing the Bund Report in Yiddish, and hence obviously directed to the Jewish population in Poland.<sup>28</sup> Within a week, the BBC had made an arrangement with the Polish National Council giving the BBC priority in the reporting of all future atrocity stories.<sup>29</sup>

On July 1, 1942, the *Polish Fortnightly Review* published a report based on the allegations made in the Bund Report, and also mentioning specific camps: Sobibor, and Majdanek, near Lublin.<sup>30</sup> It also made a reference to atrocities at Auschwitz, described as a labor camp, where about a thousand Soviet and Polish POWs were supposed to have been gassed the previous September, and mentioned another camp nearby, called *Paradisal*, because, so the report alleged, "from it there is only one road, leading to Paradise."<sup>31</sup> It further alleges that the crematoriums in the *Paradisal* camp were five times larger than those at Auschwitz, and that experiments with poison gas were conducted there.<sup>32</sup> It should be emphasized that the remarks in the *Polish Fortnightly Review* concerning Auschwitz were not in

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 294f for the complete text of the front page editorial. It is worthy of note than an analysis of the original text indicates that the atrocities are enumerated by way of justifying the recalcitrance of the Bund to the German occupation, and condemning the cooperation of the Jewish Councils. On these last, consult especially Isaiah Trunk, *Judenrat*, and Emanuel Ringelblum, *Polish-Jewish Relations during the Second World War*.

<sup>25</sup> Gilbert, *Auschwitz*, 43, *passim*. The aim of the Bund Report, by the way, was not to elicit a Zionist quid pro quo, but rather to call for reprisals against Germans held by the Allies. This tends to support the idea that the gassing claims were generally believed by Polish Jews in exile.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

the Bund Report; they appear to have come from earlier reports that were sent to London.<sup>33</sup>

Looking over these initial claims, it is clear that the claim of gassing is but one of a number of extermination claims being made. Furthermore, it is evident that the claims of gassing focus more on the allegation of experiments rather than a systematic extermination procedure. On the Auschwitz claims, there are some startling inaccuracies: Paradisal is clearly a reference to Birkenau, but Birkenau had no crematoriums until the following spring, and the term Paradisal itself, as a road to paradise, is obviously the origin of the *Himmelfahrt* that will later figure so prominently in the folklore of Sobibor and Treblinka but which has no place in the history of Birkenau.<sup>34</sup>

The other thing that is important to note in this first rush of stories about gasings is that the BBC has already begun to play a major role in recycling these rumors back to their point of origin in Poland.<sup>35</sup> These broadcasts in effect create a feedback loop that repeats and gives authority to Polish rumors, which are then reinjected back into Poland, where they may be expected to multiply and burgeon. There will be more to say of these broadcasts shortly, but the role of radio in disseminating and universalizing the rumors of mass gassing is something that deserves a very thorough accounting.

By July 16, 1942, the allegations of gassing were repeated in the *News Review*, here with the claim that the Germans were preparing “large gas stations” where the Polish Jewish population would be murdered.<sup>36</sup> The report claims that Jews were to be given “no sleeping drugs... they were just trussed up and finished off.”<sup>37</sup> This report is getting us closer to the claim as we understand it today, but the reference to drugs and trussing up the victims suggests more a reference to gassing as a form of execution than for mass extermination: in other words, it appears that the author was attempting to compare the gassing procedure alleged in Poland with that used for executions in the United States.<sup>38</sup>

Later that same summer, two rumors were passed on to Gerhart Riegner, the Geneva representative of the World Jewish Congress in Geneva.<sup>39</sup> Both of these came from Germans, private citizens hostile to Nazism, and both claimed that

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33 The inference derives from the fact that Oswiecim (Auschwitz) is not mentioned in the Bund Report; yet it is mentioned in the underground appeal of March 16; compare Dawidowicz, ed., *Holocaust Reader*, 215-216. However the details concerning Auschwitz in the July 1 article of the *Fortnightly Review* are not present in that earlier communication.

34 On *Himmelfahrt*, see Harris, *Tyranny on Trial*, 334, for an example.

35 The inference derives from the facts of the Yiddish language broadcast, the BBC's claiming priority in announcing atrocity claims, and the BBC's wide listenership in occupied Europe which will be discussed later. An analysis of BBC broadcasts is very much needed. More evidence of this feedback loop will be discussed further below; compare Shermer, *Why People Believe*, 100, for an elucidation of the concept. The concept under different words should be familiar from the study of cybernetics or Foucault (“discursive loop”).

36 Gilbert, *Auschwitz*, 51.

37 *Ibid.*, 51.

38 Perhaps the text was rewritten in London for the sake of an Anglo-American audience, whose association with poison gas would more readily conjure up the idea of execution: cyanide gas had been used for executions in the United States since 1924; see Crowell, “Technique and Operation of German Anti-Gas Shelters in World War II: A Refutation of J.C. Pressac's ‘Criminal Traces’”

39 Gilbert, *Auschwitz*, 56-58.

the National Socialist government was preparing to use poison gas: the one claim would mutate into the formulation of “lighting the gas ovens”;<sup>40</sup> the other made a specific reference to the use of prussic acid, or cyanide gas (*Blausäure*).<sup>41</sup> Both of these rumors are considered important because they stem from German sources, and because cyanide gas would later be considered to be a basic “murder weapon” in the extermination process.<sup>42</sup> But it should be clear that rumors heard even by prominent Germans, in the context of the established BBC gassing claim feedback loop, are no more valid than any others. In this respect it is interesting to note that when two “eyewitnesses” from Poland were interviewed in Geneva at about the same time, neither one said a word about gas exterminations, although they described many other hardships endured by Polish Jews.<sup>43</sup>

A BBC broadcast on September 27 featured the exiled German author Thomas Mann, who repeated the gassing claim, saying that 16,000 French Jews had been gassed on a train after it had been “hermetically sealed” and that 11,000 Polish Jews had been put to death in the same way.<sup>44</sup> It is known that such rumors were heard in Europe at the time.<sup>45</sup> It follows that among the French and Dutch Jews being deported in the fall of 1942 there would be some who would be quite anxious about what awaited them in the concentration camps.

The next important development in the mass gassing claims comes again from Polish sources, in particular the testimony of Jan Karski, a Polish intelligence operative who claimed to have been an eyewitness at Belzec; indeed, his report also mentions Sobibor and Treblinka.<sup>46</sup> These various reports were compiled by the Geneva Zionists, and then publicized in London and New York at the same time.<sup>47</sup> There were two new elements to these materials. The first is the description of the loading of deported Jews into railroad cars covered with lime and chlorine—this apparently being the origin of the later claim of extermination with chlorine gas.<sup>48</sup> The second was the description of extermination at Belzec—the victims were told to strip, as if for a shower, were led into a room, and then electrocuted via a metal plate on the floor.<sup>49</sup> The elaboration of these materials in the *New York Times* on November 26, 1942, would include allegations by Rabbi Stephen S. Wise that the Germans were also turning the bodies of dead Jews into “fats and soaps and lubri-

<sup>40</sup> The “gas oven” formula is attributed to a Dr. Sommer, although it is not exactly clear if he composed the message that was eventually passed on to the West. Gilbert, *Auschwitz*, 56, 58n.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 56, 58n, repeated arguments that a single source existed for both messages; credit for identifying the “prussic acid” component as supplied by a Mr. Schulte belongs to Richard Breitman.

<sup>42</sup> The current version holds that circa one million people were exterminated with cyanide gas evolving from Zyklon B, a common pesticide. The other two million gassed are said to have been killed with exhaust gases, specifically carbon monoxide from diesel engines.

<sup>43</sup> Gilbert, *Auschwitz*, 64.

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Wilhelm Stäglich, *Auschwitz*, 112.

<sup>45</sup> The inference is supported in Anne Frank, *Diary of a Young Girl*, 53, where for the entry of October 9, 1942, she describes hearing rumors of gassing over the “English radio.”

<sup>46</sup> Gilbert, *Auschwitz*, 93.

<sup>47</sup> Martin, *The Man Who Invented*, 40. In the *New York Times* the following day, that is, November 26, 1942. The details are clearly the same.

<sup>48</sup> Gilbert, *Auschwitz*, 94.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

cants” and that the Germans were now “injecting bubbles into their veins” because “prussic acid had been found to be too expensive.”<sup>50</sup>

This particular cycle of extermination claims seems especially rich. Lime and chlorine were standard materials used to combat epidemics—we will discuss this in more detail shortly. The extermination description at Belzec is noteworthy for two reasons: first, because it is apparently the first time that “showering” is explicitly described as an element in pre-extermination deception, although as we have seen the connection appears to have preceded this statement,<sup>51</sup> and second because the electrocution claim is no longer made today (although it must be said that it would later undergo significant elaboration).<sup>52</sup>

The last element that is interesting is in regard to the soap claim, which has quietly been abandoned by all responsible researchers in recent decades.<sup>53</sup> The claim of corpse utilization seems obviously related to a similar false claim made about the Germans in the First World War, and indeed it was recognized as such in some quarters even in 1942.<sup>54</sup> Another point is that there are two documents that indicate that the Germans were attempting to squelch such rumors in Slovakia and Lublin in July and October of 1942.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, we know that the “soap making” claim originally arose in 1942 among ethnic Poles, who, along with the Jews, were being resettled on the eastern bank of the Bug River.<sup>56</sup>

The accumulation of extermination claims made in 1942 would lead the Allied leaders to make a declaration on December 17, 1942, condemning German practices without, on the other hand, specifying procedures.<sup>57</sup>

In April 1943, an interesting memo of atrocities was drafted in London by a Pole, identified only as a member of the Polish underground. It claimed to describe extermination activities at Auschwitz Birkenau. Three types of extermination besides shooting were alleged in this anonymous document. They were:

- a. Gas Chambers. *The victims were undressed and put into those chambers where they suffocated.*
- b. Electric Chambers. *These chambers had metal walls; the victims were brought in and high-tension electric current was introduced.*

<sup>50</sup> Martin, *Man Who Invented*, 41.

<sup>51</sup> Compare the communication of March 16, 1942, discussed above; also Sylvia Rothschild, ed., *Voices from the Holocaust*, where a Polish Jewish survivor recalled his fear of going to the bathhouse at Sachsenhausen in fall 1942, 159, and habitual BBC listening by others, 129, 153. This testimony also indicates the very wide dispersion of the shower-gassing claim/rumor at this time, which inferentially supports the concept of the BBC feedback loop.

<sup>52</sup> The nadir of this claim may be found in the *Black Book of Polish Jewry*, published in 1946, quoted in Carlos Porter, *Made in Russia: The Holocaust*, 381.

<sup>53</sup> Compare Mark Weber, “Jewish Soap,” in *Journal of Historical Review* 11, no 2. Also compare Hilberg, *Destruction* (1st ed.), 331, 470. Rejection of the wartime soap-making rumor should be distinguished from the claim, made at the International Military Tribunal (IMT) at Nuremberg by the Soviet Union, that the Germans conducted soap-making experiments at Stutthof c. 1944. This last claim is not explicitly rejected, but see Weber’s article above. Readers are directed to the complete affidavit in support of the claim, reproduced in Porter, *Made in Russia*, 368-376, with the recommendation that they read it and decide for themselves.

<sup>54</sup> Martin, *Man Who Invented*, 46.

<sup>55</sup> Hilberg, *Destruction* (1st ed.), 331, German propaganda division reports October 1942, and NO-1660.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 331.

<sup>57</sup> Martin, *Man Who Invented*, 44.

c. The so-called *Hammerluft* system. This is a hammer of air. These were special chambers where the hammer fell from the ceiling and by means of a special installation victims found death under air pressure.<sup>58</sup>

Needless to say neither method b. nor c. forms part of the current extermination narrative. However, these two story elements are good examples of how Holocaust claims are later elaborated and developed. The description of the electric chambers is almost certainly derived from the Karski report, and will surface again. The *Hammerluft* system appears even more interesting. The crux of this rumor appears to be the idea of a falling hammer: this is an early appearance of a claim for a method of execution that will later emerge as a (purportedly) prime form of death at Mauthausen (where it was supposed to be the “Kugel Decree”), Buchenwald, and also Sachsenhausen, where in the form of what Carlos Porter sarcastically called the “pedal-driven brain-bashing machine” it was supposed to have been used to exterminate 840,000 Russian POWs.<sup>59</sup> On the other hand, the element in the claim that touches on air pressure is probably the grandfather of the so-called “vacuum chambers” at Treblinka that would make a brief appearance in 1945.<sup>60</sup>

For all of the subsequent development of the *Hammerluft* claim, it seems odd that this rumor could have arisen in the first place, since there is no material or physical evidence to support it (to be sure, there is no such evidence for any of the claims we have reviewed so far). We are tempted to think that someone encountered the term “*Hammerluft*,” which might conceivably refer to a pneumatic hammer, and this led to some grisly speculation. On the other hand it is interesting to note that during the war the Germans attempted to develop a secret weapon that involved high-pressure jets of gases that would penetrate the fuselage of low-flying aircraft, and, as it was a military project, POWs and Jewish forced laborers were no doubt involved.<sup>61</sup> Perhaps rumors of this project also mutated into this particular extermination claim.

The aforementioned memo, drafted April 18, 1943, was never issued, probably because the main atrocity story at the time was the massacre of the Polish officers in Katyn forest, which had just been revealed by the Germans.<sup>62</sup> The story is simply this. Over ten thousand Polish officers fell into Soviet hands in 1939 and were never heard from again. In February 1943, shortly after the fall of the Sixth Army at Stalingrad, Germans stationed outside of Smolensk discovered mass graves of Polish officers. The Germans spent two months exhuming and analyzing the remains, accounting for 4,400 bodies in all. Several non-German forensic experts, including an independent Polish commission, were called in to investigate and

<sup>58</sup> Gilbert, *Auschwitz*, 130.

<sup>59</sup> On the “Kugel Decree” see Harris, *Tyranny on Trial*, 248-250; on the real meaning of the term, see Carlos Porter, *Not Guilty at Nuremberg*, 15-16; on the “pedal-driven brain-bashing machine” see Porter, *Made in Russia*, 15, 378-380.

<sup>60</sup> Porter, *Made in Russia*, 408.

<sup>61</sup> Fritz Hahn, *Waffen und Geheimwaffen des deutschen Heeres 1933-1945*, “Windkanone,” vol. 2, 136f.

<sup>62</sup> Allen Paul, *Katyn: The Untold Story of Stalin's Polish Massacre*, 210; the Germans broke the story April 13, 1943.

carry out autopsies. The results in the subsequent German report, which was more than three hundred pages in length, concluded that the officers had been systematically butchered in the spring of 1940. It was, in other words, an atrocity carried out by the Soviet Union.<sup>63</sup>

The Katyn episode is interesting for a few reasons. In the first place, confronted with well-nigh irrefutable evidence of the criminality of their main ally, both Britain and the United States took the position that it was a German crime.<sup>64</sup> Second, the German conduct of the exhumations and autopsies was thorough and meticulous: the international specialists, including the Poles, were allowed to conduct their researches with the minimum of interference.<sup>65</sup> Third, the German forensic report is probably the most detailed analysis of any atrocity that occurred in the Second World War. Nothing even remotely comparable has ever been produced for the many allegations of German atrocity.<sup>66</sup>

In the midst of now typical gas chamber claims in May and June, and perhaps as a response to the Katyn accusation, the Soviets conducted a trial in Krasnodar in July 1943, featuring German POWs who confessed to the gassing of people by use of “gas vans” or, as the Russians called them, “*Dushegubki*” or “murder vans.”<sup>67</sup> It is worth mentioning here that no “gassing van” has ever been located.<sup>68</sup> In August 1943 a periodical entitled *Polish Labor Fights!* repeated extermination claims for Treblinka, this time referring to rooms that were crammed with people, sealed, and then filled with steam that killed the victims.<sup>69</sup> Aside from the novel use of steam, later abandoned, one notes here again the use of the “showering” motif in the extermination process.

In late November 1943, the Soviets, upon the liberation of Kiev, alleged that several tens of thousands had been shot at Babi Yar, a ravine outside of the city.<sup>70</sup> The absence

63 Paul, *Katyn*, 254; the length of the Soviet report is given as 38 pages.

64 On the Allied response, see Paul, *Katyn*, 222, especially 301-315, and Martin, *Man Who Invented*, 65-69.

65 On the German handling of Katyn, see Paul, *Katyn*, 208-210, 228-231, 270-273.

66 The German production *Amtliches Material zum Massenmord von Katyn* is approximately 350 pages in length, including 60 pages of photos, about 80 pages detailing the 4,000 corpses exhumed, extensive autopsy reports, other analyses (e.g., dendrochronological analyses), along with all relevant documents, reports, and a chronology. It cannot be compared to anything prepared by the Allies either during or after the war; it can only be compared to an archaeological study.

67 Gilbert, *Auschwitz*, 149. The trial took place from July 14 to July 17, 1943. See *The People's Verdict: A Full Report of the Proceedings at the Krasnodar and Kharkov German Atrocity Trials*. *Dushegubki* is the feminine substantive plural from the neuter noun *Dushegubstvo*, meaning murder, literally, destroying or crushing of the spirit (from the verb “to breathe”). The cognate derivation of suffocation is therefore innate.

68 Ingrid Weckert's article “The Gas Vans: A Critical Assessment of the Evidence,” in Rudolf, ed., *Dissecting the Holocaust*, 215-242, provides a detailed analysis of this claim. A review of the testimonies in *The People's Verdict* finds that the confessions of the German defendants and other witnesses on the gas vans are almost word for word identical, but these descriptions have never been correlated with any drawing or physical object. Other noteworthy themes developed, beginning at the Krasnodar Trial and particularly at Kharkov in December, include the claim that the Germans became obsessed with secrecy once they found out that the Soviets had obtained “gas van” documents, that Hitler personally ordered the suppression of “gas van” information in July 1943, and that the bodies were burned to “wipe out the traces” of the crimes. The file 501-PS from the Nuremberg trial—apparently based on documents originally put into evidence by the Soviets at Kharkov (see Butz, *Hoax*, 267n [Butz references Reitlinger])—contains most of the documents in support of the claim; the most important one, and the only document that explicitly discusses gassing, is a copy of a letter purportedly written by Becker to Rauff concerning the operation of “gas vans.”

69 Butz, *Hoax*, 127.

70 *New York Times*, November 29, 1943, quoted in Butz, *Hoax*, 125. It should be noted that the author of the article, W. H. Lawrence, expresses some skepticism about the scale of the killings alleged because of the lack of forensic evidence.

of forensic evidence was explained by claiming the Germans had somehow managed to dig up all of the remains a few weeks before retreating from the Red Army and then burn all the bodies without leaving a trace. What is at issue here is not the reality of shooting claims, per se, for there certainly is much evidence to corroborate the notion that the Germans and their East European auxiliaries massacred many people, including many Jews, apparently in the course of carrying out the Commissar Order to kill communists and communist sympathizers, as well as in the context of anti-partisan warfare.<sup>71</sup> Rather, what is interesting about the Soviet claim is the assertion that all of the remains were completely destroyed. This is a very prominent feature of atrocity claims made against the Germans in the Second World War.

In December 1943, the Soviets held another atrocity trial, this time in Kharkov, a city in the eastern Ukraine that had changed hands several times during the war. Again, there were repetitions of the gas van testimony given at the Krasnodar trial, and, on December 16, 1943, an interesting description of Auschwitz was given by an SS officer, Heinisch:

*PROSECUTOR: Tell the court about your talk with Somann.*

*HEINISCH: Somann told me that death caused by gas poisoning was painless and more humane. He said that in the gas van death was very quick, but actually death came not in twelve seconds but much more slowly and was accompanied by great pain.*

*Somann told me about the camp in Auschwitz in Germany where the gassing of prisoners was carried out. The people were told that they were to be transferred elsewhere, and foreign workers were told that they would be repatriated and were sent under this pretext to bath-houses. Those who were to be executed first entered a place with a signboard with "Disinfection" on it and there they were undressed—the men separately from the women and children. Then they were ordered to proceed to another place with a signboard "Bath." While the people were washing themselves special valves were opened to let in the gas which caused their death. Then the dead people were burned in special furnaces in which about 200 bodies could be burned simultaneously.<sup>72</sup>*

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<sup>71</sup> The question of the number of Jews shot by the Germans or their auxiliaries is hotly debated by revisionists. There seems little reason to disbelieve the extensive documentary records, which indicate a minimum of several hundreds of thousands of Jews slain. The next question pertains to the reason for these shootings: in some cases it appears tied to anti-partisan activity, in others retaliation, or simply punitive measures, or to the ideological commitment of some Nazi commanders to the killing of all Jews, or even, in a few instances, to antiepidemic measures. On the other hand, there are other documents, too varied to discuss here, that strongly suggest that children, the elderly, and others unable to work were executed as a matter of official policy. The traditionalist claim, supported by the judgment of the IMT and NMT, is that 2 million Jews of all ages and conditions were shot, and that they were shot because of their Jewish identity alone. The actual totals one can derive from the existing documents—assuming 100 percent reliability—seem to lie in the neighborhood of about one million.

Many revisionists dispute the claim of shooting exterminations, largely, one thinks, because it is traditionally linked to the gassing claim, although it must be said that the evidence for mass shootings is of a completely different order of magnitude and verisimilitude than the evidence for gassing. In general, I do not dispute the shooting claims, but better evidence may surface on the numbers killed, or regarding German rationales, or how the practice evolved, that may affect our understanding of what these mass killings represented. In any case, I do not believe that they represented an "extermination policy."

<sup>72</sup> *The People's Verdict*, 90.

Heinisch went on to say that Somann was the chief of the Security Service in the Breslau area (the general area in which Auschwitz is located), that gas executions took place only in camps on German soil, and that the decision to carry out executions “by means of gas poisoning” was made at a conference in the summer of 1942 which Hitler, Himmler, and Kaltenbrunner attended.<sup>73</sup>

Heinisch’s testimony is remarkable in several respects. First of all, we have by December 1943, at a trial under Soviet auspices, a clear, albeit erroneous, narrative of the gassing claim at Auschwitz, in a form more or less similar to the standard narrative and in a publication that received wide distribution. It is also notable that Heinisch does not specify the ethnicity of the victims, but rather prefers to speak of foreign workers and their families: this at a time when large numbers of Ukrainians were being evacuated to the Reich for labor and were being subjected to the indignities of communal showers.<sup>74</sup>

The description of the gassing process provided by Heinisch varies from the standard version. Therefore, in attempting to account for it, we could conceive of a link back to the unpublished narrative concerning Auschwitz in May, or to other rumors that may have been circulating at the time. But it is important to note that the narrative contains details about bathing and disinfection that we have not encountered prior to this point. It is also important to reflect on how it could be possible for Heinisch, a district commissar at Melitopol in occupied Russia, and Somann, an SS chief in Breslau, to be informed of a process that the postwar trials have assured us was carried out in the greatest secrecy.<sup>75</sup>

In early 1944, in February, the Belzec electrocution story once more emerged.<sup>76</sup> Finally, at the beginning of May, the *New York Times* repeated a story in which the Germans were planning to construct “special baths,” which were in fact gas chambers, and in which the Hungarian Jews were to be exterminated.<sup>77</sup> By this time, then, the gassing claim had become cemented its most typical form.

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 90, 91f.

<sup>74</sup> The Soviet prosecution at Nuremberg in the course of its presentation stressed elements of sexual shame and dishonor among Ukrainian deportees during this time-frame, viz. [quote] Turning to Page 5 of the same document, Paragraph 12 in the German text it appears at Page 6, Paragraph 1: “The following abuses were reported from the delousing stations: ‘In the women’s and girls’ shower rooms, services were partly performed by men, or men would mingle around or even help with the soaping, and vice versa there were female personnel in the men’s shower rooms. Men also for some time were taking photographs in the women’s shower rooms. Since mainly Ukrainian peasants were transported in the last months, as far as the female portion of these are concerned, they were mostly of a high moral standard and used to strict modesty, they must have considered such a treatment as a national degradation.’” [end quote] “Eighteenth Day, Wednesday, 12/12/1945, Part 10,” in *Trial of the Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal*, vol. 3, 437ff.

<sup>75</sup> It is also remarkable that Gilbert, in *Auschwitz*, completely ignores Heinisch’s testimony about Auschwitz, even though he references the Kharkov trial, references *The People’s Verdict*, and sought to present in that book a complete narrative of how information about Auschwitz was acquired. It is also remarkable that Heinisch’s narrative precedes the 1944 constructions of the Auschwitz narrative. A review of other sources, primary and secondary, initially showed no references to Heinisch or Somann concerning Auschwitz. However, it is appears that Somann was already notorious to the Polish underground from November 1940, due to his role in the reprisal execution of Poles at Auschwitz, see Danuta Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle, 1939–1945*, 19, 34. There appear to be no further references to Somann: according to most accounts, regular gassings did not begin at Auschwitz until spring 1942.

<sup>76</sup> Butz, *Hoax*, 202.

<sup>77</sup> Butz, *Hoax*, 204. This narrative, like the other Auschwitz narratives for 1944, appears to have come from the Weissmandel circle in Bratislava (compare Dawidowicz, ed., *Holocaust Reader*, 318–327) but given the testimony of Heinisch six months previous its derivative nature is easily argued.

It should be emphasized at the end of this brief review of gassing and other extermination claims that to this point not a hint of what we would normally call evidence had been brought forward. Nevertheless we can see emerging over time a kind of model for extermination procedures, what we will call the shower-gas-burning sequence. The idea that victims would be led into a bathing facility of some kind, and then executed (the method of execution focusing on gas more and more as time went by), and then burned so that no trace remained was already very common by the summer of 1944.

In fairness it should also be kept in mind that the shower-gas-burning concept still coexisted with other methods of extermination, including steam, vacuums, hammers of air, and electrocution, which have not been alleged in many years. We should expect therefore a heightened level of material and documentary proof in support of the gassing allegations as opposed to the others: we will see in subsequent chapters the extent to which that is the case.

In reviewing these gassing claims we find that virtually all of them came from anonymous sources in Poland, and that all of them were publicized and propagated by Jewish agencies in Switzerland, London, and America.<sup>78</sup> The conclusion that many revisionists have drawn is that therefore these gassing claims were developed by Jewish groups as part of a hoax.<sup>79</sup> We would dissent from this interpretation: it is too great a leap to suggest that these Jewish agencies, in publicizing these claims, knew them to be false, or were publicizing them to some nefarious purpose. On the contrary, all of the internal evidence—letters, diaries, stray conversations—indicates that the Western Jews most responsible for the spread of these claims actually believed them.<sup>80</sup> The question of whether these stories were then used to pursue political ends, and specifically Zionist ends, does not by itself discount the apparent sincerity of what these Jewish leaders were writing and saying at the time. To put the matter simply, they were in no position to know what was really going on: all they knew, or thought they knew, was that their coreligionists were undergoing a terrific ordeal of persecution, and needed help.

Having surveyed the claims, we must now attempt to interpret the nature of these various story elements. In other words, if these rumors are not a reflection of reality, then where did the rumors come from? It is clear that the use of gas was expressed in three ways before settling on the shower-gas scenario. One of these involved the idea of gas as a means of execution, in which the victims were not sedated; another involved the use of gas in experiments, which linked it to the allegation of prussic acid use; and finally there was the variant that featured the “lighting of the gas ovens.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Gilbert, *Auschwitz*, passim.

<sup>79</sup> Butz, *Hoax*, 20–21, 390, for an example. Butz’s meaning of the word “hoax” is rather more subtle than his use of the word implies (420); compare a later discussion in *Hoax*, 320–321. The other revisionist most closely associated with the hoax concept is Robert Faurisson.

<sup>80</sup> Gilbert, *Auschwitz*, 66, and esp. 67, 135, 136 (Ziegelboym’s suicide); Henry Morgenthau, *Mostly Morgenthau*, 366 (Henry Morgenthau Jr.’s comment).

<sup>81</sup> Gilbert, *Auschwitz*, 56–58.

The “gas oven” motif is clearly a garbled association between crematoriums, almost all of which are gas operated, and the basic gassing claim. This perhaps innocent association, which corresponds to the known gas ovens that existed in many homes, tended to create an absolute linkage between gas chambers and crematoriums: that is, wherever a crematorium was, there was also a gas chamber.

The “lack of sedation” motif, as already discussed, was probably an extension of the use of poison gas for execution purposes in the United States. The electrocution motif, prominent at about the same time, was a probable extension of the same idea, since electrocution was even more widely used for executions in America.<sup>82</sup>

Since the poison gas used for American executions was also cyanide, that could account for the rumors of cyanide-gas usage. But there are other contexts in which cyanide gas could have emerged in official German documents or discussions during this period, and these usages could have led to garbled understanding which would account for the rumors as well, particularly those concerning experiments.

Soon after the invasion of Russia, the Wehrmacht obtained materials indicating that the Red Army had contingency plans for spraying German troops with cyanide gas from low-flying aircraft. As a result, in January 1942, the Germans conducted experiments on farm animals using this gas, with generally fatal effect. This in turn led to the development of the FE 42 gas mask filter, which provided protection against cyanide gas. But the Germans, for reasons of security, attempted to keep these developments secret.<sup>83</sup> Thus we have at the beginning of 1942 secret experiments with prussic acid and the development of a device to protect against it, all of this before or roughly simultaneous with the emergence of rumors that the Germans were experimenting with this gas on human beings. A far more potent association in which prussic acid would emerge concerned the use of this material for delousing and disinfecting communities in Eastern Europe. Therefore we must make a detour to discuss these German delousing and disinfection procedures.

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<sup>82</sup> Stephen Trombley, *The Execution Protocol*, discusses American execution techniques and their origins.

<sup>83</sup> Günther Gellermann, *Der Krieg, der nicht stattfand*, 186f.

### **3. GERMAN DISINFECTION PROCEDURES**

*Western disinfection procedures developed in nineteenth century to combat cholera, typhoid, dysentery, and typhus. —German methods very systematic, constant exposure to cholera and typhus because of Eastern European immigrants fleeing persecution. —Hamburg epidemic in 1892. —Mary Antin's passage in 1893. —American procedures, 1892, and the fear these evoked in the Jewish community. —German disinfection procedures in the First World War in Turkey. —In Poland. —English procedures in Poland in 1919. — American procedures in Poland. —German technological developments in the 1920s and 1930s. —The mechanics of disinfection: shaving, showering, and fumigating. Zyklon B. —Double-doored Apparate for disinfection. —Railway car gassing tunnels. —Typical responses among Eastern Jews and others: noncomprehension, fear, anxiety, evasion, and destructive rumors of extermination.*



**D**ISEASE HAS MOVED hand in hand with warfare and migrations throughout history, and has brought more than one army to its knees. Eastern Europe was a particularly dreaded location for such epidemics: the Allies in the Crimean War and Napoleon's army in 1812 were decimated by diseases, above all typhus and cholera, but also typhoid and dysentery.<sup>84</sup> For a long time the cause of these diseases was unknown. Only toward the end of the nineteenth century was it understood that cholera, typhoid, and dysentery were transmitted by microbes, usually in contaminated water.<sup>85</sup> The vector of typhus—the body louse—was not identified until shortly before the First World War.<sup>86</sup>

This lack of understanding did not prevent Europeans from attempting to control these diseases, since the general understanding was that filth and poor hygiene had something to do with their transmission.<sup>87</sup>

Toward the end of the nineteenth century Germany developed a number of procedures for the delousing and disinfection of people and their clothing. These involved showering, smearing the body with petroleum or other substances to kill bugs, and steaming or boiling belongings.<sup>88</sup> The application of these procedures soon came to a test in the 1880s.

Typhus was endemic in Eastern Europe, and cholera had swept through the region on several occasions in the nineteenth century.<sup>89</sup> The constant saturation, particularly with typhus, conferred a certain immunity on the inhabitants.<sup>90</sup> Someone transplanted to these regions could easily catch these diseases.<sup>91</sup> Someone leaving the area might carry them.<sup>92</sup> The population of the area, comprising roughly the

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84 The preeminent revisionist work on the subjects discussed here are two articles by Friedrich Paul Berg, "Zyklon B and the German Delousing Chambers" and "Typhus and the Jews," both originally published in the *Journal of Historical Review*.

The following texts on epidemic diseases and their role in history were found useful: Geoffrey Marks and William Beatty, *Epidemics*; Frederick Cartwright, *Disease and History*; William McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples*; Charles Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years*; Hans Zinsser, *Rats, Lice, and History*; Bernard Dixon, *Magnificent Microbes*; Erwin Schimitschek and Günther Werner, *Malaria, Fleckfieber, Pest*; Henry Hobhouse, *Forces of Change*.

85 Cartwright, *Disease*, inter alia, discusses the waterborne diseases in detail.

86 Schimitschek, *Malaria, Fleckfieber, Pest*, 90.

87 To a large extent Rosenberg's *Cholera Years* is expressly concerned with the development of prophylaxis without a clear comprehension of etiology, and see Evans, *Tod in Hamburg*.

88 Enumerated in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 12th ed., entry "Typhus," and Richard J. Evans, *Tod in Hamburg*.

89 Consult Zinsser, *Rats, Lice, and History*; Marks and Beatty, *Epidemics*; Hobhouse, *Forces*; also E. W. Goodall, "Typhus Fever in Poland," in *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine* 13 (April 23, 1920).

90 Note important characterization of typhus quoted in Dixon, *Magnificent Microbes*, 201.

91 *Ibid.*, also Goodall, "Typhus Fever."

92 This very important concept involves the manner in which recrudescing typhus, which can recur many years after infection, can lead to a mild case of fever. However, if the person afflicted with "Brill-Zinsser disease" lives in a louse-ridden community, infection can then be transmitted to the louse and then to the louse matrix of the community with epidemic and lethal effect. Compare the comments by Zinsser, *Rats, Lice, and History*, 235, 235-239, in which he sketches the outlines of two species of the louse-borne disease. For typhoid fever, it is well known that about 1 percent of victims (female only) can become permanent carriers of the microbe in their gall bladders; compare "Typhoid Mary."

western Russian Empire and the eastern provinces of Austria-Hungary, Jewish and gentile, was uniformly impoverished, hungry, and, by then current Western hygienic standards, filthy.<sup>93</sup> It is no exaggeration to state that most of the people in this region were but one crop failure away from death.<sup>94</sup>

In 1881, after the assassination of Tsar Alexander II, anti-Semitic riots became characteristic in the region.<sup>95</sup> That was the last straw for many Jews, who had borne impoverishment, hunger, and filth as stoically as their gentile counterparts, in addition to government interference in their traditional way of life. As a result, many Jews chose to emigrate, and this led them in many cases through Germany.<sup>96</sup> In Germany, they were subjected to the standard disinfection procedures, of which Mary Antin gives a much quoted account in her memoirs:<sup>97</sup>

*In a great and lonely field, opposite a solitary house within a large yard, our train pulled up at last, and the conductor commanded the passengers to make haste and get out. [...] [The conductor] hurried us into the one large room that made up the house, and then into the yard. Here a great many men and women, dressed in white, received us, the women attending the women and girls of the passengers, and the men the others. This was another scene of bewildering confusion, parents losing their children, and little ones crying; baggage being thrown together in one corner of the yard, heedless of contents, which suffered in consequence; those white-clad Germans shouting commands, always accompanied with "Quick! Quick!"—the confused passengers obeying all orders like meek children, only questioning now and then what was to be done with them. And no wonder if in some minds stories arose of people being captured by robbers, murderers, and the like. Here we had been taken to a lonely place where only that house was to be seen; our things were taken away, our friends separated from us; a man came to inspect us, as if to ascertain our full value; strange-looking people driving us about like dumb animals, helpless and unresisting; children we could not see crying in a*

93 E. Starkenstein, "Hygienische und sanitäre Verhältnisse Polens: Ein Beitrag zur Ostjudenfrage," in *Archiv für Soziale Hygiene und Demographie* nos. 1-2 (June 12, 1917) 19-38, is characteristic; gentile populations had similar problems, consult *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, entry "Typhus."

94 This is a truism of Russian history, due to the short growing and harvesting season, and other factors, such that grain yields rarely exceeded 3:1. Hobhouse, *Forces*, discusses in greater detail.

95 These are the "pogroms," which will continue until the end of the Russian Civil War. The roots of these anti-Jewish actions seem variable; partly attributed to religious anti-Semitism (i.e., Blood Libel accusations), partly due to the "Russification" tendencies of the Empire, which affected all minorities, not just the Jewish people; partly due to economic competition with other ethnics (Germans, Greeks, Armenians, Old Russian sectarians); partly due to the peculiar position the Eastern Jews occupied vis-a-vis the peasantry, which was newly emancipated and striving to adapt; as well as other social, economic, and demographic conditions, some of which are adumbrated by Hobhouse, *Forces*. In short, the circumstances that could contribute to anti-Jewish violence at this time and in the examined period were quite complex. What they all seem to have in common is the radical change taking place in the Empire, which will become even more radical after the Revolution of 1917. To anticipate a later note, I register here merely the tendency of many Jewish observers to regard these causes as united only by hatred of the Jewish people; I note as well the tendency of Jewish historians to regard these outbreaks by and large as the product of official instigation.

96 Discussed in, inter alia, Howe, *World of Our Fathers*, 29-38.

97 Mary Antin, *The Promised Land*, 138. The book was originally published in 1912, and was based in turn on *From Plotzk to Boston*, from the 1890s, which in turn was based on an epistle Mary wrote in Yiddish to an uncle in Russia shortly after her arrival in Boston in the spring of 1893. The text is given in truncated form in Howe, *World of Our Fathers*; Howard Markel, *Quarantine!*; and Robert Jan van Pelt and Deborah Dwork, *Auschwitz: 1270 to Present*.

way that suggested terrible things; ourselves driven into a little room where a great kettle was boiling on a little stove; our clothes taken off, our bodies rubbed with a slippery substance that could be any bad thing; a shower of warm water let down on us without warning; again driven together to another little room where we sit, wrapped in woolen blankets till large, coarse bags are brought in, their contents turned out, and we see only a cloud of steam, and hear a woman's voice to dress ourselves, —“Quick! Quick!”—or else we'll miss—something we cannot hear. We are forced to pick out our clothes from among the others, with the steam blinding us; we choke, cough, entreat the women to give us time; they persist, “Quick! Quick!—or you'll miss the train!” Oh, so we really won't be murdered! They are only making us ready for the continuing of our journey, cleaning us of all suspicions of dangerous illness. Thank God!

Mary Antin's bewilderment at disinfection and quarantine, arising from disorientation and novelty, is understandable; so too are the wild rumors that would come from incomprehension and anxiety.<sup>98</sup> But it must be said that such measures were necessary: the year before Mary Antin made her passage in 1893, Hamburg had been hard hit by a cholera epidemic, and New York City had been hit with both a cholera and typhus epidemic.<sup>99</sup>

In the case of the New York epidemics we find many themes that would repeat themselves over subsequent decades. The immigrants, particularly Jews, feared the process of disinfection and quarantine, believing in some cases that their loved ones were being taken to a slaughterhouse.<sup>100</sup> They distrusted the health authorities, and sought to hide instances of typhus, never realizing of course that such opposition and concealment merely spread the disease further.<sup>101</sup> In addition, there were problems with the quarantine. By regulation, those dead of typhus had to be cremated, but this was a violation of Jewish law.<sup>102</sup> The quarantine stations did not make provision for kosher food, and, as a result, several pious Jews starved themselves.<sup>103</sup> The interactions between the New York health authorities and the immigrant Jews could almost be characterized as culture shock, so deep was the chasm of noncomprehension and nonaccommodation that divided them.

The same pattern emerged in the First World War, and not only among Jewish people. The Germans, in the context of reorganizing the Turkish army, spent a great deal of effort in controlling typhus and other diseases.<sup>104</sup> The two main tools of this

98 Mary Antin's account of disorientation, and, in particular, fear of disinfection showers, was not uncommon; compare Ronald Sanders, *Shores of Refuge*, which references several complaints about the Hamburg baths in particular (245, 231, and especially 243), and also quotes a short story by Sholem Aleichem that also discusses the dreaded Hamburg bath (143-144); see for other hysterical reactions, 155.

99 On Hamburg, see Evans, *Tod in Hamburg*; for New York, see Markel, *Quarantine!*

100 Markel, *Quarantine!*, 52, 50.

101 *Ibid.*, 54, 44f. A case of typhus causes the rickettsia to course in the patient's bloodstream, where it can be communicated to lice and from the lice to other people. Hence, in a lice-ridden environment, and it must be stressed that in 1892 lice were not understood as the vector, refusal to comply with quarantine certainly would facilitate the spread of the disease.

102 *Ibid.*, 63.

103 *Ibid.*, 65.

104 Helmut Becker, *Äskulap zwischen Reichsadler und Halbmond*, provides an extensive survey including many extracts

effort were the *Dampfdesinfektionswagen* (mobile steam disinfection trucks) and the Turkish baths, which were converted for disinfection purposes.<sup>105</sup> The Germans used primarily sulfur gas, which required a generator (*Vergaser*) that would burn the sulfur and provide the gas.<sup>106</sup> By the beginning of 1914 the Germans were using *vergasen* (gasify, gas) as a synonym for *begasen* (fumigate).<sup>107</sup>

Cooperation among the local populations varied: the Turks did not understand why lice had to be killed, because Allah forbade it; the Greek Orthodox and Jewish subjects objected on religious grounds to the bathing and shaving that was part of the treatment.<sup>108</sup>

A severe typhus epidemic in Serbia in the winter of 1914–15 led to international intervention, including an American Relief Expedition that did much to control the disease in its early stages.<sup>109</sup> In 1915–1916, as Bulgaria entered the war on the side of the Central Powers, she was given large chunks of Serbian territory and this in turn required heightened vigilance on the part of the disinfection squads.<sup>110</sup> In this context a story appeared in the *London Daily Telegraph* in March 1916 that alleged that 700,000 Serbians had been asphyxiated.<sup>111</sup> Robert Faurisson has successfully shown that this rumor or atrocity claim was directly related to the application of disinfection measures in the region.<sup>112</sup> Surely it is no coincidence that the first claim of mass exterminations in 1942, as we recall, also featured gassings, the *Daily Telegraph*, and 700,000 victims. The story also reminds us that a mobile steam disinfection truck could easily be converted in a frightened and ignorant mind into a traveling gas chamber.<sup>113</sup>

The reactions to disinfection procedures in Turkey and the Balkans were also apparent in Poland, whether the disease control was being administered by Germans, Americans, or the British.<sup>114</sup> The Germans went to extensive lengths to control dis-

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from primary sources and memoirs.

105 Becker, *Äskulap*, 3, and compare discussion of *Badeanstalten* to control typhus, 126; use of petroleum, 191; discussion of *Apparat*, 361–362, etc.

106 *Ibid.*

107 *Ibid.*, 38. “Die Desinfektionswagen führen vor die Kasernen, Truppenteil für Truppenteil wurde gebadet. Dann die neue Kleidung empfangen, und sofort nach dem Zeltlager abgerückt. In der Kaserne wurde dann die alte Kleidung, Wäsche, Bettzeug desinfiziert, die Zimmer mit Formaldehyd und gegen die Läuse mit schwefelige Säure vergast.” [“The disinfection trucks drive up to the barracks, squad after squad of troops is bathed. Then they receive new clothing and immediately return to the camp. In the camp all the old clothing, laundry, and bedding are disinfected, the rooms fumigated with formaldehyde and, especially for the lice, sulphur.”] Quoted from Meyer’s memoirs.

108 *Ibid.*

109 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, entry “Typhus.”

110 Becker, *Äskulap*, inferred from the description of heightened procedures in the European portion of Turkey during this period, 368–388; note also discussion of railroad delousing tunnels, 374.

111 Robert Faurisson, “Request for Additional Information on the Myth of ‘Gassings’ of Serbs in the First World War,” *Journal of Historical Review* 11, no. 2 (1991), but noted already by Laqueur, *Terrible Secret*, 9, in 1980.

112 Faurisson, “Request,” and also contains the full text of the 1916 article. Paul Weindling, *Epidemics and Genocide in Eastern Europe, 1890–1945*, 106, repeats a claim that Armenian children were killed in a steam bath with poison gas during the First World War, but it is unclear whether the claim is actually contemporary.

113 The use of such vehicles in the Second World War is well attested, consult Crowell, “Technique,” for references.

114 For German disinfection procedures in the First World War, titles include: Dr. Blumberg, “Über behelfsmäßig herstellbare Anlagen zur Entlausung und Desinfektion im großen,” in *Öffentliche Gesundheitspflege* 10, 1918, 353–364; Dr. Wolf, “Das Desinfektionsverfahren mit Blausäure,” in *Öffentliche Gesundheitspflege* 2, 1919, 54–66; Dr. Wolf, “Das Desinfektionsverfahren mit Blausäure (Zusammenfassende Übersicht II)” in *Öffentliche Gesundheitspflege* 4 1922, 126–130. For British procedures, see Goodall, “Typhus Fever”; for Americans in the Typhus Relief Expedition of 1919, see Alfred E. Cornebise, *Typhus and Doughboys*.

eases, and particularly typhus, throughout Poland.<sup>115</sup> This involved carrot and stick methods: on the one hand, the Germans painstakingly wrote a brochure in the Yiddish language, trying to explain, with appropriate references to the Torah, the importance of personal hygiene, and the necessity of controlling lice.<sup>116</sup> On the other hand, the Germans would sometimes be required to force the local inhabitants to bathe and shower at bayonet point.<sup>117</sup>

When the war was over, a terrible typhus epidemic swept through Poland and the western Russian provinces.<sup>118</sup> American and British specialists went to Poland with a view to controlling the disease. They also sought to delouse and disinfect the residents.<sup>119</sup> The American effort included the establishment of several disinfection stations, including one at Auschwitz, which held 2,500 prisoners, 700 children, and processed tens of thousands more.<sup>120</sup> Both the Americans and Britons also ran into resistance and noncompliance, particularly on the part of the Jewish population.<sup>121</sup> One feature of the American treatment that soon became typical was the use of bottled cyanide gas as a means of destroying vermin.<sup>122</sup>

In the 1920s the Germans developed media for using cyanide gas that were safer than the use of bottles or the so-called barrel system.<sup>123</sup> One substance developed, called Zyklon B, used clay-like pellets into which the gas was absorbed as liquid under pressure and then sealed in a can.<sup>124</sup> When the can was opened, the pellets would be strewn and the gas would slowly develop.<sup>125</sup> By the Second World War, through the addition of gypsum, Zyklon B had achieved a stability such that three hours were required for the full evolution of the gas at near room temperature,<sup>126</sup>

115 For example, Dr. Celarek, "Über die unter der Zivilbevölkerung Lublins im Jahre 1915/16 herrschende Fleckfieberepidemie und ihre Bekämpfung," in *Öffentliche Gesundheitspflege* 11 Heft 11, 1917, 597-602; and Starkenstein, "Hygienische und sanitäre Verhältnisse Polens."

116 Dr. Frey, "Die Bekämpfung der Fleckfieberepidemie in der Zivilbevölkerung des Generalgouvernements Warschau in den Jahren 1915/16," in *Öffentliche Gesundheitspflege* 1, 1917, 12-30 (the Yiddish instruction appears on 21-25, phonetically in German script, compare Fig. 11, and the article contains many excellent photos; the following issue contains the continuation of the article).

117 Cited in Goodall, "Typhus Fever."

118 Goodall, "Typhus Fever"; Cornebise, *Typhus and Doughboys*; Zinsser, *Rats, Lice, and History*; and several others.

119 Goodall, "Typhus Fever"; Cornebise, *Typhus and the Doughboys*.

120 Cornebise, *Typhus and Doughboys*, 96. The selection of Auschwitz as a site for such centralized facilities was due to the surrounding open country and the excellent railway connections (97), factors which probably influenced its selection in the Second World War as well.

121 Goodall, "Typhus Fever," Cornebise, *Typhus and Doughboys*, passim, but see 94, 96 (the reference to the complaint of the Jews is characterized by Cornebise as "anti-Semitic"), 122; however, Isaac Bashevis Singer's historical novel, *The Family Moskat*, 376, includes an instructive description of the situation at the time:

"An epidemic of typhus threatened, and even cases of cholera had been reported; the authorities hastily assigned a barrack for the disinfection of the civilian population. Orthodox Jews were compelled to shave off their beards and earlocks, and girls had their heads shorn. Immediately there sprang up a group of 'fixers,' who, for a bribe, obtained forged disinfection certificates for those who would not submit to these indignities."

122 Cornebise, *Typhus and the Doughboys*, 93, 96-97, 98-100, 115; note in particular the quoted message, "Am looking forward with anticipation to the gas-squad with HCN that you promise sometime," 96.

123 Berg, "Zyklon B"; the barrel method involved placing a cyanide salt such as sodium cyanide into a bath of sulfuric acid, thus evolving the gas at a high rate, which is extremely dangerous. Execution gas chambers in the United States have always used this method.

124 Ibid.

125 I say "slowly" here, but originally the development of the gas was rather rapid. This caused problems with the shelf life of the can and frequently caused danger, insofar as the liquid would then be destabilized within the can even before opening. German Rudolf's researches have found that gypsum was added in the 1930s to protract the evaporation.

126 This is indicated by an article by R. Irmischer, "Nochmals: 'Die Einsatzfähigkeit der Blausäure bei tiefen Temperaturen'"

which was ideal for its purpose as an insecticide.

During this period the Germans also developed fumigation chambers, or *Entwesungskammern*.<sup>127</sup> These were usually constructed out of steel, although brick and concrete could also be used.<sup>128</sup> About 10 meters square, the rooms were filled with clothes, and then the Zyklon pellets would be strewn among them. Such chambers, or *Apparate*, typically had two doors: the dirty clothes would go in one door, the disinfected clothes would be taken out of the other door.<sup>129</sup> The Germans also developed a complicated machinery whereby forced air at or near the boiling point of cyanide would be blown through the pellets to speed up the evolution time.<sup>130</sup> The same air-circulation technology (*Kreislauf*) was employed in large railroad tunnels, which by means of the air-circulation gas-generating apparatus (*Kreislaufvergasungsapparaturen*) could fumigate an entire passenger train at one time.<sup>131</sup>

Although Zyklon B was widely used for disinfection, it is important to note that throughout the '30s and during the war many other gases and substances were employed to combat vermin.<sup>132</sup> One gas that was widely substituted for Zyklon was "T-Gas," a mixture of ethylene oxide and carbon dioxide which came in steel tanks and would be piped into the disinfection chamber.<sup>133</sup> Other gases included Tritox, Ventox, and Areginal.<sup>134</sup>

Delousing and disinfection procedures were also a major component of German municipal disinfection centers, temporary huts of the German Labor Service, and transit camps (*Durchgangslager*) for POWs or deported populations. All three featured a division into a dirty and clean side (*reine und unreine Seiten*), and all three featured undressing rooms, shower rooms, and standard-size fumigation chambers with double doors.<sup>135</sup> There were some variations, of course. The municipal disinfection center at Darmstadt, for example, was enlarged in the Second World

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in *Zeitschrift für Hygienische Zoologie und Schädlingsbekämpfung* (1942), which shows a 100 percent evaporation of the cyanide from the gypsum ("ERCO") composite pellets after three hours at 59 degrees Fahrenheit (15 C).

127 Berg, "Zyklon B."

128 Ibid.

129 Ibid.

130 Ibid.

131 Ibid.

132 B. Schmidt, "Desinfektion, Sterilisation, Entwesung," in Siegfried Handloser, ed., *Wehrhygiene*, lists several, including Zyklon, Ventox, Tritox, Cuprex, formaldehyde.

133 Ibid., 193f

134 Jürgen Kalthoff and Martin Werner, *Die Händler von Zyklon B*, provides extensive details of these other gases, as well as the history of disinfection materials, particularly as these touch upon the activities of the Hamburg-based Tesch & Stabenow.

135 Heinrich Kämper, "Die Umgestaltung und Vergrößerung der Desinfektionsanstalt der Stadt Dortmund," in *Gesundheits-Ingenieur* (Sept. 27, 1941); Josef Stangelmeyer, "Genormte, zerlegbare Rohrleitungsnetze für die gesundheitstechnischen Anlagen der ortsveränderlichen Unterkünfte des Reichsarbeitsdienstes," in *Gesundheits-Ingenieur* (June 25, 1942); Friedrich Konrich, "Über die Sanierungsanstalten der deutschen Kriegsgefangenenlager," in *Gesundheits-Ingenieur* (July 19, 1941); Franz Puntigam, "Die Durchgangslager der Arbeitseinsatzverwaltung als Einrichtungen der Gesundheitsversorgung," in *Gesundheits-Ingenieur* 2, 1944, 47-56; other references of relevance to the Second World War include: Joseph Ruppert, "Gesundheitsverhältnisse und Seuchenbekämpfung im Generalgouvernement," in *Der praktische Desinfektor* (June 1941), 61-74; Georg Finger, "Grundsätzliches zur Läusebekämpfung mit Imprägnierungsmitteln," in *Der deutsche Militärarzt* (June 1944), 295-297. Other relevant titles include Friedrich Erhard Haag, *Lagerhygiene*; Jost Walbaum, *Kampf den Seuchen! Deutscher Ärzte-Einsatz im Osten*.

War to make room for the influx of laborers from the East, which we assume to have comprised Poles, Soviet POWs, and Jews.<sup>136</sup> Its cellars were also adapted to air raid shelters.<sup>137</sup> The standard huts (*Unterkünfte*) for the German labor service were equipped with a diesel room, since diesels were expected to provide electricity in the absence of a power net for these outlying structures: these structures were also meant to be temporary and were designed to be put up and taken down in a minimum of man hours.<sup>138</sup>

In the Second World War, the Germans aggressively pursued the containment of disease using all of these methods. As the concentrations of Jews in the ghettos increased, epidemics would break out, and the Germans would attempt to get the local Jewish authorities to implement disinfection procedures.<sup>139</sup> Sadly, concealment, noncompliance, and resistance were characteristic in many ghettos; on the other hand, the records indicate that the ghetto in Vilna (Vilnius) was able to successfully control epidemics throughout the war.<sup>140</sup>

The experience of the Wehrmacht in the field also suggests a successful effort at controlling epidemics, including the use of decontamination vehicles and mobile showering units, many of which were improvised by the men of the German Medical Corps (*Sanitätsdienst*).<sup>141</sup>

Of course, the most notorious example of the application of these procedures came in the concentration camps. Upon arrival, inmates were routinely stripped, searched for valuables, showered, and then given clothes that had been previously disinfected.<sup>142</sup> In fact, the most common procedure involved disinfecting the clothing in one part of the “bath and disinfection complex” while the arrivals showered in another part. Kurt Vonnegut’s description shows how even American prisoners of war entering German custody could become anxious and fearful at the strangeness of the ritual:

*The naked Americans took their places under many showerheads along a white-tiled wall. There were no faucets they could control. They could only wait for whatever was coming. Their penises were shriveled and their balls were retracted. Reproduction was not the main business of the evening.*

*An unseen hand turned a master valve. Out of the showerheads gushed scalding rain. The rain was a blowtorch that did not warm. It jazzed and jangled Billy’s skin without thawing the ice in the marrow of his long bones.*

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136 Kämper, “Die Umgestaltung.”

137 Ibid.

138 Stangelmeyer, “Genormte, zerlegbare Rohrleitungsnetze.”

139 Walbaum, *Kampf den Seuchen!*, is one source for this. Trunk, *Judenrat*, describes the general reluctance to submit to these procedures, as do other Holocaust authors, including Christopher R. Browning, *The Path to Genocide*, 145-168.

140 Discussed in Trunk, *Judenrat*, 165; the whole of chapter 7 is very valuable and apt here. Unfortunately, Trunk follows a tendency among Jewish historians whereby all misfortunes that occur are viewed as part of someone else’s conspiratorial designs; thus the diseases that occurred in the ghettos are said to have been part of the Nazis’ “diabolical plan” (143). The enormous expenditure that the Germans made for controlling diseases tends to make this interpretation unsupported, even if we conceded that the main German interest was self-interest.

141 Alex Buchner, *Der Sanitätsdienst des Heeres, 1939-1945*.

142 Discussed in Rothschild, ed., *Voices*; also Isaiah Trunk, *Jewish Responses to Nazi Persecution*, both *passim*.

The Americans' clothes were meanwhile passing through poison gas. Body lice and bacteria and fleas were dying by the billions. So it goes.<sup>143</sup>

There seems little reason to doubt that the level of disorientation and fear had persisted since the time of Mary Antin fifty years before, to say nothing of the humiliation: indeed, there are witness testimonies that support the idea of such continuity.<sup>144</sup>

In recounting these aspects of German disinfection procedures, as well as Jewish responses, which ranged from sullen noncompliance and avoidance to paranoid fear, one finds a remarkable similarity and a probable point of contact for virtually all of the gassing claims from 1942 into the summer of 1944.

Sobibor, for example, was described in German documents as a transit camp (*Durchgangslager*).<sup>145</sup> Yet a transit camp would require facilities for showering arrivals and disinfecting their belongings before sending them farther on their journey.<sup>146</sup> And indeed we find in survivor testimonies that that is exactly what happened to them there.<sup>147</sup> Yet at the same time, we have rumors reported in the West, and later we will have testimonies, that assure us that Sobibor was a camp where arrivals were simply exterminated via the familiar shower-gas-burning sequence.<sup>148</sup> The same situation applies to Treblinka testimonies, for the Malkinia disinfection establishment was only a few kilometers away.<sup>149</sup>

For Majdanek the situation is even more remarkable. As we shall see later, the Bath and Disinfection Complex II would be earmarked as an extermination center by the Soviets: but in its construction it is virtually identical to the standard hut for delousing incoming members of the Labor Service and disinfecting their belongings.<sup>150</sup>

In summarizing the gassing rumors for the period 1942 through the spring of 1944 we encountered several references to prussic acid, showers and baths, and mobile gas chambers that led us into a discussion of German disinfection procedures. We have found that during six decades before the Second World War the Germans had devised, for purposes of disease control, procedures that called for the use of mobile delousing and disinfection chambers, baths and disinfection complexes, and fumigation chambers that would utilize a common pesticide, Zyklon B, whose active ingredient was cyanide gas.

143 Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse Five*, 84.

144 Compare Rothschild, ed., *Voices*, 159; also Trunk, *Responses*, 162. Trunk has several more of these, in Yiddish testimonies most of which were given soon after the war.

145 Butz, *Hoax*, 288; Hilberg, *Destruction* (1st ed.), 619.

146 Puntigam, "Die Durchgangslager der Arbeitseinsatzverwaltung."

147 Miriam Novitch, *Sobibor: Martyrdom and Revolt*. Also consult the writings of Jules Schelvis, a Dutch Jew who passed through this camp, and who describes hundreds of other Dutch Jews assigned from Sobibor to camps in the Lublin area.

148 Novitch, *Sobibor*.

149 The standard work on the subject of Treblinka as well as Belzec and Sobibor remains Arad, *Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka*, while Steiner's novelistic treatment from the 1960s (*Treblinka*) remains influential. Articles by Andrew Allen and Mark Weber, and, in particular, Arnulf Neumaier's article "The Treblinka Holocaust" (in Rudolf, ed., *Dissecting the Holocaust*) discuss the details with greater rigor, and attempt to put the workings of the camp in a wider context.

150 Consult and compare floor plan of Majdanek Bath and Disinfection complex, in Rudolf, ed., *Dissecting the Holocaust*, 415.

But above and beyond the German procedures we have found characteristic reactions to such disease control measures among many ignorant or traditional religious communities, and also among Jews, particularly those from the traditional and insulated East European communities.<sup>151</sup> The reactions have ranged from avoidance and noncompliance, to anxiety, fear, and rumor-mongering of a particularly destructive sort. Finally, we note a haunting similarity between the delousing procedures known to have been applied and the rumors of mass gassing that were current at the time.

Therefore the most likely explanation for the evolution of the mass gas extermination legend, to this point in our analysis, is that the application of delousing measures on the populations of Eastern Europe, and particularly on the Jewish people who were being resettled in the East, or dragooned into forced labor, conjured up rumors of extermination and slaughter as they had in the past. These rumors, in turn, were conveyed to Jewish parties in Western Europe and the United States, who appear to have all too readily believed them. The rumors in turn were propagated by the British in radio broadcasts back to Europe, including broadcasts in Yiddish, such that the rumors were already widely known, if not widely credited, throughout Europe by the end of 1942.<sup>152</sup> We are now prepared to engage the next evolution of the mass gassing claim.

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<sup>151</sup> Trunk, in *Responses*, as well as Novitch, *Sobibor*, contain testimonies whereby the Westerners (chiefly Dutch) arriving at Sobibor welcomed the showers, the implication, sometimes explicit, being that the Polish Jews knew better.

<sup>152</sup> For example, the Jewish population of Warsaw definitely heard the BBC broadcast of June 1942, because its reception is described in the diary of Emanuel Ringelblum, *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto*, 296-298. In addition, there are several references to gassing rumors heard over the radio in the diary of Victor Klemperer (quoted in Eric Johnson, *Nazi Terror*, 437-441), which suggests widespread knowledge of such rumors by the population in Germany from 1942. Finally, Johnson succeeded in locating the program logs of the BBC and found numerous references to gassing in all kinds of German-language radio programming, beginning in December 1942, *Nazi Terror*, 441-450. Laqueur, *Terrible Secret*, also itemizes several broadcasts in different languages.



#### **4. THE FIRST REPORTS ON AUSCHWITZ AND MAJDANEK**

*First claims of mass gassing at Auschwitz sandwiched around Soviet occupation of Majdanek camp. —The first inaccurate Auschwitz memo, July 1944. —Soviet guided tour of Majdanek, August 1944, and Special Commission. Gassing motifs emerge. —Double-doored disinfection Apparate identified as gas chamber. —Fascination with the peephole on the door: fundamental proof of the gassing claim. —Peephole then figures in Auschwitz claim, in War Refugee Board Report, November 1945. —An apparent convergence of fact is perhaps merely a convergence of rumor.*



**I**N THE SUMMER of 1944 the legend of mass gassing extermination was solidified by a series of reports published by the Soviet government, and, at the end of the year, by a report issued by an agency of the United States government. At this point the gassing claims assumed authoritative status, so much so that by the end of the year the Germans would explicitly deny them. The issuance of official reports cannot be overstressed: a claim of any kind repeated over an official medium, such as radio, and particularly in print, gains enormous weight. Nevertheless, as we shall see, these claims were not accompanied by hard evidence.

The first document that is important is a communication that seems to have come from a Jewish circle in Slovakia at the beginning of July 1944, which we will call the July Report. This report is noteworthy because it contains the first full series of allegations about the Auschwitz Birkenau camp. Gilbert reproduces the document in full.<sup>153</sup> In the context of the gassing claim, the report contains some data that may be considered accurate, in the sense that they do not contradict the current version. Thus we have a garbled reference to the Zyklon B issued by Tesch & Stabenow, and we have a reference to a bathing establishment, and holes in the ceiling where the gas drops down.<sup>154</sup> But there are other elements in the report that are clearly false: the reference to the number of holes (three); the time required for execution (one minute); the rails that are said to have led to the cremation ovens, which are also incorrectly described and counted; and so on.<sup>155</sup>

While we can grant that different observers might incorrectly estimate the time of execution, or the number of victims, because of the shock of what they were observing, it is quite another matter for such a witness to lose his or her ability to count or perceive at the most elementary level. Therefore, while we may be inclined to dismiss the differences in the time of gassing, or the number of victims, the errors of physical detail are much more serious, and strongly suggest that whoever described these processes was never anywhere near a gas chamber or a crematorium. Therefore it must be conceded that the witnesses who wrote the report were repeating rumor, and, even if the witnesses believed it, the existence of a rumor is certainly not proof of the facts which the rumor alleges. The only thing the July Report really shows is that gassing rumors were current in Auschwitz at the time.

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<sup>153</sup> Gilbert, *Auschwitz*, 262-264, where it is described as a summary. The changes to this document, which will culminate in the War Refugee Board (WRB) Report, are detailed by Miroslav Karny, "The Vrba and Wetzler Report," in Gutman and Berenbaum, *Anatomy*, 553-568.

<sup>154</sup> Karny, "The Vrba and Wetzler Report," in Gutman and Berenbaum, *Anatomy*, 553-568. Although the July Report is described as a summary, it contains errors of detail (e.g., "Megacyclon") that are absent from the November WRB Report, as well as an important omission (i.e., the peephole at the inaugural gassing) that is included in the later report. Karny's article suggests that the report was revised throughout the year; it is difficult to check exactly how because he further notes that the original manuscript has not survived (564n5).

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

The actual elements of the July Report combine old and new features. The communiqué represents the first time that Zyklon B was specifically described as the source of poison gas. On the other hand, as we have seen, rumors about cyanide usage sprang up in the summer of 1942 but were abandoned later that year. The showering motif appears, which had been a common feature ever since late 1942. Evidently the notion of poison entering through the actual holes in the showerhead was an easy inference—we note that in the previous year, in claims of steam exterminations at Treblinka, the steam was described as emerging from holes in the pipes. This conceptualization of the gas dropping down on the inmates may also account for the idea of overhead openings needed for introducing the gas: obviously, the Zyklon granules, some ¼" to ½" in diameter (6 mm-12 mm), could not pass through a showerhead and would require a larger opening.

Another explanation, and a possible clue to another motif, involves the dusting with chlorine and lime that frequently accompanied the deportations, a motif which goes back to the Karski report. That description had already led to some descriptions of chlorine gassing.<sup>156</sup> In the July Report, however, we have a situation in which the bathers are led into a room, allowed to stand for several minutes so that an optimum temperature is achieved, and then the gas in the form of powder is thrown on them. Of course the problem with this description is that it is false: Zyklon B does not act in this fashion, the gas evolves from the carrier immediately on the opening of the can.<sup>157</sup>

The next event in the evolution of the gassing legend is crucial, because it involves the first Allied exposure to a German concentration camp. Majdanek was liberated at the end of July 1944, during a massive Soviet offensive that destroyed Germany's Army Group Center.<sup>158</sup> For a month, the Soviets did not allow any visitors; then, at the end of August, they gave Western journalists a brief tour.<sup>159</sup> This tour, in turn, generated wide press reportage by the *New York Times* and the *Christian Science Monitor*, and was accompanied by an official report of the Soviet Special Commission on Majdanek.<sup>160</sup>

The gassing sequence at Majdanek is different from that described at Auschwitz in July, or at any other camp to this point. Previous accounts had always stressed that the victims were disrobed and met their end in the shower or bath itself. But at

<sup>156</sup> Martin, *Man Who Invented*, 145.

<sup>157</sup> That is, Zyklon does not come in a powder, and the optimum temperature is not liable to be reached in a packed underground cellar. It should be noted that some cyanide products do come in powdered form, but these are not the substances alleged.

<sup>158</sup> This was Operation Bagration, timed to coincide with the third anniversary of Barbarossa and to assist the Western Allies, who were still pinned down in Normandy. An evaluation of precisely what the Soviets encountered during this advance, which surrounded huge amounts of territory, is crucial to settling claims of what occurred here during the war.

<sup>159</sup> Martin, *Man Who Invented*, 145; also Jürgen Graf and Carlo Mattogno, *Concentration Camp Majdanek*, a thorough and indispensable account of materials for this camp.

<sup>160</sup> *Communique of the Polish Soviet Extraordinary Commission for Investigating the Crimes Committed by the Germans in the Majdanek Extermination Camp in Lublin*, hereinafter, *Majdanek Communique*. This document, in the Hoover Library, Stanford, CA, was placed on the Internet due to the efforts of Philip Trauring. Compare also Graf and Mattogno, *Concentration Camp Majdanek*, 79-89, for a detailed analysis of Soviet and Polish claims. On contemporary press coverage, consult, e.g., W. H. Lawrence, "Nazi Mass Killing Laid Bare in Camp," in *Reporting World War II*, Part 2, *American Journalism, 1944-1946*, 267-273.

Majdanek it was now alleged that the shower was a preliminary step to the gassing process, which occurred at the other end of the building.<sup>161</sup> This is a major divergence and we must inquire why.

The reason appears to lie in the physical layout that presented itself to the Russians. Most of the gassings were supposed to have taken place in the building labeled “Bath and Disinfection Complex II.” This is a long narrow building that featured a series of rooms, including an undressing room, a shower room, a drying room (*Trockenraum*—that is, a heated room for drying inmates after showering) and, at the far end, and originally detached from the bathing complex,<sup>162</sup> three small squarish rooms (approx. 4 x 4 meters, but one larger), two of which had outside attachments with stoves that piped air into the rooms (the third stove was connected to the drying room).<sup>163</sup> The showers in the building actually worked; therefore, the gassings would not have happened there. The smaller rooms and the drying room, brick faced on the outside and roofed with reinforced concrete, thus became the gas chambers.<sup>164</sup>

There were other features present at the site. The drying room (sometimes called Room “A”) had two wooden openings carved into its concrete ceiling: the same room contained several wooden struts, apparently with some wire reinforcing.<sup>165</sup> It was also equipped with wooden doors with three sets of bidirectional handles.<sup>166</sup> The smaller rooms had heavy steel doors and gastight doors with peepholes, also with bidirectional handles.<sup>167</sup> In addition, two of the rooms had piping running along the wall, about 30 cm above the floor, that appeared to be connected to five steel tanks located outside of the rooms.<sup>168</sup> At first glance the gastight doors and the ceiling openings seem to be peculiar additions for a bath and disinfection complex, but they do not necessarily support a gassing claim. Otherwise, the structure corresponds to typical bath and disinfection complexes.

The Soviet scenario that was presented to the world’s press went like this: the people were told to strip, leave their clothes in one room, then pass into another room where they would shower.<sup>169</sup> After the shower, they would be led into one of the “gas chambers,” into which the Zyklon B would be dropped down on them after a waiting period. The three stoves, on the other hand, would generate carbon monoxide gas that would be piped into the rooms, or else hot air to heat the rooms,

<sup>161</sup> Majdanek Communique, 13-17.

<sup>162</sup> Shermer and Grobman, *Denying History*, 161-167, see esp. Figure 27, 164.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> It is important to stress that the three gas chambers that I have sometimes described as attached to the bath and disinfection complex were not attached at the time of liberation, as the analyses of Graf and Mattogno, *Concentration Camp Majdanek*, and Shermer and Grobman, *Denying History*, make clear. In addition, there appear to have been several other reconstructions made on this site. This has led me to errors in interpreting the data not only in earlier versions of this study but also in Crowell, “Defending against the Allied Bombing Campaign, Air Raid Shelters and Gas Protection in Germany, 1939-1945,” Part 2.

<sup>165</sup> Noted by Aroneanu, *Inside the Concentration Camps*, but not the text of the communique we are using here.

<sup>166</sup> Graf and Mattogno, *Concentration Camp Majdanek*, 124, 150, 308-309.

<sup>167</sup> Majdanek Communique.

<sup>168</sup> Graf and Mattogno, *Concentration Camp Majdanek*, 120.

<sup>169</sup> Majdanek Communique.

or finally carbon monoxide would be piped in through the tanks.<sup>170</sup> Meanwhile, the Germans were said to have watched the death throes of the victims through the peepholes.<sup>171</sup>

There are some problems with this scenario. Of the four rooms designated as gas chambers, only one (Room “A”) had openings in the ceiling for the Zyklon to be introduced. Two of the other rooms had crudely cut holes in the reinforced concrete.<sup>172</sup> One of the rooms, the largest one, had no ceiling opening at all. Three of the rooms had stoves attached outside (hence, perhaps, the origin of the “three gas chambers”); the fourth room had no opening of any kind except the door.<sup>173</sup> Graf and Mattogno have noted that of the five tanks found, only two remain, and they are marked not CO, but CO<sub>2</sub>, that is, carbon dioxide, necessary for the generation of disinfection gases (T-Gas and others), but with no claimed extermination potential.<sup>174</sup> These, along with the stoves, would suggest that the rooms were used over time with a variety of disinfestation substances, including Zyklon B, T-Gas, and hot air. Due to their bidirectional handles, the gastight doors with peepholes could be opened from inside or outside.<sup>175</sup> Finally, the idea that showering ahead of time would facilitate the evolution of Zyklon B is simply wrong.<sup>176</sup> What we have here is a clear case of forcing the facts to fit the theory.

Furthermore, while we continue to maintain that most of the elements in the gassing story arose more or less spontaneously and were just as spontaneously believed, at Majdanek we are confronted with grim evidence of a deliberate Soviet hoax. This is because while Room “A” of the complex features two carefully crafted and well-dressed openings of wood in the ceiling, someone had attempted to replicate the openings in two of the smaller rooms (“B” and “C”) by clumsily hacking small, squarish holes through the reinforced concrete roof and not even bothering to remove the rebar.<sup>177</sup> It is simply unbelievable that the workmanship that created the apertures in the ceiling of Room “A” created the holes in the roof in Rooms “B” and “C”; moreover, the openings could never have been gastight. To the extent that these latter openings are claimed as contemporaneous openings devised for introducing poison gas, we are looking at a clear-cut case of Soviet fraud.

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170 Ibid. The source of the CO and function of the stoves is not completely clear from the text, although bottles of CO are described. Apparently this led to some confusion subsequently; thus the photograph #0326 on the US Holocaust Memorial Museum Internet website described the stoves as “furnaces” which generated “carbon monoxide.”

171 US Holocaust Memorial Museum Internet website; consult photo of Majdanek “gas chamber” door.

172 Carlo Mattogno, “The Gas Chambers of Majdanek,” in Rudolf, ed., *Dissecting the Holocaust*, 413-434, provides several very interesting photos of features at Majdanek; also consult Graf and Mattogno, *Concentration Camp Majdanek*, 255-311.

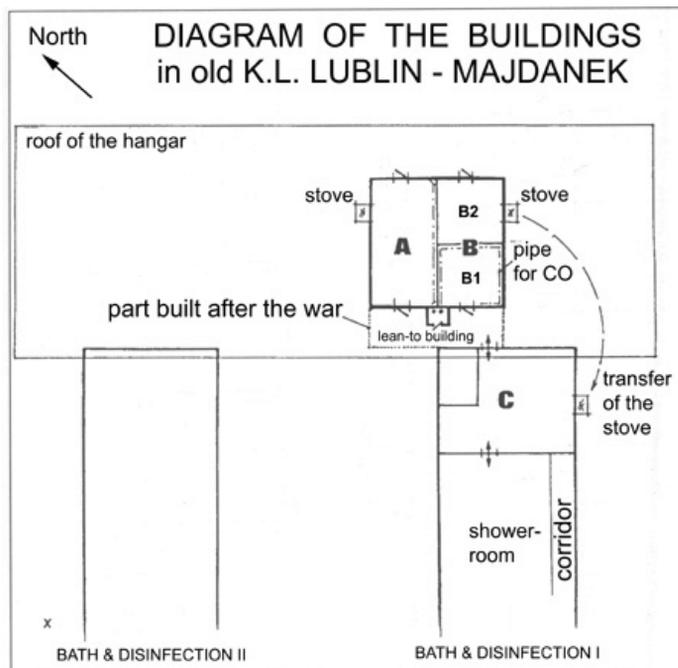
173 David Cole’s “Forty-Six Unanswered Questions about the Gas Chambers” is important not only for its discussion of Majdanek but also of Auschwitz Birkenau. At [www.codoh.com](http://www.codoh.com).

174 Graf and Mattogno, *Concentration Camp Majdanek*, and see the discussion in B. Schmidt, “Desinfektion, Sterilisation, Entwesung.”

175 See Crowell, “Defending,” Part 2.

176 That is, humidity and moisture inhibit the evolution of the gas.

177 Mattogno, “The Gas Chambers of Majdanek” in Rudolf, ed., *Dissecting the Holocaust*, 413-434, esp. 422.



The reverberations of the Majdanek Special Commission were extremely broad; many of the symbols of the Holocaust have their beginning here. Among these one may note the huge piles of clothes, shoes, and hair, which were taken as *prima facie* evidence of exterminations of a million and a half human beings, although we now know that these piles of belongings indicate no such thing, and the current evaluation holds that fewer than 100,000 perished at Majdanek.<sup>178</sup> Other features that would soon become common in Holocaust narratives include the redbrick facing of the gas chambers, the flat concrete roofs, the piping above the floor, and similar elements. But the most sensational element of the Majdanek report was the gastight doors with peepholes. The first place this would become apparent was in the War Refugee Board Report.

The War Refugee Board Report would not be issued until late 1944, but the matter it contained, including the July Report, had circulated in various indeterminate forms for several months before.<sup>179</sup> It is known that repetition of some of these via radio broadcasts called forth a German rejection of its allegations in October.<sup>180</sup> It was not until November 26, 1944, that the WRB Report was issued, and was summarized in the world press.<sup>181</sup> The contents of the report, with respect to the

<sup>178</sup> Dalton, *Debating*, 131-141.

<sup>179</sup> Gilbert, *Auschwitz*.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid. For coverage in the NY Times, see John H. Crider, "U. S. Board Bares Atrocity Details Told by Witnesses at Polish

gassing claim, largely recapitulated material from the July Report. However, there is one reference to the peephole not present in the earlier report that strongly suggests the influence of the Majdanek Special Commission:

*Prominent guests from Berlin were present at the inauguration of the first crematorium in March 1943. The “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.*<sup>182</sup>

The WRB report contained many errors by the standards of today’s knowledge: neither its number of victims nor its descriptions of the crematoriums and gas chambers are accepted by any authority.<sup>183</sup> Nevertheless it was for some months the most important document in propagandizing not only the shower-gas-burning sequence but also the alleged unique status of Auschwitz Birkenau as a slaughterhouse of vast proportions. But as we have seen, it contained enough errors that it could not be a reliable source for the mass gassings it alleged, and, in fact, it appears to have both influenced, and been influenced by, the Soviet Special Commission on Majdanek.<sup>184</sup> In the panicked atmosphere of the time, no doubt the similarities of the two reports would have caused more than one sincere individual to feel that they were slowly piercing a veil; fifty years later, however, it seems less likely that that was the case.

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Camps,” in *Reporting World War II*, 553-559.

<sup>182</sup> Dawidowicz, ed., *Holocaust Reader*, 119.

<sup>183</sup> Compare Gilbert, *Auschwitz*, or Dawidowicz, *Holocaust Reader*, 119.

<sup>184</sup> That the WRB report was combined from various rumors was corroborated at the first Zündel trial in 1985, during which Rudolf Vrba, under cross-examination, admitted that he repeated rumors, and was not an eyewitness to what he described, moreover: “He defended ‘errors in good faith’ in his 1944 Auschwitz accounts, which he made two weeks after escaping, as due to ‘great urgency’ to warn Jews.” “Book ‘An Artistic Picture,’” Dick Chapman, *Toronto Sun*, January 24, 1985.

## **5. THE EASTERN CAMPS, POLEVOI'S REPORT, AND THE GERSTEIN STATEMENT**

*Soviet propagandists begin gathering gassing stories in August 1944; these are published in Yiddish. —Soviet Special Commissions in fall. —Deposition of Leleko, February 1945, summarizes these claims. Close linkage of Leleko deposition with descriptions for Majdanek, therefore probable derivation. —Gerstein Statement from April of 1945. —Contains many fantastic elements, gassing elements in turn derivative of Leleko, Majdanek, and initial Pravda reports on Auschwitz. —Gerstein illustrates absolute identity of Zyklon B with an extermination program in Allied thinking. Gerstein's story widely publicized in France in July 1945. —His suicide follows.*



**D**URING THE SUMMER of 1944, the Soviet propagandist Ilya Ehrenburg began acquiring testimonies from the Aktion Reinhardt camps. Some of these were collected and published in *Merder fun Folker* in 1945.<sup>185</sup> Looking over some of these testaments today, one finds that while gassing claims are repeated, they are not usually presented with much detail.<sup>186</sup> We should keep in mind, however, that regarding these Aktion Reinhardt camps (Sobibor, Treblinka, and Belzec) the buildings had been dismantled and there were no physical traces of gas chambers.<sup>187</sup> No orders, correspondence, or documents concerning gas chambers in any of these three camps were presented in the immediate postwar period, nor has there been any such documentation since.<sup>188</sup> Our knowledge of the Reinhardt camps—in which today it is said that close to two million were killed—rested then, as now, solely on witness depositions and SS confessions.<sup>189</sup> The only corroboration for the actions alleged at these camps is some mass graves, which, by normal estimation of grave mass, contain perhaps a few tens of thousands of bodies altogether.<sup>190</sup> This may indicate murders and mass executions of some type, but does not indicate mass exterminations on the scale usually alleged, and to date there is still no evidence for the use of poison gas.

At the end of January, Auschwitz was liberated, and the Red Army found about six thousand prisoners who had been considered too ill by the Germans to remove to Germany.<sup>191</sup> Photographs of the liberated inmates, who included several hundred children, indicate old age, even infirmity, but neither starvation nor epidemics.<sup>192</sup> Obviously the fact that such inmates were alive tended to contradict the already dominant conception; later, an SS man would confess that Himmler had ordered all exterminations to cease the previous November, in fact precisely on November 26, 1944, the day the WRB report was issued.<sup>193</sup> Needless to say, no documentary

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<sup>185</sup> Novitch, *Sobibor*, passim.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> The standard story is that the Germans dismantled them to hide the traces of their crimes, but under our theory the huts would have been dismantled after use.

<sup>188</sup> All documentation pertaining to these camps subsequent to the immediate postwar period has consisted of testimonies, thus, Gitta Sereny's *Into That Darkness* contains what are said to be interviews with former commandant Franz Stangl in the early 1970s, but aside from being very scanty on detail, these interviews also offer no proof, simply corroboration of the standard claim.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> John C. Ball, "Air Photo Evidence" in Rudolf, ed., *Dissecting the Holocaust*, 269-282, and see also Ball's website, at [www.air-photo.com](http://www.air-photo.com).

<sup>191</sup> Noted in the Soviet Special Commission, USSR-8, introduced at the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, discussed below.

<sup>192</sup> Stiglich, *Auschwitz*, contains several such photos, section after 376.

<sup>193</sup> This is according to a postwar SS affidavit, but is not corroborated. Interestingly, *Czech, Auschwitz Chronicle*, references this for the 26th, but then references for the day before (November 25) a scrap of paper of unknown origin which refers to the order to dismantle the crematoriums. The juxtaposition would repay careful scrutiny.

evidence in support of this confession has ever surfaced.<sup>194</sup>

At the same time, the Soviets made reference to the liberated Auschwitz camp in their national propaganda organ, *Pravda*. After a brief reference on February 1, a full report, by correspondent Boris Polevoi, was published on Friday, February 2, 1945, less than a week after the camp had been liberated, and a full three months before the official Soviet report on Auschwitz.

Polevoi's indebtedness to the Majdanek reportage is explicit, but at the same time there are some differences:

Last year, when the Red Army revealed to the world the terrible and abominable secrets of Majdanek, the Germans in Auschwitz began to wipe out the traces of their crimes. They leveled the mounds of the so-called "old" graves in the Eastern part of the camp, tore up and destroyed the traces of the electric conveyor belt, on which hundreds of people were simultaneously electrocuted, their bodies falling onto the slow moving conveyor belt which carried them to the top of the blast furnace where they fell in, were completely burned, their bones converted to meal in the rolling mills, and then sent to the surrounding fields.

In retreat were taken the special transportable apparatuses for killing children. The stationary gas chambers in the eastern part of the camp were restructured, even little turrets and other architectural embellishments were added so that they would look like innocent garages.<sup>195</sup>

There is one major surprise to this narrative: it is completely different from the report of the Soviet Special Commission on Auschwitz. That report, in turn, would show the influence of the War Refugee Board (WRB) Report of November 26, 1945. An obvious inference is that the Soviet Auschwitz narrative was revised subsequent to this report to make it harmonize with the various anonymous messages which comprised the WRB report. Nevertheless, Polevoi's report shows other influences and connections.

For example, the concept of the "factory of death" is today well known in the Holocaust literature, but appears to have its beginnings here. That concept in turn seems clearly linked to Russian, Soviet, and Western symbolism rejecting the industrial factory system; compare the short stories of Anton Chekhov or various writings of Maxim Gorky, or, further, the *Angst* of German Expressionism. Meanwhile, the concept of the Germans "wiping out the traces of their crimes" goes back, as we have seen, to the Katyn Forest revelations of 1943.

It hardly needs to be pointed out that the "electric conveyor belt" has no place in any subsequent Auschwitz narratives. This story element is probably linked to the reports concerning the large electric chambers at Belzec and elsewhere.<sup>196</sup> The

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<sup>194</sup> The facts behind the "stop the gassing" order are reconstructed in Göran Holming, "Himmlers Befehl, die Vergasung der Juden zu stoppen," in *Vierteljahreshefte für freie Geschichtsforschung* 1, no. 4 (Dec. 1997), 258-259.

<sup>195</sup> *Pravda*, February 2, 1945, p. 4, my translation.

<sup>196</sup> But see note 367 below, for a description of a conveyor belt in a euthanasia institution from 1941.

“special transportable apparatuses for killing children” are probably references to gas vans, their special utilization for that purpose first attested at the Krasnodar-Kharkov trials. The description of “stationary gas chambers” is apparently a reference to either the delousing stations BW 5a and 5b at Birkenau, or else Crematoriums IV and V. The reference to the “gas chambers” as “garages” (“*garazhi*”) was a characterization first made of the “gas chambers” at Majdanek.

What is most striking about this press report is not its derivative nature or that it is totally at variance with the version of Auschwitz that we have come to know, substituting the traditional atrocity record with another, completely imaginary one. Rather, what impresses is that the first non-anonymous observer at the Auschwitz camp could be so far from the current narrative; this speaks not only to the inaccuracy of this initial report, but also to the artifice of subsequent ones.

Shortly after Polevoi’s report was published, Soviet interrogators developed affidavits from Pavel Leleko, who had been a police guard at Treblinka.<sup>197</sup> Coincidentally, Leleko’s interrogations are supposed to have begun on the same day that the WRB Report was issued, three months before. On the following February 20 and 21, 1945, Leleko contributed two affidavits, and these rehearse the structure of the Treblinka mass gassing claim, and indeed the gassing claim for all the Aktion Reinhardt camps.<sup>198</sup>

The Leleko depositions contain the following details of the gassing process:

1. The victims were detained, asked to turn in all valuables, were separated by sex, and stripped. Then the victims were walked to a separate area that housed the gas chambers.
2. The gas chambers had flowers growing alongside in boxes. Instead of a door the victims entered through a heavy hanging made from a rug.
3. A long passage moved through the length of the building, five rooms on each side (10 in all).
4. Four rooms on each side comprised gas chambers, 6 meters square in size, 2.5 to 3 meters high.
5. The center of the ceiling had a light fixture with no wiring and two showerheads whereby the gas was let into the chamber.
6. The walls, floor, and ceiling were of cement.
7. Each gas chamber had two doors, one opening to the outside whereby the bodies were removed.

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<sup>197</sup> Documents of the US government reproduced in Yoram Sheftel, *Defending Ivan the Terrible*, 378. It should be noted that the Leleko interviews are the earliest recorded in this document; however it is also important to note that the Soviets had already issued their “special commission,” that is, had established the facts on Treblinka, two months before Leleko’s interrogations began. See discussion of “Canonical Holocaust” below.

<sup>198</sup> The two later Leleko depositions played a crucial role in reversing the conviction of Ivan Demjanjuk, hence they have been widely distributed and widely cited. We reference the versions found on the Nizkor site, at [www.nizkor.org](http://www.nizkor.org).

8. 500 people per chamber (500 people in 36 square meters).
9. Eight rooms out of the 10 used for gas chambers, the other two contained “powerful German engines” that fed the gas into the chambers.
10. After being filled, the gas chambers were sealed “by hermetically closing doors.”
11. Progress of the gassing was observed by looking through a “porthole” “near each door.”
12. The gassing took 15 minutes.
13. About 20 meters distant was the old gas chamber building, which had only three gas chambers.
14. The bodies were disposed in a concrete incineration pit about 20 meters long and 1 meter deep.<sup>199</sup>

The interrogation of Leleko is valuable because it is one of the most detailed descriptions of a gassing at one of the Aktion Reinhardt camps. All other confessions, to the extent that they describe the gassing process at all, show clear traces of harmony with Leleko’s testimony.<sup>200</sup>

The problem is that Leleko’s testimony offers nothing new. The entire shower-gas-burning sequence was already well known by this time, so Leleko’s remarks are not revelatory and could have been derivative. More interesting are his comments on the unwired light bulbs in each room, and the two showerheads through which the gas was supposed to have filled the chamber. Such details tend to confirm our surmise that the association of showers and gas would inevitably lead to the conception of the gas actually coming down through the nozzle—although this method would not seem to have been particularly effective, given that carbon monoxide is lighter than air.

More serious is the fact that the description of the building sounds remarkably similar to the Bath and Disinfection Complex at Majdanek. Again, we have a long corridor. Again, medium-sized rooms into which hundreds of people are forced in the nude. Again, the chambers are constructed with cement, or more likely reinforced concrete. Again, each chamber has two doors. Again, the doors are hermetically sealed, and again, the dying are observed through a porthole or peephole. Even the number of “old gas chambers” corresponds to the number alleged at Majdanek.

Finally, there is a detail that is almost decisive in linking Leleko’s account with Majdanek: the engines. As we recall, three rooms at the bathing complex were equipped with outside stoves that forced hot air into the rooms. This is entirely consistent with the idea of hot-air delousing, disinfection with Zyklon or other

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Compare, for example, the descriptions established at the various Treblinka trials from 1950, and also the testimony of Franz Suchomel in Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah*.

cyanide products, or combinations of the two. But the Soviet Special Commission on Majdanek had suggested that these stoves instead generated carbon monoxide gas that was led into the rooms in order to kill the people inside. (The Soviets also alleged that carbon monoxide was led into another room through a pipe.)<sup>201</sup> Leleko's description of powerful German engines that generated enough carbon monoxide to kill 500 people in 15 minutes seems clearly derivative of the Majdanek concept. Leleko's confession does not specify the type of engine; that would be left to Kurt Gerstein two months later, with even more problematic implications for the mass gassing claim.

Kurt Gerstein was a minor officer in the SS who was apparently involved in some anti-Nazi activities before and during the war.<sup>202</sup> He was, however, an engineer, and was apparently involved in the use of cyanide gas for disinfection purposes.

He fled the approaching Red Army and surrendered to Allied custody in late April 1945, and on May 6 was turned over to the French authorities.<sup>203</sup> During this period he wrote several versions of an affidavit or statement, which differ in small details, but which generally provide a picture of a gassing at Belzec concentration camp and a confirmation of gassing operations at the other Aktion Reinhardt camps.<sup>204</sup>

The Gerstein Statement, as the various drafts are known, is probably the most widely quoted document by those who claim that mass gassings took place.<sup>205</sup> The problem is that it is almost never quoted in full, because the entire document contains a number of errors and improbabilities.<sup>206</sup>

The Gerstein Statement, concerning gassing, and a few other matters, may be summarized as follows:

1. Gerstein visits Belzec and Treblinka,
2. Belzec has a capacity of 15,000 per day, i.e., 15,000 persons could be killed per day,
3. Sobibor (not seen), has a capacity of 20,000 per day,
4. Treblinka, a capacity of 25,000 per day.
5. Globocnik, who controls the camps, instructs Gerstein to disinfect clothes and also increase efficiency of the gas chambers, which are using old diesel engines.
6. Globocnik informs Gerstein that Hitler and Himmler had been to

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<sup>201</sup> *Majdanek Communique*.

<sup>202</sup> Henri Roques, *The "Confessions" of Kurt Gerstein*, is the standard revisionist analysis of his depositions and his life; compare 90.

<sup>203</sup> Roques, "Confessions," 122. It is important to note here that Roques is strictly concerned with analyzing the statements of Kurt Gerstein, not with any global Holocaust analysis as such.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.* Compare Dawidowicz, ed., *Holocaust Reader*, in whose anthology it constitutes the sole description of gassing, and the sole document not completely contemporaneous with what it describes.

<sup>206</sup> Dawidowicz, *Holocaust Reader*, for an example. Roques cites several others, "Confessions," 143-156.

the camp on August 15, 1942: Gerstein records an utterly incredible conversation between Hitler and Globocnik.

7. At Belzec, Gerstein describes the bathhouse,
8. with flowers growing outside,
9. and a sign “To the baths and inhalations.”
10. The building is accessed by a small stairway,
11. there are three rooms on either side, 4 x 5 meters, 1.9 meters high, “like garages” (the wording in one version appears to describe two doors per chamber, viz. “on return”).
12. A transport arrives and everyone is forced to strip and turn in valuables in sequence,
13. the hair is shorn, someone tells Gerstein, “to make of it something special for the submarines, linings, etc.”
14. The people are crowded into the gas chambers, 700-800 in 25 square meters.
15. The diesel engine fails to work; Gerstein times the delay, two hours and 49 minutes on his stopwatch.
16. One can see that many are still alive through a little window and the electric light in the room.
17. After 32 minutes of the gassing all are dead.
18. Later Gerstein goes to Treblinka, where there are 8 gas chambers,
19. mounds of clothes and underwear 35–40 meters high, and
20. the numbers reported on the BBC are too low: 25 million have been gassed.
21. On June 8, 1942, Gerstein had spread rumors that the cyanide he was picking up at Kollin, in Czechoslovakia, was for killing people.
22. The cyanide in his transport consisted of bottles which he later poured out.
23. Another method of murder consisted of leading people up staircases and throwing them into blast furnaces.<sup>207</sup>

The material or documentary evidence for any of these claims is nil.<sup>208</sup> It is not

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<sup>207</sup> Roques, “Confessions.” Detailed tables describing the elements of the eight [sic] different versions are found between 117-118.

<sup>208</sup> The only “corroboration” for Gerstein’s testimony, at a camp where 600,000 murders are claimed, is the 1946 book of Rudolf Reder, which describes the same lengthy diesel breakdown. That was precisely one of the elements mentioned in French news reports, July 4, 1945 (Roques, “Confessions,” 108, reproduces the story in *France-Soir*). The confession of Pfannenstiel came later; consult Roques, “Confessions,” 299-309, esp. 302, for an interesting discussion of his interrogations by the postwar courts.

normally claimed that anyone was killed with bottled cyanide. When that claim is made, as, for example, in postwar testimony by former SS, it is arbitrarily corrected by historians.<sup>209</sup> It is established that Hitler and Himmler were never at these camps in August 1942.<sup>210</sup> The crowding elements and the piles of clothing are impossible exaggerations. Therefore we are not bound to analyze the document as fact but are rather entitled to move immediately to the question of the source of the statement's elements.

The diesel gas reference is probably connected either to Soviet revelations of gas vans or else to Soviet discussions of Treblinka.<sup>211</sup> Other tropes can be identified: for example, the description of the gas chambers as appearing "like garages" is almost certainly indebted to Werth's description of Majdanek the previous summer, or Polevoi's description of Auschwitz two months previous.<sup>212</sup> It is interesting to note that if Gerstein really was involved in the spreading of rumors about cyanide use for human beings, then the timing of these rumors (June 8, 1942) would coincide with the rumor of cyanide use that reached Switzerland the following August.

Another element: the 25 million victims motif goes back to a usage manual on Zyklon.<sup>213</sup> The heaps of piled clothes are a reference to Majdanek.<sup>214</sup> Above all, the statement shows the influence of Leleko's February interrogations and probably other testimonies concerning Treblinka and Sobibor made at the same time or before. In particular, the use of the "blast furnace" motif shows the clear influence of Polevoi. But many other elements, including the number of rooms, the arrangement of the building, the engines, the peepholes, even the flowers in front of the building, also appear derivative.

The main problem with the Gerstein Statement is that one does not pick and choose from a document. Many elements of Gerstein's statement are simply false; if we reject these, we must legitimately ask why we should give credence to the other elements.<sup>215</sup> As it turns out, the only part of the statement which is commonly quoted, and considered unambiguously true, is its repetition of the now conventional shower-gas-burning concept. Yet this simply means that we are using a part of Gerstein to confirm what we already know.

The gravest structural difficulty with the Gerstein Statement is that it insists on the use of diesel engines in the generation of carbon monoxide gas for the gas

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209 François Furet, *Unanswered Questions*, 35n, 350, 72n, 352; Uwe Adam, "The Gas Chambers," in Furet, *Unanswered Questions*, 134-154.

210 Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham, *Nazism, 1919-1945*, vol. 3, *Foreign Policy, War, and Racial Extermination*; like most of those who use Gerstein, the authors annotate when they do not omit.

211 This seems clear, although Friedrich Berg believes that the diesel motif goes back to the gas vans of the Krasnodar trial of July 1943, if not earlier in Soviet propaganda thinking.

212 Werth's account will be given at the beginning of Section 15, below.

213 Roques, "Confessions." The document is known as NI-9912. A translation of this document into French was one of the early broadsides in Robert Faurisson's revisionist career.

214 Compare *Majdanek Communiqué*.

215 Rassinier summed this up beautifully in *Debunking the Genocide Myth*, 196: "If it is not true that the gas chambers at Belzec, Treblinka, and Sobibor could asphyxiate between 15,000 and 25,000 persons a day; if it is not true that a gas chamber 25 meters square could hold 700 to 800 persons; if it is not true that a train with 45 cars could transport 6,700 persons; and if it is not true that Hitler was at Belzec on August 15, 1942, I ask what does it contain that is true, since it contains nothing else?"

chambers. Since 1983, Friedrich Paul Berg, a professional engineer and former environmental expert, has demonstrated that this would be a most improbable method for mass exterminations: diesel engines emit virtually no carbon monoxide.<sup>216</sup> These analyses, in turn, cast grave doubts on the alleged gassings at all of the Aktion Reinhardt camps, because, following Gerstein, diesel engines—usually from Soviet tanks but sometimes from submarines—are nowadays always alleged as the means of gas production at these three camps.<sup>217</sup>

A final point to be borne in mind in evaluating the Gerstein Statement is that Gerstein, a Zyklon technician, was attempting by his confession to deflect guilt away from himself, which in turn proves the extent to which Zyklon was perceived solely as a death-dealing mass-murder weapon at the time.<sup>218</sup> In this regard he was unsuccessful: after his claims were widely publicized in the press in July 1945, the French indicated their intention to try him as a war criminal, and Gerstein committed suicide.<sup>219</sup>

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216 Berg's "The Diesel Myth" has existed in several different versions; consult the version "Diesel Gas Chambers: Ideal for Torture—Absurd for Murder" in Rudolf, ed., *Dissecting the Holocaust*, 435-470, or one of several articles which cover the same material at [www.codoh.com](http://www.codoh.com).

217 Eichmann, in his 1960-61 interrogations, referenced submarine engines as being the source of the carbon monoxide: this is almost certainly a garbling of Gerstein's assertion. It should be noted that the Germans collected hair from German women in both world wars, although the purpose was unclear. In the First World War, women's hair was used to strengthen rubber driving belts.

218 Referring to the effect of the *Majdanek Communique*, and the WRB report.

219 Roques, "Confessions."

## **6. THE CANONICAL HOLOCAUST**

*The gassing claim as we understand it today is double-rooted: first, in the photographs and newsreels of the dead at Belsen, who perished from typhoid, typhus, and tuberculosis, and second from the Soviet Special Commission on Auschwitz, which concluded four million dead with no direct documentary evidence. —Analysis of the Soviet claim. —Influence of Soviet report on Allied interrogators. —Influence of Soviet report on eyewitnesses: Bendel and Bimko. —Influence of Soviet report on German confessions: Maximilian Grabner and others.*



**I**F WE WERE TO PINPOINT the time at which the gassing claim assumed its present shape, it would be in the three-week period from April 15 to May 6, 1945. During this period the Western Allies liberated a number of concentration camps, and at the end of this period the Soviets issued their Special Commission report on Auschwitz Birkenau.

On April 15, the British Army took over the Bergen Belsen complex, which at this point contained tens of thousands of prisoners.<sup>220</sup> The images of Belsen, cultivated by British military photographers, left an indelible impression: stacks of nude, discolored, and disfigured corpses, many in advanced stages of putrefaction, lined like cordwood outside of buildings. Overcrowded barracks full of dead and dying inmates. Large mass graves full of contorted and twisted bodies. The universal reaction was one of shock, horror, and disbelief: a common remark was that words could not describe what the liberators had seen.<sup>221</sup>

That April, the United States Army liberated Dachau and Buchenwald.<sup>222</sup> These camps, too, provided their own images: at Dachau, a group of open train cars containing the bodies of a few hundred dead prisoners; at Buchenwald, a handful of strips of human skin which had apparently been lifted from the corpses of tattooed inmates.<sup>223</sup> The American reaction to such death and destruction transcended shock in at least one instance: an American officer, confronted with the bodies at Dachau, is said to have lined up several hundred German soldiers (mostly youths) who had ended up in the camp at its liberation and machine-gunned them in cold blood.<sup>224</sup>

The Allied soldiers, confronted with these scenes of horror, interpreted them in terms of what they knew. And what they knew after three years of unchecked propaganda was that the Germans had been engaged in the systematic murder of millions of human beings in the camps by means of the shower-gas-burning sequence. The presence of a shower, or a crematorium, or a delousing chamber became *prima*

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<sup>220</sup> Jo Reilly, ed., *Belsen in History and Memory*; Monika Gödecke, ed. *Konzentrationslager Bergen-Belsen: Berichte und Dokumente*.

<sup>221</sup> Reilly, ed., *Belsen*; see especially the article by Paul Kemp, "The British Army and the Liberation of Bergen Belsen April 1945," 134-148.

<sup>222</sup> Buchenwald was liberated a few days before Belsen, but the liberation of the bulk of the camps, including the scenes at Dachau and Mauthausen, came toward the end of the month. See the discussion of the chronology in David A. Hackett, *The Buchenwald Report*, a translation of a contemporaneous US Intelligence Report prepared by the Psychological Warfare Division of SHAEF and written in German.

<sup>223</sup> Aroneanu, *Inside the Concentration Camps*, 106.

<sup>224</sup> Irving, *Nuremberg*, provides a photograph of an American soldier manning a machine gun. The actual number of German prisoners killed, either by American soldiers or liberated prisoners, remains unclear: a wide range between a few dozen and five hundred remains. Having investigated the matter over the years I have come to the conclusion that the actual number of dead was in the dozens, not hundreds, but that the latter figure became popularized precisely because of the suppression of information on the subject.

*facie* evidence of the well-known gas extermination claim.<sup>225</sup> The nude, discolored, and disfigured bodies were no doubt victims who had been gassed just before the Allied forces arrived.<sup>226</sup> Again and again one finds the sentiment that the corpses were the proof of the totality of an accusation that had been made for years, and that the Germans had been stopped, as one American put it, “before they had time to get their act together.”<sup>227</sup>

The problem is that these perceptions were wrong. What the Allies had found in the western camps was simply the result of the “last major epidemic of typhus in world history.”<sup>228</sup> The epidemic had been precipitated by the complete breakdown of sanitation, transportation, and provisioning for the concentration camp system in the last weeks and months of the war.<sup>229</sup> The bodies were discolored and disfigured by the process of putrefaction; they were nude because whenever a prisoner died the other prisoners would strip their clothing and burn the lice-infested garments.<sup>230</sup> Although widely publicized descriptions and photographs of gas chambers were proffered at the time, these turned out to be nothing but standard delousing chambers.<sup>231</sup> In 1960, it was established that there were no gassings in the western camps.<sup>232</sup> But in 1945 none of this penetrated the Western consciousness, which could not see beyond the piles of dead bodies, and saw in them proof of German evil and Nazi *Kultur*.<sup>233</sup> The imagery of the western camps, and above all Belsen, would remain for decades the proof of the Holocaust, and by extension, of the gas extermination claim.

Just before the end of the war, the Soviets issued a report that would authoritatively establish the nature of the extermination program. Like most Soviet reports, the Soviet Special Commission on Auschwitz was relatively brief, about thirty pages, and published in brochure format.<sup>234</sup> Given the emphasis on the gassing

<sup>225</sup> Edward R. Murrow, “For Most of It I Have No Words,” 681-685, and Martha Gellhorn, “Dachau,” 724-730, in *Reporting World War II*.

<sup>226</sup> The inference is that such sentiments must have informed the decision to conduct autopsies at Natzweiler-Struthof and Dachau: no autopsy report from any camp has ever yielded a verdict of cyanide poisoning.

<sup>227</sup> Aroneanu, *Inside the Concentration Camps*, 129, quoting from American report on Buchenwald.

<sup>228</sup> Paul Kemp, “The British Army and the Liberation of Bergen Belsen April 1945,” 147, in Reilly, ed., *Belsen*. Fritz Berg however has suggested that it was followed by a little-known but widespread epidemic in Poland. Indeed, this, like most events between the Bug and the Dniepr between 1944 and 1948, still requires enlightening scrutiny.

<sup>229</sup> This is the standard revisionist view. Consult Butz, *Hoax*, 61-62, 151, and esp. 370-374 for Commandant Kramer’s description; also Berg, “Typhus and the Jews,” for material on infrastructure destruction. Nevertheless, traditional Holocaust writers sometimes view these deaths as intentional (see article by Christine Lattek, “Bergen-Belsen: From ‘Privileged’ Camp to Death Camp,” in Reilly, ed., *Belsen*). In this regard it is interesting to note that during the epidemics that raged through Bergen Belsen in the spring of 1945, of 18,168 total dead between March 1 and April 6, only 183 were from the “Star Camp” especially set aside for Jewish prisoners, and only 321 from the three main subcamps specifically for Jewish prisoners (the balance was approx. 4 thousand in the Women’s Camp and 11 thousand in the Prisoner Camp #2): table cited in Monika Gödecke, ed., *Konzentrationslager Bergen-Belsen*, 164-165.

<sup>230</sup> Testimony of Dr. Russell Barton, in Kulaszka, ed., *Did Six Million?*

<sup>231</sup> Aroneanu, *Inside the Concentration Camps*, photo before 138, reproduces perhaps the most famous of these photographic hoaxes or misunderstandings: a pensive GI standing before a delousing chamber, with the caption: “An American soldier contemplates the entrance to the control room from which cylinders of Zyklon B were released into the gas chamber.” An early postwar documentary, “Nazi Concentration Camps,” also simulates a gassing by juxtaposing a shot of a delousing chamber that cuts to a leather-gloved hand which reaches in from the left of the frame to turn a valve to release the gas. This is supposed to have occurred at Dachau: the method described is erroneous.

<sup>232</sup> Martin Broszat’s letter was published in *Die Zeit*, August 26, 1960; discussed by Butz, *Hoax*, 74.

<sup>233</sup> “Nazi Kultur” was the sign put up by the British at Belsen, a photo of which is in Reilly, ed., *Belsen*.

<sup>234</sup> The entire text of this document, “The Soviet War Crimes Report on Auschwitz, Nuremberg Trial—6 May 1945,” refer-

claim there is very little descriptive material contained in the report. Only two documents are cited: one, a reference to the construction of crematoriums; the second, a document that refers to baths for special purposes for either Crematorium IV or V.<sup>235</sup> We should note that this evidence is not only considered incriminating but sufficient proof of the crime. This shows the extent to which the shower-gas-burning sequence was fundamental to thinking at the time: any one of the elements was considered decisive for the others. The substance of the report, with respect to the gassing claim, can be summarized in the following extract:

1. Twelve crematory ovens with 46 retorts were available in four new crematoriums.
2. Every retort could take three to five corpses.
3. The cremation procedure took approximately 20 to 30 minutes.
4. The baths for special purposes, that is, the gas chambers for the killing of human beings, were located in the cellars of special buildings next to the crematoriums.
5. There were also two other separate "baths"; the bodies of people killed here were burnt in separate fires in the open.
6. Dogs helped to drive the men intended for death into the baths.
7. On the way, they were driven with blows from clubs and rifle butts.
8. The doors to the chambers were hermetically sealed, and the people in them were poisoned with Zyklon.
9. Death occurred within 3-5 minutes.
10. After 20-30 minutes, the bodies were removed and taken to the crematory ovens in the crematoriums.
11. Before cremation, cremation dentists removed all gold teeth from the bodies.
12. The "production" of the "baths" and gas chambers by far exceeded the capacity of the crematory ovens; therefore the Germans used gigantic fires in the open to burn the bodies.
13. Ditches 4-6 m wide, 25-30 m long, and 2 m deep were dug for these fires.
14. Channels ran along the floor of the ditches and were used for air supply.
15. The bodies were brought to the fires by narrow-gauge railway, and placed in layers crossways in the ditches.
16. Oil was poured over them and that is how they were burnt.<sup>236</sup>

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enced as USSR-8, translated by Carlos W. Porter, may be found at [www.codoh.com/trials/triussr8.html](http://www.codoh.com/trials/triussr8.html).

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid. The above points are from the actual text of the report.

At the end of the report, the Soviets calculated the number of bodies that could be burned in each of the five crematoriums; this totaled 279,000 per month, from which they concluded that the maximum capacity of the crematoriums was over five million throughout the period of their existence.<sup>237</sup> Nevertheless, their conclusion stated that “the technical commission established that the German hangmen killed not less than 4,000,000 citizens of the USSR, Poland, France, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Holland, Belgium, and other countries during the period of the existence of Auschwitz camp.”<sup>238</sup>

Hence was born the Auschwitz four million.

The Soviet Special Commission on Auschwitz is probably the most important document ever issued on the gas extermination claim.<sup>239</sup> Indeed, it is somewhat shocking to see the extent to which the claim is traced back to this slim and insubstantial brochure. But at the time it established not only the fact of the gas extermination claim but also the implementation of that alleged policy at the largest of all of the concentration camps. On the other hand, the report offers no proof of the claims that it makes—only two documents in circumstantial support, an assertion of the number of victims based merely on the arbitrary multiplication of unsupported cremation rates, and eyewitness testimony that fails to even come close to providing details of the gassing procedure.

The importance of the document immediately became apparent in the interrogations, confessions, and immediate postwar trials. The first of these was at Belsen in the fall of 1945.<sup>240</sup> Although the purpose of the trial was ostensibly to try the SS personnel who had been captured at that camp, it turned out that many of the SS and many of the prisoners had been transferred to Belsen from Auschwitz in late 1944 and early 1945.<sup>241</sup> As a result, the Belsen trial was also a trial about the reality of what happened at Auschwitz: indeed, the proceedings included the showing of a Soviet film on Auschwitz.<sup>242</sup>

The German defendants were almost all former Auschwitz guards. The Belsen commandant, Josef Kramer, had formerly served briefly as commandant at Birkenau. Franz Hössler had been the head of the women’s camp. Irma Grese had been a warder at Birkenau. All of them were accused of participating in selections for the gassing process and all of them eventually admitted their participation. The extent to which the Soviet commission colored their confessions can be readily seen.

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> Originally, I stressed the importance of the Soviet Special Commission because, unlike the WRB Report, it was the only such report accepted without qualification by the International Military Tribunal (the WRB had only a small listing of victims, about 1.8 million, entered into the record) and because the “four million” was a clear and easily traceable marker. However, further research suggests that the WRB report, along with the original July Report and the Majdanek Special Commission, all tended to mutually reinforce and influence each other. The problem is that none of them is based on solid documentary evidence.

<sup>240</sup> The main source for this trial is Raymond Philips, ed., *Trial of Josef Kramer and 44 Others (The Belsen Trial)*, also known as vol. 2 of *War Crimes Trials*, under the editorship of Sir David Maxwell-Fyfe. On Irma Grese, see Daniel Patrick Brown, *The Beautiful Beast*.

<sup>241</sup> Brown, *Beautiful Beast*.

<sup>242</sup> Philips, ed., *Trial of Josef Kramer*, 653.

On May 22, 1945, the day after Heinrich Himmler was taken into British custody, Josef Kramer gave a lengthy statement describing the conditions in all the camps where he served, including Belsen, Birkenau, and Natzweiler-Struthof. He explicitly denied the existence of “a gas chamber” at Auschwitz.<sup>243</sup> The next day, Himmler was dead, an apparent suicide.<sup>244</sup> In a later interrogation, Kramer admitted to the existence of “a gas chamber” at Birkenau over which he had no jurisdiction.<sup>245</sup> From the stand, he would declare that his initial denial was motivated by an oath of silence to which he was no longer bound, thanks to the deaths of Hitler and Himmler.<sup>246</sup> Unfortunately we do not have the date of the second statement by Kramer, but it seems likely that the revelations of the Soviet Special Commission were instrumental in getting him to admit to the gassing claim. The idea that he would be silent about the gassing claim, if it was true, when the WRB report had made essentially the same charges as far back as November 1944,<sup>247</sup> and when the Soviet Auschwitz Report had been issued two weeks earlier, is very difficult to believe. The idea of an oath to remain silent makes no sense with regard to Hitler, who had been dead for weeks, nor is it likely that Kramer would deny, while his superior Himmler was also in British custody, something his interrogators were surely expecting him to admit.<sup>248</sup>

The rest of the defendants at the Belsen Trial also endorsed the gassing claim, with varying degrees of vagueness—Grese, for example, would claim that she heard of the gas chamber from the prisoners’ grapevine—and after being found guilty eleven of the 45 defendants were hanged.<sup>249</sup>

The Auschwitz Special Commission definitely set the tone not only for subsequent confessions but also for eyewitness testimonies: in early September 1945, the former political officer at Auschwitz, Grabner, gave a confession in Vienna in which he said that 3 million had been exterminated at the camp by the time he left in December 1943.<sup>250</sup> This generally accords with the Soviet projections, in the sense that if 3 million had died by the end of 1943, that would project to another million or so by the time the camp was liberated in January 1945. Even more precisely, at the Belsen Trial, two former Auschwitz prisoners, Dr. Bendel and Ada Bimko, also attested to the reality of the gas chambers, Bimko in particular supporting the 4 million figure in two places.<sup>251</sup>

243 Ibid., 718-737, 738f. Gödecke gives two dates: May 2, and May 22. If the latter, the proximity to the death of Himmler is striking. If the former, the weight of the Soviet Special Commission, issued four days later, is increased.

244 Reitlinger, SS: *Alibi of a Nation*, 447-449.

245 Philips, ed., *Trial of Josef Kramer*, 718-737, 738f.

246 Ibid.

247 Preceded, as we have seen, by the Soviet Kharkov Trial of December 1943.

248 Butz, *Hoax*, 242, makes the same arguments about Kramer’s confessions. For further on the quality of Kramer’s confessions, see Robert Faurisson, “Sur la prétendue ‘chambre à gaz’ homicide du Struthof: les trois confessions successives et contradictoires de Josef Kramer.”

249 Gödicke, ed., *Konzentrationslager Bergen-Belsen*, 231-233, provides a list of the defendants for the three Belsen trials (55 defendants in all) and sentences. What is less well known is that a dozen of the defendants were kapos, that is, prisoners. It should be obvious, then, that prisoners had a strong incentive to maintain a low profile and an orthodox interpretation: one prisoner was apparently denounced and put on trial because he was in an SS uniform at liberation.

250 Grabner’s confession cited in Ernst Klee, ed., “*Schöne Zeite*,” 228.

251 Philips, ed., *Trial of Josef Kramer*, 68, 740ff, in both direct testimony and sworn affidavit.

The fact that the eyewitness testimonies and confessions in the postwar period correspond to the Soviet Special Commission could be taken as simple corroboration of the Soviet report, except that it has now been recognized that the Soviet report was wrong, in particular on its totally arbitrary calculation of four million victims (current estimates hold one million or less).<sup>252</sup> That figure derived from the Soviet calculation of cremation capacities. It did not derive from testimony. On the other hand, we have several testimonies and confessions that support it. But since the figure is wrong, it follows that the testimonies and confessions which support the calculation were influenced by that report.

If a witness or a confessor makes statements that corroborate statements in an official and widely publicized report, that witness or confessor may be viewed as independently verifying the truth, although the absence of material or documentary support would still leave the matter in doubt. But when the witness or confessor corroborates statements and the statements are false, then one can presume that the witness and confessor statements were simply derivative of the reports. To put it another way, several testimonies may converge on a truth, but several testimonies cannot converge on a falsehood: in such a case one is dealing either with statements derived from a common erroneous source or a kind of mass hysteria determined by the authority of an erroneous source.

Such is the problem with all witness testimonies and confessions for the gas extermination claim, particularly for this initial period, but even more so subsequently. The allegations of mass gassing had been widely disseminated since 1942, and had assumed official status by the fall of 1944. Under these circumstances it would have been impossible to obtain “blind” testimony or an untainted confession. Only statements that provided high levels of corroborative detail would be probative, yet that is precisely what was never offered. Eyewitness testimonies and confessions made the gravest errors whenever they strayed into details, for example, in Ada Bimko’s odd notion that the cyanide gas was kept in large round tanks,<sup>253</sup> or Josef Kramer’s assertion that a gassing at Natzweiler was carried out by pouring half a pint of salts into a pipe.<sup>254</sup>

The Auschwitz Special Commission derived its authority partly because the Soviet government issued it and partly because there were no other reports—unlike in the case of Katyn—to contradict it. Its authority was certainly not due to any exhaustive forensic, documentary, or material calculations. Yet for some time it was, along with the WRB report, the only substantial document describing what had supposedly occurred at Auschwitz, and appears to be the only one entered into evidence at the International Military Tribunal.<sup>255</sup> As a result it became one of the fundamental

<sup>252</sup> The general consensus from Reitlinger (1953) through Pressac (1993) is that the overall death toll at Auschwitz was less than one million, although there have always been those who have claimed higher totals, e.g., Dawidowicz, *War against the Jews*, (1975); Yehuda Bauer, *History of the Holocaust*, (1982) et al.

<sup>253</sup> Carlo Mattogno, “Two False Testimonies from Auschwitz,” in *Journal of Historical Review* 10, no. 1 (Spring 1990).

<sup>254</sup> Quoted in William L. Shirer, *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, 1141.

<sup>255</sup> I should qualify my remarks here, for two reasons. First, the WRB Report, although erroneous, and with totals much

documents to consult for anyone who wished to know what had transpired there. Witnesses preparing to testify would have consulted it so that they could refresh their memories or to put their own experiences in a wider context. Most important, Allied officials, confronted with former Auschwitz personnel, would have to consult the report in order to know how to distinguish truth from falsehood in the course of their prisoner interrogations.<sup>256</sup>

As soon as a witness or confessor made statements corroborating the Soviet Special Commission, then those statements themselves acquired the Soviet report's weight of authority, because they matched its claims. Over time the proof of the mass gas exterminations at Auschwitz would not be traced in the popular mind back to the Soviet Auschwitz report itself, but rather to testimonies and confessions that were clearly produced under its influence. Thus a version of the gassing claim, what we shall call the Canonical Holocaust, evolved almost entirely through oral testimonies that built upon the basis of a report that had no substance. Meanwhile, the damning newsreels of Belsen would be manipulated and transposed from camp to camp according to the whim of the prevailing culture, and provide the unanswerable ground to the claim.<sup>257</sup>

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less than the Soviet Report, was still widely available. Second, Robert Jan van Pelt, in his expert report for the Irving v. Lipstadt Trial, made an argument for the superior quality of the Polish Commissions on Auschwitz; however, these investigations, published in *German Crimes in Poland*, vol. 1: *Central Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland*, 27-93, do not appear to be appreciably more detailed than the Soviet reports. The narrative contains only a handful of references, while the discussion of the mass gasings occupies all of four pages, 83-87. Doubtless some of this material would have been available in 1945 through the media, indeed our interpretation assumes this, but van Pelt does not explore this avenue. Jean-Claude Pressac's *chef d'oeuvre*, *Auschwitz: Technique and Operation of the Gas Chambers*, also contains several photographs of star witness Henryk Tauber: arriving at the camp in civilian clothes, donning a prison uniform, and posing for several photographs. Clearly, Tauber's appearance to testify was not meant to be kept from the public, and it is doubtful if the content of his testimony was concealed. In any case the testimony of eyewitnesses in newspapers—and both the Soviet and Polish commissions relied on the same individuals—would not have carried as much authority as an official report.

<sup>256</sup> It is understood that an interrogator will seek to elicit information; therefore he must have some kind of focus as to which information is valuable and truthful and which is not: the Canonical Holocaust provided this. Compare the comments in Malise Ruthven, *Torture: The Grand Conspiracy*, 275.

<sup>257</sup> Reilly, ed., *Belsen*, in an article provides several references to ways in which the Belsen images were appropriated for other camps, thus, for Buchenwald for the film *Judgment at Nuremberg*; see also Rudolf, ed., *Dissecting the Holocaust*, 249, for an example where a photo of a Belsen pit grave is transposed to Auschwitz.



## **7. THE NUREMBERG TRIALS**

*The aim of the Nuremberg trials to discredit National Socialism and German militarism: the future pacification of Germany. —Evidence provided for incriminating value. —No attempt at putting documents in context. Soviet Union oversees most of the gassing-claim presentation. —Soviet record in 1930s show trials indicates mass hysteria, conspiratorial thinking, forced confessions. —Hysterical atmosphere at Nuremberg: judges, who privately doubt, fail to maintain a rational atmosphere.*



THE ORIGINS of the Nuremberg trials lay in the desire of the Allies as far back as 1943 to take revenge on the Nazi leadership, and punish the German people.<sup>258</sup> It is clear that part of the desire was to ensure that there would be no more wars with Germany: hence at this early date one frequently encounters calls for simply executing tens of thousands of the leadership cadre in Germany, or even sterilizing the total German population.<sup>259</sup>

A general aspect of this hostile attitude was one of paranoia, evinced in conspiracy thinking about the Germans or at least about their leadership. The roots of such paranoia could be variously explained. For one thing, wars always generate suspicions and anxieties that frequently go over the top: one thinks of elements of the British Army, confused and disoriented by the German offensive of May 1940, finding secret messages in the plowings of Belgian farmers.<sup>260</sup> Another contributing factor is the death and destruction of the war: history provides many instances where terrible misfortunes have been attributed to the secret plotting of others. Jews, for example, were frequently scapegoats in times of plague and disease.<sup>261</sup> In the context of war-hatred against Germans, such attributions were a natural extension: during the influenza pandemic of 1918–1919, an American official attributed this terrible outbreak to a German submarine which had brought the disease to America under the Kaiser's order.<sup>262</sup>

Still another contributing factor to such paranoia is the extent to which war hysteria attributes malevolent “fifth column” tendencies to specific minority groups. The internment by the Americans of the Japanese, including Japanese Americans, and other Axis nationals, the Soviet deportations of the Volga Germans and Crimean Tatars, as well as the German deportations of the Jews, all seem to have been influenced by this kind of thinking to at least some degree.

To a certain extent such conspiratorial thinking is probably a throwback to shamanistic thinking, the idea that misfortune has a direct cause that can be traced

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<sup>258</sup> This is widely attested, see especially Morgenthau, *Mostly Morgenthau*, Ann and John Tusa, *The Nuremberg Trial*, 21–28; Irving, *Nuremberg*, discusses the matter extensively in chapter 2, “Lynch Law.”

<sup>259</sup> The widespread fascination with castrating Germans elicited comments from none other than President Roosevelt himself; see Morgenthau, *Mostly Morgenthau*; and Butz, *Hoax*, 104–107, who cites Clifton Fadiman and Ernest Hemingway. Irving traces the concept back to a book written by an embittered American Jew, in *Goebbels*, 369, 372–373.

<sup>260</sup> Len Deighton, *Blood, Tears and Folly*, 194–195.

<sup>261</sup> Norman Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide*, a study on the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, recapitulates much of this material, and also shows the composite roots of that document. Unfortunately, Cohn takes an uncritical and erroneous view of statements derived from the Gerstein Statement (236). The reader will have perhaps already noted that the concept of the National Socialist mass gas extermination program is an inversion of the Protocols concept which many, including many National Socialists, held about Jewish people. Therefore, in this sense, Cohn's choice of quotes is apt: the Gerstein Statement is the mirror image of the Protocols. Further, the reader should note that the widespread popularity of the Protocols concept (which nowadays embraces most conspiracy theories) is fundamentally a mythic reaction to certain aspects of modernity; in other words, just like our subject.

<sup>262</sup> Richard Collins, *The Plague of the Spanish Lady*, 83.

back to a specific malevolent agent: one thinks of the various witch hunts that have cropped up here and there in European history.<sup>263</sup> As it applied to the Germans in the twentieth century, such conspiratorial thinking about German motives and German conduct clearly preceded the Second World War: one thinks of the Reichstag fire and even more sinister theories traced back hundreds of years.<sup>264</sup>

In the context of the postwar period this simply meant that the Allies were not inclined to trust the German people and least of all their former leadership.<sup>265</sup> The Allies were convinced, on the basis of the Canonical Holocaust, that the German people, or at least the SS, had engaged in the most barbaric crimes, and they would not be dissuaded by denials.<sup>266</sup> Down to the common soldier, one finds that whenever any German denied knowledge of “what was going on in the camps” the usual conclusion drawn was that he was simply lying.<sup>267</sup> A final contributing element to this Allied paranoia was the inevitable imbalance whereby a comparatively small occupying force sought to control a nation of 80 million people; history again shows that when such a small group attempts to impose its will on the majority, conspiracy thinking is a natural result.<sup>268</sup>

Simply put, a profound gulf existed between occupier and occupied. Allied paranoia created the certainty of German conspiracies, of which the mass gassing program was merely one. The Germans were not to be trusted to tell the Allies what had happened and why; they were merely expected to confirm what they were told. The source of the information for what had happened was, after all, available in reports that had been authoritatively issued by the Soviet and later Polish communist governments, as well as by confessions and affidavits that simply restated what everyone had known all along. In this atmosphere of assumed guilt and conspiracy, it was unfortunate that the presentation for the mass gassing and extermination claims at Nuremberg fell almost entirely to the Soviet Union, which already had long experience with conspiracies, paranoia, and show trials.

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<sup>263</sup> Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*; also Ruthven, *Torture*. Both authors (indeed, most modern authors) trace the witch hunts to social and hence ideological stress.

<sup>264</sup> The Reichstag Fire is a classic instance of paranoia striking in both directions; the National Socialists were convinced that the communists had set the blaze, while most everyone outside of Germany was convinced of German guilt. Fritz Tobias' study eventually showed that van der Lubbe set the fire by himself; thus the Law of Parsimony eventually gets rid of conspiracy theories; see Fritz Tobias, *The Reichstag Fire*. Because Hitler benefited from the fire, in the sense that it facilitated the Enabling Acts, it was long considered another Nazi plot; compare William L. Shirer, *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, 192-193.

<sup>265</sup> One theme that is not pursued here but certainly deserves fuller treatment involves the Allied desire to pacify Germany; this meant not only the demilitarizing of the nation but also the discrediting of its military and political elite. Lucius Clay, in his memoirs, *Decision in Germany*, discussed with frankness the result of the Nuremberg trials: the National Socialist party was thoroughly discredited (250-252). At the same time, Clay noted that the attempt to discredit the military leadership was less successful. Therefore the reader should understand that one of the reasons that the atrocity charges (including the gassing claim) were pursued with such abandon, and were allowed to be pursued, and have been allowed to propagate unchecked, is because very quickly they became narrowed in function to the simple discrediting of National Socialism. Noting that these charges have been allowed to stand because they discredit National Socialism does not, however, constitute an endorsement of National Socialism.

<sup>266</sup> The interrogation of Dr. Pfannenstiel, whom Gerstein mentioned in his statement, is characteristic. See Roques, “Confessions,” 299-308.

<sup>267</sup> *Life*, May 8, 1945, provides some examples, but this is a very common sentiment expressed in GI memoirs and the press. <sup>268</sup> This is the central thesis of Ruthven's book. Interestingly, the notion is recapitulated by the conspiracy of Hitler's resurrection; compare *Life* (n. 267, above). (Ron Rosenbaum, “Explaining Hitler,” in *The New Yorker* [May 1, 1995], 50-73, covers the same ground), as well as the generalized paranoia about “Werewolves” and the “Alpine Redoubt.”

What transpired at Nuremberg cannot be fully grasped without some understanding of the psychology of Soviet judicial procedure under Stalin. In the 1930s, the Soviets conducted numerous trials, mostly involving prominent communists but also “saboteurs,” who, it was said, were attempting to destroy the Soviet Union.<sup>269</sup> It is generally granted that the accusations made in these trials were false. An extract from the affidavit of a confessor’s who was charged with sabotaging Soviet agriculture as part of a German plot is very revealing:

*The chief task assigned to me by the German intelligence service at that time was to arrange to spoil grain within the country. This involved delaying the construction of storehouses and elevators, so as to create a discrepancy between the growing size of the grain collections and the available storage space. In this way [the German agent] said, two things would be achieved: firstly, the grain itself would be spoiled; and secondly, the indignation of the peasants would be aroused, which was inevitable when they saw that grain was perishing. I was also asked to arrange for the wholesale contamination of storehouses by pests, especially by corn-beetles ... The German intelligence service made a special point of the organization of wrecking activities in the sphere of horsebreeding in order ... not to provide horses for the Red Army. As regards seed, we included in our program muddling up seed affairs, mixing up sorted seed and thus lowering the harvest yield in the country. As regards crop rotation, the idea was to plan the crop area incorrectly and thus place the collective farm peasants in such a position that they would be virtually unable to practice proper crop rotation and would be obliged to plough up meadows and pastures for crop growing. This would reduce the size of the harvests in the country and at the same time arouse the indignation of the peasants, who would be unable to understand why they were being forced to plough up meadows and pastures when the collective farms wanted to develop stock-breeding and required fodder for the purpose. As regards the machine tractor stations, the aim was to put tractors, harvester combines and agricultural machines out of commission, to muddle the financial affairs of the machine and tractor stations, and for this purpose to place at the machine and tractor stations useless people, people with bad records, and above all members of our Right organization. As regards stock-breeding, the aim was to kill off pedigree breed stock and to strive for a high cattle mortality ... to prevent the development of fodder resources and especially to infect cattle artificially with various kinds of bacteria in order to increase their mortality ... I instructed [the head of the veterinary department] and Boyarshinov, Chief of the Bacteriological Department, to artificially infect pigs with erysipelas in the Leningrad region and with plague in the Voronezh region and the Azov-Black Sea Territory. I chose these two bacteria because the pigs are inoculated not with dead microbes, but with live ones, only of a reduced virulence. It was therefore quite simple from the technical standpoint*

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<sup>269</sup> Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror*, is the standard reference, but see also Ruthven, *Torture*, 218-278.

to organize artificial infection ... For this purpose three factories were selected at my suggestion ... In these factories serums were made with virulent bacteria and given special serial numbers. Boyarshinov was informed of these serial numbers and he transmitted them to the chiefs of the veterinary departments in the localities who could be relied on in this matter, and they in turn transmitted them to veterinary surgeons who had anti-Soviet feelings and who in case of a heavy cattle mortality would not raise a big fuss.<sup>270</sup>

The detached reader notes first of all the tremendous scope of the secret conspiracy alleged, as well as the fact that every conceivable shortcoming of Soviet agriculture is being attributed to it. A natural conclusion is that the Soviet government had orchestrated a tremendous hoax. But that is probably too radical an interpretation. It is hard to believe that any rational government, intent above all on simply suppressing its enemies,<sup>271</sup> would devise such a lunatic indictment. Rather it suggests that, probably with some rational and deliberate coaxing from above, the concept of sabotage took on a life of its own in the minds of the security apparatus, the interrogators, and probably even among many of the defendants as well. In other words, we are looking at an instance of mass hysteria in which Soviet society had been taken over by rumors of secret “wreckers” whose secret agenda was so skillfully masked that no hard evidence existed, and whose works comprised all of the misfortunes of the process of collectivization and dekulakization. To say that it was wholly deliberate is to go against the weight of analysis from history: as Malise Ruthven pointedly notes, histories of the witchcraft mania never suggest that the inquisitors were perpetrating a fraud.<sup>272</sup>

A similar hysterical atmosphere of endlessly ramifying atrocity appears to have prevailed at Nuremberg. The Americans had found half a dozen strips of human skin at Buchenwald ornamented with tattoos.<sup>273</sup> At Nuremberg, this freak discovery became a veritable cottage industry in the concentration camps: according to Dr. Blaha, the Germans made riding breeches, gloves, and ladies’ handbags from human skin at Dachau,<sup>274</sup> while the witness Balachowsky assured the court in his

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<sup>270</sup> Quoted in Ruthven, *Torture*, 245-246.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

<sup>273</sup> Butz, *Hoax*, 520, provides a photograph of the Buchenwald exhibition that the German people were forced to view, again, as proof of the moral bankruptcy of the National Socialist regime. The photograph featured various anatomical exhibits, two shrunken heads, and half a dozen strips of human skin, most with tattoos, one of almost the complete frontal torso. Over on the far right of the photo one can see a lampshade on a stand; this was also claimed to have been made of human skin although basic visual inspection indicates that it is of a different material than the others. This lampshade appears to have been made of goatskin, and is the root of all of the rest of the “human skin” stories. Compare Aroneanu, *Inside the Concentration Camps*, 106, quoting SHAEF report on Buchenwald, compare Hackett, ed., *op. cit.* As far as is known, neither that lampshade nor any of the other materials discussed in the text has ever been positively identified. In addition, no one has ever offered any of the other more exotic products for either inspection or examination. If such materials did exist, it is likely that they would still exist today for testing or confirmation, since it is known that the United States government retains human skulls gathered by Americans soldiers and sailors in the South Pacific during both the Second World War and the Vietnam War, Kenneth Iserson, *Death to Dust*, 467.

<sup>274</sup> Cited in Porter, *Made in Russia*. The reader is reminded that Porter’s text simply involves captioned pages from the trial record that have been photographed and presented in legible format whole, i.e., his book does not comprise interpretation of these affidavits and testimony, other than, of course, in his selections.

testimony that it was used to bind books.<sup>275</sup> The Soviets then produced samples of what they claimed was tanned human skin along with a few exhibits that were purportedly human soap.<sup>276</sup> It need hardly be said that none of these claims has ever been verified; the Soviet samples have disappeared.<sup>277</sup>

The prosecution's case at the Trial consisted mostly of reading into the record miscellaneous atrocity claims from affiants who never appeared to testify.<sup>278</sup> (The defense was allowed half a day to summarize 300,000 affidavits in rebuttal.)<sup>279</sup> With regard to the gas extermination claim, an important document was an affidavit from Höttl, who subsequently evaded prosecution, which explained that secret orders from Himmler had established the extermination program, and that four million had been killed in the concentration camps, six million Jews in all.<sup>280</sup> Later testimony by Wisliceny repeated Höttl's claim, and put the blame for the events on the missing and presumed dead Adolf Eichmann.<sup>281</sup> No documents, then or now, have ever been advanced that point to the planning, budgeting, or ordering of a gas extermination program.

The Soviet presentation, covering most of February 1946, was considered excessive by some: after presenting an affidavit that a German commandant had taken Jewish children, thrown them in the air, and then shot them for the entertainment of his small daughter, Justice Parker of the United States would be heard to privately comment: "They have gone too far!"<sup>282</sup> When Madame Vaillant-Couturier presented fantastic testimony of the mass gassings at Auschwitz, Justice Biddle of the United States would note privately, "This I doubt"<sup>283</sup> and Justice Birkett of the United Kingdom would express private misgivings.<sup>284</sup> But it points to the hysterical atmosphere of the time that neither they, nor anyone else, had the courage to publicly dissent and inject some rationality into the proceedings.<sup>285</sup>

In the summer of 1946, Soviet hubris finally overreached itself with the submission of a 56-page octavo pamphlet that claimed the Germans had murdered 11,000 Polish officers and had buried them in the Katyn Forest in order to discredit the Soviet Union: under the rules of the Court, the mere submission of such a report

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<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

<sup>278</sup> Telford Taylor, *Anatomy of the Nuremberg Trials*, 315.

<sup>279</sup> Cited in Porter, *Nuremberg*.

<sup>280</sup> Discussed in Irving, *Nuremberg*, 343-344.

<sup>281</sup> Irving, *Nuremberg*, 345, and see also Harris, *Tyranny*, 313.

<sup>282</sup> Ann and John Tusa, *The Nuremberg Trial*, 198.

<sup>283</sup> Irving, in both *Goering*, 727, and *Nuremberg*, 347, makes references that are keyed to Biddle's private papers.

<sup>284</sup> Quoted in Taylor, *Anatomy*, 315. Taylor also recognized the likelihood of exaggeration and inaccuracy in these accounts.

<sup>285</sup> This ties directly to the judges and lawyers at Nuremberg, and the community of historians, who have failed to oppose censorship today. It is of course one thing for historians to avoid investigating contentious matters. That is not praiseworthy but it is understandable; although we should keep in mind that tenure was not designed to cover minor personal peccadilloes but rather to protect scholars when pursuing difficult questions. It must be said that Dr. Butz, regardless of the merits of his book or his arguments, is the only American academician to have used tenure for the purpose for which it was designed. On the silence of historians in the face of censorship, that is another affair. On the other hand, I am bound to record the statements of the late professors emeritus Raul Hilberg and Gordon Craig, who both publicly denounced censorship and taboo on this subject.

would normally be enough to establish it as “fact of common knowledge.”<sup>286</sup> The depressing thing about the Soviet Katyn report is that it is in fact longer and more substantial than either the Majdanek or Auschwitz reports.<sup>287</sup> It is also completely false, since it has been reasonably well known since 1952 and was admitted by the Soviet Union in 1989 that Katyn was a Soviet atrocity.<sup>288</sup> The Germans, who finally had evidence to contradict a Soviet claim, tested the assumption, and finally, after some conflict, were able to present their own witnesses to the affair.<sup>289</sup> The court made no mention of Katyn in its final judgment, making it very clear that at this trial justice and morality had to defer to political expediency.<sup>290</sup>

At the end of the Soviet prosecution case, the defense phase of the trial began. About a week after that, Winston Churchill, borrowing a phrase from Joseph Goebbels, spoke of an Iron Curtain descending over the continent of Europe.<sup>291</sup> Almost simultaneously, a week-long trial was held in the Hamburg Curio House against the principals of the firm Tesch & Stabenow, which had sold Zyklon B to the Auschwitz camp. That trial, which yielded two death sentences, brought to the fore a number of witnesses—Bendel, Broad, and Bimko—whose narratives had already been before the public eye. Just days after the conclusion of that trial, and not far away, the British Field Police seized the former commandant of Auschwitz, Rudolf Höss.

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<sup>286</sup> Taylor, *Anatomy*, 313, reference to Article 21 of the London Charter.

<sup>287</sup> The Majdanek report runs to 26 pages, the Auschwitz report would be estimated at about 35, the Katyn brochure introduced in evidence was 56 pages long.

<sup>288</sup> Paul, *Katyn*, 3, 361.

<sup>289</sup> Harris, *Tyranny*, 251, 267, summarizes the German counterarguments, as well as the 1952 Congressional Hearings.

<sup>290</sup> No mention in judgment: compare Taylor, *Anatomy of the Nuremberg Trials*, 639-640. Generally speaking it seems odd that historians continue to use Nuremberg testimony, especially unattested Soviet-generated testimony, as proof of German atrocities. The Soviet Katyn testimony, that described how the Germans dug up the bodies of the 11,000 Polish officers, transported them to Katyn, went through their pockets and planted papers, then reburied them, and then dug them up again, as part of a plot to discredit the Soviet Union, is just as detailed, cogent, and realistic as that provided by the Soviet Union for the extermination camps.

<sup>291</sup> Churchill's speech, March 6, 1946, Fulton, Missouri, first stated by Goebbels, (Irving, *Goebbels*), but in fact the phrase appears to be very old, going back to the eighteenth century at least.

## **8. THE CONFESSIONS OF RUDOLF HÖSS**

*Höss captured and interrogated by British after Soviets conclude gassing claim presentation. —Höss' confessions clearly coerced. —Analysis of March 16, 1946, and April 5, 1946, affidavits and associated interrogations. —Content of these affidavits derives from Soviet presentation, and probably other sources. —Errors in these affidavits.*



HÖSS WAS SEIZED on March 13, 1946, on a farm in the British Zone where he had spent the past several months as a common laborer.<sup>292</sup> His affidavits deserve particular attention: for many years historians have been content to merely quote extracts from Höss' affidavits, usually the one from April 5, 1946, as proof of the mass gassings. The popularity of this affidavit, also known as 3868-PS, is directly related to the fact that it is the only thorough narrative concerning Auschwitz made by Höss that was entered into the trial record at the IMT. In later writings, Höss would claim that he had been severely beaten in the early period of his confinement.<sup>293</sup> Later revelations, largely developed by Robert Faurisson, indicate that he was systematically tortured, largely by sleep deprivation.<sup>294</sup>

These factors probably explain the incoherence of his very first affidavit, that of March 16, 1946, which betrays a British influence in its many references to Belsen. The most interesting of these concerns a legend regarding 1,800 Belsen inmates who were sent to Auschwitz, a particularly venerable Holocaust story.<sup>295</sup>

The April 5, 1946, affidavit is the one most frequently quoted and the one that makes the various gas extermination claims with some semblance of order.<sup>296</sup> The claims may be summarized:

1. Mass gassings began in the summer of 1941 and continued until fall 1944.
2. 2,500,000 were gassed, another 500,000 died from other means, for a total of 3 million.
3. Höss left Auschwitz in December of 1943, but he was kept informed.

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<sup>292</sup> The surname of the commandant of Auschwitz is usually rendered as "Hoess," which frequently leads to confusion with Adolf Hitler's aide, and Nuremberg defendant, Rudolf Hess. The proper German spelling is "Höß," but for the sake of clarity for an English-speaking audience I have made a compromise. The main text concerning Höss' career consists of his own writings, Rudolf Höss, *Death Dealer*, Steven Paskuly, ed., which is the standard English translation. The German original, *Kommandant in Auschwitz: Autobiographische Aufzeichnungen des Rudolf Höß*, edited by Martin Broszat, is slightly truncated but includes valuable annotations. It is important to keep in mind that all of Höss' postwar statements were made in custody and under juridical suspense.

<sup>293</sup> Höss, *Death Dealer*, 179f.

<sup>294</sup> First developed by Robert Faurisson, "How the British Obtained the Confessions of Rudolf Hoess," in *Journal of Historical Review* 7, no. 4 (Winter 1986–87); also corroboration in Irving, *Nuremberg*, 240–246, and the relevant footnotes.

<sup>295</sup> Quoted in part in Ernst Klee, et al., eds., "Schöne Zeiten," 242–245. The Belsen refugees who ended up at Auschwitz are also described by Gilbert, *Auschwitz*, and Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle*. The story appears to have emerged into the mainstream sometime at the beginning of 1944. The basic feature of the tale is a riot in the undressing room, which requires the "half gassing" of those already in the gas chamber. Another element of the tale, left out of Höss' account, is the woman who tempts the German soldier, acquires his weapon, and shoots him, which sparks the riot. Stäglich covers this element of the story in detail. The woman is variously described.

<sup>296</sup> Other affidavits from this period include an affidavit for American psychologist G.[ustave] M.[ahler] Gilbert admitting to the gassing of 2.5 million, and the death of another .5 million, etc. The March 16, 1946 affidavit (NO-1210), as well as other affidavits under American auspices (NI-034, NI-036) have never been published but can be obtained from mimeographs in large document centers in the United States. Irving remarks, *Nuremberg*, that the transcripts of Höss' interrogations are not yet complete. Many of the transcripts, at least those conducted by the Americans, are located on microfilm M 1270, roll 7, at the US National Archives.

4. The “Final Solution” meant the complete extermination of Jews in Europe.
5. Höss was ordered to establish extermination facilities in Auschwitz in June 1941, on direct orders from Himmler.
6. Höss visited Belzec, Treblinka, and Wolzek, where carbon monoxide was used.
7. Höss decided to use Zyklon B.
8. “We knew when the people were dead because their screaming stopped.”
9. Gas chambers could hold 2,000 people at a time.
10. Children were invariably exterminated and mothers tried to hide their children.
11. The exterminations were secret, but
12. the stench from the burnings informed everyone for miles around that exterminations were going on.

Offhand, the affidavit seems impressive and authoritative. But on closer analysis it is clear that the document contributes absolutely nothing to what was already known as a “fact of common knowledge” at the time.<sup>297</sup> Indeed, it seems remarkable that nearly all prior commentators on Höss fail to recognize the significance of the fact that by the time of his capture the gassing narrative had achieved almost finished form at the bar of the International Military Tribunal.<sup>298</sup>

In detail: that Himmler directly ordered the exterminations simply repeats the unsubstantiated assertion found in the Höttl affidavit of 1945.<sup>299</sup> The idea that the exterminations went back to 1941, and that the Final Solution was a code word for the extermination of the Jews, goes back to the Nuremberg testimony of Dieter Wisliceny, von dem Bach Zelewski, and Ohlendorf given in January 1946.<sup>300</sup> The emphasis on the fate of the children reflects the testimonies of Schmaglenskaya and Vaillant-Couturier in January and February.<sup>301</sup> The reference to the stench of the burnings is, as we shall see, a hoary exaggeration that goes back to rumors of the euthanasia campaign in 1941. The claimed number of victims for Höss’ tenure—2.5 million gassed and 0.5 million dead by other means—is traceable to the confession of Grabner the previous September. Both reflect the calculations

<sup>297</sup> A reference to the London Charter, Article 21. As to the “authority” and “reliability” of such affidavits the reader is directed in particular to NI-036, which consists of a lengthy and leading interrogation of Höss in German, followed by the English language affidavit (NI-034) that grew out of the session. A comparison of the two is highly instructive.

<sup>298</sup> For example, Faurisson, “How the British,” goes directly from the German surrender of May 8, 1945 to Höss’ capture, preferring to stress the Jewish identity of those he identifies as being instrumental in the construction of what he calls “the Auschwitz myth.”

<sup>299</sup> Irving, *Nuremberg*, 236.

<sup>300</sup> Harris, *Tyranny on Trial*, 313, 349.

<sup>301</sup> Compare Harris, *Tyranny*, 347, 431, Taylor, *Anatomy*, 317. These women were the two main witnesses to what transpired at Auschwitz. Vaillant-Couturier’s testimony was admittedly hearsay. They were not cross-examined.

of the Soviet Special Commission on Auschwitz, which claimed 4 million for the entire period of the camp's operation, which, if it came to 3 million by the end of 1943, implied approximately 1 million in 1944. It is also interesting to note that the range of victims—2.5 to 3 million—as well as other details coincides with the testimony of Pery Broad at the Tesch & Stabenow trial in Hamburg just weeks before.<sup>302</sup> On the other hand, there was no “Wolzek” camp, and none of the three camps Höss claimed to have inspected existed in 1941.

The April 5, 1946, Höss affidavit is simply a confirmation of what was already known.<sup>303</sup> What it contributed was not new, and where it was new it was clearly wrong. It provides no elaboration or explanation for any of the claims that it repeats; in fact, most of Höss' testimony at Nuremberg, ten days later, consisted of making statements that failed to confirm the contents of the affidavit.<sup>304</sup> After his testimony on behalf of Kaltenbrunner, his cross-examination by the prosecution consisted merely of nodding or answering “yes” as his affidavit was read into the record.<sup>305</sup> The affidavit is ultimately an extension and confirmation of the Canonical Holocaust as represented by the Soviet Special Commission on Auschwitz. As such it is practically valueless from a historiographical point of view.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that Höss' statements speak with great authority to most historians due to his role as the commandant of Auschwitz. Therefore the peculiarities of this affidavit require further study. The best way to do this is by reviewing the previous record of interrogations and affidavits. It soon becomes evident that the affidavit of April 5, 1946, drew not only on the antecedent interrogations but also on the affidavit of March 16. It is therefore necessary to take a closer look at that affidavit.

We recall first of all that, according to a number of sources, Höss was beaten and deprived of sleep for perhaps three days while the March 16 affidavit was being prepared.<sup>306</sup> This is important to note because it suggests that pressure was being applied to Höss during these initial interrogations. One can easily imagine, for example, that a prominent Nazi might have been beaten upon entering custody. Yet sleep deprivation is something else; it is not a punishment one would inflict on someone in anger or in a rage. Hence there exists a strong suspicion that Höss was deprived of sleep in the course of his interrogation in order to manipulate his responses.

The affidavit of March 16, 1946, also known as NO-1210, exists only in an English

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302 For Grabner, compare Klee, et al., eds., “*Schöne Zeiten*,” 228ff, 259. For Broad, see *Proceedings of a Military Court for the Trial of War Criminals held at the War Crimes Court, Curiohaus, Hamburg, upon the trial of Bruno TESCH, Joachim DROSIHN and Karl WEINBACHER*, Public Records Office, London, WO235/83 [hereinafter, *Tesch-Weinbacher Trial*].

303 That is, bearing in mind the results of the Soviet Special Commissions, the WRB report, the evidence provided at the IMT, and the elaboration of same by the Allied prosecutions and the media to that point in time. Thus, for example, there is no reference to euthanasia in the March or April affidavits; the public exposition of that connection with mass gassing would await Konrad Morgen's affidavits and testimony at Nuremberg in July–August, 1946. On the other hand, the euthanasia connection does appear in Höss' affidavit written in November 1946, that is, after the connection had become public knowledge. See Höss, *Death Dealer*, 28.

304 Porter, *Nuremberg*, discusses this in detail.

305 *Ibid.*

306 Described by Faurisson, “How the British” as well as Irving, *Nuremberg*, 349–357.

version (although it references an original). After going over details of his early life and prior career as a Nazi, Höss discusses Auschwitz:

*I was given the order, by a higher authority the then inspectorate of concentration camps, to transform the former Polish Artillery Barracks near AUSCHWITZ into a quarantine camp for prisoners coming from Poland. After HIMMLER inspected the camp in 1941, I received the order to enlarge the camp and to employ the prisoners in the to be developed agricultural district and to drain the swamps and inundation area of the Weichsel. Furthermore he ordered to put 8-10000 prisoners at the disposal of the building of the new Buna Works of the I.G. Farben. At the same time he ordered the erection of a POW camp for 100 000 Russian prisoners, near BIRKENAU.*

*The number of prisoners grew daily in spite of my repeated interventions that billets were not sufficient, and further intakes were sent to me. Epidemic diseases were unavoidable because medical provisions were inadequate. The death rate rose accordingly. As prisoners were not buried, crematoriums had to be installed.*

*In 1941 the first intakes of Jews came from Slovakia and Upper Silesia. People unfit to work were gassed in a room at the crematorium in accordance with an order which HIMMLER gave to me personally.*

*I was ordered to see HIMMLER in BERLIN in June 1941 and he told me, approximately, the following: The Fuehrer ordered the solution of the Jewish Question in Europe. A few so-called Vernichtungslager are existing in the General Government (BELZEK near RAVA RUSKA East Poland Tublinka near MALINA on the river Bug, and WOLZEK near Lublin).<sup>307</sup>*

The first thing we notice upon reviewing this excerpt is that Höss is providing two different narratives. According to the first two paragraphs, in 1941 Himmler visited Auschwitz in order to direct the expansion of the camp (which would have meant Birkenau) with a view to establishing a quarantine camp. The establishment of a quarantine camp in turn implies a function similar to the disinfection center established at Auschwitz twenty years earlier by the Americans, while the quarantine itself implies the later transfer of prisoners into Germany for labor purposes. The increased transports and the increasing epidemics (which presumably would have meant 1942) accord with all sources, and provide a ready explanation for the construction of the crematoriums which were planned in the summer of 1942 and were completed in the spring of 1943.

On the other hand, the very next two paragraphs tell a completely different story, albeit one more or less consistent with the affidavit of April 5. According to this one, Höss was called to Berlin in June 1941 for a meeting with Himmler, and was told to arrange for the extermination of the Jews. For this reason, Höss claims, he conducted a tour of the other extermination camps in 1942; nonetheless, he also

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307 NO-1210.

states that at the 1941 meeting he was told:

I had to make the preparations at once. He [Himmler] wanted the exact construction plans in accordance with this instruction in four weeks.<sup>308</sup>

In other words, from June 1941, Höss was now to be constructing crematoriums with gas chambers for the purpose of exterminating the Jewish people.

Before proceeding with a comparison of these two narratives, there are three points of detail to establish. The first is the date of Höss' tour of the other extermination camps. This matter came up in the interrogation of April 3, 1946, in the morning session (page 7):

Q. To come back to the facts about your trip to Treblinka. If I understand you correctly, you told me the other day that you visited Treblinka in 1941.

A. Yes.

Q. And in another statement by you, made at another place, you said you visited Treblinka in 1942. Which year is correct?

A. 1941 is correct. If I said 1942, it was incorrect.<sup>309</sup>

The second point of detail concerns the timing of the order Höss claimed to have received from Himmler. This was addressed during the first interrogation of April 1, 1946 (page 18–19):

Q. But you said you received the order from the Reichsfuehrer SS in person.

A. Yes.

Q. About July, 1941? Where did you see him?

A. I was ordered to him in Berlin.

Q. Are you sure it was after the Russian campaign had started?

A. No, it was before the Russian campaign had started.

Q. Then it couldn't have been in July.

A. I cannot remember the exact month, but I know it was before the date that the Russian campaign was launched.<sup>310</sup>

The third and final point of detail concerns the mysterious “Wolzek” camp, described on March 16 as “near Lublin” and therefore clearly a garbling of “Majdanek,” which was actually the name of the suburb of Lublin where the camp was situated. This came up in the interrogation of April 4, 1946, in the afternoon session (page 5), during the following exchange:

<sup>308</sup> Ibid., This follows directly from the paragraph quoted above.

<sup>309</sup> Interrogation of Hoess, April 3, 1946, M 1270, roll 7.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

Q. Did the camps in the East come under the Inspectorate of the Concentration Camps?

A. Only those that I mentioned in the Baltic countries, as those labor camps belonging to the Riga territory, and Lublin, Warsaw, and Krakow, which I mentioned before.

Q. How about Treblinka, Wolzek, and Belzek?

A. They came under the commander of the Security Police and Higher SS and Police Leader of Krakow.

Therefore, with respect to the second narrative of the March 16, 1946, affidavit we can say that there is no doubt that Höss claimed his meeting with Himmler took place in June 1941, that he inspected the other extermination camps at that time, and that he prepared plans for gas chambers and crematoriums within a few weeks of that meeting: all of these claims are objectively false. The reference to “Wolzek” is of importance mainly because its mention by the American interrogator establishes that the March 16, 1946, affidavit was used as the basis for these interrogations, as well as for the drafting of the April 5, 1946, affidavit.

At this point we have to exercise some judgment, and attempt to reconstruct the sequence of events. In the first two paragraphs of his March 16 description of events at Auschwitz, Höss sets forth a narrative that corresponds with all currently known facts about the camp. In other words, the account is objectively true; the only questionable aspect concerns the rationale behind the construction of the crematoriums. On the other hand, in the second two paragraphs Höss provides a narrative that cannot possibly be true, but which accords with conventional wisdom in a general sense in terms of crematorium construction and Jewish exterminations. It is doubtful if Höss, unbidden, would have told two completely different stories one right after the other. We surmise therefore that Höss was pressured, probably by sleep deprivation, at some point between the two narratives.

Now the question concerns the order of the stories. We can imagine a situation where Höss might have been pressured after the first narrative in order to produce the second one, but it is not believable that Höss would have been pressured to produce the first one after freely offering the second. The reason should be obvious: the first narrative provides an innocuous rationale for both the construction of Birkenau and the crematoriums, and furthermore contradicts the second narrative. It follows therefore that the first narrative was the original narrative that Höss offered.

But was that initial narrative true? We know that it does not contradict our current knowledge about the camp, except, again, with regard to a possibly self-serving explanation for constructing the crematoriums. But the real point is not the objective truth of the initial narrative as much as the fact that the apparent pressure subse-

quently applied tells us that his interrogators did not believe it. They were, however, apparently satisfied with the second narrative, including other details which Höss offered further on, including such statements as:

*I imagine about 3,000,000 people were put to death, about 2,500,000 were put through the gas chambers. Those numbers are officially put down and personal experiences also by Obersturmbannführer EICHMANN in a report to the specialist on Jews in the RSHA to be passed on to HIMMLER. Those people were mostly Jews. I personally remember during my time as Camp Commandant at Auschwitz the order from the Gestapo to gas 70,000 Russian Prisoners of war which I did. The highest number of prisoners put through the gas chambers at AUSCHWITZ was 10,000 in one day. The limit of what the installations could do. I also remember the big transports which arrived: 90,000 from Slovakia, 85,000 from Greece, 110,000 from France, 20,000 from Belgium, 90,000 from Holland, 400,000 from Hungary, 250,000 from Poland and Upper Silesia and 100,000 from Germany and Theresienstadt.<sup>311</sup>*

Here we have another implicit contradiction: first, the claim that three million were put to death, of which 2.5 million were gassed, and that they were “mostly Jews,” but that at the same time only slightly over one million Jews “arrived” at the camp. As already noted, the 2.5–3 million range is false, and was never supported by any written document. But the distribution of the Jewish transports is remarkably consistent with numbers Höss would come back to again and again, and with the exception of the Hungarian and Polish numbers, accords more or less with universally accepted calculations. At this point, we will simply note that Höss references the “arrival” of these Jews but not their deaths.

The final question we have to deal with here is the state of mind of his interrogators. If the first narrative is correct, and the second narrative false, why would his interrogators allow him to make what in retrospect are such obvious errors? The simplest explanation is that his interrogators did not recognize the errors as such, which indicates that they were acting more or less in good faith, but under a cloud of ignorance. Interrogating the commandant of Auschwitz, with a general sense of what had happened, based on such documents as the WRB Report, the Soviet Special Commission on Auschwitz, and the ongoing International Military Tribunal, the interrogators simply led the interrogation—and the sleep deprivation—in order to get him to provide a version of events that would correspond not so much with what they knew, but what they felt would be the truth.

The erroneous details of the March 16, 1946, affidavit loom larger when we realize that all of the interrogations leading up to the preparation of the April 5 affidavit are based on it, in an almost literal page by page sequence. We also find, in reviewing those early April interrogations, that Höss coolly repeats again and again the

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311 NO-1210.

same false statements from the prior affidavit—sometimes, admittedly, with some confusion, which usually led to some prompting by the Americans as to where he should be going with his answers.

But the interrelationship of the materials is very important. Reading the interrogations of April 1–4, 1946 in isolation, one is generally impressed with the manner in which Höss frankly describes the development of an extermination program. He must be telling the truth. On the other hand, the researcher is likely to be crestfallen as Höss repeats other statements that couldn't possibly be true. He must, for some reason, be lying. It is only after comparing the various statements that one begins to understand that by April 1946 Höss was mechanically repeating the story elicited from him in March, and that narrative structure, including the 1941 extermination order and the visits to nonexistent camps, would be a feature of all subsequent affidavits.

Within a few weeks, Höss was transferred to Poland, where he was extensively interrogated prior to hearings in Krakow in December 1946.<sup>312</sup> A number of affidavits were prepared in November, and these, stitched together with the memoirs he penciled in early 1947, have frequently been issued as his “Autobiography.”<sup>313</sup> A feature of one of these affidavits, “The Final Solution of the Jewish Question,” contains elements that differ from the previous affidavits but retains most of the same errors. The main feature of this affidavit is that Höss distanced himself from the figure of 2.5–3 million victims, which he blamed on Eichmann and British torture, while repeating the distribution by nationality of about one million Jewish arrivals.<sup>314</sup>

It is frequently stated that the “Autobiography” was composed in its entirety after Höss was sentenced to death, so that he would have had no reason to lie or shade the truth.<sup>315</sup> This does not appear to be accurate. Whatever the determination of the Krakow hearings, Höss was not put on trial until March 11 of 1947, the trial lasting for almost three weeks.<sup>316</sup> At his trial, Höss admitted to all charges and directed all of his questions to witnesses with a view to bringing down the total number of victims, cited in the indictment as “about 300,000 camp registered inmates,” “about 4,000,000 people mainly Jews brought to the camp from different European countries to be killed upon their arrival,” and twelve thousand Soviet POWs.<sup>317</sup> On the other hand, Höss did contradict his November 1946 affidavit in court by claiming that the total killed was 2.5 million.<sup>318</sup> It appears that Höss' questioning had

<sup>312</sup> Broszat, ed., *Kommandant*, 8-10; Porter, *Nuremberg*, discusses this in detail. See also *Law-Reports of Trials of War Criminals*, The United Nations War Crimes Commission, vol. 7.

<sup>313</sup> Compare the arrangement of Broszat, who includes the essay on the “Final Solution” as an addendum, and Paskuly (ed.), who leads with this document in Höss, *Death Dealer*. I feel justified in calling these documents affidavits because (a) they were all signed and dated, (b) there were attempts to introduce some of them as bona fide affidavits during the NMT, and (c) Broszat claims that they were prepared in “close connection” with the interrogations by presiding judge Jan Sehn.

<sup>314</sup> Höss, *Death Dealer*.

<sup>315</sup> Höss, *Death Dealer*; compare Paskuly's comments in the Foreword, 22.

<sup>316</sup> *Law-Reports of Trials of War Criminals*, vol. 7.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>318</sup> Höss, testimony March 17, 1947 entered into evidence for the Eichmann trial; see the complete transcripts at [www.](http://www.)

some effect: in its verdict, the court determined that “an undetermined number of people, at least 2,500,000, mainly Jews” were murdered.<sup>319</sup>

Höss was sentenced to death on April 2, 1947, by the Supreme National Tribunal of Poland, just two weeks before he was hanged, and two months after his memoirs had been completed.<sup>320</sup> The memoirs themselves are a model of incoherence and contradiction, containing a number of demonstrable untruths, as for example the reference to the secret files recording the “several millions” of Germans who were killed in the Anglo-American bombing campaign.<sup>321</sup> Nevertheless the memoirs, or more precisely the November affidavit on the “Final Solution” attached to them to form the “Autobiography,” remain the most frequently cited source for the reality of the gassing claim,<sup>322</sup> although what actually happens is that the mere existence of these writings is used to give retroactive authority to the problematic April 5, 1946 affidavit, which, as we have seen, leads back to the March 16, 1946 affidavit, which contained numerous false statements extracted under torture.

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nizkor.org.

319 *Law-Reports of Trials of War Criminals*, vol. 7.

320 *Ibid.*

321 Höss, *Death Dealer*, 171, and, inter alia, compare his final letters to wife and children.

322 For example, on the subject of the Final Solution in Poland, Norman Davies simply transcribes excerpts in his *God's Playground*, vol. 2.



## **9. INTERPRETING DOCUMENTS AND THE POSTWAR LITERATURE**

*Quality of documents offered at Nuremberg. —Documents offered as indicative of gassing actually indicate something else. —The Wetzel-Lohse correspondence. —The diary of Dr. Kremer. —Postwar literature emerging in this period: Olga Lengyel, Miklos Nyiszli. —Clear influence of claims in Soviet report. —Inaccuracy of details and unreliability of descriptions. The main conduit for cultural awareness of the gassing claim. —The absence of evidence is considered the proof of the gassing claim: the conspiratorial nature of the gassing claim.*



A DISCUSSION of Höss' various confessions, and particularly those in the spring of 1946, leads naturally to the quality and context of the documentary evidence offered at the Nuremberg trials.<sup>323</sup> Thousands of documents were submitted; but the documents were selected and submitted with a view to convict, not to understand. A. J. P. Taylor recognized this years ago:<sup>324</sup>

*The evidence of which there is too much is that collected for the trials of war-criminals in Nuremberg. Though these documents look imposing in their endless volumes, they are dangerous material for a historian to use. They were collected, hastily and almost at random, as a basis for lawyer's briefs. This is not how a historian would proceed. The lawyer aims to make a case; the historian wishes to understand a situation. The evidence which convinces lawyers often fails to satisfy us; our methods seem singularly imprecise to them. But even lawyers must now have qualms about the evidence at Nuremberg. The documents were chosen not to demonstrate the war-guilt of the men on trial, but to conceal that of the prosecuting Powers. [...] The verdict preceded the tribunal; and the documents were brought in to sustain a conclusion which had already been settled. Of course the documents are genuine. But they are "loaded"; and anyone who relies on them finds it almost impossible to escape from the load with which they are charged.*

It is advisable therefore to pause momentarily and look at some of the documents that were presented as proof of exterminations, and particularly gas exterminations.

It is surprising to note that it appears no documents referencing gas chambers were entered into the record of the International Military Tribunal, if we exclude affidavits and testimony.<sup>325</sup> Most of the few documents that we have were recorded by the Nuremberg Military Tribunal, an American court that ran from 1946 to 1949, and which comprised twelve cases against the Nazi leadership. The most important of these, in terms of the gassing claim, was Case #4, the "Concentration Camp Case," which occupied most of 1947. Of the seven hundred documents

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<sup>323</sup> Such studies do not exist. Of the dozen or so books on the Nuremberg trials in the past sixty years that are not strictly memoirs, the majority are concerned either with the defendants in a biographical format, or concerned with enumerating the actual flow of the trial itself.

<sup>324</sup> A. J. P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War*, 13.

<sup>325</sup> Based on a review of the documentary lists provided with the publication of the International Military Tribunal; as reproduced in ed. James J. Sanchez, et al., *Nuremberg War Crimes Trials Online*, vol. 1. This is a CD-ROM which contains all of the proceedings of the IMT and NMT: the production suffered from inaccurate scanning, so numerical and spelling errors abound. However, when cross-checked to the original published volumes it is a valuable source. Two obvious exceptions to the statement concerning documents on gas chambers at the IMT would be 501-PS, containing documents pertaining to the use of gas vans, and apparently originally discovered by the Soviets in 1943, and various Zyklon invoices contributed by Kurt Gerstein, given the number 1553-PS. However, given the wide use of Zyklon for disinfestation, as noted earlier, these last cannot be given any probative weight.

entered by the prosecution, only four can be interpreted as referencing gas chambers: NO-4473, the so-called “*Vergasungskeller*” letter; NO-4465, a letter referencing “three gas chambers” specified as “*gasdichte Türme*”; and NO-4344 and -4345, which reference the construction of “extermination chambers” specified as “*Entwesungskammern*” at the concentration camp of Gross-Rosen.<sup>326</sup>

Two of these documents are definite mistranslations, and the third is quite possibly so. As we have seen, “*Entwesungskammern*” were standard delousing and disinfection chambers, and had nothing to do with extermination gas chambers. Similarly, “*gasdichte Türme*” are better translated as “gastight turrets” or “towers” but in any case cannot be associated with “gas chambers.” Finally, as we have seen, “*vergasen*” (to gas) was widely used as a synonym for “*begasen*” (to fumigate)—even in Auschwitz documents<sup>327</sup>—and has no necessary relationship to extermination gassing. The fact that at least two of these documents were clearly misused goes far to prove the argument that in the immediate postwar period the gassing claim was buttressed by the ignorant misuse of German documents taken completely out of context.

Probably for this reason, present-day arguments in favor of the mass gassing claim rarely depend on such obvious mistakes, but rather on a second order of documentation that suggests, without directly attesting to, the existence of mass gassing.<sup>328</sup>

One example concerns a draft memo, the so-called Wetzel-Lohse correspondence, concerning conditions around Riga, and entered into the Nuremberg Military Tribunal as NO-365. The draft letter mentions putting large numbers of Jews into forced labor, and discusses the need for building the necessary “*Unterkünfte*” with the appropriate “*Vergasungsapparate*.”<sup>329</sup> In the context of the disinfection literature, however, this is clearly a reference to Labor Service huts that would be equipped with the standard *Entwesungskammern* for delousing clothing.<sup>330</sup> Yet this same document has been occasionally put forth as evidence of a homicidal gassing program, even though there is no material or documentary support for that interpretation, and even though no one claims today that there were any homicidal gas chambers in Riga.<sup>331</sup>

<sup>326</sup> Based on a review of the documents listed in the “Concentration Camps Case,” more formally *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals under Control Council Law No. 10* vol. 5, *United States v. Oswald Pohl, et. al. (Case 4: ‘Pohl Case’)*.

<sup>327</sup> The most obvious of these is the diary of Dr. Kremer, discussed below. Another well-known document concerns a special order from Commandant Höss of Auschwitz dated August 12, 1942, concerning the potential for accidents in airing out spaces that have been gassed (*Vergasungen*) due to the lower content of odor agent in the Zyklon B then in use. The document, uncatalogued in the archives of the Polish State Auschwitz Museum, is reproduced in Pressac, *Auschwitz: Technique and Operation*, 201.

<sup>328</sup> A major exception concerns the documentation unearthed by J. C. Pressac in the 1980s, and contained in *Auschwitz Technique and Operation*. The quality of Pressac’s evidence is discussed in Section 14.

<sup>329</sup> Document quoted in Ernst Klee, ed., *Dokumente zur ‘Euthanasie,’* 271f.

<sup>330</sup> Such descriptions and floor plans are legion in the German disinfection literature. I cite here the floor plan contained in Stangelmeyer, “Genormte, zerlegbare Rohrleitungsnetze.”

<sup>331</sup> Of course, revisionists never argued the existence of homicidal gas chambers at Riga, but the traditional view did until well into the 1950s, e.g., Léon Poliakov, *Harvest of Hate*. See the response to a critic, “Response to J. McCarthy on NO-365, The Wetzel-Lohse Correspondence.” Gerald Fleming, *Hitler and the Final Solution*, made a connection between this memo

Another example concerns the diary of Dr. Kremer, who arrived at Auschwitz at the beginning of September 1942.<sup>332</sup> The diary makes one reference to Zyklon B, in the unambiguous context of a barracks fumigation (“*Vergasung eines Blocks*”), and then goes on to record the arrival of convoy after convoy of Western Jews at Auschwitz at a time when typhus was rampant and killing thousands there. Yet this document, unambiguous on its face, is constantly advanced as proof of a mass gas extermination campaign. Two quotes are usually given:<sup>333</sup>

September 5, 1942. In the morning attended a Sonderaktion from the women’s concentration camp (Muslims); the most dreadful of horrors. Hschf. Thilo—army doctor—was right when he said to me that this was the anus mundi. In the evening towards 8:00 attended another Sonderaktion from Holland. Because of the special rations they get a fifth of a liter of schnapps, 5 cigarettes, 100 g salami and bread, the men all clamor to take part in such actions. [...]

October 18, 1942. Attended 11th Sonderaktion (Dutch) in cold wet weather this morning, Sunday. Horrible scenes with three women who begged us for their bare lives.<sup>334</sup>

It is conceivable that what Kremer is describing here are selections for hospitalization, disinfection, or even euthanasia.<sup>335</sup> But it is extremely unlikely that a gassing process is being described. For example, the *Sonderaktionen* (special actions) appear to be taking place outside, and there is a rush of SS men who wish to participate for extra rations. Yet, according to Pery Broad’s writing, this is precisely the description of the rewards given to the SS men for helping in the processing of a new transport, not mass murder and not gas exterminations.<sup>336</sup> Moreover, gasings would not take place outside nor would they require large participation—the role of the SS in the gasings was supposed to have been limited to one or two individuals throwing the cans of Zyklon down some kind of chute.<sup>337</sup>

Nor are the terrified Dutch women determinative of mass murder. We know that Thomas Mann had broadcast rumors of gasings (specifically, train gasings)

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and gassing vans, but “huts” are not “vans.” The idea that the *Vergasungsapparate* were “gas vans” seemed to originate at the Eichmann trial. It is interesting to note that both Eichmann and his counsel Servatius considered this document a forgery. See Eichmann transcripts at [www.nizkor.org](http://www.nizkor.org).

332 Dr. Kremer’s diary was a staple of the first Auschwitz trial in 1946; Kremer was imprisoned for ten years and then returned to Germany. The relevant portions of the diary have been reproduced in Ernst Klee, et al., eds., “*Schöne Zeiten*,” 231–241, as well as in the English translation, *The Good Old Days*. Robert Faurisson has contributed an important discussion of Kremer’s diary, his imprisonment, and aftermath, “Confessions of SS Men Who Were at Auschwitz,” *JHR* 2, no 2 (Summer 1981).

333 Klee et al., eds., “*Schöne Zeiten*,” 233, 234, 237.

334 Originally I had relied on the English translation in Klee, et al., eds., *The Good Old Days*, which construed “*nackte um Leben*” to mean “naked women ... begging for their lives,” etc. However, this is wrong, and furthermore there are other mistranslations in this volume: thus, in a record of Stark’s testimony about Auschwitz, “*Luftschutz*” is translated as “airtight.”

335 This last appears to be the interpretation of Robert Faurisson, who also believes that the “last bunker” in question is the famous “Block 11” at the *Stammlager*.

336 Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle*, 809.

337 The normal scenario at Auschwitz, as alleged, involved one or two individuals who would empty cans into overhead apertures (for crematoriums I, II, and III), or a single individual who would open a can, climb a ladder, and throw the contents through a window (crematoriums IV and V).

on the 27th of September.<sup>338</sup> We further know that Anne Frank learned of such gassing rumors from the “English radio” in Holland on the 9th of October.<sup>339</sup> Other European Jews, recalling the war years, also claim to have regularly listened to the BBC.<sup>340</sup> So we have every reason to believe that many of these Dutch deportees were at least aware of these kinds of rumors. Regardless of the eventual fate of these people, since the Dutch Jews lost many lives in the camp system, there is a valid reason for suspecting that the reaction of the Dutch women was, in this particular instance, one of panic and hysteria. This is further borne out by the fact that, after the war, Dr. Kremer told his interrogators where the diary was, believing that its contents would exonerate him.<sup>341</sup>

Such examples as these could be multiplied many times over, although not that many times, because the documentary basis for the gassing claim is so thin. The simple fact remains that most of the documents generated at Nuremberg that were said to apply to mass gas extermination are simple references to known German delousing and disinfection procedures, or else benign documents onto which a gassing interpretation has been placed. It is noteworthy that those who use these documents as a means of proving the mass gassing claim tend to give short shrift either to the disinfection use of Zyklon B, German disinfection procedures in general, or the rampant epidemics that probably killed hundreds of thousands in the camps.<sup>342</sup>

The same situation pertains to documents that claim to prove the extermination program per se. The vast majority of these involve the substitution of terms. In other words, the Germans had a policy of deporting Jews to Eastern Europe (*Evakuierung nach dem Osten, Umsiedlung*), drawing off the able-bodied for labor or the unfit for concentration in ghettos, through special actions (*Sonderaktionen*) where selections (*Selektionen*) were made, by way of achieving a final solution (*Endlösung*) to the Jewish problem in Europe.<sup>343</sup> But according to the gas extermination interpretation, following on the assertions of Höttl and Wisliceny, all of these terms were simply code words for gas extermination.

The problem is that this interpretation is undercut by many other documents, for example, by the following extract from the summer of 1942, when the “Final

338 Stiglich, *Auschwitz*, 112-113.

339 Anne Frank, *The Diary of a Young Girl: Definitive Edition*, 53.

340 E.g., Rothschild, ed., *Voices*, 129, 153.

341 Stiglich, *Auschwitz*, 92, quotes Langbein to different effect; but see Faurission's discussion of the sequel, “Confessions of SS Men Who Were at Auschwitz.”

342 See Hilberg's remark, *Destruction* (1st ed.), 345; also Gilbert, *Auschwitz*, who scants references to the toll of the epidemics. According to Rudolf, “Holocaust Victims: A Statistical Analysis,” in Rudolf, ed., *Dissecting the Holocaust*, 181-214, 300,000 died in the concentration camp system (212), officially. Taking into consideration the eastern camps (which are not normally counted), an estimate of hundreds of thousands dead seems reasonable for the camps alone.

343 On the concept of esoteric speech involved here, Dawidowicz has made the most extended arguments in *War against the Jews* (1975). However well put these arguments, they are unconvincing, first, because as she acknowledges esoteric (or “Aesopian”) speech is a function of powerless minorities, not empowered ones; second, because under this assumption it presumes a meaning of the code that has never been demonstrated; and third, because she overreaches the thesis and attempts to argue that the Madagascar proposal was also a “code word,” a concept which most historians reject, partly because of documents such as Rademacher's 1942 letter. See [www.codoh.com/incon/inconmad.html](http://www.codoh.com/incon/inconmad.html).

Solution” had been in effect for almost a year:

*In order to get initial control over the Jews, regardless of whatever measures may be taken later, Jewish Councils of Elders have been appointed which are responsible to the Security Police and Security Service for the conduct of their fellow Jews (Rassengenossen). Moreover, the registration and concentration of the Jews in ghettos have been started.... With these measures, the foundations for the Final Solution of the Jewish Problem—planned for a later time—have been laid in the territory of Byelorussia (Weissruthenien)*<sup>344</sup>

As well as by Hitler’s own words in the fall of 1941:

*From the rostrum of the Reichstag, I prophesied [in 1939] to Jewry that, in the event of the war’s proving inevitable, the Jew would disappear from Europe. That race of criminals has on its conscience the million dead of the First World War and now already hundreds of thousands more. Let nobody tell me that all the same we can’t park them in the marshy parts of Russia! Who’s worrying about our troops? It’s not a bad idea, by the way, that public rumor attributes to us a plan to exterminate the Jews. Terror is a salutary thing.*<sup>345</sup>

Hitler’s interlocutors at this particular table talk were Himmler and Heydrich: therefore, to read this text as something other than what it says, one would have Hitler dissembling to the two main architects of his anti-Jewish policy.<sup>346</sup> It is also worth pointing out that the “marshy parts of Russia” is a reference to Byelorussia (Belarus).

Finally the interpretation of Final Solution as a mass murder policy is undercut by a document shown by David Irving in his most recent book on Nuremberg, in which Staatsekretär Franz Schlegelberg wrote, in the spring of 1942, that Dr. Hans Lammers had phoned to tell him that Hitler had repeatedly said that the Final Solution was to be postponed until after the war. The document was missing for many years.<sup>347</sup>

Therefore, to maintain that these documents pertain to an extermination plan, one must argue that sometimes these words meant extermination, and sometimes they did not. The reader is left to ponder how the German bureaucracy would ever

<sup>344</sup> A communication from the SD of the SS, NO-5156, written June 26, 1942, quoted in Trunk, *Judenrat*, 260.

<sup>345</sup> Another mistranslation; this one became apparent during the Irving-Lipstadt trial. The original final phrase reads, “*Es ist gut, wenn uns der Schrecken vorangeht, dass wir das Judentum ausrotten*,” which might be better rendered, “It’s good if the word gets around that we are out to destroy Jewry.” The original translator, Weidenfeld, simply attempted to explain the meaning of that statement, I believe appropriately, but it would have been better done in an annotation. The document, as well as much else particularly relevant here, may be found on Irving’s website at [www.fpp.co.uk](http://www.fpp.co.uk).

<sup>346</sup> Ron Rosenbaum, “Explaining Hitler,” in *The New Yorker*, May 1, 1995, 50-73, 60; in 1998 Rosenbaum’s writings were expanded into book form. Further on the issue of the “Hitler Order,” see [www.codoh.com/incon/inconorders.html](http://www.codoh.com/incon/inconorders.html).

The focus that historians of this subject have in attempting to prove Hitler’s culpability seems rather tendentious: if no order has surfaced, then there is no reason to presume that one ever existed. This has not prevented historians from going into extended arguments over exactly when this hypothetical order was issued; see Browning, “Beyond ‘Intentionalism’ and ‘Functionalism’: The Decision for the Final Solution Reconsidered,” in Browning, *Path to Genocide*.

<sup>347</sup> Irving, *Nuremberg*, 142.

have been able to function under such conditions, if such was the case.

Beginning in 1946, and therefore concurrent with the introduction of these documents at the International Military Tribunal, a number of personal eyewitness accounts were published for mass circulation. These included, among others, Olga Lengyel's *I Survived Hitler's Ovens* and Miklos Nyiszli's *Auschwitz: A Doctor's Eyewitness Account*.<sup>348</sup>

It seems clear when reviewing this literature that it was written in a deliberately sensational style meant to appeal to the lowest common denominator in reading tastes. Lengyel's book, for example, is full of lurid gossip about Irma Grese, her supposed affair with the notorious Dr. Mengerle [sic], grotesque medical experiments, and lesbian affairs among the women inmates. Nyiszli is an endless series of hard-to-believe mass murders, by various means. On the other hand, Nyiszli is considered an important source by most Holocaust historians, even though, by the time his book achieved prominence in the West in 1953, he was already dead and therefore incapable of being cross-examined.<sup>349</sup>

The books, which, incidentally, were both written by Hungarian physicians, are clearly derivative of the Soviet Special Commission on Auschwitz. This is made clear not only by the number of victims (Nyiszli cites 4 million, Lengyel cites 1.4 million in the summer of 1944, that is, on the Soviet scale), but also by the general arrangement of gas chambers and crematoriums, the precise arrangement of the burning pits, and the numerous descriptions of medical experiments. In fact, when read in conjunction with the Soviet report these two books read almost like novelizations of that document. But it is precisely where the Soviets are silent in their report, that is, on the actual layout and conduct of the gassing process, that Drs. Lengyel and Nyiszli make mistakes. Thus Dr. Nyiszli makes a number of observations about the size of the crematoriums and purported gas chambers that are clearly wrong,<sup>350</sup> while Dr. Lengyel writes that the gas crystals were introduced from a trapdoor on top of the chamber, and that a glass porthole had been fitted into the trap for observing the operation, which contradicts the current version.<sup>351</sup>

Such sensational and inaccurate studies are doubtless the most popular medium whereby knowledge of the mass gassing claim has been disseminated. But as we have seen, these treatments are heavily indebted to, if not completely derived from,

<sup>348</sup> Olga Lengyel, *I Survived Hitler's Ovens* (aka *Five Chimneys*); Miklos Nyiszli, *Auschwitz: A Doctor's Eyewitness Account*.

<sup>349</sup> Hilberg uses both Lengyel and Nyiszli extensively to describe camp conditions. Pressac also relies heavily on Nyiszli in *Auschwitz: Technique and Operation*, 469-480. Controversy over Nyiszli's identity has been constant since Paul Rassinier investigated the matter at the time that Nyiszli's memoirs first achieved broad circulation in the West, when published in *Les temps moderne* in 1953. See Butz, *Hoax*, 166; Rassinier, *Debunking*, 178-182.

<sup>350</sup> Nyiszli, *Auschwitz*, Butz, *Hoax*, 166, Rassinier, *Debunking*, 178-182, and consider Pressac's rationalization of this fact in *Auschwitz: Technique and Operation*.

<sup>351</sup> Lengyel, *I Survived Hitler's Ovens*, 68-70. The idea that the holes in the roof were windows appears to derive from the WRB report, which described three holes, or, in the French translation, "*fenêtres*" (windows, openings; the original English language WRB report used the word "traps"). The idea of "windows" was later stated as fact by eyewitness Bielski (Ryba) at the NMT "Concentration Camp" trial (consult the transcripts for NMT Case 4), although he appeared to back away from this claim in later testimony. In the appendix to Pierre Vidal-Naquet's *Un Eichmann de papier* (1980, at [www.anti-rev.org](http://www.anti-rev.org)) there is an appendix by Pitch Bloch in which Bloch describes reading in 1944 a Swiss version of what was essentially the WRB report, which described "*trois fenêtres*" (three openings, but could also mean three windows). We might consider this an object lesson of the way in which false claims develop, as well as of the enduring influence of the WRB report.

the Canonical Holocaust of the Soviet Special Commission on Auschwitz and other camps. That decreases their historical value greatly.

Yet what has happened over time is that the exaggerated claims in these sensationalist efforts have multiplied and acquired an authority almost equal to that of the Nuremberg court itself. Once the mass gassing claim was accepted without adequate documentary or material support, its defenders were in no position to deny the claim of streams of melted human fat gathered from the runoff of burning corpses, and then either made into soap or ladled back onto the pyre to expedite the burning.<sup>352</sup>

In the fall of 1946, the International Military Tribunal gave its final verdict, and endorsed both the gassing claim and the soap-making claim.<sup>353</sup> The allegations having thus officially passed into the historical record, any further proof would have been considered superfluous. But the problem, as we have seen so far, is that little in the way of proof was offered at Nuremberg.

The most troubling aspect of the mass gassing claim is not that it was made on the basis of slender or nonexistent evidence. It is rather that nothing has been produced over the past fifty years that supports the claim. In the past several years numerous archives have been opened to study, and the British government has released many of its ULTRA decrypts for scholarly use, along with the transcripts of conversations among detained Germans that were secretly recorded.<sup>354</sup> The tapes and decrypts indicate a knowledge of mass shootings as far back as the summer of 1941, as well as the confessions of SS officers who took part in such procedures, as well as secret concentration camp radio traffic, including that of Auschwitz, but there is nothing in any of these materials about gassing.<sup>355</sup>

This should represent a serious problem for historians. To maintain the gas extermination claim, purely on the basis of the documentation at Nuremberg, is also to maintain that it was carried out with such stealth and cunning that no record was ever made, not even in secret radio traffic or eavesdropped conversations. Because of the broad currency of the gassing claim, it is sometimes said that to deny it is to accuse the Jewish people of a grand conspiracy to create it. But the truth would seem to be the other way around: given the lack of evidence, it is those who assert that mass gassings took place who are in the position of having to explain why the evidence does not exist. They are the ones who end up asserting the existence of a grand conspiracy.

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<sup>352</sup> The testimony of Henryk Tauber, from May 1945, reproduced in Pressac, *Auschwitz: Technique and Operation*, 481-502. Pressac considers this "95 percent accurate."

<sup>353</sup> Quoted in Porter, *Made in Russia*; Irving, *Nuremberg*, esp. 236.

<sup>354</sup> Irving, *Nuremberg*, 275-277. Richard Breitman, *Official Secrets*, was the first book to utilize the ULTRA decodes.

<sup>355</sup> I have let this sentence stand but it is no longer accurate. In 2001, Richard Overy published *Interrogations*, which was a compendium of Nuremberg-era interrogations and eavesdropping on prisoners. There is one brief recorded conversation (371f) which describes something similar to the mass gassing scenario; however, it is inaccurate and clearly hearsay. The extent to which it may have been influenced by postwar revelations is hard to determine.



## **10. RETROFITTING THE EUTHANASIA CAMPAIGN**

*Euthanasia program begins 1939. —Evidence indicates lethal injections were used. —German people begin to rumor poison gas and death ray usage because the bodies are cremated, by 1940. —Strong opposition of German people. —In summer 1945, narratives of euthanasia killings emerge; these use the same materials (double-doored Apparate) and procedure for the now familiar shower-gas-burning sequence. —Shower element does not fit the euthanasia procedure. —Confusion of deceptions. —Concept transference, compare the First World War. —Conclusion: euthanasia gassing narratives derived from extermination gassing narratives, but rumors of gas usage came first. —Demonstrated German fear of poison gas and cremation.*



SO FAR WE HAVE SEEN that through the spring of 1946 the gassing claim continued to develop, acquiring weight from authoritative reports and the judicial notice of the IMT Tribunal, which by its rules accepted any evidence proffered by the prosecution as fact. The gassing claim acquired immediacy and broad acceptance through the medium of popular paperbacks, graphic photos, and newsreel footage. We recall that the extermination claim had fastened on the now familiar shower-gas-burning sequence by the summer of 1942, and beginning in the summer of 1944 that claim was imposed upon the physical facts of the camps. By the summer of 1945, the mass gassing claim, as a “fact of common knowledge,” had been saturating popular consciousness for four years, even though up to this point, as we have seen, no direct material or documentary evidence had been offered in its support. The next development, starting in September 1945, and culminating in the affidavit and testimony of Konrad Morgen in the summer of 1946, was remarkable: the gassing claim, and specifically the shower-gas-burning sequence, was now backdated to well before spring of 1942, to the National Socialist euthanasia program, and, moreover, the two processes were linked.

That there was a euthanasia campaign, beginning in the fall of 1939, is not in dispute.<sup>356</sup> The program was enacted by a secret Hitler decree and so the nature and the processes of the program were never officially discussed. The program was meant to provide for the mercy killing of the insane, and others who suffered severe mental and physical handicaps, or were near death. The program also provided for the euthanizing of children with severe disabilities.<sup>357</sup> The severe mental or physical limitations of the victims is something that should be kept in mind, because of the euthanasia scenarios that would emerge beginning in the fall of 1945.<sup>358</sup>

The euthanasia program generated many rumors that indicated the strong opposition of the German people. In December 1941, Thomas Mann claimed over the BBC that several thousand individuals had already been killed in the euthanasia program with poison gas.<sup>359</sup> There had been widespread rumors that year, prompt-

<sup>356</sup> Main texts on the euthanasia program are Ernst Klee, ed., *Dokumente* and Ernst Klee, “Euthanasie.” In English, there is a substantial section on euthanasia in Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism, 1919–1945*, vol. 3. To these might be added Robert J. Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors*, and Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide*. The first three of these texts are valuable because they represent the sum of the documentary evidence gathered or proffered to demonstrate that euthanasia was carried out by means of poison gas. Friedlander’s text is valuable because it is based on the extensive interrogations and trial records in various postwar euthanasia trials. There are two other ways in which Friedlander’s book is particularly valuable. First, because he makes clear the kinds of pressure that was brought to bear in euthanasia interrogations; see for example, 198 and 193. Second, because his review of interrogations indicates that the first admission of euthanasia gassing occurred during the interrogation of Karl Brandt, September 2, 1945, that is, contemporaneous with the Belsen trial, which began September 17. Friedlander considers many of Brandt’s statements as “bizarre,” as well they might be, especially if they are taken at face value.

<sup>357</sup> Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism, 1919–1945*, vol. 3, 1006.

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 3, 1006, for characteristics of adult prospective victims, 998, 999.

<sup>359</sup> *New York Times*, December 7, 1941. Thomas Mann’s radio speeches were later collected and published and are still

ing strong comments against the program by Catholic clerics. The most famous of these was a sermon by Cardinal Count von Galen of Münster, on August 3, 1941, which explicitly discussed the claims that the mentally handicapped were being put to death and which vigorously condemned the killings.<sup>360</sup> No method of execution was discussed; but what had registered in the minds of the people was the fact that the deceased were in all cases cremated: this alone gave rise to suspicions.<sup>361</sup>

Ten days later, on August 13, 1941, the Bishop of Limberg wrote a letter to the Reich Minister of Justice which demonstrated the extent to which the rumors had now filtered down even to children at play, once again emphasizing the extent to which cremation was the source of rumors:

Several times a week buses arrive in Hadamar with a considerable number of such victims. School children of the vicinity know this vehicle and say: "Here comes the murder-box again." After the arrival of the vehicle, the citizens of Hadamar watch the smoke rise out of the chimney and are tortured with the ever-present thought of the miserable victims, especially when repulsive odors annoy them, depending on the direction of the wind.

The effect of the principles involved here are: Children call each other names and say, "You're crazy, you'll be put into the baking oven in Hadamar." Those who do not want to marry, or find no opportunity, say, "Marry, never! Bring children into the world so they can be put into the bottling machine!" You hear old folks say, "Don't send me to the state hospital! After the feeble-minded have been finished off, the next useless eaters whose turn will come are the old people."<sup>362</sup>

It should be noted in passing that the references to the stench and smoke from the cremations are inaccurate exaggerations, but we will have more to say about cremation shortly.<sup>363</sup>

What we have, then, as early as 1941, are rumors concerning the euthanasia program which have fastened on the cremation or burning element of the usual sequence. Going even further back, we find rumors from 1940 that help to round out the picture. William Shirer's *Berlin Diary* was published in June 1941, and, as a note for November 25, 1940, we find the following entry:

*Of late some of my spies in the provinces have called my attention to some rather*

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available: Thomas Mann, *Deutsche Hörer!* The broadcasts are keyed to the time they were recorded, not necessarily broadcast, and they indicate that Mann discussed gassing on several occasions, including November 1941 (thousands of euthanasia victims gassed, 45), January 1942 (hundreds of Dutch Jews experimented upon with poison gas, 49), June 1942 (the Dutch Jews are now 800 and were gassed at Mauthausen, 66), and September 27, 1942 (11,000 Polish Jews gassed in airtight vehicles [*Wagen*]). The texts of these broadcasts further support the idea of the widespread awareness of the gassing claim throughout Europe at this time, as well as the role of the BBC in its dissemination.

360 Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism, 1919–1945*, vol. 3, 1036.

361 *Ibid.*, vol. 3, see copy of the form letter of condolences (1028), and Shirer entry below.

362 615-PS. I am using the English translation provided in this document. The notion of euthanizing the elderly goes back to the turn of the century, using chloroform in euthanasia centers. Winsor McKay's graphic series, "Dream of the Rarebit Fiend," contained one such fantasy (March 1, 1905) concerning a man over sixty and a "Chloroformatory."

363 As Butz notes (*Hoax*, 168), cremation had evolved into a relatively clean procedure partly in response to objections such as these, which, in our view, were symptomatic of a broad social condemnation of cremation for other reasons.

peculiar death notices in the newspapers. [...]

I am also informed that the relatives of the unfortunate victims, when they get the ashes back—they are never given the bodies—receive a stern warning from the secret police not to demand explanations and to “spread false rumors.” [...]

No wonder that to Germans used to reading between the lines of their heavily censored newspapers, these [death] notices have sounded highly suspicious.[...] And why are the bodies cremated first and the relatives told of the deaths later? Why are they cremated at all? Why aren't the bodies shipped home, as is usually done?

A few days later, I saw the form letter which the families of the victims receive. It reads: “We regret to inform you that your—, who was recently transferred to our institution by ministerial order, unexpectedly died on —of—. All our medical efforts were unfortunately without avail. [...]

“Because of the danger of contagion existing here, we were forced by the order of the police to have the deceased cremated at once.”

This is hardly a reassuring letter [...] and some of them, upon its receipt, have journeyed down to the lonely castle of Grafeneck [...] They have found the castle guarded by black-coated SS men who denied them entrance. Newly painted signs on all roads and paths leading into the desolate grounds warned: “*Seuchengefahr!*” (Keep Away! —Danger of Pestilence!).

[...]

What is still unclear to me is the motive for these murders. Germans themselves advance three:

1. That they are carried out to save food.
2. That they are being done for the purpose of experimenting with new poison gases and death rays.
3. That they are simply the result of the extreme Nazis deciding to carry out their eugenic and sociological ideas.

The first motive is obviously absurd, since the death of 100,000 persons will not save much food for a nation of 80 million. Besides, there is no acute food shortage in Germany. The second motive is possible, though I doubt it. Poison gases may have been used in putting these unfortunates out of the way, but if so, the experimentation was only incidental. Many Germans I have talked to think that some new gas which disfigures the body has been used, and that this is the reason why the remains of the victims have been cremated. But I can get no real evidence of this. [...] <sup>364</sup>

There are even earlier reports. In July, 1940, a report to Philip Boulter contained a

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<sup>364</sup> William L. Shirer, *Berlin Diary*, 570-574. Note that Shirer dismisses the idea that euthanasia would be done for cost. However, Noakes and Pridham cite a document that suggests just this kind of reasoning, 1042; it is interesting to note that this odd and ambiguous document did not make it into Klee's comprehensive collection.

reference to the claim that “at first, the population supposed that it was a question of the patient being used as test subjects for poison gas or that experimenting concerned the healing of persons poisoned with gas were supposed to be executed.”<sup>365</sup> Another letter, from October, reports:

*I have carefully investigated these rumors, especially since they are appearing more frequently and on a larger scale. Thus, for instance, it was claimed that the patients would be used as subjects for poison gas experiments and the personnel of the institutions were sworn to secrecy about the killings.*<sup>366</sup>

Slightly outside of our timeline, but relevant for other reasons, is the fully developed rumor in a letter from May 1941:

*I am told that even children call out when such transport cars pass: There are some more to be gassed. [...] The story goes that the arrivals are at once entirely undressed, paper shirts are put on them and they are then taken into a gas chamber where they are liquidated with prussic acid and an additional narcotic gas. The bodies are said to be taken on a conveyor belt right into the cremation room, six at a time into one oven; the ashes are distributed into six urns and sent to the relatives.*<sup>367</sup>

Therefore, no later than the summer of 1940 we have a full range of speculative rumor concerning the euthanasia program. There are associations with cremation, which is considered incriminating; the association with cremation has in turn led to rumors about death administered by poison gas and death rays which disfigure the victims. There are associations with disease control: first, the justification given by the government for the rapid cremations, and second, the quarantine signs that Shirer reports. Thus among the rumors current on euthanasia as early as 1940 we have identified the burning element of the familiar sequence, which has in turn generated the gassing element. What we appear to be missing is the showering element, although we do have an association with the dread of disease and with disease control measures.

Beginning with the affidavits of Konrad Morgen in July 1946, which were intended to absolve the SS of responsibility for the mass extermination gassings, we have an attempt to link the chronologically later mass gassing claims to the prior rumors of euthanasia gassings.<sup>368</sup> The proof offered then, which has been con-

<sup>365</sup> NO-830, 4, lack of agreement in original.

<sup>366</sup> NO-836.

<sup>367</sup> NO-844. This document, which provides a full description of a completely erroneous procedure, is noteworthy for containing elements—fantastic cremation events, conveyor belts, use of cyanide gas—that would normally be assigned to a much later period. With regard to the present discussion note the absence of showers.

<sup>368</sup> Konrad Morgen was an SS judge advocate investigating criminal behavior in the SS. He was called by the defense at the IMT to argue that the SS was not a criminal organization. He linked the euthanasia campaign to the gassing claim through Christian Wirth of the Criminal Police, whereby Wirth had contrived to get some Jews to destroy their coreligionists with the assistance of Ukrainians, Balts, and other East Europeans, occasionally in SS uniforms but not SS. Morgen further argued that the gassings were done with such stealth and cunning that no one in the SS knew about them, and that no one was gassed at Auschwitz, the gas chambers in that region being at Monowitz, an IG Farben controlled industrial plant a couple

sidered sufficient since, consisted not of direct material or physical evidence, but rather postwar testimonies.

The numbers arriving varied between 40 and 150. First, they were taken to the undressing room. There they—men and women in different sections—had to undress or they were undressed. Their clothes and luggage were put in a pile, labeled, registered, and numbered. The people who had undressed then went along a passage into the so-called reception room. [...] Then the people were led [...] through a second exit back into the reception room and from there through a steel door into the gas chamber. The gas chamber had a very bare interior. It had a wooden floor and there were wooden benches in the chamber. Later, the floor was concreted and finally it and the walls were tiled. The ceiling and other parts of the walls were painted with oil. The whole room was designed to give the impression that it was a bathroom. Three showers were fixed in the ceiling. The room was aired by ventilators. A window in the gas chamber was covered with a grill. A second steel door led into the room where the gassing apparatus was installed. [...] The steel doors were shut and the doctor on duty fed the gas into the gas chamber. After a short time the people in the gas chamber were dead. After around an hour and a half, the gas chamber was ventilated. At this point, we burners had to start work. Before I deal with that I would like to make a few more statements about the feeding of the gas into the gas chamber. Next to the gas chamber was a small room in which there were a number of steel canisters. I cannot say what kind of gas was in these canisters or where it came from. The contents of these canisters was fed through a rubber pipe into a steel pipe. On the canisters there was a pressure gauge. When the gas chamber was full, the doctor went to the canisters, opened the tap, and the gas poured through a 15–20 mm pipe into the gas chamber. As I have stated previously, between the gas chamber and the gas canister room there was a steel door. A third door led from the gas chamber into the yard. These doors had a brick surround and there was a peephole into the gas chamber. Through this peephole one could see what went on in the gas chamber.<sup>369</sup>

The remarkable thing about this testimony, generated in 1945 or thereafter, is that it so closely parallels the kind of procedure said to have taken place according to the Canonical Holocaust. Hence, we have the arrival of a bus or train of people. They are separated by sex. They are led to undressing rooms where their belongings are sorted and registered. Then they are led into a shower, where they are gassed. Finally, they are burned. The other remarkable thing about this testimony is that its physical description strongly suggests the influence of the disinfection chamber arrangement at Majdanek: the steel doors with peepholes; the small pipe that leads to nowhere, but which is here explained as connected by rubber tubing to carbon

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of miles away. Morgen's testimony is valuable in the sense that it shows criminality among the SS running the concentration camps; however, his narrative concerning the gas exterminations is an intricate, and demonstrably false, conspiracy theory.

<sup>369</sup> Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism, 1919–1945*, vol. 3, 1025. Affidavit of Vinzenz Nohel, September 4, 1945.

monoxide in tanks;<sup>370</sup> the two steel doors with peepholes to the gas chamber, one of which leads to the outside, but for no apparent reason; and the brick facing on the concreted structure.

There are two fundamental problems with such testimony: one is that it simply repeats the by then universally known shower-gas-burning sequence. Second, the concept behind the extermination procedure makes no logical sense.

Let's just assume for the moment that the shower-gas-burning sequence had actually been developed for the extermination of people being deported to the East. There would be some logic to the procedure, but only to this extent: some means would have been needed to deceive the victims so that they could be concentrated into a small enclosed space, and the regulation delousing procedure might theoretically provide cover for this deception.<sup>371</sup> But such a procedure would have been purposeless for the euthanasia victims, since many were incapable of any rational thinking and would hardly require such subterfuge, let alone the fact that many could probably not even stand, to say nothing of standing in a camouflaged shower room waiting to be gassed.

There is a confusion of deceptions here: the deception to get people into the gas chambers is not the same as the deception whereby people are gassed with carbon monoxide so that they die painlessly and without premonition.<sup>372</sup> The trappings of a shower would be irrelevant to bringing about the deceptive death by CO to a euthanasia victim. Moreover, there has never been any testimony that the extermination gassing victims did not know that they were being killed.

As a result the euthanasia eyewitnesses contradict each other: on the one hand we are told that the victims would go into the shower facility, and then within a few moments would lie down on the benches where they would pass into a lethal sleep unawares,<sup>373</sup> while others assure us that the death agony would take ten minutes or more and would be accompanied by horrible scenes.<sup>374</sup> And this leads to another confusion: euthanasia victims in Germany were not passing through zones where diseases were endemic; indeed, in most cases they were simply being transported from asylums or sanitariums. A delousing procedure would not be necessary, so, apparently for this and for other reasons, the showers were now to be equipped with benches: in other words, in the testimonial descriptions, the shower rooms were transformed into steam baths. But what is the purpose of showerheads in a steam bath?

Nevertheless, to the Americans prosecuting the Medical Case before the

<sup>370</sup> Mattogno, "The Gas Chambers of Majdanek," in Rudolf, ed., *Dissecting the Holocaust*, 413-435, has a photo of this pipe. Note aperture that had been cut through the reinforced concrete; the rebar remained and there is no apparent provision for gastightness.

<sup>371</sup> However, Friedrich Berg points out in his article, "Typhus and the Jews," that, given the reluctance that East Europeans had to communal bathing, dummy shower arrangements would not have been a particularly good way to lull potential victims.

<sup>372</sup> That is, the justification for the use of carbon monoxide in the euthanasia program is that it caused rapid death with no premonition, but that deception has nothing to do with the deception alleged in the extermination campaign.

<sup>373</sup> Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism, 1919-1945*, vol. 3, 1019.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*, 1027.

Nuremberg Military Tribunal, which began in late October 1946, it must have made sense. After all, it was known by virtue of the International Military Tribunal's judicial notice that millions of people in Eastern Europe had been exterminated by the shower-gas-burning sequence, and it was further alleged by Konrad Morgen that thousands had been gassed and burned in the euthanasia program. Therefore it must have seemed obvious to the Allies that the euthanasia program would have employed the shower element and all that was necessary was to get the defendants—on trial for their lives—to confess. This led to one of the strangest exchanges in the Nuremberg Trials, during the questioning of Dr. Viktor Brack:

QUESTION: And these people thought that they were going to take a shower bath?

BRACK: If any of them had any power of reasoning, they had no doubt thought that.

QUESTION: Well, now, were they taken into the shower rooms with their clothes on or were they nude?

BRACK: No. They were nude.

QUESTION: In every case?

BRACK: Whenever I saw them, yes.<sup>375</sup>

The continuation of Brack's testimony, involving the close questioning by Judge Sebring, was even more opaque and evasive:

QUESTION: Now, of what materials were these gas chambers built? Were they movable gas chambers, very much like the low-pressure chambers that Professor Dr. Ruff talked about, or were they something that was built permanently into the camp or installation?

BRACK: No special gas chamber was built. A room suitable in the hospital was used; a room of necessity attached to the reception ward and to the room where the insane persons were kept. This room was made into a gas chamber. It was sealed, given special doors and windows, and then a few meters of gas piping were laid, or some kind of piping with holes in it. Outside this room there was a container, a compressed gas container with the necessary apparatus, that is, pressure gauge, etc.

QUESTION: Now what department had the responsibility for constructing or building these gas chambers, what department of the Party or of the government?

BRACK: No office of the Party. I don't understand the question.

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<sup>375</sup> "VII: Extracts from Argumentation and Evidence of Prosecution and Defense: (D) Euthanasia: (d) Evidence: Extracts from the Testimony of Defendant Brack: Examination: Part 4," in *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals under Control Council Law No. 10. Vol. 1: United States of America v. Karl Brandt, et al. (Case 1: 'Medical Case')*.

QUESTION: Somebody had to build these chambers. Who gave the orders and who had the responsibility of building them, was that your department?

BRACK: I assume the orders were given by the head of the institution, but I don't know who actually did give the orders.

QUESTION: In other words, were these chambers not built according to some specifications, plans and specifications?

BRACK: I can't imagine that, every chamber was different. I saw several of them.

QUESTION: Do you know what department gave the order for having the chambers built? Was that your department under Bouhler?

BRACK: No. It was Bouhler himself.

QUESTION: And he gave the order to the various heads of institutions to install this chamber, is that correct?

QUESTION: Now, how would the heads of each of these institutions know how to install a gas chamber unless there were certain plans and specifications given to them?

BRACK: I never saw any such plan. I don't know of any.

QUESTION: Would you know how to go out and build a gas chamber unless some engineer or planner had told you? Certainly I wouldn't.

BRACK: I don't know whether I would either. Presumably he called in an engineer.

QUESTION: That's what I'm trying to say. What engineer or group of engineers was responsible for seeing that these gas chambers were built so that they would do the job they were supposed to do?

BRACK: There was certainly no group of engineers. I presume there was somebody at the institutions who had enough technical ability to do it. I don't know.

QUESTION: Then, so far as you know, someone at one of these institutions would be told by Bouhler to construct a gas chamber and he would call the head of the institution then would call on someone, you don't know whom, to go out and build the chamber. Is that correct?

BRACK: That is how I imagine it.

QUESTION: Well, wouldn't it make a considerable difference whether the chamber was to be constructed for euthanasia by carbon monoxide or by some other means? Wouldn't there have to be some technical information available to the head of the institution so that he could give directions to his

mechanic to build the thing to do the thing it was supposed to do?

BRACK: I must say honestly I really don't know anything about that. I can't judge.

QUESTION: Do you know whether or not any department of the government, under Bouhler, or under Brandt, or under anybody else, was responsible for seeing that the gas apparatus was installed properly?

BRACK: I don't know, but I don't believe so because I would probably have heard of it.

QUESTION: How large were these gas chambers?

BRACK: They were of different sizes. It was simply an adjoining room. I can't remember whether they were 4 x 5 meters, or 5 x 6 meters. Simply normal sized rooms, but I can't tell you the exact size. It was too long ago. I can't remember.

QUESTION: Were they as large as this courtroom?

BRACK: No. They were just normal rooms.

QUESTION: Well, a man of your intelligence must have some idea about the size of these rooms. The assertion "normal size" doesn't mean anything in particular.

BRACK: By that I mean the size of the normal room in a normal house. I didn't mean an assembly room or a cell either. I meant a room, but I can't tell you the exact size because I really don't know it. It might have been 4 x 5 meters, or 5 x 6 meters, or 3.5 x 4.5, but I really don't know. I didn't pay much attention to it.

QUESTION: Have you ever visited a concentration camp or a military camp of any kind?

BRACK: I visited a concentration camp, and I was once in a military camp as a soldier.

QUESTION: Have you ever seen a shower room or shower bath built into a camp of that kind where the inmates of concentration camps, or where soldiers in a military barracks, can take showers?

BRACK: Yes, I have. In my own barracks.

QUESTION: And would you say that this euthanasia room at the various institutions was about that dimension?

BRACK: I think it was much smaller.

QUESTION: Well, perhaps we can get at it this way. I thought perhaps you knew something about the mechanical construction that I supposed every-

body knew something about. This room of yours that you talk about, how many people would it accommodate?

BRACK: Yesterday I said that according to my estimate it might have been twenty-five or thirty people.

QUESTION: And that is still your estimate today? I remember yesterday that you said that, and that is still your estimate today, it could comfortably take care of twenty-five or thirty people?

BRACK: Yes. That's my estimate.

QUESTION: Now, the carbon monoxide gas that was used for the purpose of euthanasia, where did it come from? I know you said yesterday that it came out of tubes very much like oxygen came in, but where did the tubes come from? Do you know?

BRACK: I don't know. They were the normal steel containers which can be seen everywhere.

QUESTION: Do you know how they reached the camp?

BRACK: That I don't know.

QUESTION: Do you know whether any department of the government was responsible for furnishing the gas to the camp?

BRACK: No. They were probably bought.

QUESTION: You think then that perhaps the superintendent of the institution, if he wanted some carbon monoxide gas, would just walk downtown and walk into a store and buy a steel tube of it and put it under his arm and carry it on back to the camp; pay for it out of his pocket?

BRACK: No, not out of his own pocket but through the institution. The institutions bought them, I mean.<sup>376</sup>

In the case of Viktor Brack, we have the ready confession of someone who claimed to be deeply involved in the euthanasia program, someone whose name indeed was supposed to be synonymous with gassing,<sup>377</sup> but who at the same time was unable to recall anything about it.<sup>378</sup>

<sup>376</sup> Ibid., checked against the trial transcripts NARA, M 887, R 8, F 916-F 920; the first quoted excerpt actually appears later, F 923-F 924. As far as I have been able to determine, this exchange, which goes on from this point for a few more pages, was the only occasion in which gassing was discussed at the Medical Trial, which was in any case mostly concerned with medical experiments and euthanasia as such, rather than euthanasia gassings. In the late 1950s the West German government began to hold further trials on this theme.

<sup>377</sup> Compare the discussion of NO-365, the Wetzel-Lohse draft, discussed in Chapter 7.

<sup>378</sup> Brack's strange statements find a ready explanation when we reflect on the pressure brought to bear on him during his interrogations, cited in part by Friedlander, *Origins*, interrogations of Brack accessible at NARA (National Archives) by consulting publication M1019. Briefly, Brack was deeply implicated by documents concerning plans to sterilize Eastern Jews (this is ultimately why he was hanged), and was confronted with these documents during interrogation, along with threats and an amazing tirade delivered by the interrogator. It is also worth mentioning that Brack, whose testimony above comes from May 1947, also argued that he was mentally ill and suffering hallucinations in the fall of 1946 when his affidavit was prepared.

Given the chronological order of these testimonies and the context of the evolution of the shower-gas-burning sequence it seems clear that these descriptions of euthanasia shower-gassings represent a clear case of concept transference: that is, the shower element from the camps has been retrofitted onto another situation, with a correspondingly poor fit.

A similar case occurred in the First World War propaganda. At that time, the legend arose that German soldiers were cutting off the hands of Belgian children.<sup>379</sup> The claim was of course false, and furthermore no logical reason was ever advanced for the procedure. However, if we go back to the turn of the century we can find the likely source of the story. In 1903, Roger Casement published an expose of the brutal treatment that King Leopold's concessionaires were carrying out in the Belgian Congo.<sup>380</sup> This included the use of bounty hunters, who were supposed to provide proof of their kills. The proof consisted of the hand of the victim. Hence, the claims of sacks of hands, taken as bounty, figured prominently in this scandal. The practice, as grotesque as it was, makes some sense in the context in which it is said to have occurred. It seems likely that this claim was simply transposed from the Belgian Congo to Belgium proper in 1914 and the identities of the malefactors changed, but in the process of transference the concept acquired a certain telltale illogic.

Since there was a euthanasia program, and since it antedated the mass gassing program, the acceptance of the shower-gas-burning sequence for the euthanasia program provides strong support for the chronologically later claim of mass gassing, even though the specifics of the mass gassing claim were outlined in detail years before those of the euthanasia campaign were described.<sup>381</sup> Yet the description of the sequence for the euthanasia program comes after, and is clearly influenced by, the establishment of the canonical shower-gas-burning sequence, and furthermore has no material, documentary, or physical support.<sup>382</sup>

There are, however, elements in the euthanasia rumors which may have influenced subsequent developments. The stench and smoke from the crematoriums and the "murder wagons" are two such elements.<sup>383</sup> It is significant that within

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379 Arthur Ponsonby, *Falsehood in Wartime*, 78-82.

380 Compare Roger Casement, *Treatment of Women and Children in the Congo States: What Mr. Casement Saw in 1903*. Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, is a recent and relatively even-handed description of the atrocities committed in the Congo.

381 The euthanasia campaign was well documented, and may have involved carbon monoxide in some cases, although the overwhelming evidence points to sedatives and particularly injections, both in the euthanasia institutions and the concentration camps under the program "14 f 13." But if the euthanasia program, relatively well recorded, can be established as having used the shower-gas-burning sequence, then that provides corroborative weight to the thesis of the shower-gas-burning sequence for the alleged extermination facilities, for which there is no documentary record at all.

382 Klee provides the closest thing to documentary proof; with regard to the shower-gas-burning sequence, virtually nothing: there is a photograph of a shower (*Dokumente*, 132) for example, which is supposed to have been a gas chamber, but which was later cleverly converted into a shower. So in essence we are offered a photograph of a shower. We are also being offered, at the same time, a conspiracy theory that the people involved in the euthanasia program left behind abundant evidence of their killings yet sought to conceal the gassing method alone.

383 The smoke and stench element comes up in Höss' April 5, 1946 affidavit; as we have seen, it appears in many contexts. Butz, *Hoax*, 118-120, considered this claim *prima facie* evidence of hoaxing. The "murder wagons" are of course important to the Soviet claims of "gas vans."

days of Bishop von Galen's protestations about the euthanasia program, rumors of gassings were alleged in Poland; both of these followed Shirer's gassing rumor, published in June.<sup>384</sup> There is also the possibility that the disease control measures reportedly invoked to conceal the operations of the euthanasia program, as well as to justify its cremations, inspired rumors analogous to the disinfection rumors from the turn of the century. But here again, it is clear that the invocation of disease control for the sake of secrecy and cremation would have been applied to the outside world: there would have been no reason to continue such an elaborate charade for the victims of the program itself. The presence of the showering element in the euthanasia program thus makes no sense.

This observation leads us back to the presence of the gassing element in the euthanasia program. We know that gassing had been alleged as far back as the fall of 1940 in the context of the euthanasia rumors because it was conceived as causing disfiguration, which would then require cremation to hide the traces. Gassing is not being claimed for any other reasons, or based on any other evidence. This simply means that the suspicion of cremation, and fear of disfiguration caused by poison gas, were the real source of the gassing claim at that time. Therefore we must now turn and consider the social and cultural attitudes about cremation and poison gas in the 1930s.

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<sup>384</sup> Martin, *Man Who Invented*, 38. This in turn supports the inference that the mass gassing claim derives not only from the circumstances of delousing and disinfection, but also directly from the rumors of the euthanasia program.

## 11. THE FEAR OF CREMATION AND POISON GAS

*Cremation still relatively modern in the 1930s and 1940s. Resistance by many social elements gives rise to bizarre ideas of concealing crimes and corpse recycling. —National Socialism advocates cremation because of overcrowding and disease control. —Cremation fears mirrored in many instances of Allied fear about German secret weapons, technological abilities. —Fear of poison gas and its disfiguring effects common in interwar culture. —Vicki Baum. —Pabst's Kameradschaft. —Poison gas and mass hysteria: Israel, 1991; Florida, 1971; D-Day, 1944; the "War of the Worlds" panic of 1938. —Disfigured bodies, from fire or putrefaction, are conceived as victims of poison gas: Germany, Kassel bombing raid, 1943; concentration camps, 1945. —Poison gas often conceived as airborne: German civil defense.*



THE MODERN ADVOCACY of cremation was only about sixty years old by the time the National Socialist dictatorship began.<sup>385</sup> Two factors tended to support the procedure: a chronic lack of burial space, and hygienic requirements, including disease control.<sup>386</sup> On the other hand, the procedure inspired sometimes violent opposition, largely because it conflicted strongly with both Christian and Jewish conceptions of body disposal and the hopes of the afterlife.<sup>387</sup> As a result, the development of the procedure in the twentieth century was slow.<sup>388</sup>

Advocacy of the process increased throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, especially in Germany, where it was associated with rationality, modernity, and public health.<sup>389</sup> By the beginning of the 1920s, less than 2 percent of the deceased in Germany were cremated, but by 1930 that number had increased to over 7 percent.<sup>390</sup> The National Socialist government gave its support to the process by the law of 1934, placing cremation on the same level as more traditional burial practices.<sup>391</sup> Many have commented subsequently on the rapid development of the practice, and have noted that it represents the “full mechanization” of modern life,<sup>392</sup> and as such, a strong rupture with traditional life. What needs to be appreciated, however, is that rapid changes in how people live also affect how they perceive the life they are living: no doubt many of the fearful perceptions of cremation were related to that rapid cultural change which shook traditional faiths<sup>393</sup>—“The modern world is an anti-Christian world,” so wrote the leader of German Social Democracy, August Bebel, in 1884, who, in accordance with his will, was cremated in 1913.<sup>394</sup>

Probably as a result of these anxieties about cremation, the procedure became the focus of a number of strange ideas. One of these was that cremation was suspicious, because by burning a body a post mortem on the cause of death would be made

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<sup>385</sup> On the subject of cremation's reemergence, see Kenneth Iserson, *Death to Dust*; Norbert Fischer, *Vom Gottesacker zum Krematorium*; and see also Sir Henry Thompson, entry “Cremation” in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed.

<sup>386</sup> Compare Thompson, “Cremation.”

<sup>387</sup> Thompson explores this theme in particular, but it is something of a truism in writings about cremation.

<sup>388</sup> Although Germany built the first modern crematorium, actual use was hindered by social attitudes; consult Thompson, “Cremation.”

<sup>389</sup> Fischer, *Vom Gottesacker zum Krematorium*, 96.

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid.*, 116. The increase in cremation rates in traditionally Protestant venues was even greater. In Hamburg it climbed from 2.8 percent to 27.8 percent between 1913 and 1930.

<sup>391</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*, 124, and also quoting Siegfried Giedion, 101.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*, 116, also 99 for typical exaggerations and hostile reactions, particularly from churches, to the process.

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.*, 115. His actual words were “*Die moderne Kultur ist eine antichristliche Kultur*,” which Fischer characterizes as anti-clericalism, and probably correctly. Nevertheless, bearing in mind the psychic investment which most people have made in traditional religions, to construe his words as “Modern culture is the culture of the Antichrist” would probably not exaggerate the way in which many regarded such attitudes.

next to impossible to carry out.<sup>395</sup> Under such conditions, all manner of murder, poisoning, and other activities could be carried out secretly.<sup>396</sup> It was this element that clearly excited the German people, especially after the National Socialist government not only endorsed cremation for an overcrowded Germany but also made it mandatory in all concentration camps.<sup>397</sup>

A second aspect of cremation concerned utopian and futuristic ideas of recycling. Aldous Huxley would clearly articulate the idea in his negative utopia *Brave New World* in 1932:

Following [the train's] southerly course across the dark plain their eyes were drawn to the majestic buildings of the Slough Crematorium. For the safety of night flying planes, its four tall chimneys were flood-lighted and tipped with crimson danger signals. It was a landmark.

"Why do the smoke-stacks have those things like balconies around them?" enquired Lenina.

"Phosphorous recovery," explained Henry telegraphically. "On their way up the chimney the gases go through four separate treatments.  $P_2O_5$  used to go right out the chimney. Now they recover over 98 percent of it. More than a kilo and a half per adult corpse. Which makes the best part of four hundred tons of phosphorous from England alone." Henry spoke with a happy pride, rejoicing whole-heartedly in the achievement, as though it had been his own. "Fine to think that we can go on being socially useful even after we're dead. Making plants grow."<sup>398</sup>

Cremation was not only associated with recycling and various sinister motivations. Some of the claims made about the process can be compared to various other fantastic claims made about German technological and even medical innovations which were typical during the war and in the immediate postwar period. For example, it was claimed by the Soviets at Nuremberg that German doctors had perfected a method of infecting people with cancer,<sup>399</sup> and General Patton, in his memoirs, seemed to take seriously a claim that a German doctor had been able to keep a brain alive, separated from its host.<sup>400</sup> When a plan for a German space station was uncovered—a development which made sense in terms of the German space program—it was reported in the American press as a plan for a platform that would use a giant mirror to reflect the sun's rays back to the earth in concentrated form in order to incinerate cities or boil "part of the ocean."<sup>401</sup> Speculation about

<sup>395</sup> Iserson, *Death to Dust*; Thompson, "Cremation."

<sup>396</sup> Iserson, *Death to Dust*; Thompson, "Cremation."

<sup>397</sup> Fischer, *Vom Gottesacker zum Krematorium*, 115. Here we mean "mandatory" in the sense that from 1939 virtually every concentration camp would be equipped with cremation facilities.

<sup>398</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*, 48.

<sup>399</sup> The Soviet Special Commission on Auschwitz, USSR-008.

<sup>400</sup> George S. Patton, Jr., *War As I Knew It*, 284. Patton probably got the idea from *Donovan's Brain*, a 1942 novel by Curt Siodmak, a Dresdener of Polish Jewish stock and brother of the director Robert Siodmak, which pioneered the idea of brains surviving out of bodily context, and in turn probably inspired *Madmen of Mandoras* (1963, aka *They Saved Hitler's Brain* (1966)), as well as other fantasies of rejuvenating Hitler, e.g., Ira Levin's *The Boys from Brazil*.

<sup>401</sup> *Life*, July 23, 1945, 78. The relationship of German rocket and secret weapons technology to postwar hysteria, and

the development of the so-called “Sun Gun” was matched by the hysteria of Allied pilots who, from fall 1944 on, began to report small balls of fire tracking their aircraft over Germany. These “Foo Fighters” or “Kraut Balls” were said to be remote-controlled flying objects sent up by the Germans to sabotage the electrical systems of Allied planes; although they appear to have been nothing more unusual than St. Elmo’s fire.<sup>402</sup>

In our opinion, the attitudes about German crematoriums in the 1930s and 1940s clearly reflect this kind of technological hysteria, largely because of the fantastic burn rates attributed to German crematoriums or other techniques in the realm of body disposal. It was not uncommon during the immediate postwar period to hear testimonies asserting that German cremation ovens could burn thousands of people in a single day,<sup>403</sup> or that the Germans had devised a “special procedure” for burning thousands of bodies in the open air without fuel,<sup>404</sup> just as one could hear testimonies arguing that thousands of people could be packed into a space for gassing which normally would scarcely contain hundreds by use of “the German method.”<sup>405</sup>

Notwithstanding a well-known document concerning Auschwitz that suggests that bodies could be burned to ash in fifteen or twenty minutes,<sup>406</sup> the facts, developed by the Italian researcher Carlo Mattogno, are simply otherwise. The cremation of a body has a thermal barrier of about 40 minutes for the reduction of body proteins and about 20 to 30 minutes more to reduce the bones to ash.<sup>407</sup> Bearing in mind these facts, derived in empirical tests by British cremationists in recent years,<sup>408</sup> we are forced to conclude that the daily capacity of German crematoriums is more realistically measured in the several dozens or, at most, hundreds rather than the several thousands.<sup>409</sup> It follows also that the existence of crematoriums cannot be cited as evidence of an intent to exterminate, as was argued then, even though that claim is still encountered from time to time to this day.<sup>410</sup>

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most particularly to science fiction and UFO hysterias, has been the subject of a number of credulous studies, but the theme has not received the mainstream academic exposure that it deserves, perhaps because these hysterical postwar claims flow right back to the kinds of claims repeatedly made about the extermination processes in the camps.

402 Renato Vesco and David Hatcher Childress, *Man-Made UFOs 1944–1994*, 77–87. See also Brad Harris, *Die dunkle Seite des Mondes*, vol. 1, 119–174, for a more extensive discussion of the legend of German secret weapons and Nazi UFOs.

403 Specifically, the Soviet Special Commission on Auschwitz claimed that 279,000 people could be cremated by the 56 Auschwitz Birkenau ovens in a month, i.e., 9,300 per day. Some eyewitnesses, e. g., Nyiszli, assert even higher rates of combustion.

404 Testimony of Dr. Konrad Morgen, August 7, 1946, IMT, vol. 20.

405 Cross-examination of Dr. Bendel, *Tesch-Weinbacher Trial*, Public Records Office, London, WO235/83.

406 A document of dubious provenance (marked as a copy (“Abschrift”), reproduced in one of its forms by Pressac, *Auschwitz: Technique and Operation*, 244, asserts half that amount. Neither number is credible because neither is possible, as even Pressac admits. The document is discussed in “Bomb Shelters in Birkenau,” Section 1.4, elsewhere in this volume.

407 Carlo Mattogno, “The Crematoria Ovens of Auschwitz and Birkenau” in Rudolf, ed., *Dissecting the Holocaust*, 373–412.

408 Mattogno, in “The Crematoria Ovens,” cites “Factors Which Affect the Process of Cremation,” third session, by Dr. E. W. Jones, assisted by Mr. R. G. Williamson, *Annual Cremation Conference Report*, Cremation Society of Great Britain, 1975. It should be stressed that all of the surviving documentation on mass cremations in German camps, cited by Pressac, *Auschwitz: Technique and Operation*; Mattogno, “The Crematoria Ovens”; and Pressac (with van Pelt), “The Machinery of Mass Murder at Auschwitz,” in Gutman and Berenbaum, *Anatomy*, 183–246, are of orders of magnitude that support the British conclusions. None support the extravagant cremation rates argued by Pressac, e.g., in “Machinery,” 199.

409 Mattogno, “The Crematoria Ovens.”

410 Breitman, in *Official Secrets*, attempted to argue that the Germans had plans to build an extermination camp at Mogilev,

To a certain extent the German leadership is responsible for encouraging the Allies to make exaggerated claims about German technological prowess. The constant talk of wonder weapons that would turn the tide of war helped maintain home front morale. On the other hand, such claims, coupled with the very real German innovations in weapons technology, including jet aircraft, rocket planes, cruise missiles, guided missiles, and many others, were bound to lead the Allies to believe that the “latest word in fascist technology”<sup>411</sup> would have no limits, and thus any claim became plausible: even crematoriums that could defy the laws of nature, or which were in fact “gas ovens.”<sup>412</sup> The undercurrents of fear and anxiety in these superstitious attributions of diabolical skill to one’s enemy are, we believe, easily seen.

There were also cases where the Nazi leadership, and specifically Adolf Hitler, would attempt to gain a psychological advantage by exaggerating German technological capabilities. For example, when the Germans invaded Belgium in May 1940, they seized the fortress of Eben Emael in twenty-four hours, much to the astonishment of the Allies. In a speech, Hitler attributed the success to a special weapon or *Angriffsmittel*, whose character he would not divulge. His coy announcement immediately created apprehension among the Allies, as well as speculation about the nature of the wonder weapon: bombs containing liquid oxygen as well as a paralyzing and nonlethal nerve gas were both suggested as possibilities.<sup>413</sup> In fact, the legendary *Angriffsmittel* turned out to be nothing more complicated than a shaped explosive charge, but that does not mean that these other contemporary speculations are valueless to the historian. On the contrary, because they represent almost pure projection, they tell us a great deal about the widely held beliefs in German technological and scientific prowess as well as about then common concerns with specific types of weapons, including poison gas.

Even more than cremation, poison gas excited great fears. Doubtless much of this was directly due to the extensive use of gases in the First World War, which injured over a million men.<sup>414</sup> A number of gases were used in that war, but two

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based on the facts that (a) a crematorium was planned for that Soviet city, and (b) Zyklon B was sent to that location. Breitman was indebted to Christian Gerlach, who originated the idea that the planned crematorium at Mogilev was somehow proof of an intent to establish an “extermination camp,” although both ignored the evidence that there were sizable typhus deaths at that location and that the bodies would have required cremation for purposes of public health (Christian Gerlach, “Failure of Plans for an SS Extermination Camp in Mogilev, Russia,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 11, no. 1 (1997): 60-78). Breitman felt justified in rejecting that explanation by contending that Zyklon B was solely an agent of mass murder, as opposed to other Zyklon agents A, C, D, E, and F, whose existence Raul Hilberg had hypothesized in 1985. (Hilberg, *Destruction* (3rd ed.), 1000). However, this is wrong: there were no Zyklon types beyond A (the original gaseous product), B (absorbed cyanide in earthen pellets), and C (from 1943, identical to B but with a different warning agent). The error comes from Hilberg’s misreading of documents concerning the fumigation of belongings seized from Jews in the Riga area which described different concentrations of Zyklon, that is, grams per cubic meter, which were in the industrial jargon referred to as classes C–F.

411 A phrase from “The Factory of Death at Auschwitz” by Boris Polevoi, *Pravda*, February 2, 1945. The article has been separately translated into English and annotated at [www.codoh.com](http://www.codoh.com).

412 The concept of “gas ovens” has been a particularly venerable one, such that the linkage of cremation, gas, and homicide has been considered well-nigh absolute. It is notable in this respect that, as previously noted, only four prosecution exhibits in the NMT concentration camp case pertained to possible gas chambers, but many more described the construction of crematoriums in the camps. Hence the latter has typically been used as proof of the former.

413 *Time*, May 20, 1940, 28.

414 See Crowell, “Technique and Operation of German Anti-Gas Shelters,” for an introduction to poison gas usage and

appear to have particularly excited the popular imagination. The first of these were the blister gases, or vesicants, commonly called mustards, which were notorious for scarring and disfiguring their victims.<sup>415</sup> It was clearly this kind of gas that the German people were thinking of when the euthanasia rumors developed.

The second gas was hydrocyanic acid, or cyanide gas, whose usage in the war was not very successful, but which nevertheless created a very odd optimism about the use of this odorless, invisible, almost instantly lethal, and therefore painless gas.<sup>416</sup> A practical side effect of this optimism was the appropriation of cyanide gas for executions in the United States in 1924.<sup>417</sup>

A brief perusal of interwar culture makes it clear that poison gas, and the effects of its use, were very much a part of the cultural landscape. The Austrian Vicki Baum's novel, *Grand Hotel*, later made into a widely popular film in 1932, featured events in a Berlin hotel, narrated by a doctor whose face had been hideously scarred by mustard gas in the Great War.<sup>418</sup> Pabst's *Kameradschaft* (1931), a film that describes a group of German miners who bravely tunnel across the border to rescue their French comrades, features at its climax the hallucination of a wounded Frenchman, who suddenly sees the German trying to save him as a soldier, in gas mask and coal scuttle helmet, emerging from a cloud of gas. The film also juxtaposes the gas explosion in the mine that traps the Frenchmen to the communal shower room of the German miners: perhaps already here we have the popular image of showering and gas combined.<sup>419</sup>

In one of his better known assaults on the German bourgeoisie, the *Weltbühne* critic Kurt Tucholsky would casually mention gassing his opponents, sardonically describing the gas that would seep into the houses and kill children, women, and men alike.<sup>420</sup> And Ernst Krenek, in his opera, *Der Diktator* (1926), which tells of a dictator who controls a nation with hypnotic powers, features a character blinded by poison gas who sings a lyric describing the horror of a poison gas attack, emphasizing disfiguration and discoloration.<sup>421</sup>

This constant awareness of poison gas increased after the Italians made a much publicized, but perhaps overstated, use of aerial mustard gas attacks against the Ethiopians in 1935. H. G. Wells' *Things to Come*, in the 1938 film version, would also feature such an aerial gas attack.<sup>422</sup>

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several references. Also consult Dieter Martinetz, *Der Gaskrieg, 1914–1918*, for First World War use. For Second World War non-use, consult Crowell, "Technique"; also Gellermann, *Der Krieg, der nicht stattfand*; for groupings of documents and document extracts pertaining to gas warfare throughout the twentieth century see Hans Günther Brauch and Rolf-Dieter Müller, *Chemische Kriegführung-Chemische Abrüstung*; also Hahn, *Waffen und Geheimwaffen*, 223-235.

415 Crowell, "Technique."

416 Ibid.

417 Trombley, *Execution Protocol*.

418 *Grand Hotel*, Edmund Goulding, director (1932).

419 *Kameradschaft*, Georg W. Pabst, director (1931).

420 Quoted by Stäglich, *Auschwitz*, 59.

421 Quoted in Johannes Riedel, "Echoes of Political Processes in Music during the Weimar Republic," in Frank D. Hirschbach, *Germany in the Twenties: The Artist as Social Critic*.

422 *Things to Come*, 1936, William Cameron Menzies, director (1936). Significantly, the film also features a plague outbreak.

At the same time, in the fall of 1938, Europe was gripped by the threat of war as the Munich crisis unfolded. Fear of bombing was great, but so too was the fear of aerial poison gas attacks. The British government had prepared to distribute some thirty-eight million gas masks, and after the Fleet was mobilized on “Black Wednesday,” panic became a feature of gas mask distribution.<sup>423</sup> Two other aspects of public attitudes during the crisis are worth noting: the proliferation of rumors such that, for example, a cloud of autumn mist might be interpreted as poison gas,<sup>424</sup> and psychosomatic reactions, as when the rumor of a squadron spraying chlorine gas in East London caused the physical illness of several.<sup>425</sup> Indeed, a government committee of psychiatrists estimated that, in the event of war, the two million estimated dead by bombing and gassing would be joined by some five to six million victims of panic and hysteria.<sup>426</sup>

The generalized fear of poison gas inarguably played a role in one of the most notorious episodes of mass hysteria in modern times: The *War of the Worlds* radio broadcast of October 30, 1938.<sup>427</sup> Following directly on the heels of the Munich crisis, and the popularity of a play that described aerial warfare, the fictionalized and updated account featured a Martian invasion of New Jersey that caused panic among tens of thousands nationwide.<sup>428</sup> Two points about the broadcast are noteworthy: the initial attack, at the precise point when most people would have tuned in, discussed the discovery of bodies that had been horribly disfigured and burned, and the fact that the broadcast contained a lurid description of a cloud of poison gas moving across Manhattan, destroying everyone that it touched.<sup>429</sup> The accounts in the *New York Times* the next day are interesting in assessing public reaction:<sup>430</sup>

#### RADIO LISTENERS IN PANIC, TAKING WAR DRAMA AS FACT

*Despite the fantastic nature of the reported “occurrences,” the program, coming after the recent war scare in Europe and a period in which the radio frequently interrupted regularly scheduled programs to report developments in the Czechoslovak situation, caused fright and panic throughout the area of the broadcast.*

*Many sought first to verify the reports. But large numbers, obviously in a state of terror, asked how they could follow the broadcast’s advice and flee from the city, whether they would be safer in the “gas raid” in the cellar or on the roof, how they could safeguard their children, and many of the questions which had been worrying residents of London and Paris during the tense days before the Munich agreement.*

423 Laurence Thompson, *The Greatest Treason: The Untold Story of Munich*, 2.

424 Thompson, *The Greatest Treason*, 210.

425 *Ibid.*, 3.

426 *Ibid.*, 5.

427 Curtis MacDougall, *Hoaxes*, 43.

428 “The Invasion from Mars” (radio adaptation by Howard Koch of H. G. Wells’ *War of the Worlds*), Harold W. Kuebler, ed., *The Treasury of Science Fiction Classics*, 417-438. It is interesting to note that the other Martian weapon was a “death” or “heat-ray”; compare Shirer’s diary entry, above.

429 “The Invasion from Mars,” in Kuebler, ed., *Treasury*, 425, 431.

430 These and other newspaper excerpts come from Howard Koch, *The Panic Broadcast*, which contains reproductions of newspaper clippings between 16-24 and 89-96.

“They’re Bombing New Jersey!”

Jersey City police received similar calls. One woman asked Detective Timothy Grooty, on duty there, “Shall I close my windows?” A man asked, “Have the police any extra gas masks?” Many of the callers, on being assured the reports were fiction, queried again and again, uncertain in whom to believe.

The incident at Hedden Terrace and Hawthorne Avenue, in Newark, one of the most dramatic in the area, caused a tie-up in traffic for blocks around. The more than twenty families there apparently believed a “gas attack” had started and so reported to the police. An ambulance, three radio cars, and a police emergency squad of eight men were sent to the scene with full inhalator apparatus.

They found the families with wet cloths on faces contorted with hysteria. The police calmed them, halted those who were attempting to move furniture on their cars and after a time were able to clear the traffic snarl.

East Orange police headquarters received more than 200 calls from persons who wanted to know what to do to escape the “gas.”

The role of the radio in propagating the *War of the Worlds* broadcast was duly noted in the contemporary media. Thus the *New York World Telegram* would editorialize on November 1:

It is strange and disturbing that thousands of Americans, secure in their homes on a quiet Sunday evening, could be scared out of their wits by a radio dramatization of H. G. Wells’ fantastic old story, *The War of the Worlds*.

Mr. Welles did not plan deliberately to demoralize his audience. But nerves made jittery by actual, though almost incredible, threats of war and disaster, had prepared a great many American radio listeners to believe the completely incredible “news” that Martian hordes were here.<sup>431</sup>

While columnist Hugh Johnson opined:

... the incident is highly significant. It reveals dramatically a state of public mind. Too many people have been led by outright propaganda to believe in some new and magic power of air attack and other development in the weapons of war.<sup>432</sup>

Columnist Dorothy Thompson was even more emphatic:

The immediate moral is apparent if the whole incident is viewed in reason: no political body must ever, under any circumstances, obtain a monopoly of radio.

The second moral is that our popular and university education is failing to train reason and logic, even in the educated.

The third is that the popularization of science has led to gullibility and new su-

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431 Ibid.

432 Ibid., 89-96.

perstitutions, rather than to skepticism and the really scientific attitude of mind.

The fourth is that the power of mass suggestion is the most potent force today and that the political demagogue is more powerful than all the economic forces.<sup>433</sup>

The reminiscences of the “survivors” of the Martian invasion also tell us a great deal about common attitudes about Germans, poison gas, and other subjects. One recalled:

The announcer said a meteor had fallen from Mars and I was sure he thought that but in the back of my head I had an idea that the meteor was just a camouflage. It was really an airplane like a zeppelin that looked like a meteor and the Germans were attacking us with gas bombs.<sup>434</sup>

And a Californian remembered:

My wife and I were driving through the redwood forest in Northern California when the broadcast came over our car radio. At first it was just New Jersey but soon the things were landing all over, even in California. There was no escape. All we could think of was to try to get back to LA to see our children once more. And be with them when it happened. We went right by gas stations but I forgot we were low on gas. In the middle of the forest our gas ran out. There was nothing to do. We just sat holding hands expecting any minute to see those Martian monsters appear over the tops of the trees. When Orson said it was a Halloween prank, it was like being reprieved on the way to the gas chamber.<sup>435</sup>

These fears were clearly carried over to the Second World War itself, especially around the time of D-Day. The Allies, in their dress rehearsals at Slapton Sands, were clearly concerned about the possibility of gas attacks,<sup>436</sup> and this fear appears to have had something to do with the disaster at Omaha Beach, when a brush fire was taken as a cloud of poison by pinned-down American soldiers.<sup>437</sup> Within a month, Winston Churchill would dictate a memorandum discussing these very matters, as well as the possibility of drenching the German cities and armaments centers with mustard gas.<sup>438</sup> The Germans had similar concerns.<sup>439</sup>

There is no question then that the fear of poison gas was very much a part of the interwar and wartime consciousness. But we should also note that poison gases,

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<sup>433</sup> Ibid.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>436</sup> Edwin P. Hoyt, *The Invasion Before Normandy*. Note especially the photograph of mock casualties in gas masks, section after 134.

<sup>437</sup> Sterling Seagrave, *Yellow Rain: A Journey through the Terror of Chemical Warfare*, 60-62, 80-81 (Omar Bradley is quoted in the latter pages). Michael Shermer provides a wartime home-front episode of gas hysteria, concerning the “Phantom Gasser of Mattoon,” *Why People Believe*, 99.

<sup>438</sup> Gellermann reproduces a photocopy of the entire document, *Der Krieg, der nicht stattfand*, 249-25.

<sup>439</sup> Professor Otto Bichenbach, deposed by the French in 1947 (NO-3848), claimed that the Germans tested poison gases on concentration camp inmates because “At that moment, the military situation was bad for the Reich. The Allies had landed in North Africa and the Abwehr knew that 50,000 tons of phosgene gas was stored in Africa. [...] The gas war seemed inescapable. The supreme command of the Wehrmacht was convinced at that moment that the Allies would be compelled to use gas to force ‘Fortress Europa.’”

like poisons generally, are well suited to paranoid and hysterical reactions, because by definition the substances tend toward the impalpable.<sup>440</sup>

If, for example, gas is conceived as having an odor, then any unfamiliar odor could be attributed to a deadly gas. Berton Roueche provided a case study of such a hysterical reaction that occurred in 1971 in a Florida school: a new carpet had been laid, leaving an unfamiliar smell, a young woman fainted, because she had the flu, and within an hour dozens of students complained of being poisoned.<sup>441</sup> This association of odor with poison, by the way, is particularly deeply rooted in Western culture, in the sense that it ties into the miasmatic theory of disease,<sup>442</sup> as well as with the Victorian belief in “vapours” which were the supposed source of hysteria among women.

On the other hand, if a gas is conceived as a cloud of smoke or mist, then any cloud of smoke or mist may be perceived as a poison gas, and this is apparently what happened at Omaha Beach.

Again, if the gas is conceived as both odorless and invisible, then we have a case where simply the suggestion of poison gas can lead to the claim of its use: this occurred during the Gulf War, when Iraqi SCUD missiles landed in Israel.<sup>443</sup>

Finally, if the gas is conceived as disfiguring—and this is what most people had in mind during the Second World War—then the result is that any decomposed or otherwise disfigured body would be attributed to poison gas usage, and this happened in Germany following at least one Allied raid.<sup>444</sup> Since the Americans and British found similar scenes in the western camps when they liberated them, there is little reason to doubt that they suspected poison gas usage for the same reasons.<sup>445</sup>

The fear of poison gas usage in the West was pervasive even before the Second World War. It was variously believed that it would come in a visible cloud, or be dropped from the skies, or be both odorless and invisible, and would kill instantly with terrible disfiguration. Thus the culture was primed for accusations

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<sup>440</sup> I am reminded here of the mentality associated with poisons and poisonings; compare Charles Mackay, *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*, section on the “Slow Poisoners,” 565–592.

<sup>441</sup> Berton Roueche, “Sandy,” in *The Medical Detectives*, 339–352. “Mass Psychogenic Illness Attributed to Toxic Exposure at a High School,” *The New England Journal of Medicine* 342, no. 2 (January 13, 2000), discussed a similar case of mass gas hysteria, in Tennessee, following a similar course as above. The article suggests that the term “mass hysteria” be retermed “mass psychogenic illness” in recognition of the fact that the former term is demeaning, and indeed tends to reinforce the symptoms.

<sup>442</sup> Rosenberg, *Cholera Years*, and Evans, *Tod in Hamburg*, both discuss this, particularly in connection with the career of Max Pettenkofer. Pettenkofer was so certain that germs were not themselves etiologically decisive that during a cholera epidemic he quaffed a glass of contaminated water to prove his point. He did not contract the disease. His experiment was later repeated by the Russian scientist Elie Metchnikov, with matching results. Indeed, it appears that such daring was the real motivation behind the Russian composer Peter Tchaikovsky’s replication of the stunt, during the cholera epidemic of 1892–93. The fact that his attempt followed the premiere of his most maudlin symphony (“Pathétique”) by only a few days, and the fact that he died as a result, has led to no end of speculation among music historians.

<sup>443</sup> E.g., Elaine Showalter, *Hystories*, 23. Altogether about three dozen SCUDs landed in Israel, and it was assumed that any one of them might contain chemical agents. The number of occasions in which such strikes caused a mass psychogenic reaction is unclear.

<sup>444</sup> Compare Crowell, “Defending.”

<sup>445</sup> John Dennis McCallum, *Crime Doctor*, 1978, describes the activities of Dr. Charles Larson, who conducted autopsies at Dachau; his comments are ambiguous. Autopsies were also supposed to have been conducted at Natzweiler-Struthof; no results indicating cyanide poisoning have been released.

of poison gas usage. But since the main fear was that such gas would be delivered from the air, we would also expect gas protection to be a prominent feature of German civil defense. And indeed it was.

## **12. GERMAN CIVIL DEFENSE AND THE SPECTER OF GAS WARFARE**

*German air raid shelters meant to serve also as anti-gas shelters. —Therefore equipped with gastight doors. —Air raid shelter doors also equipped with peepholes, to allow inspection without breaking the gastight seal. —The doors at Majdanek are air raid shelter doors, the bathing facility meant to double as a decontamination center. —The main fear is from disfiguring mustard gases, therefore Germans equipped laundries and public baths to serve as decontamination centers in the event of a gas attack. —Fears of the belligerents about poison gas use —German testing of war gases on camp prisoners —The Bari incident —No military use of poison gas in the Second World War —Bombing assault on Germany killed perhaps 3/4 million people; most perished from gas poisoning (CO) and were at least partially cremated by dry heat. —But this event would be inverted into an accusation against the German people after the war.*



**T**HE GERMANS INVESTED hundreds of millions of dollars in the preparation of air raid shelters.<sup>446</sup> From the beginning, all German air raid shelters were designed to protect against poison gas as well as against bombs. As a result, special air raid shelter doors were developed, usually made of steel. The doors featured a round peephole covered with a perforated steel plate to prevent breakage, the peephole meant to facilitate visual inspection without having to break the gastight seal by opening the door.

Because there was a particular concern about aerial poison gas attacks, a number of other measures were adopted. For example, part of every municipal air raid crew was designated as a decontamination squad, whose uniforms and equipment would come in handy for other sanitation procedures, including corpse disposal. Because of the particular fear of mustard gas, municipal disinfection centers, bath-houses, and laundries would all be adapted for decontaminating people and their belongings in the event of a gas attack. The Germans devised a number of different shelters, with an emphasis on aboveground air raid and anti-gas shelters that the Western Allies never matched. Every basement, or *Keller*, was also supposed to serve doubly as a gasproof bomb shelter if needed.

In the beginning of the war, the greatest emphasis was placed on constructing shelters in the northwest areas of Germany, that is, the areas that were believed most likely to be bombed by the Allies. For that reason, air raid protection measures tended to be more lax in the east and south. This is probably part of the reason that Dresden failed to construct the dedicated public shelters that were common in cities like Hamburg. However, beginning in the summer of 1942, a general awareness began to grow that the Allies were serious in their attempts to bomb German cities; this meant that even territories to Germany's east were put on alert.

An indication of this heightened awareness comes from a directive dated August 6, 1942, entitled "Guidelines for the Construction of Air Raid Shelters in the Area of the Military Authority in the Government General," meaning occupied Poland. The document stressed the need to build air raid shelters, and described how these were to be constructed such that the entire occupancy of a building was accommodated, in accordance with German policy. In addition, the guidelines directed that existing basements were to be used—and in the absence of basements, ground floors—for the establishment of ad hoc bomb shelters. The document further stated that attention should be paid to anti-gas measures.<sup>447</sup>

Further indications of air raid and gas protection activities in Poland come from

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<sup>446</sup> This section roughly corresponds to Crowell, "Defending," Part 1, and consult the sources cited.

<sup>447</sup> Crowell, "Bomb Shelters," Document 1.

the diary of Hans Frank, which specifically discussed gas protection in two notes;<sup>448</sup> documents from the Majdanek camp to the Auert firm in Berlin requesting gastight doors with peepholes;<sup>449</sup> and second-hand information pertaining to the construction of bomb shelters in Warsaw,<sup>450</sup> all of these from the fall of 1942.

There is an oddity about the Frank notes concerning gas protection. Not only do they contain a description of the extension of gas protection to parts of the native population, but there is also a discussion of code words to signal the implementation of these measures. This suggests a belief that gas attacks might be imminent. One of the entries concerning gas attacks follows with remarks from Frank about “laying to rest the specter of atrocity propaganda” (*mit dem Spuk der Greuelpropaganda ... aufräumen*).<sup>451</sup> Bearing in mind that Frank spoke a few months after the June 1942 gassing claims were broadcast by the BBC, and noting also that Frank’s remarks came just a few days before Thomas Mann would reiterate claims about mass gasings in Poland, his comment suggests two other things. First, it seems likely that Frank was aware of the claims being made about mass gassing in Poland. More important, the context suggests the Germans were aware of the gassing accusations and that perhaps on some level they were concerned that the broadcast of such claims might be part of a conditioning campaign to justify the “retaliatory” use of poison gas.

Such a possibility not only helps explain the pursuit of air raid and gas protection measures in the east at this time, it also draws attention to the comparative preparedness of the combatants to engage in chemical or even biological warfare, and the way the threat of such use might have affected the thinking and conduct of the combatants. It is known, for example, that the English and the Americans developed impressive arsenals of chemical and biological weapons.<sup>452</sup> It is also known that the Germans developed large stocks of chemical weapons, including a whole class of chemical weapons—the nerve gases—knowledge of which was kept from the Allies throughout the war.<sup>453</sup> It is hard to say to what extent the secret preparations for chemical warfare could have contributed to generalized fears and speculation about poison gas.

The threat of poison gas attacks would also have necessitated tests on the effects of such gases. Both sides conducted such tests, the Germans using concentration camp prisoners. The German tests generated a certain amount of correspondence

448 Ibid., Document 2.

449 Ibid., Document 3.

450 Ibid., Documents 4 and 5.

451 Ibid., Document 2. An examination of American newspapers indicates that charges and counter-charges about poison gas use, and therefore threats of retaliation, were frequent during the war. For example, see the following, all from the *New York Times*: February 2, 1941, Germans decline to use poison gas; July 24, 1941, Russians accuse Germans of using poison gas; May 11, 1942 and following, Churchill threatens to use poison gas on Germany if Germany uses it on the Russians, bases his accusation on supposed German movement of poison gases to the eastern front and the nationwide construction of “gas shelters” (May 12, 1942, 5); January 18, 1943, “Hitler May Use Gas”; April 23, 1943 and following, “Britain Warns Nazis on Gas”; “Nazis Said to Fear Gas” (April 27, 1943); June 9, 1943, “Third Warning to Axis”; November 30, 1943, “Nazi Resort to Gas Likely,” etc.

452 Seagrave, *Yellow Rain*; Robert Harris and Jeremy Paxman, *A Higher Form of Killing*.

453 Harris and Paxman, *A Higher Form of Killing*, 53-67.

containing references to “gas” that are sometimes offered as proof of the mass gassing claim.<sup>454</sup>

The potential use of poison gas, shrouded in secrecy, led to at least one tragedy. In December 1943, the Luftwaffe carried out a raid on a number of American merchant ships in the southern Italian port of Bari. Unbeknownst to virtually everyone, one of the sunken ships contained large stores of mustard gas bombs that leaked into the flaming harbor. Hundreds died as a result of this incident, largely because a proper diagnosis could not be arrived at, and the entire episode spurred rumors of German first use as well as plans for a “counterstrike” that were luckily abandoned.<sup>455</sup> Probably the incident also spawned quite a bit of speculation about poison gas usage on both sides.

The possibility of poison gas usage in a military context generated large stocks of weapons, as well as tests, correspondence, and contingency plans. Moreover, as the incident at Bari as well as Hans Frank’s diary indicate, each side was very anxious about the other side’s possible use. These things should be kept in mind when reviewing the gassing claims.

One could conceivably argue that the Germans were especially careful not to record anything about the mass gassings precisely because of the fear of chemical warfare retaliation, but there are several problems here. The first is that the German records concerning chemical weapons development and testing largely survived the war, which contradicts the idea of an embargo on documentation about gassing. Second, and moreover, according to the gassing claim, chemical weapons were not used. Therefore one is again confronted with the absence of documentation concerning mass gassing, and mass gassing alone. A third problem is that, since the Germans were indeed concerned about the retaliatory use of poison gas, they would have been foolish to carry out mass gassings, especially since they were simultaneously being accused of doing so by Allied media. A fourth problem is even more mysterious: for while the Allies accused the Germans of mass gassings from 1941 onwards, they never used these accusations as a pretext for using poison gas themselves. This suggests that the Allies did not believe their own reports.

Our discussion of the implementation of civil air defense and gas protection measures in occupied Poland has led us into a discussion of the potential for chemical weapon usage in the Second World War. But there is one more respect in which such a discussion of civil defense measures in Eastern Europe may help clarify an issue in the run of atrocity accusations made against Germany. We recall that in March 1943 a refugee from Poland penned a document describing the “*Hammerluft*” system, in which prisoners at Auschwitz were supposedly killed with a “hammer of air.” No one has ever explained the source of this claim, which appears to have emerged in occupied Poland at about the time civil air defense measures were

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<sup>454</sup> Kalthoff and Werner, *Die Händler von Zyklon B*, 194-195. A lot of documentation of this type was introduced in the Medical Trial, the first trial of the Nuremberg Military Tribunal (NMT).

<sup>455</sup> Glenn B. Infield, *Disaster at Bari*, 1971.

first being implemented there. We are reminded that the German word for civil air defense is *Luftschutz*, literally, air protection. One wonders if a non-German speaker might have misconstrued *Luftschutz* as *Luftschütz*, which could have been interpreted to mean “to shoot with air.”<sup>456</sup>

As noted, neither side used poison gas in the Second World War. Yet, in one of the strange ironies of history, the Allied bombing campaign, which killed perhaps three quarters of a million German civilians, gassed and burned the majority of its victims. Most of them, trapped in the basement shelters of their buildings, could not escape the carbon monoxide generated by the bombs and fires, whose small molecular size was almost impossible to filter, and so were in effect gassed. Meanwhile, the tremendous heat from the firestorms, which often exceeded 1,000 degrees Celsius, would effectively cremate their bodies with dry heat. But in the aftermath of the war this destruction of the German people with gas and fire was completely overlooked in the Allied prosecution of Germans on charges of gassing and burning.

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<sup>456</sup> Similarly, the application of gas protection, or “*Gasschutz*,” may have fostered another set of rumors.

### **13. CIVIL DEFENSE IN THE CONCENTRATION CAMPS**

*Concentration camps important to war industry. —Therefore require air raid and anti-gas protection, according to German guidelines. Review of evidence for air raid shelters and gas protection in the concentration camp system. —Himmler order of February 8, 1943, directly precedes flood of work orders for gastight fixtures at Auschwitz Birkenau —Extensive documentation indicates the presence of gastight bomb shelters for prisoners by the spring of 1944 —Reference to “Bomb Shelters in Birkenau.”*



THE CONCENTRATION CAMPS also featured extensive civil-defense paraphernalia. There are at least five reasons why this would be so. In the first place the guidelines for air raid shelter construction from the fall of 1940 mandated that all new constructions, particularly in the armaments industry, should be equipped with (gastight) air raid shelters.<sup>457</sup> Second, it is well known that the concentration camp system was regarded as a crucial source of labor for the armaments industry. Third, a directive from Heinrich Himmler dated February 8, 1943, makes it clear that the SS was very concerned about the possibility of air attacks on the concentration camp system.<sup>458</sup> Fourth, it is known in the case of the Auschwitz camp, for example, that it received civil air defense directives throughout the war. Fifth and finally, the concentration camps were indeed the target of Allied bombs, the first bombing of Auschwitz taking place in early May 1943.<sup>459</sup>

The main shelters found in the concentration camps were covered trenches dug out of the ground. But given the concerns among the civilian population concerning gas warfare, we should expect similar adaptations in the camps. A cursory inspection of contemporary photographs and documents further supports the inference of widespread air raid and gas protection in the concentration camps. The dwelling of the Auschwitz commandant, for example, clearly shows a gastight shutter, or *Blende*, attached to the right front of the building, along with a ventilation pipe, while the blueprints for the Central Sauna at Birkenau indicate that its basement was equipped with an emergency exit.<sup>460</sup>

The hypothesis concerning air raid shelters at Auschwitz was strengthened by the 1998 discovery of three documents from the Moscow archives that prove that the Germans were concerned with developing an extensive network of air raid shelters at Auschwitz Birkenau starting from the summer of 1943; that is, at the same time that the building office of that camp was flooded with work orders for gastight fixtures.<sup>461</sup>

The hypothesis concerning air raid shelters at Auschwitz as well as at Birkenau was effectively proved in June 2000, through the publication of a daughter article of the present study, "Bomb Shelters in Birkenau." Limited almost entirely to the records of the Central Construction Office, and with full documentation, the study showed:

- That Auschwitz, and in particular its construction office, was in

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<sup>457</sup> This section roughly corresponds to Crowell, "Defending" Part 2, and consult the sources cited. There are also important references to "Bomb Shelters in Birkenau," reproduced elsewhere in this volume.

<sup>458</sup> Ibid.

<sup>459</sup> Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle*, entry for May 5, 1943.

<sup>460</sup> Compare the photographic evidence in Crowell, "Defending," Part 2.

<sup>461</sup> The documents, copies of which were transmitted to this author by Germar Rudolf, have been reproduced on the Internet on David Irving's website, at [www.fpp.co.uk](http://www.fpp.co.uk), with translations by an unknown party on CODOH at [www.codoh.com](http://www.codoh.com).

receipt of high-level civil air defense memoranda, directives, and instructions throughout the war;

- That these documents spelled out the manner in which civil air defense measures were to be implemented, including recommendations involving the use of new and existing buildings for auxiliary bomb shelter use;
- That Auschwitz received high-level directives on air raid shelter measures in February and March of 1943, that is, simultaneous with the completion of the crematoriums and the fitting of gastight doors and shutters at those locations;
- That the planning of dedicated trench shelters began in the summer of 1943, only weeks after the last of the gastight fittings had been delivered to the crematoriums;
- That these trench shelters were meant for the SS, the workers, and for the prisoner population at Auschwitz, Birkenau, and all of the other subcamps;
- That the building of more shelters at Auschwitz and Birkenau was frustrated by overcrowding, lack of space, and the high water table at Birkenau;
- That even so several trench shelters were built or planned at Birkenau;
- That all of these trench shelters were to be equipped with gastight doors, and such trench shelters were being completed as early as March 1944;
- That it was assumed existing buildings would also be used for civil air defense, including their basements;
- That the preparation of existing buildings for civil air defense was satisfactorily advanced by the end of 1943, and had been—at least with respect to blackout preparations—for a long time by then;
- That the basements of the buildings in Auschwitz were specifically allocated to the prisoners for civil air defense;
- That camp security was an important element in the civil air defense measures applied at Auschwitz.<sup>462</sup>

A number of subsidiary conclusions may be arrived at on the basis of the previously ignored cache of Auschwitz documents concerning gastight bomb shelters. However, in terms of the thesis argued here, it is sufficient to note that there is no

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<sup>462</sup> “Bomb Shelters in Birkenau.”

doubt that there were such gastight bomb shelters at Auschwitz Birkenau.

Turning to other camps, we find that the Bath and Disinfection Complex II at Majdanek has a number of features, including gastightness, that support an air raid shelter interpretation. Clearly, the gastight doors with peepholes are air raid shelter doors, constructed by the Auert firm in Berlin. Other doors in the complex appear to be rudimentary air raid shelter doors constructed of wood.<sup>463</sup> The CO gas-mask filters found on site were produced by Auer (not to be confused with Auert), which was a major supplier of air raid shelter equipment in Germany throughout the war.<sup>464</sup> In addition, the gas-mask filter was specifically constructed according to air raid shelter specifications.<sup>465</sup> The overhead openings in the drying room (Room “A”), discussed earlier, were constructed concurrent to the delivery orders for the gastight bomb shelter doors,<sup>466</sup> and furthermore meet German industry standards (DIN) for the construction of emergency exits from air raid shelters.

Of course, as we have seen, other features at the site point to a disinfection use. These include the overall construction of the building and its location, the external stoves, the piping, the tanks of carbon dioxide, and the positioning of a thermometer in one of the peepholes. However, these features could be squared with air raid shelter usage in the context of decontamination, inasmuch as hot air was a recommended form of decontamination, requiring gastight doors as well as openings for thermometer consultation.<sup>467</sup> Furthermore, a wartime pamphlet of the German Gas Protection Service of the Wehrmacht specifies that existing structures can be adapted for decontamination use.<sup>468</sup>

The simplest explanation is that the Bath and Disinfection Complex II at Majdanek was modified in the fall of 1942, such that it could continue its use as a delousing station while in addition being available for air raid and gas protection as well as decontamination.<sup>469</sup> Support in the surrounding context lies in the fact that these modifications to the Majdanek camp in occupied Poland occurred at the same time that the Germans were providing the Jewish inhabitants of the Warsaw Ghetto with materials for air raid shelters, materials that were used instead to construct a network of defensive bunkers that were employed against the Germans in May 1943.<sup>470</sup>

By analogy we could also compare evidence of other showers in the German concentration camp system that were equipped with gastight doors. For example, it is known that the Germans would erect showers in their crematoriums: the thermal

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463 Photos in Graf and Mattogno, *Concentration Camp Majdanek*, 308, 309.

464 Michael Foedrowitz, *Bunkerwelten: Luftschutzanlagen in Norddeutschland*, 51.

465 Graf, Mattogno, *Concentration Camp Majdanek*, 123.

466 Ibid.

467 Kalthoff and Werner, *Die Händler von Zyklon B*, describes the use of these other gases.

468 Described in *Entgiften von Bekleidung und Ausrüstung in ortsfesten Anlagen*, issued by the Gasabwehrdienst aller Waffen, dated (January 1, 1943).

469 Crowell, “Defending,” Part 2.

470 Stroop Report, in “Bomb Shelters in Birkenau,” Documents 4 and 5.

energy of the ovens provided a cheap and economical source for hot water.<sup>471</sup> Hence, the crematoriums at Natzweiler and Mauthausen were both equipped with working showers,<sup>472</sup> Dachau today has a nonworking shower in its crematorium, and showers were installed in one of the morgues of Crematorium III at Birkenau in May 1943 in order to provide hot showers for the prisoners during a typhus scare.<sup>473</sup> The Mauthausen shower room is equipped with a bomb shelter door,<sup>474</sup> while the Dachau shower has been equipped with a disinfection chamber door, perhaps one left over from the four disinfection cubicles nearby.<sup>475</sup> Meanwhile, the transfer documents indicate that the basement shower room of Crematorium III at Birkenau was also equipped with a gastight door. In sum, we have showers at five camps—Majdanek, Mauthausen, Dachau, Natzweiler, and Birkenau—that are equipped with gastight doors, and, in at least three cases, identifiable bomb shelter doors. The global explanation would see this juxtaposition as clear evidence of the implementation of known German civil air defense measures for chemical-warfare decontamination. On the other hand a selective interpretation would see this as evidence of homicidal cyanide gas chambers: however, this explanation then has to account for the working showers in four out of five cases, the fact that air raid shelter doors can be opened from inside, and the fact that no one claims today that anyone was gassed in the shower rooms of either Majdanek, Natzweiler, Dachau, or even, arguably, Mauthausen.<sup>476</sup>

Another possible explanation concerns the deliberate use of civil air defense fixtures for disinfection purposes. This seems the most likely explanation for the fact that the three outside gas chambers at Majdanek, which were originally separate from the disinfection complex, but which have since been extensively altered,<sup>477</sup> are all equipped with Auert bomb shelter doors. Support for this interpretation comes from incidental claims made at the Tesch-Weinbacher trial that the gas chambers at Lublin (Majdanek) were adapted in 1944 for the use of other gases besides Zyklon B, specifically, Areginal, a gas which, like T-Gas and others, points to the need for heating, careful temperature monitoring, and carbon-dioxide use.<sup>478</sup> But in this case it would mean that the camp simply used air raid shelter doors that had been acquired two years previously for this new purpose. Certainly there would have been no point in 1942 in ordering bomb shelter doors from Berlin, four hundred miles away, to construct *ad hoc* disinfection gas chambers in 1944.

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<sup>471</sup> Pressac, *Auschwitz: Technique and Operation*; Mattogno, “The Crematoria Ovens,” in Rudolf, ed., *Dissecting the Holocaust*, 373-413.

<sup>472</sup> For Natzweiler, Pressac, *Auschwitz: Technique and Operation*; for Mauthausen, Shermer and Grobman, *Denying History*, 168. It is a little unclear which door Shermer and Grobman are referring to, but other photos on the web make it clear that the door on the Mauthausen shower is a bomb shelter door.

<sup>473</sup> “Bomb Shelters in Birkenau,” Section 3.6.

<sup>474</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>475</sup> Pressac, *Auschwitz: Technique and Operation*, contains a famous photo of one of the disinfection chamber doors.

<sup>476</sup> Shermer and Grobman, *Denying History*, argue the use of the Mauthausen shower as a gas chamber, 168, but this is also in contradiction to Broszat’s 1960 declaration.

<sup>477</sup> Shermer and Grobman, *Denying History*, 161-168.

<sup>478</sup> See *Tesch-Weinbacher Trial*, Public Records Office, London, WO235/83.

## **14. PRESSAC'S "CRIMINAL TRACES" AND THE NUMBER OF VICTIMS**

*Material or documentary evidence in the present day rests almost entirely on the "Criminal Traces" of J. C. Pressac, developed by the Polish communists for their Auschwitz trials in 1946 and 1947. —Yet this evidence, when viewed in the light of civil-defense literature, does not indicate gas chambers, but rather gastight bomb shelters and delousing chambers. —Since most of this evidence clearly argues for gastight bomb shelters, but was developed, and has been presented, as proof of gas chambers, it follows that there is no material or documentary evidence for gas chambers at all, and it follows further that there is a strong likelihood of a Polish and Soviet communist hoax in developing this particular evidence. —Questions concerning the overall death toll at Auschwitz, or at the other alleged extermination camps, with or without gassings —Distinct from the broader question of the overall total of Jewish victims of Nazi persecution.*



THE ISSUE OF AIR RAID SHELTERS and gas protection at the concentration camps leads directly to the purported evidence of gas chambers in the Birkenau crematoriums, which have been the subject of an important study by the Frenchman Jean Claude Pressac.<sup>479</sup>

Pressac's study represented an attempt to prove that the four Birkenau crematoriums were equipped with gas chambers, strictly on a material and documentary basis. The centerpiece of Pressac's massive tome was a list of some three dozen "Criminal Traces," which represented the totality of material and documentary evidence that can be offered in support of the thesis that mass gassing occurred at the Birkenau crematoriums. (There is no material or documentary evidence for gasings at any other locations at Auschwitz.)

We have not yet had occasion to review this part of the documentary evidence because almost all of it was produced at the time of the Polish-run Auschwitz trials in 1946 and 1947, after which it was filed away.<sup>480</sup> With one or two exceptions, these documents were never used in the West to support the claim of mass gassing. Only in the late 1980s, after the revisionist critique had cast major doubts on the veracity of the gassing claim, were these documentary traces unearthed and offered as authoritative and final proof of the mass gassing claim.

But when we review the Criminal Traces we do not find evidence of gas chambers after all. Indeed, looking at the Criminal Traces in the light of German civil-defense literature, we find instead that Pressac has unwittingly made a convincing argument that each of the Birkenau crematoriums was equipped with a gastight bomb shelter, and that these shelters also included decontamination facilities in the form of showers and baths. In this respect it is important to note that the crematorium at the base camp was known to have been used as an air raid shelter, although its poison gas protection features have rarely been commented on.

We should emphasize that all of the material and documentary evidence, when placed in a larger context, points to gastight air raid and anti-gas shelters, although it is likely that at least two of the traces—the gas detectors and possibly the term "*Vergasungskeller*"—are rooted in other benign procedures, including disinfection.<sup>481</sup> There is no direct material or documentary support for the claim that these

<sup>479</sup> This section roughly corresponds to Crowell, "Technique," and consult the sources cited.

<sup>480</sup> Crowell, "Technique"; also Crowell, "Bomb Shelters in Birkenau." This is clear by consulting the manner in which Pressac obtained and used these documents; see his *Auschwitz: Technique and Operation*.

<sup>481</sup> Crowell, "Technique," and in particular follow the links to the Internet articles of Arthur R. Butz, "*Vergasungskeller*" and "Gas Detectors at Auschwitz." Both Dr. Butz and myself have construed "*Vergasungskeller*" in a civil defense context; however, if anything, "*vergasen*"-type words are even more firmly rooted in disinfection and delousing procedures. While convinced that I am correct in identifying several civil defense and gas protection features to Leichenkeller 1 of Krematorium II (i.e., the "*Vergasungskeller*"), it is conceivable that part of it was intended for the disinfecting or delousing of clothing of the dead or the corpse handlers. However, in that case it is doubtful that the entire *Keller* would have been set aside for that purpose:

spaces were designed, let alone used, as extermination gas chambers.

That all of the Criminal Traces at Auschwitz Birkenau can be explained in terms of civil air defense literature, disinfection literature, and other technical literature means, first, that there is no longer any documentary or material evidence that mass gassings took place at all. This is important because, as we have already noted, no documents pertaining to gas extermination have ever been offered for the other camps, for example, Sobibor, Treblinka, or Belzec. Second, these documents, which the context shows clearly concern either disinfection or civil air defense procedures, were just as clearly used out of context by the Polish communists who conducted the original Auschwitz trials. One can possibly suggest that they were used out of context unwittingly, but the fact that documents pertaining to civil air defense and disinfection were so clearly misused strongly indicates that there was never any merit to the extermination-gassing claim in the first place.

In other words, civil air defense literature, along with disinfection literature, does more than explain all of the alleged documentary and material evidence for mass gas exterminations. Shown in their proper context, these documents, now clearly seen as having been misused, bring us face to face with the possibility of a deliberate Polish and Soviet communist fraud.<sup>482</sup>

At this point it seems only fair to address the critical comment that, if fraud surrounded the gas chambers at Auschwitz and Majdanek, and perhaps other camps, this does not explain away the huge death tolls attributed to these camps, or the apparently very large losses experienced by the Jewish people in the Second World War. If, as is argued today, more than one million persons perished at Auschwitz, it would make little difference whether they died from poison gas or bullets, or whether, as Princeton professor Arno Mayer has argued, from “natural causes” such as disease.<sup>483</sup>

All of this is true, and it should be stressed that disputes about the total of Jewish

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then the use of the word would be an example of metonymy, and the facility itself could well have been used for a variety of purposes, including disinfecting corpse handlers, ad hoc disinfection and delousing of camp arrivals, and decontamination. Such multipurpose use harmonizes with German civil defense procedures in the cities; consult Crowell, “Defending,” Part 1. The above 1997 conjecture of dual or even triple use of the crematoriums has been effectively proved, not only on the basis of documents discussed by Carlo Mattogno in 1999, but also on the basis of a series of reports prepared by the head of the Central Construction Office, Karl Bischoff, in May 1943; see Crowell, “Bomb Shelters,” for details, elsewhere in this volume.

482 This conclusion is, I believe, inescapable. At the beginning of my research I explored the possibility that the Soviets and other communists misconstrued the air raid shelter evidence, and it is certainly at least possible that many individuals did, and probably most Westerners. However, at no point in the historical record, or in the elaboration of these materials since then, has there ever been a recognition of the air raid shelter origins of these gastight features. It is beyond belief that the association never occurred to an establishment historian on this subject, particularly in Eastern Europe, where the only extant “gas chamber” facilities are located. Therefore I am forced to conclude that establishment historians in Poland and the Soviet Union failed to point out the implications to their thesis, namely, that the Germans had constructed air raid shelters but had used them for exterminations. This failure can only be understood as a desire to suppress the issue of air raid shelters per se, because otherwise it most certainly would have been (and would be!) a valuable addition to our knowledge of the Holocaust. Hence I conclude that the air raid shelter origin of gastight features was suppressed because of the questions it would raise, namely, the questions it would raise about the validity of the extermination hypothesis overall. This 1997 note should be supplemented by the documentation in Crowell, “Bomb Shelters in Birkenau.”

483 Lest Professor Mayer be accused of revisionism, it is best to quote him here: “...from 1942 to 1945, certainly at Auschwitz, but probably overall, more Jews were killed by so-called ‘natural’ causes than by ‘unnatural’ ones.” Arno Mayer, *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken?*, 365.

victims of German persecution lie outside the scope of this study. However, there are a number of ways in which the existence of gas chambers is essential to other claims about the Holocaust. For example, the mass gassing claim is part and parcel of the argument, advanced by Shermer and many others, that whatever process of destruction the Jewish people were subjected to involved “systematic,” “technically advanced”<sup>484</sup> procedures and “purpose-built” “extermination facilities.”<sup>485</sup> Furthermore, the mass gassing claim carries over into other areas, including the argument over the alleged intention of the Nazi leadership to physically exterminate the Jewish people (because otherwise gas chambers and crematoriums would not have been built, as the argument goes), as well as the assessment that the Western Allies were somehow complicit in the destruction of the Jewish people because they failed to “bomb the gas chambers” at Auschwitz.<sup>486</sup> However, this last claim implies that if the gas chambers had been bombed the death toll at Auschwitz would have been dramatically lower, and this simply underlines the fact that most people consider the existence of gas chambers inextricably bound up with the overall number of victims. Therefore a few comments on the case of Auschwitz seem necessary.

For several decades after the Second World War it was popularly claimed that four million had perished in the gas chambers and crematoriums at Auschwitz, and, as we have seen, this number ultimately led back to faulty Soviet calculations. True, ever since the 1950s there has been a minority view that puts the Jewish death toll at Auschwitz in the range of about one million. This conclusion was formally stated in November 1989, and forms the main conclusion of F. Piper, the current curator of the Auschwitz State Museum.<sup>487</sup>

However, the reduction of the Auschwitz death toll creates a marked imbalance in the apportionment of the victims. If, as Höss declared again and again, about one million Jews were sent to Auschwitz,<sup>488</sup> it is equally true that as many as two-thirds of these people arrived only after April 1944, about a year after the completion of the Birkenau crematoriums. This circumstance alone calls into question the allegation that the crematoriums were planned and built for mass murder, since it requires that the architects at Auschwitz not only could foresee the future course of the war but also the future course of deportations.

Moreover, the deportation of over half a million Jewish prisoners to Auschwitz coincided with an explosion of growth in the concentration camp system as a whole. For example, the overall population of the concentration camp system—including, presumably, Auschwitz—is given as approximately 250,000 by April 1944.<sup>489</sup> By February 1945, on the other hand, this population had increased to

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484 Shermer and Grobman, *Denying History*.

485 The common usage during the Irving v. Lipstadt trial. See the transcripts and much other supporting documentation at Irving’s website, [fpp.co.uk](http://fpp.co.uk).

486 A frequent accusation ever since Arthur Morse, *While Six Million Died* (1968).

487 See Piper’s essay in Gutman and Berenbaum, *Anatomy*.

488 In all of his affidavits, as well as in the affidavit of Dieter Wisliceny.

489 Richard Widmann, “Auschwitz: A Reevaluation,” [www.codoh.com/newvoices/nwidmann/nrfwausre.html](http://www.codoh.com/newvoices/nwidmann/nrfwausre.html).

over 700,000:<sup>490</sup> in other words, the population of the concentration camp system practically trebled at a time when similarly huge numbers of Jewish people were being incarcerated. The most likely explanation is that this population increase of the camp system is directly attributed to the influx of Jewish prisoners, which means that the majority did not face any program of mass extermination, let alone mass gas extermination, at Auschwitz.

This hypothesis can be tested by comparing the numbers for the Hungarian Jews, of whom it is generally conceded, beginning with Höss, that about 400,000 were sent to Auschwitz.<sup>491</sup> There is abundant evidence that many Hungarian Jews—Jews capable of work and Jews incapable of work—were widely distributed throughout Himmler’s concentration camp empire.<sup>492</sup> Himmler’s speeches from the spring of 1944 specifically reference the Hungarian deportations for labor purposes,<sup>493</sup> his memoranda specifically discuss the use of Hungarian women for forced labor,<sup>494</sup> there are documentary indications that there was a desperate need for the forced labor the Hungarians could provide,<sup>495</sup> there is further documentation that Hungarian Jews were pressed into precisely such kinds of labor,<sup>496</sup> and there are plenty of anecdotes, including numerous survivor testimonies, that describe the wide distribution of the Hungarian Jews throughout the concentration camp system after their arrival at Auschwitz.<sup>497</sup> Jürgen Graf has found evidence that tens of thousands of Hungarian Jews were sent to labor camps in the Baltic region;<sup>498</sup> other documents indicate that thousands of Hungarian Jews were sent to other camps such as Gross-Rosen from the very beginning of the Hungarian action;<sup>499</sup> and Hungarian historians, notably Szabolcs Szita, have noted that Hungarian Jewish forced labor was used in no fewer than 386 camps, including all of the main concentration camps in Germany and hundreds of their subcamps.<sup>500</sup>

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<sup>490</sup> Ibid., and see Robert N. Proctor, *The Nazi War against Cancer*, 260, 346 n.31, who references a German researcher. Proctor assumes (260) that the figure is too high for the camps alone, but the magnitude is generally accepted by most scholars; see Ulrich Herbert, *Fremdarbeiter*, 426.

<sup>491</sup> The issue of exactly how many Hungarian Jews were deported has been the subject of serious discussion among revisionists for years. See Mattogno’s arguments with Pressac, and see also Jürgen Graf, “What Happened to the Jews Who Were Deported to Auschwitz but Were Not Registered There?” and Arthur R. Butz, “On the 1944 Deportation of Hungarian Jews,” both in the *Journal of Historical Review (JHR)* 19, no. 4 (July–August 2000), pp. 4–29. I contributed an article published the following year, “Beyond Auschwitz: New Light on the Fate of the Hungarian Jews,” *JHR* 20, no. 2 (March–April 2001), as well as an exchange with Graf, “Hungarian Jews at Auschwitz and Beyond,” *JHR* 20, no. 2 (May–June 2001).

<sup>492</sup> The issue of the number of Hungarian deportees, the number used for labor purposes, and the number who by inference perished was first developed via the researches of the Hungarian historian Tamas Stark in the late 1980s. His original estimates appeared in “A magyar zsidóság veszteségei” (The Losses of Hungarian Jewry), *Historia* (Budapest), no. 1–2 (1989), pp. 54–56. He subsequently backed away from his earlier totals in *Zsidóság a vézskorszakban és a felszabadulás után, 1939–1955* (Jewry during the Holocaust and after Liberation, 1939–1955), published in 1995 (translated as *Hungarian Jews during the Holocaust and after the Second World War, 1939–1949: A Statistical Review*, in 2000). Other sources for the tremendous dispersion of Hungarian Jews for forced labor are the works of Szabolcs Szita, in particular *Halálérőd: A munkaszolgálat és a hadimunka történetéhez* (Death Fort: On the History of the Labor Service and Military Labor).

<sup>493</sup> Crowell, “Beyond Auschwitz.”

<sup>494</sup> Ibid.

<sup>495</sup> Ibid.

<sup>496</sup> Ibid.

<sup>497</sup> Ibid.

<sup>498</sup> Ibid.

<sup>499</sup> Ibid.

<sup>500</sup> Ibid.

The point, in terms of our thesis, is that there is plenty of evidence to argue that only a fraction of the Hungarian Jews deported to Auschwitz could have perished there, from which it follows that the death toll at that camp was correspondingly lower.<sup>501</sup> Yet as the death toll at Auschwitz is lowered, the less likely the implementation of a mass gassing program becomes. The same argument can be applied to the other extermination camps, that is, the “Reinhard” camps,<sup>502</sup> none of which was equipped with crematoriums similar to Auschwitz, and for which forensic study indicates mass graves in no way commensurable to the mass gassing claim.<sup>503</sup>

We should stress that by making this long detour on the connection between the mass gassing claim and the overall number of victims at Auschwitz we are not attempting to make any claims regarding the rate of survival among European Jews in the Second World War. Our general assumption, which admittedly we have never tested, is that probably millions of Jews perished during the war, since, after all, there were tremendous civilian casualties throughout eastern and central Europe both before, during, and after the Second World War, and the Jewish people bore the additional onus of being persecuted and were considered active enemies of the Third Reich. However, the point is that the mass gassing claim is not proved by any overall estimate of victims at any given location, and furthermore these estimates amount to little more than guesses.<sup>504</sup> On the other hand, the mass gassing claim has a lot to do with supporting the claim that there was an intended policy of Jewish extermination.

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501 The Jewish toll for Auschwitz as per van Pelt’s report for the Irving v. Lipstadt trial was about 900,000 deaths. Revisionists do not generally question about 100,000 of these. Van Pelt accepts that some 400,000 Hungarian Jews are included in this total, along with perhaps 200,000 more from other locales, principally Lodz. It follows that, absent an extermination theory to be applied to this 600,000, the real difference between the parties is between about 300,000 and 100,000. Meanwhile, during the five months of this traffic, at which time the cremations are supposed to have stopped, the crematoriums could have theoretically disposed of perhaps 150,000 people. No one has ever presented any evidence of large mass graves or burning pits for the remainder.

502 Stroop’s Nuremberg affidavit is relevant here. It records sending the 50,000 Jews to Lublin, while the report in his name claims they were sent to “T 2,” i.e., Treblinka, from which it is usually assumed they were exterminated.

503 In the summer of 1998, news reports described the excavations at Belzec by a team of Polish archaeologists under Andrzej Kola. Asked for a comment by email, I responded and was surprised to find my casual email published. Even worse, that email was then translated into German with many additions of a kind I would not make, and was then published again. Kola’s excavations were completed the following year and were published by the US Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) as *Belzec: The Nazi Camp for Jews in the Light of Archaeological Sources* in 2000. The basic result is that the team discovered about 30 graves, yielding in the aggregate about 6,000 square meters of possible original grave space; using Ball’s constant of ten bodies per square meter of surface area, that could yield about 60,000 corpses. Current estimates at Belzec are at about 450,000.

504 István Deák, “A Fatal Compromise? The Debate over Collaboration and Resistance in Hungary,” in István Deák, Jan T. Gross, and Tony Judt, eds., *The Politics of Retribution in Europe*, 72 n. 22.



## 15. THE GAS CHAMBER OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

*Gassing narratives from the Second World War reflected in literature prior to the war, including Sinclair Lewis (1936) and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1924). —Analysis of the shower-gas-burning concept in its parts: disinfection procedures (Mayakovsky), poison gas usage (H.G. Wells, Sax Rohmer, M. P. Shiel, Georg Kaiser, E. R. Burroughs, et al.). —Elements of the gassing claim directly pertinent to Jewish traditions: long-standing conceptions of “extermination” and its meanings, “six million,” and the concept of a secret central conspiracy to destroy the Jewish people. —The conclusion is that the cultural script for the shower-gas-burning sequence as well as the extermination/six million central conspiracy concepts are all very old and deeply rooted.*



WE HAVE SEEN so far in our traversal of the mass gassing claim that the concept of shower-gas-burning underlay the accusation of gas exterminations in the Second World War, and we have also seen that no material or documentary evidence in support of the accusation has surfaced. This leads us naturally to the question as to whether the claim is entirely fictitious.

Here are some excerpts from a gassing narrative:

And then we stopped in front of a large barrack marked *Bad und Desinfektion II*. “This,” somebody said, “is where large numbers of those arriving at the camp were brought in.” The inside of this barrack was made of concrete, and water taps came out of the wall, and around the room there were benches where the clothes were put down and afterwards collected. [...] Anyway, after the washing was over, they were asked to go into the next room: at this point even the most unsuspecting must have begun to wonder. For the “next room” was a series of large square concrete structures, each about 1/4 the size of the bathhouse, and unlike it, had no windows. The naked people (men one time, women another time, children the next) were driven or forced from the bath-house into these dark concrete boxes—about five yards square—and then, with 200 or 250 people packed in each box—and it was completely dark in there, except for a small skylight in the ceiling and the spyhole in the door—the process of gassing began. First some hot air was pumped in from the ceiling and then the pretty pale-blue crystals of Cyclon were showered down on the people, and in the hot wet air they rapidly evaporated. In anything from two to ten minutes everybody was dead. There were six concrete boxes—gas chambers—side by side. “Nearly two thousand people could be disposed of here simultaneously,” one of the guides said. [...] At first it was all very hard to take in, without an effort of the imagination. There were a number of very dull-looking concrete structures which, if their doors had been wider, might anywhere else have been mistaken for garages. But the doors—the doors! They were heavy steel doors, and each had a heavy steel bolt. And in the middle of the door was a spyhole, a circle, three inches in diameter composed of about a hundred small holes. Could the people in their death agony see the SS-man’s eye as he watched them? Anyway, the SS-man had nothing to fear: his eye was well protected by the steel netting over the spyhole. And like the proud maker of reliable safes, the maker of the door had put his name round the spyhole: “Auert, Berlin.” Then a touch of blue on the floor caught my eye, it was very faint, but still legible. In blue chalk someone had scribbled the word “vergast,” and had drawn above it a skull and crossbones.<sup>505</sup>

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505 Alexander Werth, *Russia at War, 1941–1945*, 807–808; the context indicates that Werth is simply quoting his older

And here are some excerpts from another:

I was ordered by Brack to attend the first euthanasia experiment in the Brandenburg asylum near Berlin. I went to the asylum in the first half of January 1940. Additional building work had already been carried out especially for the purpose. There was a room similar to a shower room which was approximately 3 by 5 meters and 3 meters high and tiled. There were benches round the room and a water pipe about 1 inch in diameter ran along the wall about 10 cm off the floor. There were small holes in this pipe from which the carbon monoxide gas poured out. The gas cylinders stood outside the room and were already connected up to the main pipe. [...] There were already two mobile crematoriums in the asylum with which to burn the corpses. There was a rectangular peephole in the entrance door, which was constructed like an air raid shelter door, through which the delinquents could be observed. The first gassing was carried out by Dr. Widmann personally. He turned the gas tap and regulated the amount of the gas. [...] For this first gassing about 18–20 people were led into this “shower room” by the nursing staff. These men had to undress in an anteroom and they were completely naked. The doors were shut behind them. These people went quietly into the room and showed no signs of being upset. Dr. Widmann operated the gas. I could see through the peephole that after about a minute the people had collapsed or lay on the benches. There were no scenes and no disorder. After a further five minutes the room was ventilated.<sup>506</sup>

Here are excerpts from a third:

Then came the idea of a room such as you see here with iron door and shutter—a hermetically sealed room. Put those two facts together, and whither do they lead? [...] Observe what I found. You see the gas-piping along the skirting here. Very good. It rises in the angle of the wall, and there is a tap here in the corner. The pipe runs out into the strong room, as you can see, and ends in that plaster rose in the center of the ceiling, where it is concealed by the ornamentation. That end is wide open. At any moment by turning the outside tap the room could be flooded with gas. With door and shutter closed and tap full on I would not give two minutes of conscious sensation to anyone shut up in that little chamber. By what devilish device he decoyed them there I do not know, but once inside the door they were at his mercy. Now, we will suppose that you were shut up in this little room, had not two minutes to live, but wanted to get even with the fiend who was probably mocking at you from the other side of the door. What would you do? ... Now, look here! Just above the skirting is scribbled with a purple indelible pencil, “We, we—” That’s all.<sup>507</sup>

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dispatches here.

<sup>506</sup> Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism, 1919–1945*, vol. 3, 1019; Klee, “*Euthanasie*,” 110. This appears to be testimony of August Becker in 1960, and should be compared with his affidavit from April 4, 1960.

<sup>507</sup> Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Complete Sherlock Holmes*, 1120.

What is the difference among these accounts? They all sound similar. The first is from Alexander Werth, and fairly represents the kinds of arguments he and others made in September 1944 in describing the operation of the Majdanek gas chamber. As we have seen, the gastight door, which he found so incriminating, is merely an air raid shelter door. The second account comes from testimony about a euthanasia gassing, which we have seen involves a probable retrofitting of the shower-gas-burning concept. The final excerpts come from a Sherlock Holmes story, “The Adventure of the Retired Colourman,” by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, written in 1924 or 1925.

The Holmes story reminds us of two things. First, that a clearly fictional—but meant to be realistic—depiction of a gassing could antedate any gassing stories by almost twenty years. Indeed, we are almost inclined to think that Conan Doyle’s adventure—bearing in mind the universal popularity of the Sherlock Holmes stories back then—contributed some detail to the other two later accounts.

The second thing that comes to mind is the ultimate origin of these concepts. That is, we are not merely interested in the idea of poison gas, but also in the concepts of delousing and burning, and how they evolved and were associated in the Western mind. In addition, we should also take note of those concepts that we specifically associate with the Holocaust, namely, an extermination program, carried out according to higher orders in a secret fashion, and consuming a predetermined number of Jewish victims. What we are proposing is no longer a simple history of what happened, but of how what happened was interpreted by those who experienced it, heard about it, or discovered evidence about it on the basis of their expectations and beliefs.

Such an investigation takes us far from mere literary analysis and almost into a kind of literary archaeology that would take years to unravel. Nevertheless it is still possible to adumbrate some of the roots of these various concepts.

From the nineteenth century “gas” seems to have conjured up above all the fire-damp of coal mines, which engendered several terrible disasters.<sup>508</sup> Alternatively, gas was related to medicine because of its use as an anesthetic for surgery and dentistry.<sup>509</sup> Finally, coal gas was harnessed at the beginning of the nineteenth century for illumination purposes, and was widely distributed throughout Europe by the early twentieth century.<sup>510</sup> This largely impure gas was potentially lethal because of the carbon monoxide it contained; there are several references to its use in the

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<sup>508</sup> Roger Smith, *Catastrophes and Disasters*, 121-126.

<sup>509</sup> Gerald Messadie, *Great Scientific Discoveries*, 16, 17.

<sup>510</sup> The technical name for the product was “coal gas” involving the distillation of gas from coal, or “coal water gas,” produced by heating coke in the presence of water. These processes released flammable hydrogen gas but also quantities of poisonous carbon monoxide, and was the predominant source of gas in homes until after the Second World War, when it was gradually replaced by natural gas. The by-product of such “town gas” production, by either method, was large amounts of black goo called “coal tar.” Beginning in the 1850s, experiments began to be made on this material which created not only the modern dye but pharmaceutical industries as well. In Germany the various dye companies, Hoechst, Bayer, BASF, and others formed themselves into a cartel, the “IG Farben,” whose daughter companies still dominate the field, despite German defeat and spoliation in two world wars.

popular press and literature as a means of suicide,<sup>511</sup> accidental deaths,<sup>512</sup> and even murder.<sup>513</sup> In our opinion, the idea of a painless death through gassing, of a death without premonition, as well as the idea of lethal “gas ovens” were all largely derived in the popular mind from the deaths caused by coal gas.<sup>514</sup>

However, it was probably the mining concept of gas as an explosive that inspired H. G. Wells’ *War of the Worlds* from 1898, where exploding gases provide not only propulsion for the Martian craft but also a potent weapon.<sup>515</sup> Gas usage again would figure in the Martian stories of Edgar Rice Burroughs, from 1913, although here the association clearly seems to have been with nitrous oxide, which frequently is known to cause out-of-body experiences.<sup>516</sup> Probably the Holocaust researcher should be familiar with as many associations of gas as possible when reviewing the construction of gassing claims.<sup>517</sup>

Gas warfare in terms of air power also figures in the European mind earlier than we might think. As early as 1912, a Leipzig correspondent, reviewing the political scene in the Balkans, spoke of the need to develop “poison gas bombs,”<sup>518</sup> and, as far back as 1932, the author of a novel about the coming war would provide a vivid description of the bombing of Paris, ending with a gas attack.<sup>519</sup> Again, H. G. Wells is a prominent figure here, for his *War in the Air* from 1908 featured air battles between huge airships or zeppelins that were kept aloft by their “gas cham-

511 E.g., Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* and O. Henry, “The Furnished Room,” and compare the film *Dinner at Eight* (1933) directed by George Cukor, based on the play by George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber (1932).

512 A common folklore element. Compare also the 1880s pamphlet, “Illuminating Water Gas a Poison!” which argues that the “coal water gas” production method generates much higher levels of carbon monoxide than the “coal gas” method, although both are deadly by normal standards.

513 Harold Schechter, *Depraved*, which recounts the tortures and murders committed by Herman Mudgett, who called himself “Dr. H. H. Holmes.” Among other crimes Dr. Holmes is supposed to have locked two children into a trunk and then gassed them via a rubber hose running from the nearest gas outlet.

514 The anecdotal and even statistical evidence of suicides by using the coal gas in ordinary kitchen ranges is extensive. Statistics from the first decades of the twentieth century indicate hundreds if not thousands of such deaths per year, and as late as the early 1960s in Great Britain several thousand gas suicides were recorded each year (Britain changed over to natural gas in the mid-60s). Gas as a means of suicide (not merely gas ovens but simply gas lamps that were not lit) appears to have been used in the famine in the German-speaking world after the First World War, as well as periodically throughout the West during various economic depressions. The changeover to natural gas after the Second World War reduced the incidence of kitchen range suicides; however, carbon monoxide suicides using automobile exhaust remain common (note that this is essentially the technique claimed at the “Reinhard” camps.)

It is interesting to note that carbon monoxide poisoning is apparently a favored method of suicide for poets and writers: Tadeusz Borowski (famous for his Auschwitz writings), Sylvia Plath, William Inge, Anne Sexton, and John Kennedy Toole all used the method, the first two using oven gas. Notice should be made of Alfred Hitchcock’s somewhat tasteless use of the trope in *Torn Curtain* (1966), in which the hero, played by Paul Newman, kills the East German agent by “gassing” him, that is, by holding his head inside a kitchen range.

I must also record the terrible irony that the diaries of Victor Klemperer record several instances of German Jews who committed suicide with oven gas to avoid deportation. The anti-Nazi German poet Jochen Klepper also committed suicide in the same way, along with his ethnic Jewish wife and step-daughter, in December 1942, for the same reason.

515 H.G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds*.

516 Compare Edgar Rice Burroughs, *A Princess of Mars* (1913). Such gas is the medium of the hero’s instantaneous space travel.

517 For example, the *New York Times*, October 9, 1938, describes the case of two Jewish refugees from Hitler’s Germany who were inadvertently gassed when the hold of the ship in which they were hiding was fumigated with poison gas (probably Zyklon or something similar) while docked in London; the Balvano rail disaster of March, 1944, near Naples, in which over four hundred Italians were asphyxiated with carbon monoxide when a freight train got stuck in a tunnel, and many other contemporaneous accidents involving either poison gas or asphyxiation. The Coconut Grove fire of November 28, 1942, which killed 492 at a Boston night club, with a significant number of deaths from inhalation, is perhaps also relevant.

518 Peter Fritzsche, *A Nation of Fliers*, 41.

519 *Ibid.*, 229.

bers,” and, since gas was essential for the maintenance of air superiority, part of the action of the novel involved the destruction of the opponents’ gas plants.<sup>520</sup>

A further literary synthesis of “gas” themes may be found in the expressionist “Gas” trilogy (1917–1920) by the German playwright Georg Kaiser,<sup>521</sup> in which gas assumes the role of not only the primary engine of social and industrial development but also the weapon that has the potential for destroying mankind, rather as many have regarded nuclear power in our own time.

When looking for literary references to gas in order to define what the word conjured up in people’s minds, it is interesting that Conan Doyle is a veritable fount of references to poison gases of various kinds, including cyanide.<sup>522</sup> Particularly interesting in this respect is *The Poison Belt*, from 1913, which describes Planet Earth entering into a celestial cloud of poison gas that apparently kills all; the only hope for the five survivors is to turn the Madame’s boudoir into a kind of “anti-gas shelter” complete with bottled oxygen.<sup>523</sup> This novel, in turn, probably borrowed the motif of a worldwide gassing from M. P. Shiel’s *Purple Cloud* (1901), in which an explorer returns from the North Pole to find that the world has been destroyed by “another Krakatoa,” which belched huge clouds of cyanide gas that destroyed mankind.<sup>524</sup>

The writings of Shiel, probably best known for his “Yellow Peril” novels,<sup>525</sup> suggest further connections, concerning not only science fiction: anti-Asian paranoia that may have been grafted onto other contexts in the twentieth century (the use of poison gas in the 1915 Sax Rohmer novel, *The Return of Fu Manchu*, comes to mind);<sup>526</sup> the fear of secret weapons; and more generally what is known as the “Future War” subgenre of science fiction.<sup>527</sup> In this respect we find all manner of secret weapons discussed in the tense atmosphere of the 1930s, including poison gas.<sup>528</sup> On the other hand, the idea that the Germans were using their dominance in the chemical industry for developing secret weapons was a common idea even

520 H. G. Wells, *The War in the Air* (1908), Gutenberg e-text.

521 George Kaiser, *Gas*, and see introduction for discussion of the other plays in the trilogy.

522 Doyle, *Complete Sherlock Holmes*, passim. The malefactor in the story cited attempts suicide with cyanide after his capture. Nor am I forgetting the William Gillette play, *Sherlock Holmes*, which featured a scene of Holmes with a cigar locked in a basement “gas chamber.” A film version of this, *Sherlock Holmes im Gaskeller*, followed by 1907 in Denmark.

523 Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Poison Belt*. The basic idea of the novel would later be reworked by Stephen King for his film *Maximum Overdrive* (1986) which features the earth passing through the tail of a comet whose gaseous elements animate eighteen wheelers and other mechanical devices which then terrorize American teenagers.

524 M. P. Shiel, “The Purple Cloud,” in *The Collected Writings of MP Shiel*, vol. 1; although in fact it seems more likely that Doyle’s immediate influence was the arrival of Halley’s Comet in 1910, concerning which there was speculation that Earth would be inundated in clouds of cyanide gas, which some scientists had claimed comprised the comet’s tail. Consult contemporary news reports.

525 Shiel was apparently the inventor of the Future War subgenre concerning the “Yellow Peril”; see “The Yellow Danger” of 1893, with several name changes and subsequent variations. The genre seems to have always been characterized by more than a tinge of hysteria reflecting anxieties about industrialized life (compare the symbolism in *Metropolis*, but perhaps traceable to Melville, as well). Albert Dorrington, *The Radium Terrors*, 1912, featuring Japanese theft of radium in order to make weapons of mass destruction, etc. must be considered another important contribution to the genre.

526 Sax Rohmer, *The Return of Fu Manchu*, Gutenberg e-text.

527 I. F. Clarke, *Pattern of Expectation* (1979), summarizes the history of the matter. Clarke has also issued at least two compendia of mostly European authors in the pre-1914 era, interpolating modern scientific and technical discoveries into their imaginings of future wars. The genre, focused mostly in Britain, has always had a strong anti-German component.

528 Ibid. Many other titles could be cited.

in the first years after the First World War, as is attested by the 1921 book *The Riddle of the Rhine*.<sup>529</sup>

Most remarkably, by the 1930s we find references to gas killings strikingly similar to those that arose in 1940. In 1937 a Jehovah's Witness publication reported on the alleged use of poison gas in German camps,<sup>530</sup> and Sinclair Lewis' *It Can't Happen Here* from 1936 features an episode in which twenty Jews are asphyxiated in the basement of their synagogue with bottled carbon monoxide.<sup>531</sup>

We have already touched on delousing procedures and cremation in the popular culture, as encountered in Huxley and the memoirs of Mary Antin, and even in the short fiction of Sholom Aleichem. Doubtless there are many more. The Soviet poet Mayakovsky used the motif of a delousing station in his futurist play *The Bathhouse* (1926) to describe a process of exclusion, cleansing, and, as it were, "ideological delousing."<sup>532</sup> It is interesting to note that there are at least two claims from the Second World War that allege that the Germans used showers to kill people, but not with poison gas.<sup>533</sup>

Turning now to the concepts important to the Jewish perspective on the Holocaust, the usage of the term "extermination" is deserving of further delving. In this respect the researcher is surprised at how easily the term is employed to describe the persecutions and hardships of the Eastern Jews since the early 1880s. Thus, in 1882, a speech in the United States House of Representatives concluded, "The Hebraic-Russian question has been summed up in a few words: 'Extermination of two and one-half millions of mankind because they are—Jews!'"<sup>534</sup> Meanwhile, in a letter written in 1939, the legendary Jewish historian Simon Dubnow would write of conditions in Germany: "Hitler's 'system of extermination' is simply a translation of Haman's plan to 'destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all Jews.' [...] Hitler has almost realized his plan. One million Jews in Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia are destroyed, plundered, mutilated [...]."<sup>535</sup>

Further evidence of various uses of the word "extermination" and its German form "*Ausrottung*" comes from the 1936 compilation *Der gelbe Fleck*, edited by Lion Feuchtwanger, where the subtitle refers not to physical killing, but simply to the intent to enforce German Jewish emigration, resulting in the *Ausrottung* of German Jewry.<sup>536</sup> While *Ausrottung* in this case is probably best rendered as "ex-

529 Victor Lefebure, *The Riddle of the Rhine*, 1923. Lefebure's main thesis is that German preeminence in the chemical industry enables Germany to develop unique weapons for any future war.

530 *Awake!*, August 22, 1995, "The Holocaust: Who Spoke Out?" 10.

531 Sinclair Lewis, *It Can't Happen Here*, 232.

532 See the comments in the introduction by the translator, Andrew McAndrew, in *Twentieth Century Russian Drama*, 159-162.

533 One of these comes from the journal of Emanuel Ringelblum, *Notes*, where he repeats a rumor that prisoners are forced to go into the shower, from which they contract lung complaints and perish. Another concerns a legend in Mauthausen, according to which the prisoners were forced to stand under the cold showers until they were dead; the cold water would take up to thirty minutes to kill them.

534 Simon Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland*, vol. 2, 295.

535 Simon Dubnow, *Nationalism and History*, Koppel Pinson, ed., 355. The "one million .... destroyed and mutilated" are then described as "one half driven out" and the other half held prisoners and hostages.

536 *Der gelbe Fleck: Die Ausrottung von 500 000 deutschen Juden*, Paris: Editions de Carrefour, 1936, "mit einem Vorwort

tion,” when the book was published in England later that year the subtitle was rendered as “The outlawing of half a million human beings,” suggesting that the use of “extermination” in this context was too much even for the Jewish socialist publisher of the tract.<sup>537</sup>

With due regard to the frightful excesses of the initial wave of Russian pogroms and the effects of *Kristallnacht*, to use the term “extermination” seems either hyperbole or irresponsibility, certainly in the sense in which we construe the term today. But then the obvious conclusion is that “extermination” did not have quite the meaning in the 1930s and the Second World War that it has today.<sup>538</sup>

These remarks also refer back to the concept of “six million” Jews endangered with “extermination,” a construction which has been traced back to a speech by the governor of New York in 1919, in the context of the Russo-Polish war and typhus epidemics.<sup>539</sup> As Arthur Butz was perhaps the first to note, the final figure for Jewish losses as a result of National Socialist persecution seems to have been firmly set early in the war, certainly long before any accurate accounting could be done.<sup>540</sup> One has to inquire on the fixation with this number, especially in light of both traditional and revisionist studies that indicate the loss of life—if not the loss of community—was rather less.<sup>541</sup>

Finally, it seems to be worthwhile to study Jewish historians to grasp their vision of historical causality. Simply put, the explanations put forward by Jewish historians for the pogroms, as for any of the other misfortunes of Jewish history, are almost always expressed in terms of the conspiratorial plotting of members of the ruling elite.<sup>542</sup> Rarely does there seem to be an appreciation of the social tensions

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von Lion Feuchtwanger.”

537 See the discussion in the Irving-Lipstadt trial, cross-examination of Christopher Browning, Days 16-17. The publisher was Victor Gollancz, whose efforts on behalf of Germany after the Second World War probably saved many who would have otherwise starved to death.

538 See the comments of David Irving on the term “Ausrottung” in Kulaszka, ed., *Did Six Million?*, testifying at the Zündel trial in 1988. Irving has other relevant materials on his Internet website, fpp.co.uk.

539 In *The American Hebrew*, October 31, 1919; credit for this discovery to the Polish Historical Society. Cited by David Irving, *Nuremberg*.

540 Butz, *Hoax*, 117-118, in the context of his review of wartime propaganda; also Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies*, 66.

541 Walter Sanning, *The Dissolution of Eastern European Jewry*, provides a revisionist analysis. Germar Rudolf’s article “Holocaust Victims: A Statistical Analysis,” in Rudolf, ed., *Dissecting the Holocaust*, contrasts Sanning with the latest traditional computations of Benz and others. The question of number is not particularly interesting, unless judicious consideration is given to emigrations throughout the 1930s, realistic birth rates that would be reactive to conditions, deaths through wartime conditions, as well as the massive Soviet deportations or evacuations, this last encountered throughout the literature but usually discussed in the context of Holocaust victims; but compare Martin, *Man Who Invented*, 43, 47. Furthermore, whatever the number it does not prove a gassing program.

542 Simon Dubnow, *History*; Grayzel, *A History of the Jews*. This attitude is especially clear in explanations for the pogroms from 1881 onwards, but Dubnow also invokes the conspiratorial plotting which supposedly underlay medieval violence and “blood libel” accusations. This emphasis on “top down” causality, whereby the common people never acted against the Jewish people without external prompting, seems to be rooted in four concepts: first, biblical thinking of causality; second, Christian monarchs and nobility not infrequently extorted Jewish wealth as a guarantee of peace-keeping, and therefore were presumably capable of controlling popular violence at will; third, an unwillingness to credit spontaneous violence, especially in times of hardship, dislocation, and change; and fourth and finally, a desire not to recognize that the presence of an unassimilated minority could naturally create tensions and problems. Of course, to a pre-Zionist mind, Jewish people must have been committed to one of two paths: assimilation, which invariably involved a falling away from the Jewish community (compare Dubnow, *History*, vol. 2, 211), or maintenance of tradition, which in turn involved an acceptance of the Jewish community existing in an unassimilated context in a larger society. (This last was definitely inimical to the interests of the Russian Empire at least from the time of Nicholas I.) In this latter case they would most definitely have to believe that it was normally possible to maintain their customary insular existence without inspiring negative passions among their

that could give rise to largely spontaneous episodes of violence, or that the interests of Jewish people could conflict with those of non-Jews, thus generating tensions which would lead to tragic upheavals.

This last factor appears to be particularly instrumental in the tendency to view the Holocaust in a rather simple and monocausal way, as the personal pursuit of the Hitler-Haman, driven by unnamed demons to utterly destroy the Jews. But, aside from the biblical resonance of such an explanation, it does not fit the patterns we normally associate with any other upheavals in history. Nor does such an explanation account for the complexity of the time, or for the nature of the very real persecutions and dissolution effected by the Stalinist regime, the prewar Polish regime, or other East European governments.<sup>543</sup> To put the onus for the Holocaust solely on Hitler the Man is merely to brandish a caricature of Hitler the Devil, and certainly such historical perception is useless in preventing future holocausts. Instead, all too often, such approaches to historical judgment merely descend into a vein of highly colored condemnations, first of Hitler, then the Nazis, and finally the German people.<sup>544</sup> Such moralistic diatribes may soothe the suffering soul, but they contribute nothing to our understanding, nor, it must be said, do they contribute anything to reconciliation.

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neighbors. But it is precisely here that there is a dilemma, since the modern nation state has tended to demand homogeneity and uniformity from its members, and has systematically eroded the particularism of communities and minorities: the Tsarist policy of "Russification," which afflicted all of the minorities of the Empire, was analogous to processes carried out by Prussia, and in a different degree, by the Western states at earlier times. Whether this is "right" or "wrong" is not a historical question; however, I believe that it is inarguable that the ethnic complexity of Eastern Europe, including, but not limited to the unassimilated Eastern Jews, was the central dynamic in evolving extremist policies in Germany, Russia, and among the various nationalities in between.

<sup>543</sup> See above. There were no doubt a number of factors that led to widespread anti-Semitism throughout Europe, and particularly Eastern Europe, at this time (I am inclined to the thesis that the continent-wide phenomenon grew out of the ethnic problem in the East). The usual explanations are ideological (compare Daniel J. Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*); that is, anti-Semitism arose from the evolution of untrue and hateful prejudices about Jews, and nothing besides. But this is to some extent an obvious tautology: Jews were persecuted on the basis of hateful ideas—but why did these ideas arise in the first place? This is where Goldhagen's method, shared, by the way, by most intellectual historians of this period, even if they do not share his conclusions, shows its defects. Racial or national hatreds do not exist and develop independently of human affairs; to put it another way, such ideas always exist, but require some empirical context in order to flourish. To combat the ideas alone is merely to combat the symptom; what is needed is to examine and alter the situation in which such ideas gain adherents, or so it would appear.

Our analysis of nineteenth century anti-Semitism is pointing to the peculiar, almost caste-like, position of unassimilated Eastern Jews, the demographic trends in the region, the dynamic of industrialization, the bureaucratization of nation states, and secularization as being the most important elements in fostering anti-Jewish hatred as a species of "non-Russian" and "unassimilated" hatred. Since these are social, economic, or otherwise empirical factors, this tends to argue that the disappearance of the unassimilated East European communities, Jewish or non-Jewish, was a foregone conclusion; it further suggests that the gradual homogenization of East European communities, involving large-scale population movements, and including the brutal expulsion and/or absorption of German, Jewish, and other sectarian and ethnic minorities, was also to a large degree inevitable. This is what I mean by "other Final Solutions"—modern nationalism, as the symbolic structure of efficiently run modern states, seems to have an innate intolerance of difference; demographic pressures alone, not counting hegemonic competition, made the reordering of Eastern Europe a necessity. The grim playing out of this reordering, in our opinion, is the true context of the Jewish catastrophe.

<sup>544</sup> Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners* is to our minds a typical example.

## 16. CONCLUSIONS

*There is no material or documentary evidence that unambiguously supports the gassing claim. —The evidence put forward overwhelmingly refers to either disinfection or civil air defense, including gas protection. —Furthermore, fictional accounts of gassing antedate the gassing claim by many years. —The gassing claim as a mass delusion. —As a rumor, compare urban legends —As a legend. —As a hoax. —Analogy to UFO abductions. —The gassing claim as a cultural construct. The need for nationalities to perceive their history as unique. —The general nature of twentieth-century history in Eastern Europe. —The Jewish ordeal along the continuum of war, revolution, collectivization, dekulakization, and the German expulsions. —The gassing claim created by, and reinforced by, delusional pressures of social and cultural change as well as by censorship.*



**T**HE AIM OF THE ESSAY has been to trace in a rudimentary form the evolution of the gassing claims from the summer of 1942, when they began in the form of wartime propaganda, until the end of the Nuremberg trials, by which time they had assumed the stature of facts. Our main assumption was that in tracing the development of these stories we would be able to define precisely where and how the various story elements evolved. Of course, if the evolution of the stories had ended up in a solid documentary or material base, that would have strongly corroborated the factuality of the mass gassing allegations. But in our traversal, we have found two things:

- (1) There is no unambiguous material or documentary basis for the gassing claims: what has been put forward as indirect evidence of mass gassings turns out, in context, to overwhelmingly pertain either to German disinfection procedures or German civil air defense measures.
- (2) Gassing claims similar to those from the Second World War were made on several occasions long before the Germans are supposed to have embarked on the project.

We conclude that since the gassing claims were able to evolve and develop independent of any reliable material or documentary evidence, and indeed were able to evolve to a high degree even before the war began, the gassing claim should be recognized as a delusion, indeed, as one of the greatest delusions of all time.

The critical response could be twofold. First, the critic could say that the hundreds (really, dozens) of eyewitnesses and confessors could not be lying, they must be telling the truth in describing gas chambers, because if they were lying one would have to hypothesize a massive amount of collusion among them in order to make their stories converge.

There are several problems with this rejoinder. The most serious is that it absolutely ignores the context of the testimonies and confessions, all of which were generated in an atmosphere saturated with rumors of the shower-gas-burning sequence. The so-called “convergence of evidence” as it applies to testimonies and confessions could just as easily be attributed to a ground of generalized rumor as to one of empirical fact. Nor is this reliance on testimonies and confessions very convincing when we have seen that testimonies (e.g., Bendel, Bimko), memoirs (e.g., Lengyel, Vrba), and confessions (e.g., Grabner, Höss) are all liable to be inaccurate and untruthful, even if we were to grant that, of course, no one would ever be untruthful about these events on purpose.

As we have seen, the essentials of the gassing legend as embodied in the shower-gas-burning model were widely disseminated during the war, including via radio broadcasts to Europe. Literally anyone in 1945 or thereafter could have devised, or imagined, or attested to, a mass gassing scenario. And in fact we find further that the testimonies and confessions frequently contradict one another on almost all details, having only the shower-gas-burning sequence in common.

It is probably no coincidence that the three predicates of the sequence indicate things that prompted widespread anxiety and fear in the early twentieth century: disease and disease-control measures, poison gas usage, and cremation. Looked at from this angle, the shower-gas-burning scenario, along with the vacuum chambers, the electrocution plates, the lampshades, the soap, the medical experiments, and the films of executions and mass murders that were purportedly the delight of the Nazi leadership, are all, at least on some level, simple expressions of a myth of a twentieth-century Inferno:<sup>545</sup>

*Excuse me, please go on drinking. Are you better now? Or do you have progressive ideas about hell and keep up with the reformists? I mean, instead of ordinary cauldrons with sulfur for poor sinners there are quick boiling kettles and high pressure stoves. The sinners are fried in margarine, there are grills driven by electricity, steam rollers roll over the sinners for millions of years, the gnashing of the teeth is produced with the help of dentists with special equipment, the howling is recorded on gramophones, and the records are sent upstairs for the entertainment of the just.*<sup>546</sup>

To return to the objection that the many witnesses and confessors could not be wrong, such an objection sounds eerily similar to claims made by those who assert the reality of alien abductions: “All the major accounts of abduction in the book share common characteristics and thus provide a confirmation of one another,” wrote David Jacobs. “Even the smallest details of the events were confirmed many times over. There was a chronology, structure, logic—the events made sense .... and they displayed an extraordinary internal consistency.”<sup>547</sup> Yet Elaine Showalter, in her book *Hystories*, has a ready response for those who see in such narrative similarity something more than spectral evidence:

*Literary critics, however, realize that similarities between two stories do not mean that they mirror a common reality or even that the writers have read each other’s texts. Like all narratives, hystories [Showalter’s term for hysterical narratives—SC] have their own conventions, stereotypes, and structures. Writers inherit common themes, structures, characters, and images; critics call these common elements intertextuality.*<sup>548</sup>

<sup>545</sup> All of these are of course typical descriptions attributed to the German National Socialists.

<sup>546</sup> Jaroslav Hasek, *The Good Soldier Schweik*; from the chapter entitled “A Religious Debate,” 138. First published in serial form between 1921-1924.

<sup>547</sup> Quoted in Showalter, *Hystories*, 6.

<sup>548</sup> *Ibid.*

To the extent that we can see traces of the gassing claim in the popular culture in the decades before the Second World War, to that extent we can argue that the gassing claim arose out of such “intertextuality,” or, less ornately, out of the common sense of the time.

That the mass gassing claim can be explained as a cultural construct leads us naturally to consider whether it can be successfully explained by recourse to other approaches borrowed from psychology, crowd and social psychology, and sociology.

One approach would be to look at the gassing claim in the context of the “conveyor belt of death” imagery that frequently crops up in the Holocaust literature.<sup>549</sup> From a sociological point of view, such imagery is above all a hypostasis and rejection of the industrialization and modernization process that at this moment in historic time was completely transforming Eastern Europe. It is a truism of sociology and the sociology of knowledge that such transformations destroy the “plausibility structures,” or belief structures, of the previous craft-based or agricultural-based societies, and above all their legitimizing structures in religion.<sup>550</sup> No doubt the emotion, verging on religious devotion, that for many imbues this topic and this claim can be linked back to such crises of faith and society.

Then again, there are those who would prefer to characterize the gassing claim as a hoax. A hoax it may well be, especially when, in studying it, we limit ourselves to the cheap and salacious gossip of far too many of the immediate postwar treatments, which is, unfortunately, characteristic of most of the widely read ones.<sup>551</sup> Yet, that this great tragedy has over the years accrued a thick silt of fantasy does not on its own impugn the sincerity or the pain of those who experienced the deportations or lost loved ones during the war. Nonetheless, the gassing claim does seem to meet many of the wish-fulfillment and projection characteristics of true hoaxes.<sup>552</sup> It would probably be better to say that, if the claim is a hoax, then surely a hoax of limited participation, and we should emphasize the number of those deceived, rather than the small number of those deceiving.

Then we might ask ourselves to what extent we may call the gassing claim a rumor, or whether it even qualifies for the status of a legend. That the gassing claim began as rumor seems indisputable: it meets the general criteria of disorientation and anxiety in its formation.<sup>553</sup> But on the other hand, does it have sufficient value to remain in our collective cultural consciousness as a legend?<sup>554</sup> This brings us to the fundamental value of the Holocaust to the Jewish people.

Our general position is that the Holocaust can only be understood in the wider context of the two wars between the Slavic states and the Germanic states for East

549 Compare Aroneanu, *Inside the Concentration Camps*.

550 Compare Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, on “plausibility structures” and secularization. See also Max Scheler, *Ressentiment*.

551 In our opinion, the memoirs of Lengyel, Nyiszli, and most others that present similar materials meet this classification.

552 Curtis MacDougall, *Hoaxes*, which discusses these various motivations in great detail and with a wealth of illustration.

553 Gordon W. Allport and Leo Postman, *The Psychology of Rumor*; the first part covers the theoretical development of rumor psychology; see especially the statement on 43.

554 See the criteria in Allport and Postman, *The Psychology of Rumor*, 162.

European hegemony from 1914 to 1945 and thereafter. That conflict, in turn, can only be understood in terms of the social, economic, and demographic transformation of the region over the previous several decades. Such a putting into context certainly does diminish the Holocaust, because then it is placed between the horrors of collectivization in Russia on the one hand, and the expulsions of the Eastern Germans on the other. But while such a putting into context is probably apt for a more global and inclusive concept of twentieth-century European history, it is not going to satisfy the identity needs of the individual communities in Europe, nor can it satisfy those needs for the Jewish people. To put it another way, every group is entitled to regard their history and their trials as unique, although some mischief undoubtedly begins when one group seeks to make its group judgment the regnant judgment in a pluralistic society.

Therefore we may ask: how must the Jewish people perceive the Holocaust? From a long perspective, the erosion and gradual destruction of the Eastern European Jewish communities had been going on ever since the Polish partitions, but there is no doubt that in the twentieth century those communities not only came to an end, but were extirpated in scenes of terror and horror. Yet, given the long history of the pogroms from 1881,<sup>555</sup> the extent of prewar Polish anti-Semitism,<sup>556</sup> the non-German participation in many of the massacres,<sup>557</sup> the massive Soviet deportations of 1940,<sup>558</sup> and the anti-Semitism and persecutions of the Soviet Union,<sup>559</sup> it seems naive to insist, “No Hitler, No Holocaust.”<sup>560</sup> Given the predilection for ruthless transformations among the leaders and theorists in the region, it seems likely that had Hitler never lived someone else from some other country would have devised some other Final Solution. It should be clear, on empirical grounds alone, that to focus solely on Hitler, or National Socialism, or the German people, is to seek a simple answer and a convenient scapegoat for a process of destruction that is still difficult to grasp or reconcile with the will of the Lord of the Universe.

The rational traditions of Judaism make it doubtful that thinking men and women in the Jewish community will forever endorse claims that have been shown to be lacking empirical foundation. Therefore we should understand that the concept Holocaust, as usually discussed, can be construed and memorialized in different ways. We have

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555 See Dubnow, *History*, and Grayzel, *History*.

556 Richard M. Watt, *Bitter Glory*, esp. 356-367.

557 A standard fact that emerges in the “shooting” literature; compare Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, and Norman G. Finkelstein and Ruth Bettina Birn, *A Nation on Trial: The Goldhagen Thesis and Historical Truth*, combining two critical reviews of Goldhagen; see especially Birn’s comments, 121-122 and 131-133, as well as Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men*, probably the most neutral writing on the subject, yet the object of Goldhagen’s thesis.

558 Noted in several places, but not developed. See Martin, *Man Who Invented*, 43, 47 for a discussion of magnitudes.

559 Louis Rapoport, *Stalin’s War against the Jews*, very much in the “apologetics” vein, but contains much relevant detail. The issue of the treatment of Jews in the Soviet Union is very complex, especially if one fails to make distinctions between ethnic or “racial” Jews who assimilated to Soviet communist society, and traditional Jews who tenaciously held to Yiddish and the Torah. The religious element was persecuted from the early days of the Revolution—even by assimilated Soviet Jews—while the Yiddish component was tolerated, but not after 1948. Consult Richard Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime*, 362-366.

560 Phrase quoted in Rosenbaum, “Explaining Hitler;” attributed to Milton Himmelfarb in a 1984 article in *Commentary* magazine: no doubt the inspiration for Robert Faurisson’s notorious jibe, “No Holes, No Holocaust.”

noted the emphasis on “extermination” among Jewish historians before Hitler’s Russian War: we take this to be above all a reference to the communal and social nature of the Jewish life. In other words, we should be sensitive to the idea that while extermination may not mean death, to the extent that it involves the destruction of a Jewish community it is almost the same thing as death. Therefore, whether the victims are numbered in millions or hundreds of thousands, whether they died from typhus, or bullets, or poison gas, in German ghettos, Soviet camps, or gas chambers, and whether it was done by plan or occurred as plans unraveled, the Jewish people undoubtedly experienced a terrible bloodletting and a virtually complete loss of community in the Second World War. Whether we wish to call this “Holocaust,” realizing that to do so brings one to the endorsement of a very particular vision of Jewish-Gentile relations and a very specific political ideology, namely, Zionism, lies outside of the province of historical analysis. But whether we call it Holocaust or Judeocide<sup>561</sup> the general outlines of the destruction are clear and inarguable. We should respect this first, just as we should insist on the humanity of the German people in this troubled period, and then the facts will take care of themselves.

Returning to the objections of a possible critic, we could imagine that our interpretation of the facts could be called into question: that in our analysis we have wrongly explained the meager documentary or material data, that in fact the buildings really were gas chambers, and the documents really were references to mass gassing. There are three ways to respond to this argument.

The first is to note that, because of their inaccuracy and variability, the testimonies and confessions absolutely require corroboration with reference to material, physical, or documentary data. Moreover, the fact that delousing paraphernalia were inarguably misconstrued both after the war and during the postwar trials as being related to gas extermination means that skepticism is indeed called for and that the threshold of proof must be kept to a high standard.

The second point to make is that, if it is true that the documents usually offered do indeed have the sinister meaning attributed to them, such an interpretation cannot stand without contextual corroboration. In other words, it is not enough to impose a gas extermination interpretation on a few dozen documents. The effort must be made to place the documents not only within the full context of the documentary record, but also in the context of alternate interpretations. Over the past several decades, revisionists have offered a number of different contexts in which these documents can be explained, including disinfection, camp hygiene, crematorium construction, and civil air defense, and these alternate explanations are backed up by large contemporary literatures. No such literature—large or small—buttresses the gas extermination interpretation of these documents. The onus is therefore on the traditional interpretation to explain in detail why these alternate explanations

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<sup>561</sup> This last is the term preferred by Arno Mayer (*Why Did the Heavens Not Darken?*) and Norman Finkelstein (*A Nation on Trial*).

for the documents are unsound. But instead, the general trend of the traditional school has been to ignore these other contexts entirely, preferring to support their out-of-context interpretations by recourse to the same testimonies and confessions whose authority in turn depends on the gas extermination interpretation of the documents in question. The circularity of the argumentation is manifest.

The third response to the critic concerns the concessions that must be made to the standard narrative, if it is to stand. Those now wishing to claim that the mass gas extermination campaign took place must begin their analyses by acknowledging that the claim is traceable to a process—delousing and disinfection—that gave rise to similar claims in the First World War. They must further admit that accusations of mass gassing, clearly rooted in cultural anxiety about poison gas use, but not in reality, were current in Germany in the 1930s and before the invasion of the Soviet Union. They must grant that rumors, specifically of poison gas, have contributed to cases of mass hysteria, before, during, and after the Second World War. Finally, they must concede that the common reaction of Allied liberators in the West was also hysterical, resulting in several false allegations of gassing.

Holocaust historians in the future must also acknowledge that the Allies, and in particular the BBC, broadcast rumors about mass gassings back to Europe, including at least one in Yiddish, thus compounding the rumors that went back to the 1930s and giving them legitimacy. In spite of all this Holocaust historians must insist that the mass gassings took place, that the Nazis sought to carry out these gassings in utter secrecy even after they had been accused of them over the radio, with such success that no material or documentary trace of the operation remains. One can, by straining credulity, accept the proposition that a conspiracy would carry out a wicked deed without leaving any trace. But, in our opinion, it is simply impossible to assert that a conspiracy of such size and scope would have been organized and carried out after receiving public instruction on how it was supposed to be carried out from enemy radio broadcasts.

That brings us to the second point, which is the verdict of posterity. Historians may be gullible, but they are not permanently gullible. Historians are natural storytellers; hence they will often repeat historical details because they find them illustrative or colorful. But even historians will have to engage the details of the gassing legend some day, and when they do they will realize that there is little or no empirical substance to the claim. At that point the historian will be bound to look to the documentary record, and, finding it nonexistent, will step away from the gassing claim. It makes no difference, therefore, whether revisionists are declared right or wrong on the gassing issue at this time. The point is that future historians will certainly reject the gassing claim. Those who would propose censorship, and have a care for posterity, should rethink their steps.

The gassing claim of the Holocaust derives from a complex of delusion and censorship. We are now in a position to encapsulate how each tendency reinforced the

other. The gassing legend seemed to have been endemic in Europe for several years before the outbreak of the Second World War. At that time, and in conjunction with the National Socialist euthanasia program, conducted in secret, the rumor of gassing developed more widely. Once the Germans began large-scale deportations in the spring of 1942, the typical disinfection rumors arose, as they had in previous decades, but this time they tended to focus on the gassing claim. These rumors passed through the BBC, which gave the rumors authority and in turn created the feedback loop for their further development. In this respect the growth of the gassing rumors should be distinguished from such phenomena as the *War of the Worlds* panic, because in the latter case official denunciation of the claim was immediate. But in this case there were no official pronouncements about the extermination rumors at all, but simply the repetition of these claims.

The combination of frightful epidemic scenes in the Western camps, combined with a series of Soviet Special Commissions, including the Auschwitz report, set the seal on the story, providing the Canonical Holocaust, which in its function was scarcely distinguishable from one of the manuals of interrogation from the days of the great witch hunts or the Inquisition. The evolution of the Canon continued at the postwar trials, where the presentation on the alleged mass gasings and exterminations was in the hands of a state which had already demonstrated its schizophrenic tendencies in its approach to handling various internal crises while following a path of rapid and forced industrialization and modernization in the previous two decades. The residue of such rapid change is furthermore well understood to be anomie, disorientation, and other social pathologies, and these also profoundly affected the Jews of Eastern Europe, who were themselves not only subject to almost continuous persecution during this time but also to the disorientation and social disintegration characteristic of grand socioeconomic transformations.

The claim of mass gas extermination arose and found its fulfillment in this context.

With some imagination and sensitivity we can see how the gassing legend arose, but the decisive factor in all cases was the impeded flow of information, characteristic of censorship, along with the silence of responsible voices of reason that could have destroyed destructive rumors before they created a hysterical reaction.

In this sense we can see how Germany, falling sway to a dictatorship that carefully monitored public information, created its own resistance. The German people, excluded from the unvarnished truth by the censor, sought to fill in the gaps of their knowledge by guessing: in this way they were like any other people. When the threat of war became prominent in the late 1930s, when the concentration camp system began to expand, and, finally, when the Third Reich embarked on its saddening experiments in euthanasia, the German people could now include fear along with ignorance in their speculations. The result was the gassing claim in embryo.

In 1942, when the Germans followed up on their avowed aim to deport all of Europe's Jews to the East, the gassing rumor reemerged with new virulence, now

with a clear reference backward to the anxiety that delousing and disinfection procedures had long engendered. The rumors thus produced filtered their way back to the West, to the dozens of prominent Zionists overwhelmed in their impotence and their concern for their people. They had no way of knowing, of course, precisely what was happening, no more than the German people knew what was happening in the euthanasia centers. The rumors of gassing were plausible, and fit the cultural script. Their acceptance by the Western Zionists and particularly by prominent American Jews and US officials is not especially surprising.

Toward the end of the war in the East, the claims of mass gassing went hand in hand with emerging political interests. It was useful for the Soviet Union, stung by the revelations of Katyn, to ascribe even more monstrous crimes to its enemy, and it was also useful for the United Kingdom and the United States, which pretended to honor human rights, to have the Soviet Union portrayed as a progressive force. But this last could only be achieved by a completely monochromatic depiction of German evil. From the late spring of 1944 it seems that even Zionists, while no doubt accepting the general validity of the extermination claim, began to manipulate it for political purposes.

When the war was over, the gassing claim gradually died out in the West, asserting itself only in the East, shielded by the Iron Curtain of censorship. And later, as relations with Eastern Europe thawed, and as revisionists began putting hard challenges to the truth of the gassing claim, one by one the governments of the free world began to censor their voices in turn.

Two conclusions should be obvious. The first is that the Holocaust gassing claim arose because of censorship. The second is that today the Holocaust gassing claim can only be maintained by censorship. But censorship does more than perpetuate false belief. Because it separates and divides people from access to information, it encourages conspiratorial thinking, and hence mistrust, stereotyping, prejudice, and hatred of other groups. Because censorship involves the government in suppressing the rights of individuals, it encourages individuals to feel helpless, impotent, resentful, and bitter. But precisely because the State, in its arrogance, would prevent free people from speaking their minds, there is then no more outlet for their frustrations, except a slow, constant, and alienated simmer. And having been thus separated from the State, which is supposed to exist to serve their interests, individuals turn their backs on society, which in turn leads to the gradual erosion of civil society, leaving only atomized individuals at the mercy of the State.

The Holocaust gassing claim may have been the false fruit of censorship, but certainly the holocaust of the common people in Europe in the twentieth century was a direct result of too much state intervention, and too little respect for the rights of ordinary people. By upholding censorship of Holocaust revisionists, we duly uphold false beliefs. And we also invite the very real holocausts of the future.

PART 2

BOMB SHELTERS  
IN BIRKENAU

A Reappraisal



## INTRODUCTION

A FEW YEARS AGO the argument began to emerge that the various gastight fixtures of the Birkenau crematoriums were best explained in terms of protection against chemical warfare.<sup>1</sup> The first exploration in this area was by Arthur R. Butz of Northwestern University, whose “*Vergasungskeller*” article of July 1996 argued that the basement spaces of Crematoriums II and III at Birkenau were equipped in a manner consistent with an anti-chemical warfare “gas shelter.” In the spring of 1997, our own research led to the article “Technique and Operation of German Anti-Gas Shelters in World War II” (hereinafter, “Technique”), which approached the issue of chemical-warfare defense from an air raid protection point of view, supporting the argument with many references to contemporary German civil air defense literature.

“Technique” expanded the argument for gas protection considerably, but also created a link between chemical warfare protection and air raid protection because it showed that chemical-warfare protection was intrinsic to German bomb shelter design: that is, all bomb shelters were meant to provide gas protection, and gas shelters were essentially a subset of bomb shelters.

It should be said that the argument in “Technique” was not meant to be comprehensive but merely to alert interested students to the possibilities of German civil air defense literature in explaining the origin and purpose of the gastight fixtures of the Birkenau crematoriums. Hence, the article consisted of a simple comparison of only two data sets: the German civil air defense literature on the one hand, and the so-called Criminal Traces of J. C. Pressac on the other.

Of course, the idea that the crematoriums of Birkenau would be equipped to protect against bombs or poison gas is unusual, but it was a conclusion that seemed to us inevitable, given the essential identity of all of the gastight fixtures noted by Pressac and ordinary civil air defense paraphernalia found in the German literature. For this reason, we thought it important to put the matter before the public. At the same time, however, the idea was unusual enough that it seemed to call for further investigation, and hence a sister article, “Defending Against the Allied Bombing Campaign” (hereinafter, “Defending”) followed in July of 1997.

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<sup>1</sup>“Bomb Shelters in Birkenau” was written in late May 2000, based on research materials acquired in late April of that year. It was published in Germar Rudolf’s journal, *Vierteljahreshefte für freie Geschichtsforschung* 4, no. 3–4 (December 2000, in German translation with some edits by Rudolf: I have gratefully used some of Rudolf’s painstaking cross-references here. Rudolf’s version was the object of Mattogno’s Internet criticism in late July 2001. I will address Mattogno’s critique as well as sundry matters in a postscript to this article, from summer 2010, directly following this article.

The primary aim of “Defending” was simply to investigate whether the gastight fixtures common in the German civil air defense literature were also common in Germany during the war. The secondary aim of “Defending” was to see if there was any other evidence of bomb shelters or gas shelters in the concentration camps, and particularly in Auschwitz. The main limitation of “Defending” was that at the time we had no documents proving the existence of gastight bomb shelters in either the concentration camps, or at Auschwitz, and in the meantime we were constantly being assured from all sides that there had never been any.

“Technique” and “Defending,” along with Professor Butz’ prior article, became the basis for what was essentially a new model for explaining the gastight fixtures at Auschwitz. For many years, the existence of gastight fixtures at Auschwitz had been assumed as references to homicidal gas chambers, while since the late 1970s the standard antithesis has been that these gastight references were all references to delousing or disinfection gas chambers. We may call these the “gas chamber thesis” and the “disinfection thesis” respectively.<sup>2</sup> The new emphasis on protection against poison gas in an air raid context, however, provided a third model, what we have called the “bomb shelter thesis.”

We would define the bomb shelter thesis in this way: There are a number of objects, fixtures, and names applied to spaces in the Birkenau crematoriums and other buildings at Auschwitz, and most of these terms, although not all, include reference to gastightness. The bomb shelter thesis simply states that some, or many, or most, or all, of these are best explained in a civil air defense context, which includes gas protection. Like any thesis, the bomb shelter thesis has a maximum and a minimum. It may be that the thesis explains some of these gastight fixtures, but not others. It may be that it explains all of them, in which case it would seem to follow that the gastight fixtures of the Birkenau crematoriums were applied to those buildings with the intent of following civil air defense or gas protection guidelines, and not for purposes of mass gassing or disinfection. The only way to test the thesis would be for the various experts in this field to apply the civil air defense model to the existing evidence, and for that reason our writings on the subject have sometimes challenged these experts.

In the event, however, the experts have been disinclined to pursue the thesis at all. In early 1998, we received copies of three documents from the Auschwitz Central Construction Office, which are today archived in Moscow, and these proved that the

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<sup>2</sup> The traditional word coupling in German to describe the treatment of people or spaces for hygienic purposes is “*Entlausung und Entwesung*,” which literally means killing lice and other forms of life. We have translated them throughout as “delousing and disinfection,” although there are some caveats to observe. First, in English, disinfection implies destroying bacteria. Few German methods of “*Desinfektion*” (another German word) were completely successful in this respect: most German methods were content just to kill insects. Over the years there have been a lot of arguments about “*Entwesung*” and its meanings, such that there has also been an attempt to introduce the word “disinfest” and “disinfestation” to distinguish disinfection methods that do not destroy bacteria from those that more or less do. We do not believe entering such fine distinctions into ordinary English parlance serves any useful purpose in this discussion.

The reader should simply understand that “disinfection” in German has a different scope than in English, and does not necessarily imply the destruction of bacteria. Further, it should be understood that Zyklon B, whose active ingredient was cyanide gas, was useless in destroying bacteria, but steam and hot air were respectively more successful.

camp was involved in air raid protection measures a full year earlier than had previously been believed (Auschwitz Central Construction Office = *Zentralbauleitung der Waffen-SS und Polizei Auschwitz* = ZBL).<sup>3</sup> These documents, along with a brief letter which outlined our proposed interpretation of them, with, it must be admitted, a certain challenging and unguarded tone, were published on the website of the British historian David Irving (see *Documents*).<sup>4</sup> Shortly before, “Technique” was published by the German scientist Germar Rudolf in his revisionist journal, *Vierteljahreshefte für freie Geschichtsforschung*.<sup>5</sup> A year later, in early 1999, Rudolf’s translation of “Technique” was subjected to a critique by the Italian revisionist Carlo Mattogno, himself an apostle of the disinfection thesis.<sup>6</sup> This called forth a rather brief rebuttal from us,<sup>7</sup> which a few months later led to a further critique by Mattogno.<sup>8</sup> Finally, in early 2000, the bomb shelter thesis was discussed in some detail by Professor Robert Jan van Pelt in his expert report for the David Irving v. Deborah Lipstadt/Penguin libel trial.<sup>9</sup> This came shortly after *The Journal of Historical Review* had published another adaptation of “Technique,” this time in Mark Weber’s version.<sup>10</sup>

In the meantime, during the Irving v. Lipstadt trial, David Irving adopted a limited acceptance of the bomb shelter thesis with regard to the gastight fixtures of Crematoriums II and III; the thesis was the subject of testimony by Irving and van Pelt, was referred to in the closing speeches of both Irving and Richard Rampton QC, and was discussed in the judgment of Justice Charles Gray. It may be fairly said that the thesis is beginning to be discussed more widely, and therefore is deserving of review.

The purpose of the present study is to review the evidence for bomb shelters and the application of civil air defense procedures in the Auschwitz Birkenau complex, based primarily on documents from the Auschwitz Central Construction Office. We do not mean to rewrite or rehash the content of either “Technique” or “Defending,” but simply to supplement these articles with other information that has come to our attention from 1997 to 2000. In the course of doing so, we will have an opportunity to reappraise our interpretation of the Criminal Traces and answer the critical objections of Mattogno and van Pelt.

3 Normal citations for documents from the Auschwitz construction office reference the relevant Russian archive, that is, GARF (for “State Archives of the Russian Federation”) or USHMM (for “United States Holocaust Memorial Museum”), which has a fairly complete microfilm run of the Russian archive. However, for our purposes we reference the construction office as such as ZBL. The layout and form of the documents is in any case identical.

4 “New Documents on Air Raid Shelters at Auschwitz Camp,” February 18, 1998. Translations were done by someone else.

5 *Vierteljahreshefte für freie Geschichtsforschung* 1, no. 4 (December 1997). Actually, Rudolf edited “Technique” and also added some materials from “Defending” to his version, and again it was this version to which Mattogno responded.

6 Carlo Mattogno, “Leichenkeller von Birkenau: Luftschutzräume oder Entwesungskammern?,” in *Vierteljahreshefte für freie Geschichtsforschung* 4, no. 2 (August 2000): 152-158.

7 “Comments on Mattogno’s Critique of the Bomb Shelter Thesis” at [www.codoh.com](http://www.codoh.com).

8 Carlo Mattogno, “Reply to Samuel Crowell’s ‘Comments’” at [www.vho.org](http://www.vho.org).

9 Robert van Pelt, Expert Report for the Queen’s Bench Division, Royal Courts of Justice, Strand, London, David John Cawdell Irving vs. (1) Penguin Books Limited, (2) Deborah E. Lipstadt, Ref. 1996 I. No. 113 [hereinafter, *The Pelt Report*.]

10 Samuel Crowell, “Wartime Germany’s Anti-Gas Air Raid Shelters: A Refutation of Pressac’s ‘Criminal Traces,’” *Journal of Historical Review* 18, no. 4 (July–August 1999): 7-30.

In Part One we will describe the background to the argument, which essentially turns on the presentation of documentary evidence that the Birkenau crematoriums were adapted for the purposes of mass murder with poison gas. Here we will briefly cover the documentary situation from the time of the Nuremberg trials through the writing of our own articles in 1997.

In Part Two, following a brief survey of documents for occupied Poland, we will present several documents, many of them from the Central Construction Office of Auschwitz, which will show that Auschwitz was in receipt of civil air defense directives from the beginning of the camp's existence. We will also see that certain evidence for the implementation of civil air defense procedures comes from the summer of 1943.

In Part Three, we will review the Criminal Traces of J. C. Pressac, and make some expansions and some concessions as to the proper interpretation of a number of these documentary references. In addition, we will offer a few new documents.

In Part Four, we will array a few dozen documents, nearly all of them from the archives of the Central Construction Office, and nearly all of them unearthed by revisionist researchers in the past few years. We will attempt to arrange these documents into a coherent narrative that supports the disinfection thesis, and afterward, to point up the deficiencies of the gas chamber thesis in explaining these documents.

In Part Five, we will review the criticisms of Mattoigno and van Pelt and provide our responses to them.

Our overall conclusion is that the crematoriums in Birkenau ended up fulfilling three functions. First, they were built to implement the special measures dictated by General Kammler of the SS Construction Office in Berlin to improve hygienic conditions in the camp by providing crematoriums that would allow for the rapid disposal of the dead. Second, the showers, washing facilities, and other facilities with which the crematoriums were equipped were to be used temporarily for the showering of the prisoners, and the disinfection of their garments, prior to the completion of the Central Sauna at the end of 1943 and the main Reception Center in the main camp in 1944. Finally, like all new constructions, and particularly those equipped with showers or other washing facilities, the crematoriums were also equipped with various gastight equipment in order to fulfill civil air defense requirements, including those for chemical warfare decontamination, in accordance with a further set of directives from General Kammler. The evidence suggests that the early adherence to civil air defense guidelines was something of a formality, but that by early 1944 the matter of adequate civil air protection in the Auschwitz Birkenau camp became a pressing concern, and continued on until the liberation of the camp in early 1945.

In short, we will see that the documentary and material evidence, at all levels, indicates concern over civil air defense and gas protection in the Auschwitz camp

that increases probably from the fall of 1942 until the end of the camp's operation. This involved, by early 1944, the proliferation of gastight and other fixtures identical to the gastight fixtures with which the Birkenau crematoriums had been equipped the previous spring. The deficiencies of the alternative explanations will be noted, and the bomb shelter thesis will be argued as the most plausible explanation for the gastight fixtures of the crematoriums.



## PART 1: BACKGROUND OF THE CRIMINAL TRACES

### 1.1 THE NUREMBERG TRIALS AND OTHER POSTWAR TRIALS

At the end of the Second World War it was widely assumed that the Nazis running the concentration camps had gassed millions of prisoners in them. At the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg, which ran from late 1945 until early fall 1946, it was stated in the judgment that millions of people had been gassed and cremated at the Auschwitz camp, which actually comprised a base camp of that name and numerous satellite camps, the largest of which was at Birkenau, about two miles away. The evidence upon which the International Military Tribunal's judges made their judgment about gassings at Auschwitz consisted of some testimony and a special report prepared by the Soviet Union.

The decision of the International Military Tribunal to endorse the claim of gassing at Auschwitz had far-reaching repercussions, because it was stipulated at the time that the judgments arrived at by that tribunal would be binding for all subsequent legal proceedings. Hence, all later trials in Germany on the subject of Auschwitz, whether conducted by the occupying powers or by the Germans themselves, have never contested the gassings, since their occurrence was not something that could be disputed. This is something the student should always keep in mind.

In March 1947 the former commandant of Auschwitz, Rudolf Höss, was tried before the Polish People's Tribunal in Warsaw. At this trial protocol lists of evidence were presented, derived from earlier hearings in Krakow (hereinafter *Krakow Protocols*) in late 1946, and these became part of the court record. During 1947 the United States conducted a trial of the various heads of the concentration camp system, known as Case #4 of the Nuremberg Military Tribunal, the main defendant being Oswald Pohl, who was head of the WVHA, the division of the SS involved in the exploitation of forced labor in the camps (WVHA = *Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt* = SS Economic Administration Main Office). At that trial two documents were introduced as evidence of gas chambers at Auschwitz; they were, for more than thirty years, the only documentary evidence available in the West.

The two documents consisted of two letters from the Auschwitz Central Construction Office, one of which contains the word "*Vergasungskeller*," the other the term "*gasdichte Türme*." Both terms were translated as "gas chambers" by the American prosecution, but these translations are incorrect. We will discuss both of these documents in detail later. The point is that the broad acceptance of the

gassing claim was achieved based on testimonies, to which these two documents provided only supplementary detail. This is important, because the bomb shelter thesis is about the documents, not the testimony, and that means that the issue of a civil air defense explanation for documents is not synonymous with the issue of gassing as such.

In the early 1970s, a handful of Germans who had been to Auschwitz during the war began to make claims that they had never heard of any gassings there.<sup>11</sup> This stimulated a French professor of literature, Robert Faurisson, to go directly to the camp sites in communist Poland. Faurisson conducted critical examinations of the Auschwitz camp, and its architectural drawings, as well as of many other camps, and came to the conclusion that no one was gassed at any of them, and that the only gassings that occurred in German camps were the delousing and disinfection gassings that were repeatedly done to barracks and clothing in order to combat disease.

When Faurisson began to publish the results of his studies in the late 1970s, a great controversy erupted in France. There followed several legal proceedings against Faurisson, in which his accusers had at their disposal to contradict him only the two documents we have mentioned. This is the background to the Criminal Traces of J. C. Pressac.

## 1.2 THE CRIMINAL TRACES

Jean Claude Pressac was a pharmacist by trade but had studied the Auschwitz camp since the 1950s.<sup>12</sup> He made several trips to Auschwitz, and studied the ruins and the documents in the Auschwitz State Museum. By 1986 he had compiled a massive amount of documents, including architectural drawings, most of these culled from the Auschwitz archives, and these formed the backbone for his book, *Auschwitz: Technique and Operation of the Gas Chambers*, which appeared in 1989. The book was published in a limited edition of only 1,000 copies by the Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, a French organization of anti-Nazis. It has a certain legendary quality not only because of its scarcity, but also because of the amount of the documentation it contains. Nevertheless, as anyone who reads it can see, it does not prove the existence of homicidal gas chambers at Auschwitz.

Pressac framed his argument in terms of a response to Faurisson. Faurisson had compared the alleged gas chambers with known gas chambers in the United States, and had found the sites at Auschwitz and elsewhere to be totally lacking in the safeguards and design found in the American gas chambers. Faurisson interpreted every site with a gastight door as a delousing or “disinfestation” gas chamber for killing lice. Hence, Pressac, in rejoinder, devoted quite a bit of space to the discussion of delousing and disinfection facilities at Auschwitz. Pressac generally sought

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<sup>11</sup> For example, Thies Christophersen and Dr. Wilhelm Stäglich.

<sup>12</sup> Jean Claude Pressac, born 1944, died in 2003.

to make two points: first, that the Germans made all kinds of *ad hoc* arrangements for the use of the poison cyanide gas contained in the pesticide trade-named Zyklon B, so that they would be expected to take no special precautions in using Zyklon B for homicidal purposes. Second, Pressac wished to show that because of such casual standards any space could be a gas chamber, and that the morgues of the Birkenau crematoriums were not specially designed for gassing, but were merely convenient to that purpose.

There was a certain necessity to Pressac's argument, because when he turned to the Birkenau crematoriums he had to agree that the structural differences between these crematoriums and any other crematoriums were minor. At the same time, Pressac conceded that no architectural drawing described these spaces as anything other than morgues.

In response to Faurisson's request for a proof, "one single proof" of a gas chamber designed to kill human beings, Pressac came up with a famous juxtaposition: he was able to show that one of the basements of Crematorium III was equipped with fourteen showers and a gastight door. According to Pressac, these two things could not be explained in any other way except by saying that the basement functioned as a gas chamber, in which people were murdered with poison gas while thinking they were going to take a shower. The balance of Pressac's evidence consisted of "39 criminal traces," that is, thirty-nine instances of words or objects found in various records which, in Pressac's view, could only have a homicidal explanation.

The Criminal Traces have been subjected to many critical analyses,<sup>13</sup> of which our own "Technique" was just one. Therefore, we do not plan to go over the Traces comprehensively here, although we will discuss them again in selective detail later. Still, a few minor points are worth making.

The first is that, in terms of the types of traces Pressac found, the vast majority of them had to do with relatively innocuous terms, such as showers, heaters, and the like, and about two dozen had to do with doors or windows that were specified as "gastight" (*gasdicht*). For the most part, Pressac based his argument for gas chambers on the presence of these gastight fixtures. The question, then, was whether these gastight fixtures had to do with gassing people, or gassing things.

Revisionist responses to the gastight traces usually followed Faurisson's tradition of interpreting gastightness in terms of delousing or disinfection. There were some problems with this interpretative model. For example, some of the gastight doors were specified as having peepholes, and it was further assumed that most of them were so equipped. But disinfection with Zyklon B did not require a peepholed door. Even so, there was some evidence that peepholed doors had been used for delousing and disinfection elsewhere. Another problem with the disinfection model is

<sup>13</sup> E.g., W. Schuster, "Technische Unmöglichkeiten bei Pressac," DGG 39, no. 2 (1991): 9-13; Paul Grubach, "The Leuchter Report Vindicated: A Response to Jean Claude Pressac's Critique," *Journal of Historical Review* 12, no. 4 (Winter 1992): 445ff; Robert Faurisson, *Journal of Historical Review* 11, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 25ff; and 11, no. 2 (Summer 1991): 133ff. F. A. Leuchter, *The Fourth Leuchter Report*.

that small windows, or gastight coverings for such windows, were not a typical part of the disinfection literature. Therefore, while the disinfection explanation was certainly a counterexplanation, it was not a particularly satisfying one, and it failed to satisfy us.

### 1.3 THE LAY OF THE LAND

Before proceeding, we should orient ourselves to the crematoriums in Birkenau to make the subsequent discussion easier to follow. Figure 1 is an aerial photograph taken by Allied air forces in August of 1944. It has been oriented to the north. Above and below are two large buildings; each one has a stubby “T” shape, the leg of the “T” indicating the location of the chimney and the incinerator. Extending to the west of each structure one can discern the outline of a long low semi-subterranean room, which for both buildings is called “Morgue #2” (*Leichenkeller 2*) on all architectural drawings. These are supposed to have been the undressing rooms where people undressed before they were gassed. At right angles to Morgue #2, also mostly underground, and on the opposite side from the chimney, one can see two other basements, smaller than Morgue #2. These basements are designated as “Morgue #1” (*Leichenkeller 1*) on all known architectural drawings, and these are supposed to have been the gas chambers. Note further that both Morgues #1 have markings on their roofs. For the Morgue #1 on the top of the photo, we note that the four marks or smudges are in a kind of zigzag pattern. In the case of Morgue #1 at the bottom, the markings run down the center of the structure. These markings are supposed to be the “holes in the roof” through which the poison was introduced into the gas chamber.

The building on the bottom of the photo is usually known as “Crematorium II,” it being the second crematorium put into operation, the first one being at the *Stammlager*, or base camp, at Auschwitz. Sometimes it is referred to as “BW 30,” meaning it was the thirtieth building project for the Construction Office, sometimes as *Krema II*, etc. The building at the top of the photo is “Crematorium III,” also known as or *Krema III*, or “BW 30a.”

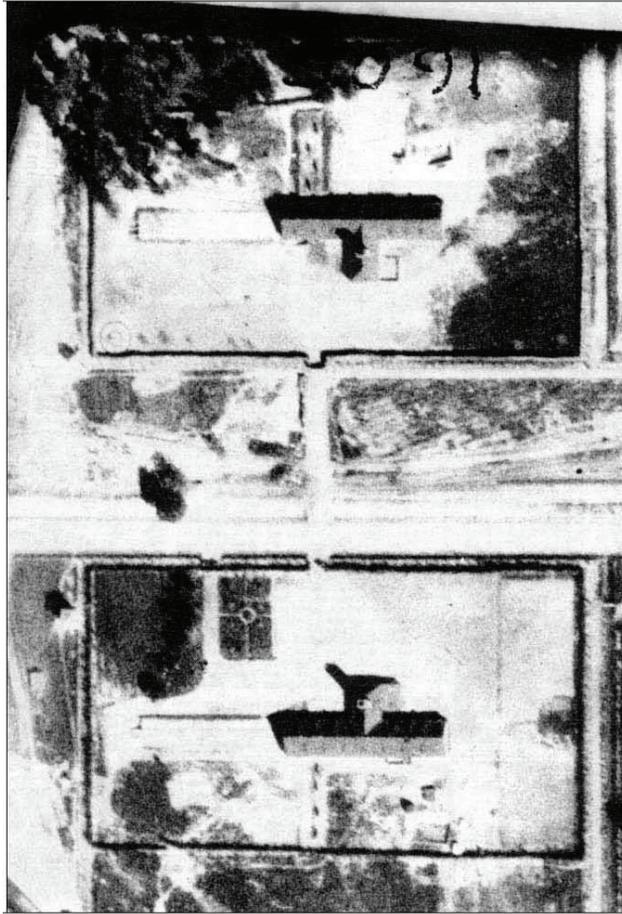


Figure 1: Aerial photo of Crema II and III

Today both of the crematoriums are in ruins, having been dismantled by the Germans before they abandoned the camp. The various basements, also in ruins, survive as large pits in the ground. The sole exception to this is the Morgue #1 of Crematorium II, whose reinforced concrete ceiling did not shatter into pieces, as was the case with the other basement ceiling slabs. The ceiling has largely collapsed toward the ground, but the explosion that knocked out its supporting pillars left some of these standing, and did not break the inner web of reinforcing steel rods. Therefore, it is possible to inspect this site in detail, both from the top, which is covered with a layer of rubble, and from below, because one can actually enter into the southernmost quarter of the basement and inspect the ceiling, take samples from the concrete, and so on.

There are two significant things to remember about this basement, Morgue #1 of Crematorium II. The first is that inspection of the roof from either the top or the

bottom has shown no trace of the four holes through which the gas was supposedly introduced into the space. In this respect, a very important concession was made during the Irving-Lipstadt trial by the defense witness van Pelt, who agreed that there are presently no holes visible. True, two holes in the roof are present today, but these are off-center, and do not match up to the markings in the photos. In light of Professor van Pelt's concession, it appears there is agreement that these two holes have nothing to do with the four holes through which the poison gas is said to have been introduced.

The second point to remember about Morgue #1 of Crematorium II is that around half a million people are supposed to have been fatally gassed within it.



Figure 2: Crematorium IV

Our next photograph, Figure 2, is of Crematorium IV, located about a quarter-mile north of Crematoriums II and III. This is a much less complicated structure than the other two crematoriums, and has its own mirror image in Crematorium V, just on the other side of this photo. What we see on the left of the structure is the lower west wing of Crematorium IV; here there were supposed to be two or three gas chambers. Note the small windows barely visible in this wing; these are supposed to have been the windows through which the poison gas was thrown into the rooms. Like Crematoriums II and III, IV and V have alternate names, i.e., BW 30b and BW 30c. These structures were blown up and are present now merely as the cement foundation slabs of the structures, with some low reconstruction of walls. These two buildings had no basements.

#### 1.4 TECHNIQUE AND OPERATION OF GERMAN ANTI-GAS SHELTERS

In early 1997, we decided that it would be appropriate to attempt to restate some traditional revisionist arguments in a manner that would be non-confrontational and conciliatory. We felt it necessary to do so because of the oppressive climate of censorship that had come to surround the subject of the Holocaust. This taboo threatened the criminalization of revisionist writings—already in force on the

European continent—in the English-speaking world. We felt then, and we still feel, that to censor revisionism on the subject of the Holocaust would be very bad, and, rather than try to defend the point with philosophical abstractions, we thought it would be more effective to try to show the merits of the long-standing revisionist challenge. It was hoped in this way that the intellectual classes, who had chosen to remain mum on the issue of censorship, would at least pause to reflect on the extent to which they had subordinated their social obligation to intellectual inquiry to the comforts of emotion and ideology.

Very early in our research we began to look for possible non-empirical sources for the gassing claims, because, we reasoned, if they were not true or were exaggerated, the stories still must have come from somewhere, and it was a task of historical reconstruction to determine their origin. We noted a few stray references to air raid shelter doors in some testimonies and found that all air raid shelter doors were equipped with peepholes, and furthermore were gastight, since the Germans were very concerned about the possibilities of aerial gas attack. Following up on the matter, we compared the Criminal Traces of Pressac with the German civil air defense literature, and found an almost perfect fit. Our main conclusion, therefore, was that the Criminal Traces were indistinguishable from the objects and nomenclature of German civil air defense.

If the main thrust of “Technique” hinged on the identity of the gastight fixtures described in the Criminal Traces and the fixtures found in the German civil defense literature, we should note that the critiques of Mattogno and van Pelt do not substantially challenge this claim. Hence, it would seem fair to claim these gastight fixtures as civil defense fixtures. However, due to the contentious nature of the subject and the lack of documentary proof, we ought to stress a distinction between the civil air defense origin of these fixtures, which has not been effectively challenged, and the civil air defense intent behind the placing of these fixtures, which is the actual point of controversy.

We should also note that there has been one minor claim about the gastight doors which should be discussed briefly. This is the argument that the peepholes of the gastight doors allegedly used to gas people were protected on the inside—ostensibly so that the people being gassed could not break the glass of the peephole—rather than on the outside. The claim stems from the postwar deposition made for the Polish investigators by Henryk Tauber, a former inmate of Auschwitz. There is also a photograph of a door that has a wire mesh covering on the inside.

There are several problems with this proposed distinction. First, the doors are not identical. The door Tauber described was wooden parquet, the door in the photograph straight wooden boards. The second problem is that gastight doors for civil air defense or gas protection purposes could have the peephole covered either on the inside, or the outside, or even not at all, and such variation would be hardly surprising for makeshift doors made on site, which was the case with most of the

gastight doors at Auschwitz. This in fact had already been noted in the footnotes to “Technique.” The third problem is that none of the other makeshift gastight doors pictured in Pressac’s book has a covering for the peephole on the inside, and none of these is claimed as a doors to a homicidal gas chamber. Therefore, we consider this distinction precious.

Figure 3, below, provides a view of a standard German air raid shelter door. This particular door is identical to one of the doors found at Majdanek in August, 1944, of which a casting is now on display at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC. We note that the covering for the peephole is on the outside of the door, and that the locking latches can be worked from either the inside or the outside. We also note to the right a shutter, or *Blende*, for making a window gastight, and behind it a wire mesh screen. Such doors as these were rather expensive, being made of steel, and they were designed to provide not only gas protection but also protection against bomb splinters (*Gasschutz und Splitterschutz*).

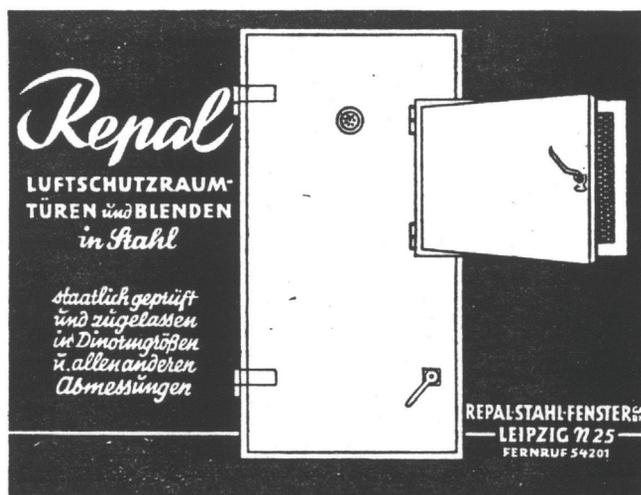


Figure 3: German air raid shelter door

Figure 4, below, shows a view of the NW angle of the *Stammlager* crematorium, taken at about the time of the Polish investigatory commission, in May of 1945. We note that there is an air raid shelter door to the right, as one would expect, since this crematorium was converted to a bomb shelter in 1944. To the left, we can see the kind of parquet door to which Tauber referred, leading to a storeroom. In the middle, we can see a former prisoner, perhaps Tauber himself, who has donned his prisoner garb for the occasion, and appears to be weeping. Apparently, this photo opportunity was staged in order to communicate something sinister about the bomb shelter door on the right.

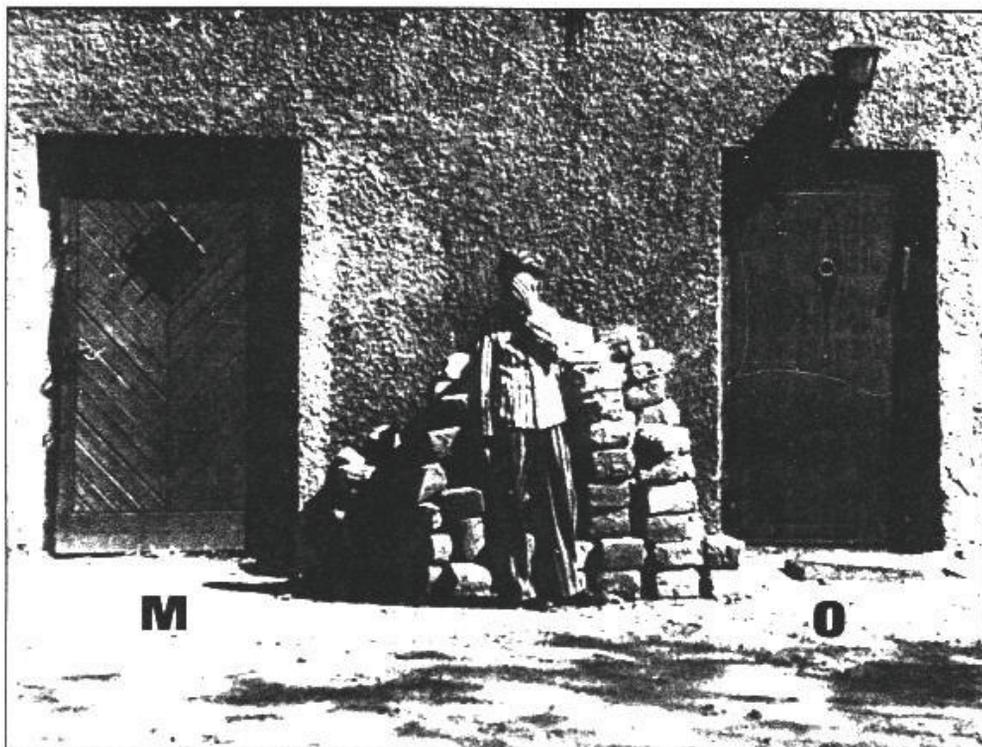


Figure 4: *Stammlager* crematorium, May 1945

Figure 5, below, shows a typical model for constructing a gastight door out of wood for air raid shelter purposes, as found in the German civil air defense literature.

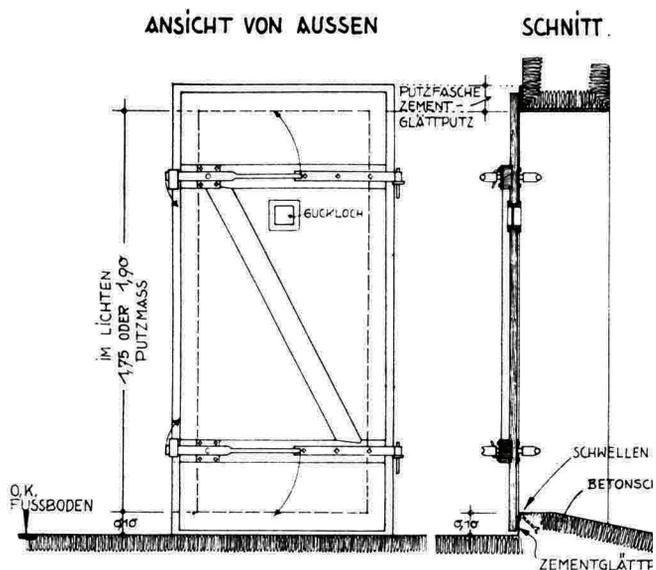


Figure 5: Gastight air raid shelter door drawing

Such a makeshift bomb shelter door would provide gas protection but minimal protection against splinters. These doors were usually made out of straight wooden boards, and gastightness was achieved in two ways: paper was glued along the cracks of the boards, and felt was nailed along the outside of the door. We note that, in this case, the peephole is not round, and appears to be completely unprotected. Several doors similar to this were found at Auschwitz at its liberation (see Figures 6 and 7). Some had round peepholes, some square; some protected, some not. As noted, none appears to have had the protection for the peephole on the outside. Only the heavy steel doors appear to have been so equipped.



Figure 6: Air raid shelter door at Auschwitz



Figure 7: Door to building in Birkenau

Finally, Figure 8 presents a photograph of a makeshift window shutter, designed to provide a gastight seal for the windows, emergency exits, or other openings of a bomb shelter. We note that this is identical in appearance to the shutter shown in Figure 3 above. Figure 9 presents a shutter that Pressac claimed was one of the “gastight doors” meant to cover the gas chambers of Crematoriums IV and V. We will express doubts about Pressac’s argument later, but for now, we simply note the essential identity of this shutter and those shown in the civil air defense literature.

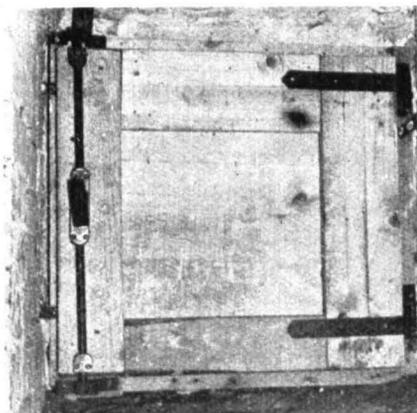


Bild 16. Eine zweckmäßige, sehr sorgfältig ausgeführte gassichere Fensterblende, mit Gummi überspannt und mit Gummidichtung.

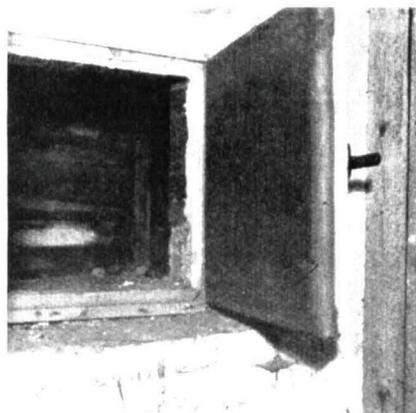


Bild 17. Die gleiche Blende wie B.l.d 16. Geöffnet.

Figure 8: Gastight shutter, or *Blende*, from German civil defense literature



Figure 9: Gastight shutter discovered in Auschwitz crematorium storeroom



Figure 9a: Another view of the shutter in Figure 9

### 1.5 DEFENDING AGAINST THE ALLIED BOMBING CAMPAIGN

The response to “Technique” was modest. In any event, we were more concerned with returning to our original project, writing a brief essay that, we hoped, would break a lance on behalf of free speech for revisionism.<sup>14</sup> However, “Technique” had raised a number of questions, and curious about these, we attempted to research them in a manner consistent with our limitations in time and resources. Obviously, one of the main questions concerned the issue of other bomb shelters: if the gastight fixtures found in the Birkenau crematoriums really were of civil air defense origin, then we should be able to find similar fixtures elsewhere, and indeed, virtually everywhere.

“Defending Against the Allied Bombing Campaign” was meant to explore that question, but in the process that led us to the literature of the German civilian experience under the bombs, an experience that in itself was worthy of consideration. Therefore, while in Part 1 of that article we were able to establish the commonplace nature of gastight fixtures in German homes and apartment buildings, we also sought to provide a brief analysis of that experience. In Part 2, lacking documentary evidence, we sought to infer the commonplace nature of civil air defense, and thus gastight fixtures, in the concentration camps as well, based on photographs, architectural drawings, and by inference from postwar studies.

The one point in “Defending” worth stressing at this point is that the German authorities established a program in the fall of 1940 stipulating that all structures, and particularly all new structures in the armaments industry (which included the concentration camps), were to be equipped with air raid shelters. In addition, it was found that the concentration camps were also supposed to be equipped with air raid shelters for the prisoners, although usually these were of a rather primitive kind, the so-called “trench shelters,” or *Luftschutzdeckungsgräben*.

The criticisms that have been made of the bomb shelter thesis to this point have been for the most part based on the limited comparative analysis found in “Technique.” On the other hand, the analysis of “Defending” concerns matters that are not really debatable, except the inferences concerning the concentration camps, most of which will be recapitulated in the course of the present study.

### 1.6 PRECURSORS OF THE BOMB SHELTER THESIS

Before setting forth our documents, we should acknowledge the precursors of the bomb shelter thesis. The first of these was Wilhelm Stäglich, a former judge, who suggested that the gastight door described in the *gasdichte Türme* letter was a bomb shelter door.<sup>15</sup> Stäglich’s comments were made in passing, for the reason

<sup>14</sup> I.e., “The Gas Chamber of Sherlock Holmes,” elsewhere in this volume.

<sup>15</sup> Stäglich, *Auschwitz*, 53.

that when he made them back in the early 1970s no one was really paying much attention to the documentary record, since, as we have seen, it was at that time essentially confined to two documents. Nevertheless, we consulted his book after writing “Technique” and “Defending” on a hunch that, as a former Luftwaffe officer, he might have some kind of intuitive reaction to the issue of gastight doors. Our guess was correct, at least as far as our thesis was concerned.

The next person to be recognized is Friedrich Berg, who has accumulated over the years a vast archive of materials concerning conditions in wartime Germany. He also perceived that there was something to the issue of German civil defense and the camps, although, as an engineer, he was more interested in the performance of diesel engines relative to the gassing claims. Robert Faurisson also made a brief reference to the issue of gastight doors for bomb shelters in his critique of Pressac, but did not pursue the matter.<sup>16</sup> There may have been others, and of course, there was the contribution of Arthur R. Butz, already described.

The point is that the general recognition of the importance of German civil air defense in explaining the gastight fixtures at Auschwitz has come solely from the non-traditional side. Not one traditional historian of the Holocaust has even noticed the significance of German civil air defense. What this means is that the bomb shelter thesis, even if only partly proved, would vindicate revisionism in general, just as it would vindicate intellectual inquiries grounded in skepticism and creativity as opposed to those based on adherence to orthodoxies and predetermined outcomes.

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<sup>16</sup> Robert Faurisson, “Auschwitz: Technique and Operation of the Gas Chambers (1989) ou bricolage et ‘gazouillages’ à Auschwitz et Birkenau selon J.C. Pressac,” *Revue d’Histoire Révisionniste* 3 (Dec.–Jan. 1990–91): 65–154.



## PART 2: BOMB SHELTER DOCUMENTS

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION: THE WIDER CONTEXT

In “Technique” and “Defending” we made the argument for the existence of bomb shelters primarily on the basis of primary and secondary literature concerning civil air defense, the Criminal Traces, and various photographic and other kinds of evidence such as we could locate. We were not able to present documents because these were unavailable. In the intervening years we have managed to accumulate some documents, and will present them here. First, however, we want to examine the wider context of German civil air defense measures in eastern Europe during the Second World War, not only because it supports the bomb shelter thesis for Auschwitz but also because it enables us to provide some explanation as to how we interpret documents. Therefore, we begin with a discussion of five documents, the term being used loosely here.

#### Document 1

##### **Guidelines for Bomb Shelter Construction in the Government General<sup>17</sup>**

The first document we present is a set of directions dated August 6, 1942, entitled “*Richtlinien für den Aufbau des Luftschutzes im Bereich des M.i.G.*,” or “Guidelines for the Construction of Air Raid Shelters in the Area of the Military Authority in the Government General,” meaning occupied Poland.

The document covers ground familiar to “Defending”: it stresses the need to build air raid shelters. These are to be constructed such that the entire occupancy of a building is accommodated; basements are to be used; if there are no basements, ground floors are to be used; attention should be paid to anti-gas measures; and so on.

This is an example of what we would call a high-level document: it comes from an official source, it articulates policy, and it says something about intentions. Historians generally rely on such documents in order to establish when something “began.” For example, it is customary to reference the beginning of euthanasia in Nazi Germany to a Hitler decree dated September 1, 1939, and we reference the “orderly and humane” transfer of some fourteen million Eastern Germans to the Potsdam Conference declaration of August 2, 1945.

The weakness of such documents is that while they describe general tendencies or attitudes, they do not tell us how, or even whether, the higher directive in ques-

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<sup>17</sup> NARA (National Archives), T501, Roll 216, 1444-1447.

tion was implemented. For example, we know that the euthanasia decree was retroactive, and that it was actually signed in October 1939. Furthermore, the decree fails to tell us anything about the program. In the second case, we know that the Germans of eastern Europe had been expelled under conditions that were neither orderly nor humane for some months even before the Potsdam announcement. So we can see that high-level documents are high level in two senses: first, they come from high up in a hierarchy, and second, they frequently bear no relation to the actual historical reality on the ground. To get a sense of that historical reality, we need to go farther down.

Still, high-level documents are useful, and not only because they provide convenient starting dates. For example, if other information concerning air raid shelters surfaced in occupied Poland, an earlier high-level document could explain the impetus behind these later activities. As it is, the document tells us only that civil air defense measures became a priority in occupied Poland at this time, and therefore the implementation of civil air defense measures can be inferred, but not proved.

## Document 2

### Entries from the Diaries of Hans Frank<sup>18</sup>

The next document consists of two references from an abstract of the voluminous diaries of Hans Frank, who was the governor of occupied Poland. Ideally, we would want the two entries themselves in front of us, but due to the difficulty in obtaining sources historians frequently rely on such abstracts. Even so, reliance on other people's abstracts has the drawback that the historian is bound to see the documents filtered through someone else's eyes: the preference for seeing the original documents cannot be over-stressed.

There are two entries of particular interest:

[September 22, 1942

[...] *secret defensive measures—gas mask distribution, gas rationing [...]*

September 24, 1942

[...] *Directions for the distribution of people's gas masks with "Chemical Weapons Use by the Enemy"—code word "Cloud" or "Thunderstorm"—, provision of gas masks to "several categories" of the non-German population.*

[22.9.1942

[...] *geheime Verteidigungssachen—Gasmaskenverteilung, Benzinsparmaßnahmen*

[...]

24.9.1942

[...] *Anweisungen zur Verteilung von Volksgasmasken bei "Einsatz chemischer*

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18 Werner Präg and Wolfgang Jacobmeyer, eds., *Das Dienstagebuch des deutschen Generalgouverneurs in Polen 1939–1945*, 565f.

*Kampfstoffe durch den Feind” – Stichwort “Wolke” bzw. “Gewitter” –, Versorgung “einzelnen Kategorien” der nichtdeutschen Bevölkerung mit Gasmasken.]*

The document supports the contention that civil air defense was becoming a pressing issue in occupied Poland at this time, because of the connection of gas warfare with aerial attacks. We could reasonably hypothesize continuity between these entries and the high-level directive of almost two months before. The Frank diary entries also give us some proof that the civil air defense directive of August was being implemented.

For lack of a better term, we would classify this document as a mid-level source. By this we mean to convey the idea that it is a document that carries with it some of the authority, scope, and comprehension of a high-level document but at the same time provides some low-level detail. But it is also important to note that mid-level documents are highly relative to the situation being researched. Frank's diary is a good source for information concerning the implementation of civil air defense measures in occupied Poland, but that is partly because he was the governor of occupied Poland: he was part of the hierarchy in question. On the other hand, we could not use Frank's diary as a mid-level source for, say, military activity on the Western Front, because that would be outside his hierarchy and Frank's words would not carry any authority. Under such conditions, Frank's diary might be useful as a low-level anecdotal source, but no more.

This is an important distinction because we note that Frank makes a passing reference to atrocities. There are other diaries, written at the same time, which also describe atrocities and, specifically, mass gassings: the diaries of Anne Frank, Victor Klemperer, and Emanuel Ringelblum. But all of these individuals wrote from outside the hierarchy that was carrying out these atrocities, and hence their remarks cannot have any authority. At best, they can provide low-level anecdotal evidence for what was actually happening on the ground, but at the same time they can provide good mid-level evidence for what people were actually talking about and hearing over the BBC.

Returning to the subject of civil air defense in Poland, we can conclude on the basis of the Frank diary entries that civil air defense measures were being implemented in Poland, and, together with the first document, we can begin to see a more connected structure of policy and implementation.

### Document 3

#### **Orders from Lublin (Majdanek) to Auert in Berlin, September 26, 1942<sup>19</sup>**

Unfortunately, this is another document for which we lack the originals. It is mentioned in a book by Eugen Kogon, apparently from the section written by Hans Marszalek. The reference reads:

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<sup>19</sup> Eugen Kogon, et al., eds., *Nationalsozialistische Massentötungen durch Giftgas*, 319.

Documents of the Central Construction Office of the Waffen-SS and Police on 26 September 1942, National State Archive Lublin [...] Document #17, delivery numbers of the Firm 656, 657, and 659.

This is what we would call a classic low-level document, something which contains an explicit description but without any surrounding context. In this case, we are lucky to have some of the doors still in existence; they can be found at the Majdanek concentration camp. Therefore, we know that these were air raid shelter doors.

Following from the documents we have already seen, it would be natural to conclude that the authorities in Majdanek decided to order some bomb shelter doors in accordance with the general civil air defense policy being implemented at that time. At least, that would be the common sense explanation. Yet other explanations insist that these doors were used either for homicidal gassing or for disinfection purposes. However that may be, the fact is that the Majdanek camp ordered several bomb shelter doors at a time when occupied Poland was in the midst of implementing civil air defense measures. Therefore, it seems to us that the most reasonable explanation is that the doors were ordered with civil air defense in mind, regardless of how the doors may have been used.

#### **Document 4** **The Stroop Report, May, 1943<sup>20</sup>**

This famous report on the destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto in May of 1943 contains two references relevant to our subject:

*While pretending to build air-raid shelters they had been erecting dug-outs within the former Ghetto ever since the autumn of 1942. These were intended to conceal every Jew during the new evacuation action, which they had expected for quite a time, and to enable them to resist the invaders in a concerted action.*

[...]

*According to depositions made yesterday and today, the Jews were asked during the second half of 1942 to erect air-raid shelters. At that time under the camouflage of erecting air-raid shelters, they began to build the dugouts, which they are now inhabiting, in order to use them for an anti-Jewish [sic] operation.”*

We would consider the Stroop Report to be an excellent mid-level source on the destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto. However, on the matter of civil defense, it lies outside the relevant hierarchy and becomes essentially an eyewitness account. Eyewitness accounts are extremely valuable to the historian in providing texture and color to historical descriptions, but just because they are limited to the eyewitness,

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<sup>20</sup> Nuremberg Document 1061-PS.

they are very unreliable in terms of surrounding context. Hence, they have to be used cautiously, the historian's own judgment ultimately being the deciding factor.

In evaluating Stroop's remarks about civil air defense in the Warsaw Ghetto we find him making claims about air raid protection for Jews in Poland that run up against our usual perceptions about the German treatment of Jews. Accordingly, if we were to encounter these references alone, we would be highly skeptical about them. However, since the remarks fit in well with the other documents we have seen, we feel justified in accepting their general validity—but again we stress that we would not be inclined to do so without high- and mid-level support.

### Document 5

#### Nuremberg Testimony about the Warsaw Ghetto Revolt, April 23, 1946<sup>21</sup>

Our fifth and final document is from the postwar testimony of Joseph Buehler, one of Hans Frank's aides. While Buehler was being examined by Dr. Seidl, who was acting as defense attorney for Frank, the following exchange occurred:

DR. SEIDL: *What did you learn afterwards about the events at the ghetto in Warsaw in 1943?*

BUEHLER: *I heard what practically everybody heard, that an uprising had broken out in the ghetto which had long been prepared; that the Jews had used the building materials given them for the purpose of air-raid protection to set up defense works; and that during the uprising violent resistance was encountered by the German troops.*

This is another example of low-level evidence and it is of the least reliable kind. The evidence is not contemporaneous with what it describes. The person repeating the information is not an eyewitness. The information was given in a judicial setting where any desire for accuracy would be in contention with many other motives. Therefore, we would not be inclined to give the testimony much weight at all.

The fact that the testimony matches the claims of the Stroop Report is not impressive, because it could be that the witness was just repeating rumors or garbled reports that he had heard around the time of the Warsaw Ghetto revolt. In fact, precisely because such testimony comes after the fact, the possibility of such influence cannot be discounted. Moreover, like the Stroop Report, it makes a claim about the German treatment of the Jewish people that is inconsistent with what we usually read. Nevertheless, precisely because the testimony matches up well with all of the other documents and is consistent with them we can accept this testimony as true.

The above traversal of five documents, or really, types of evidence, makes it clear that civil air defense measures were being implemented in occupied Poland beginning in 1942: to be exact, from August 6, 1942. These measures were already

<sup>21</sup> International Military Tribunal, XII, 75.

advanced by late September of that year. Their implementation extended to the remaining Jewish population of Poland in the city of Warsaw, as well as to the concentration camp in Lublin. These are all reasonable facts that emerge from the documents.

The problem is that, concerning the claim of mass gassing, and in particular the claim of mass gassing at Auschwitz, we do not have such documents. There is no high-level document ordering the gassing of people at Auschwitz. There is no mid-level document ordering, or even discussing, the gassing of people at Auschwitz. Pressac's Criminal Traces consist entirely of low-level documents, including work orders, requests for materials, and so forth. None of these documents contains any reference to gassing people. There are no contemporaneous eyewitness reports except a purported one, the Franke-Gricksch report, a clumsily typed copy of which did not emerge until thirty years after the war, and which has never been authenticated.<sup>22</sup> The evidence supporting the claim for mass gassings at Auschwitz comes almost entirely from postwar accounts generated at judicial hearings, and, as we noted earlier, all judicial proceedings including and subsequent to the International Military Tribunal operated under the assumption that the gassings took place. It is for these reasons, among others, that people are skeptical of the gassing claim.

The absence of any high or mid-level documents is usually explained by saying that the Nazis deliberately left none behind; in other words, there was a conspiracy not to create any documents. However, that claim itself comes from postwar accounts. Therefore this argument uses the least reliable kind of evidence to account for the absence of the most reliable kind of evidence. All conspiracy theories are similarly constructed.

Furthermore, the gaps in the documentation, given the scope of the alleged events, are huge. It is frequently said nowadays that historical events are "proved" by a "convergence of evidence," in which a multiplicity of sources "converge" on a fact. But no competent historian works that way. If the historian begins with a high-level document, he or she then looks for mid- and low-level confirmation: for documents to cover every step of the way. If, on the other hand, the search begins at the bottom with an eyewitness account or a vague reference, the existence of higher orders of evidence is inferred, and these are searched for until they are found. Part of the historian's craft is knowing where to look to find the connecting documents.

There are two reasons why the above method is the proper procedure for any historian. First, because history is not only a matter of what happened, but also how it happened. This attitude presupposes laying out a hierarchy of documents that will provide a plausible causal chain. Second, and consequently, the historian will instantly recognize the difference between a large quantity of evidence, and the qualitative distribution of that evidence in a hierarchy. If the historian begins

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<sup>22</sup> Brian A. Renk, "The Franke-Gricksch 'Resettlement Action Report': Anatomy of a Fabrication," *Journal of Historical Review* 11, no. 3 (Fall 1991): 261-279.

with, say, half a dozen eyewitness accounts, he or she will not see any value in a half dozen more: what is needed at that point is the evidence from higher levels that will explain how what the eyewitnesses described took place. In fact, the very first thing a historian should do, when confronted with two eyewitness accounts that describe something similar, is to make sure that there is no point of contact between the accounts, or that the two accounts do not derive from a third narrative. Holocaust historians are particularly weak in this area.

The “convergence of evidence” model is borrowed from evolution, specifically, from evolutionary biology. For the historian, the absence of evidence for gassing in a continuous hierarchy is a serious problem, just as an evolutionary biologist would be dumbfounded if he or she found entire geological strata in which there was no evidence of life at all. That is the proper analogy for the magnitude of the problem faced here. It should be added that we have not constructed these levels of documents to suit our thesis: on the contrary, precisely because of a critical gap in our mid-level documentation, we will not be able to prove the bomb shelter thesis in its entirety.

## **2.2 HIGH-LEVEL DOCUMENTS ABOUT BOMB SHELTERS**

Most of the documents that will be cited from here on come from the files of the Auschwitz Central Construction Office, so it seems appropriate to say a few words about the layout of these files. The story goes that when Auschwitz was liberated on January 27, 1945, most of the files in the camp had been destroyed but the files of the Central Construction Office were left intact. These files, in turn, were used by the Soviet Special Commission to write its report of May 6, 1945 (known by its Nuremberg designation of USSR-008). The bulk of the files were then moved to Moscow, where they were forgotten for many years, but some of the files (or carbon copies) were left behind for the Polish Commission on Auschwitz, which sat in 1945 and 1946. These latter files form the backbone of the collections of the National Museum at Auschwitz (known as “PMO”), and they were for many years the basis for most research on Auschwitz, conducted successively by Faurisson, Pressac, van Pelt, and Mattogno.

The Soviet Union announced the existence of the Central Construction Office holdings in 1989. Gerald Fleming and Pressac, both traditional Holocaust historians, consulted the collections shortly thereafter in order to obtain documents supporting their interpretations. Since about 1995, a number of revisionists have worked in the Central Construction Office archives slowly accumulating materials, including Michael Gärtner, Manfred Gerner, Hans Nowak, Werner Rademacher, either directly or through intermediaries, and, above all, Carlo Mattogno and Jürgen Graf, the latter two having made several highly publicized visits to the

Moscow archives.

The holdings for the Central Construction Office comprise over 83,000 pages. They are assigned with an overall cache or archive number (“Fond”) that references the collection in Moscow where they are located, in this case, “502.” In addition, the files are divided into another five groupings, or inventories (“Opisi”). Almost all of the directly relevant materials from the Central Construction Office archives come from Fond 502, Opisi 1. In addition are folder numbers, of which there are about 450 in the 502-1 series. The folders comprise materials on specific topics, and can run from a single page, for example, 502-1-141, which designates a 1943 document about central heating, up to 700 pages or more, as in the case of 502-1-92, which consists of correspondence with a number of firms about constructing workshops. The average for the 450 folders of the 502-1 set is about 125 pages apiece.

At some point, the individual folders were bound in cardboard covers, with an index card in Russian pasted to the front describing the contents. The subject of the folders is generally thematic: for example, Folders 327-340 comprise about 1,800 pages on disinfection and fumigation, Folders 305-318 comprise a like amount of material on the crematoriums, and so forth. The pages within each folder are sometimes marked, and sometimes not. When they are marked, the notation has been made in pen or pencil in the upper right-hand corner, and sometimes these numbers have been crossed out and replaced with another series. In the documents presented here, most of the page numbers have been rendered illegible by the copying process or else the pages were never numbered in the first place. Where the page numbers are both legible and make any sense in terms of a series, we have given them. Otherwise, we have just listed the folder location, thus 502-1-141.

The individual folders and the larger groupings thereof indicate some coherent organization; therefore we are inclined to believe that the files exist more or less as they were found. In fact, the folders present the usual organization of files, usually being in reverse chronological order, and often containing carbon copies. However, there is enough disorder in the files and in the ordering of the files that it seems clear that they were rifled at some point. Occasional quirks in the ordering of documents suggest that some files were removed. However, given the overall coherence of the files, we doubt if there was any large-scale interpolation of files.

One exception concerns the well-known document of June 28, 1943, which claims a capacity of the five Auschwitz crematoriums at 4,756 bodies per day. Pressac gave two reference numbers for the document, 502-1-314 and 502-1-324. When the German historian Manfred Gerner attempted to obtain the document, he was told that it was marked “502-1-314a.”<sup>23</sup> Carlo Mattogno claims that the correct filing of the document is 502-1-314, page 14a.

None of these references make much sense. Folder 502-1-324 is one of a series of folders concerning the “*Faulgasanlage*” at Auschwitz, that is, the folder concerns

<sup>23</sup> Manfred Gerner, “Schlüsseldokument’ ist Fälschung,” *Vierteljahreshefte für freie Geschichtsforschung* 2, no. 3 (September 1998): 248-261..

an attempt to extract methane gas from the sewage plant in Birkenau. On the other hand, 502-1-314 is indeed a folder in the crematoriums series, but it is a 36-page folder consisting of correspondence with Topf & Sons and other firms concerning the construction and equipment of the crematoriums. Yet the June 28, 1943 document is supposed to be a letter from the Central Construction Office to General Kammler in Berlin concerning the burning capacity of the crematoriums. There is no logical reason why this letter would be in either one of these files.

When one is confronted with a document that is inconsistent with the surrounding documents there are a few possible explanations. The document may have been misfiled. But in that case, we would expect to find analogous documents in roughly adjacent folders. In this case, there are none. Or it is possible that the surrounding documents have been removed. In this case, the surrounding documents would only be incriminating, insofar as the document pertains to very high cremation rates, so it is unlikely that any surrounding documents were removed by the Soviets. Nor is it likely that the Germans pulled the surrounding documents, because it would have been a lot simpler just to burn the slender file in its entirety. Finally, the possibility exists that the document was interpolated later. That appears to us to be the most likely explanation. We now turn to consider some other documents.

### Document 6

#### *Sofortmassnahmen bei Bomben- und Brandschäden, September 14, 1940*<sup>24</sup>

The first document is a two-page circular concerning emergency measures to repair damage from bombs and fire in air raids. It holds no particular interest, except that it is the first document in the Central Construction Office files on the subject of civil air defense. The document could satisfy a general requirement if we were looking for a high-level document to set a starting date for a general awareness of air raids and civil air defense at Auschwitz.

### Document 7

#### *Memo on Fighting Phosphorous Fires December 21, 1940*<sup>25</sup>

The document is a single-page copy from the “*Reichsminister der Luftfahrt und Oberbefehlshaber der Luftwaffe, Inspektion des Luftschutzes*” and is simply a cautionary note on the proper method of fighting phosphorous fires, which were the main component of Allied incendiary raids. The document gives appropriate reference to various civil air defense directives.

There are a couple of points of interest. First, the document is dated December 21, 1940, but was not signed until January 2, 1941. Second, the evolving rubber stamp of the Central Construction Office (here in its second form) has the document stamped “12 Jan 1941,” some ten days later.

The date of correspondence versus the date the correspondence is stamped in the

<sup>24</sup> ZBL, 502-1-1, 8.

<sup>25</sup> ZBL, 502-1-1.

Central Construction Office will later on become an issue, so we offer our thoughts on that here. Some documents are dated on a given day, and are stamped by the Central Construction Office two or three days later. On the other hand, with other documents the gap between the date of the document and its stamp date can be many days or even weeks. In general, we are going to conclude that the normal time for mail delivery is about two or three days. But we are going to further argue that the stamp date represents the date, not when the document was received in the Central Construction Office, but rather the date the document was routed through the office for signature just before being filed. In other words, for some documents we are going to argue that the gap between the document date and the stamp date indicates that the document was pending during the interim.

### Document 8

#### *Erweiteter Selbstschutz in Barackenlagern, January 4, 1941*<sup>26</sup>

A further document, also from the *Inspektion des Luftschutzes*, concerning further “self-protection” measures for barracks and other buildings. There is no stamp on the document, which is a copy of a copy.

The four-page document contains the usual cautions and indications concerning the construction of bomb shelters, such as were discussed in “Defending.” Included are the stipulations that newly constructed works (“*Werke*”) should be equipped with bomb shelters for the workers, that trench shelters (*Luftschutzdeckungsgräben*) should be constructed, that wooden barracks should be at least ten meters apart to prevent fires from spreading, that gas masks should be provided, and so on. The one point of interest concerns an apparent overriding concern with fighting fires.

### Document 9

#### *Blaues Licht während der Verdunklung, April 16, 1941*<sup>27</sup>

This is another single-page document, signed by Steffens, and coming from the office of Reichsminister Todt. It concerns the conviction of Adolf Hitler that blue light for blackout conditions is superior to red light, along with a recommendation to use blue lights for achieving blackouts. The document is not particularly interesting, except that it underlines the extent to which red light was the usual method of achieving blackouts, and it further indicates the extent to which Hitler would involve himself in minutiae.

The document is a copy of a copy, and is stamped May 15, 1941; this indicates, according to our analysis, that it took a while to generate the copies of the document, and further that it was pending for an indeterminate period of time.

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<sup>26</sup> ZBL, 502-1-1, 8.

<sup>27</sup> ZBL, 502-1-1.

### Document 10

#### Heinemann Offer to Build *Luftschutzdeckungsgräben*, January 27, 1942<sup>28</sup>

The document consists of a cover letter from the firm Heinemann & Co. in Berlin, to the “SS-Neubauleitung” at Auschwitz, consisting of an offer to build trench shelters, with a four-page attachment providing details. It is the only document in this Central Construction Office folder, the first of eight folders comprising approximately 800 pages of bomb shelter documents.

Four pages of cost estimates accompany the letter. The letter is stamped January 29, 1942, that is, two days from the date sent, which gives us a benchmark for correspondence. The document appears to be a blind bid for services, making reference only to the Reichmarschall’s (i.e., Goering’s) regulations on civil air defense. The quick routing date, plus the absence of any further correspondence, indicates that nothing came of this bid, but the document does demonstrate the extent to which civil air defense would be assumed in the concentration camps even at this early point in time.

### Document 11

#### Building Regulations for 1942, March 6, 1942<sup>29</sup>

This is a three-page document that sets out building regulations for the third year of the war. On the second page, there is a paragraph that deals with the rationing of scarce materials, including iron, and which mentions in passing:

*Roof coverings should be iron efficient. Roofs over air raid shelters arched, or at least subdivided along their length with struts and girders. [...]*

*Ovens and fire places as well as as gastight doors and shutters in iron efficient construction.*

*[Massivdecken eisensparend. Decken über Luftschutzräumen wölben, mindestens aber die Feldlängen durch Stützen und Unterzüge unterteilen. [...]*

*Öfen und Herde sowie Gasschutztüren und Blenden in eisensparender Bauweise.]*

What we find interesting in this document is that civil air defense measures are mentioned quite casually in the context of general building regulations. This goes to the point that the equipment of new buildings with bomb shelters was simply assumed, even by early 1942.

### Document 12

#### Civil Defense Security Directive, Himmler to Glücks, February 8, 1943<sup>30</sup>

This document was already cited in “Defending”; it was referenced by Hilberg

<sup>28</sup> ZBL, 502-1-400.

<sup>29</sup> ZBL, 502-1-95, 121ff.

<sup>30</sup> Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (1st ed.), 584n58.

as “Himmler Files, Folder no. 67.” It has not been possible to locate the document because the Himmler records at the US National Archives are in a different format than they were when Hilberg used them, and they are in a highly disorganized state.

The document, sent to both Pohl and Glücks, consisted of instructions on establishing security in the concentration camps to ensure that there would be no mass escapes. The document, in our view, is significant in three ways. First, because it establishes an awareness of the need for civil air defense in the concentration camps at the highest level of the SS by early February 1943. Second, because security needs would possibly justify the alternative use of the Birkenau crematoriums in the case of air attack. Third, because an obvious antidote to prisoner escapes would be to provide the prisoners with some measure of security so that they would have a stake in maintaining order in an air raid.

### Document 13

#### **Kammler Guidelines #39 for Civil Air Defense, March 6, 1943<sup>31</sup>**

This is by far the longest document pertaining to civil air defense in the top level, consisting of a fifteen-page set of guidelines (*Richtlinien*) from General Kammler, the head of SS construction projects, in Berlin, followed by a three-page supplement of no date. It has a wide distribution list, including the Central Construction Office at Auschwitz. The document is dated March 6, 1943; the routing stamp is dated June 19, 1943, and bears the usual initials. There are scribbles at the top of the page, including a large one that appears to be the name of Kirschneck, who was the overall building supervisor at Auschwitz and directly subordinate to Karl Bischoff, the head of the Central Construction Office at this time. (Kirschneck's name frequently is scribbled at the top of documents.) A further date and scribble indicates that it was initialed by other members of the office on June 29, 1943 as well as July 1, 1943. We conclude because of these dates and annotations, as well as the time gap between the document date and the stamp date, that it was given full consideration at the time.

The document, which copies much information from Luftwaffe sources from 1942, stresses protection against splinters (*Splitter*), rubble (*Gebäudetrümmer*), and incendiary bombs (*Brandbomben*); gives guidelines for constructing trench shelters (*Luftschutzdecken*); and gives specifications for providing splinter protection (*Splitterschutz*) for buildings.

In the general section of the guidelines, it is said that experience has shown that the greatest damage in air raids is caused by splinters from high-explosive bombs (*Sprengbomben*). It goes on to say that this can be limited in many ways, for example, by angling the entrances to buildings or by diminishing the size of apertures through which light enters (i.e., *Minderung des Tageslichtseintritts*), which

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31 ZBL, 502-1-8.

would mean windows among other things. It is also stated that new and existing buildings can be adapted to provide splinter and rubble protection.

In terms of specific measures, the Guidelines emphasize that windows or other ventilation openings are to be pitched high, to protect the contents of the facilities inside, and to the extent that the need for daylight allows. The size and number of doors or gates are to be limited. Doors and windows are to be protected against splinters either inside or outside, preferably with the use of splinter walls (*Splitterschutzwände*).

The document obviously has some importance concerning the implementation of civil air defense measures at Auschwitz, from its length and the attention paid to it alone. We are also reminded that both Kammler and Bischoff were relatively recent SS, having come over from the Luftwaffe in 1940, and we can surmise that both of them would have been well aware of these kinds of instructions even before these guidelines were issued. It is also relevant that the guidelines were issued at the beginning of March 1943, and filed at the beginning of July 1943, the same time frame for the completion and fitting out of the crematoriums with gastight fixtures.

#### Document 14

#### Letter on Security, Pohl to Himmler, April 5, 1944<sup>32</sup>

This is a letter from Pohl to Himmler describing security precautions at the Auschwitz camp, and should be read with Himmler's analogous letter from February 8, 1943 in mind. We quote a few extracts:

As to the security measures taken for case A, I report as follows:

1. Camp I includes the compact camp for men with a present strength of approximately 16,000 inmates.

It is surrounded with a fence and by barbed wire which, as in all concentration camps, is electrically charged. Besides there are watchtowers mounted with machine guns.

Camp II is situated about 3 km. from camp I. It accommodates 15,000 male and 21,000 female inmates. Of a total of 36,000 inmates approximately 15,000 are unable to work. Camp II is also surrounded by an electrically charged wire fence; there are also watchtowers.

[...]

2. Of the total number of 67,000 inmates those in the subsidiary camps and those hospitalized have to be deducted if the question of a threatening revolt or of escapes in Upper Silesia is to be considered.

Of the total number, 67,000 inmates; 15,000 are to be deducted, those in subsidiary camps (camp III), and the number of the hospitalized and disabled, 18,000;

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<sup>32</sup> Nuremberg Document NO-021.

so that practically 34,000 inmates have to be reckoned with. In case A this would mean danger to Auschwitz if security measures were insufficient.

3. 2,300 SS men are available to guard the inmates of camp I and II, including the staff of camp headquarters, who are to be detailed in case A. In addition there are 650 guards available for the subsidiary camps of camp III.

[...]

4. Apart from the direct security of camp I and II by manned watchtowers and electrically chargeable wire fences, a line of bunkers has been constructed as an inner ring which will be manned by SS men. On the enclosed map, this line of bunkers is marked in red.

[...]

The Luftwaffe units stationed in Auschwitz in the strength of 1,000 men are available provided the alert does not coincide with an air raid. These Luftwaffe units can however not absolutely be counted upon. In drafting the plan of operation [*Einsatzplan*] this has been taken into consideration.

The document essentially confirms that Himmler's decree of the previous year has been implemented. The use of the crematoriums to facilitate the security on the western perimeter is, we believe, a highly probable inference. It is also worth noting, in passing, that some 27 percent of the inmate strength was unable to work.

### Document 15

#### *Behelfsmässiges Bauen der Waffen-SS, August 30, 1944*<sup>33</sup>

This is a single-page letter from General Kammler of the WVHA to the Building Inspectorate of the Waffen-SS in Silesia, to which Bischoff had been promoted, which stresses that all makeshift structures should be inspected. In context, we believe that this also refers to the civil air defense directives.

### Summary

This completes a brief survey of high-level documents pertaining to civil air defense found in the files of the Central Construction Office at Auschwitz. It is clear that the Central Construction Office was in receipt of various directives and orders concerning civil air defense from the early fall of 1940. By 1942, it was obvious, even to firms in Berlin, that the concentration camp system would be in the market for dedicated civil air defense bunkers. By early 1943, there were two high-level directives concerning civil air defense that were directed to Auschwitz: the Himmler Order of February 8, 1943, and the Kammler Guidelines of March 6, 1943. The Himmler Order stressed

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<sup>33</sup> ZBL, 502-1-1, 417.

security, that is, the need to protect against mass breakouts. In this respect we should keep in mind that the crematoriums, as well as the Central Sauna, were the only large fixed structures on the western periphery of the camp to provide potential protection and security. The Kammler Guidelines are probably even more important, bearing in mind the close relationship of Bischoff and Kammler.

From a purely documentary point of view, the interpretation of the disputed low-level documents in terms of civil air defense, that is, the Criminal Traces, could be justified at any point subsequent to the fall of 1940. This justification becomes more pronounced from the fall of 1942, due to the analogous developments in occupied Poland, and even more pronounced in early 1943, due to the Himmler Order, the Kammler Guidelines, and not least the first bombing raid on the Auschwitz area on May 4, 1943. However, the justification for interpreting the low-level documents in this way is not the same thing as correctly interpreting these documents, so now we turn to see what else we can find.

### 2.3 MID-LEVEL DOCUMENTS ABOUT BOMB SHELTERS

#### Document 16

#### Pohl Itinerary, September 23, 1942<sup>34</sup>

The first documents of this class consist of materials having to do with General Oswald Pohl, who was the head of the Economic Administration of the SS (WVHA). Pohl visited Auschwitz on September 23, 1942, which we note is roughly the same time as the Frank diary entries and the Majdanek-Auert work orders cited earlier.

The documents begin with an itinerary, and then record several speeches and meetings. Overall, Pohl's speech is upbeat, with typical appeals to the inner sense of duty of his audience, who, we must remember, were 1,000 miles behind the pre-Stalingrad front performing essentially thankless work. The meeting concerned for the most part all kinds of building projects that had to do with developing the area around the camp; only toward the end of the meeting was the necessity of building the sewage plant, due to the danger of epidemics, stressed.

The itinerary mentions no visits to possible bomb shelter sites but does list the following stops:

*German Armaments Factory Disinfection and Effects Barracks / Aktion Reinhard / New Horse Barracks Camp Birkenau Station 2 of Aktion Reinhardt Military Barracks in Birkenau Poultry Farm at Harmense Reservoir Construction Dam Construction on the Vistula Economic Enterprise at Budy Raisko Sewer Gas Facility [noted in pen] Sewage Treatment Facility*

*[DAW Entwesung -u. Effektenkammer /Aktion Reinhard/ Neuer Pferdestallhof Lager Birkenau Station 2 der Aktion Reinhardt Truppenlager Birkenau Geflügelhof*

<sup>34</sup> ZBL, 502-1-19, 86-103.

*Harmense Teichausbau Dammbau an der Weichsel Wirtschaftshof Budy Raisko  
Faulgasanlage [in pen] Kläranlage]*

There are numerous other pen notations that indicate that the camp capacity of Birkenau is foreseen as 12,000 men and 18,000 women, and suggests that there were only about 1,000 persons at Birkenau at this time. A later document in the series (p. 90), however, indicates that there were 16,000 in Birkenau at the time, of which about 3,000, or 18 percent, were incapable of work.

While these documents show that civil air defense was not a high priority at this time, the documents do provide some other information. It is interesting to note, for example, a reference to “Aktion Reinhardt” spelled in both the traditional and the revisionist manner, in the same document, and in a document that clearly concerns plunder and which has nothing to do with the eastern camps, with which the name “Aktion Reinhardt” is supposed to be exclusively associated.

### Document 17

#### **Pohl Building Recommendations, June 16, 1944<sup>35</sup>**

The document is a three-page memorandum (*Aktenvermerk*) recording a meeting on June 16, 1944, and covering mostly construction issues. The occasion was another visit by General Pohl. There were ten participants, including many of the leading personalities at the camp, including Höss, Bischoff (recently promoted to the building inspectorate of the Waffen-SS), Commandant Baer, Dr. Wirths, and Jothann (Bischoff’s successor as head of the Central Construction Office).

This is a rather well-known document; there are at least two copies in the Moscow Archives and in addition the document was introduced in the Concentration Camp Trial, #4, of the Nuremberg Military Tribunal as NO-259.

The document, after a brief introduction, lists some thirty-five building projects to be carried out, including several recommendations for civil air defense. However, the entries that seemed most important in 1947 were:

10. Three barracks for the emergency measure “Operation Jews.”

[...]

16. Camouflage of the crematories and security measures by constructing a second fence (the camouflage has to be effected by rush-mats which have to be obtained by the SS *Standortverwaltung* [SS garrison administration] ).

17. Construction of six mortuaries in Ba I and II

The three barracks being discussed are probably barracks in the Mexico section of the camp or else in the Kanada section, which served to store the plunder taken from the deported Hungarians: the German word is “*Judenaktion*.” The camouflage reference is usually taken in a sinister sense. However, given a number of civil

<sup>35</sup> Nuremberg Document NO-259.

air defense measures in the document, plus the reference to security measures requiring a second fence, we are not so sure if this reference does not follow in some way from Pohl's letter to Himmler in April.

The part that we find most curious is the reference to the construction of six mortuaries (*Leichenkammern*) in Ba I and II, that is, in the two main Birkenau camps. This strongly suggests that the morgues of the crematoriums were no longer being used as morgues at this time. Otherwise, it would not be necessary to build more of them. Furthermore, this directive is frankly incomprehensible in terms of the alleged burn rates attained at this time, in which some ten thousand people could be incinerated per day in the crematoriums and the associated burning pits. It needs to be said that there is no hint of this other activity in this document at all.

### Document 18

#### Minutes of Meeting on Civil Air Defense Measures, June 28, 1944<sup>36</sup>

The document is another four-page memorandum (*Aktenvermerk*), this time of a conference concerning air raid measures implemented at Auschwitz that took place on June 26, 1944. There were fifteen participants, including Höss, Bischoff, Baer, Kramer, Dr. Wirths, Jothann, Hoessler, and Dr. Münch of the Hygiene Institute at Raisko.

The document itemizes all of the civil air defense measures that were to be implemented, including:

- Construction of a civil air defense command post as well as telephone/telex and radio commands in the basements of the Commandant's house,
- In Camp 1, the construction of firefighting reservoirs and splinter protection for all of the basement windows of the prisoner barracks, and the construction of two rooms in the new reception center "*Wäscherei*" for the Block leaders,
- In Camp 2 (Birkenau), the construction of four trench shelters of reinforced concrete for 50 men each, for the SS and the Block leaders,
- At the "*Wirtschaftshof Birkenau*," the construction of two trench shelters for 240 prisoners apiece,
- At the poultry farm at Harmense, the conversion of a basement in the castle "*Schloss*" to a shelter for the prisoners,
- At Budy, the construction of a trench shelter for 50 men, and two trench shelters for 420 prisoners (the use of the basements of existing structures is assumed),
- At the Women's Camp at Budy, trench shelters for 440 prisoners,

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<sup>36</sup> ZBL, 502-1-401.

- At “*Wirtschaftshof*” Babitz, three trench shelters for 30 men, 200 female prisoners, and 200 male prisoners,
- At the “*Pflanzensucht*” at Raisko, several trench shelters, including one for 550 prisoners,
- At the German Armaments Factory (DAW), splinter walls for the basement windows of the main buildings.

Under the heading “General” (“*Allgemeines*”) we read:

*For fire watch twelve observation bunkers.*

*Protective measures for the prisoners of Camp I in the way of trench shelters are not possible because of the lack of available space. However, two to three thousand prisoners can be sheltered in the basements [of the existing buildings].*

*Likewise in Camp II [Birkenau], in view of the high water table and the lack of space, trench shelters cannot be provided for the prisoners.*

*The prisoners of the DAW can find protection at night in the basements. Open ditches cannot be provided in view of the available space.*

[14.) *Allgemeines:*

*für Feuer- und Brandwache 12 Stück Beobachtungsbunker*

*Als Schutzmassnahmen für Häftlinge des Lager I ist die Anlage von Splitterschutzgräben nicht möglich auf Grund der vorhandenen Freiflächen. Es können jedoch 2-3000 Häftlinge in den vorhandenen Kellerräumen untergebracht werden.*

*Im Lager II können ebenfalls Splitterschutzgräben für Häftlinge mit Rücksicht auf den Grundwasserstand und die vorhandenen Freiflächen nicht angelegt werden.*

*Die Häftlinge der DAW. finden in der Nacht in den Kellerräumen den entsprechenden Splitterschutz. Offene Gräben können mit Rücksicht auf den hier vorhandenen Mangel an Freiflächen auch nicht angelegt werden.]*

Finally, the memorandum lists some completed structures, including some 20 firefighting reservoirs, each of 400 cubic meters, and 10 trench shelters in reinforced concrete.

The document makes it clear that, by midsummer of 1944, there were very ambitious plans in place for providing civil air defense throughout the Auschwitz camp complex. Furthermore, the document assumes the use of existing buildings for civil air defense purposes, although the individual buildings are not specified. Given the fact that Crematoriums II and III as well as the Central Sauna were all equipped with basements, and given that they were among only a handful of fixed structures on the western side of Birkenau, the use of these basements can certainly be inferred from this date. Finally, the document makes it clear that many of

these shelters, using either existing buildings or dedicated trench shelters, are to be used to provide shelter for thousands of prisoners. In cases where there is a scarcity of shelters available, as at Birkenau, the shelters are to be provided on a preferential basis to the SS and the Block leaders.

A further point is that attempts to construct even more shelters at both Auschwitz and Birkenau were frustrated by the lack of space, and in the latter case by the high water table. Document 31, below, describes the construction of 10 trench shelters at Birkenau, each 60 meters in length, but these shelters do not appear to be referenced in the June 26 meeting, about two weeks later.

In our opinion, the above document is strong evidence of a German intention to provide overall civil air defense protection, for both the SS and the prisoners. However, the indication that shelters could not be built in Birkenau because of the high water table undercuts our interpretation, in "Defending," that the mounds in front of the prisoner barracks were trench shelters. It may be that this interpretation is wrong, or it may be that, despite the high water table, further attempts were made to protect the prisoners later that summer. With regard to Document 31 in particular, it is hard to say if the attempt was made, but then set aside, or then resumed.

One thing is certain, however: efforts were made to protect some prisoners with trench shelters, and, as will be shown below, all of these trench shelters were equipped with gastight doors.

### Document 19

#### **Civil Air Defense Inspection by von Mirbach, December 6, 1943<sup>37</sup>**

The next document concerns a civil air defense inspection of Auschwitz that took place on December 6, 1943, conducted by Oberstleutnant von Mirbach of the Luftgaukommando VIII from Krakow, and involving Bischoff, Jothann, Josten (in charge of civil air defense), and Liebehenschel, the new commandant of the camp. The purpose of the inspection was to determine the extent to which the Auschwitz camp and its several satellites were prepared for air attacks. Von Mirbach's observations were made in point form:

- *That blackout requirements in the several SS barracks in the camp area had been prepared and had been complied with punctiliously for a long time.*
- *All measures for blackouts in the camp barracks as well as the various administrative offices had been carried out.*
- *Trench shelters for all of the SS men and the workers living in the camp had already been planned and were, with the construction of concrete formworks, already begun.*

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<sup>37</sup> ZBL, 502-1-401.

*[dass die Verdunklungsbestimmungen in den einzelnen SS-Unterkünften im Lagerbereich bereits seit längerer Zeit genauestens beachtet werden.*

*für die Verdunkelung der Lagerunterkünfte und die einzelnen Verwaltungsdienststellen sind sämtliche Massnahmen getroffen.*

*für die Sicherung bei etwaigen Angriffen nicht in Einsatz stehender SS-Männer des Wachverbandes der Verwaltungsstellen sowie der im Lagerbereich wohnenden Arbeiter ist die Anlage von Splitterschutzgräben gemäss den geltenden Bestimmungen bereits geplant and wurde mit dem Herstellen sowie Einbau der Betonformstücke die Zentralbauleitung bereits begonnen.]*

Von Mirbach's report also contains the following:

In view of the streets, the drainage, and the heavy overcrowding of the various parts of the camp, trench shelters cannot be provided for the prisoners of the base camp or the prisoner of war camp [i.e., Birkenau—SC]. Therefore for greater security a second cordon should be built.

[...]

The meeting was followed by a drive through the various camps. At this time, Oberstleutnant von Mirbach recommended that the basement windows of the fixed structures in the base camp should be equipped with splinter shutters.

*[Die Anlage von Splitterschutzgräben für die Häftlinge des Stammlagers bzw. des KGL. ist? mit Rücksicht auf die vorhandenen Strassen, Be- und Entwässerungsanlagen und der starken Belegung der einzelnen Bauabschnitte nicht durchführbar. Zur besonderen Sicherheit wurde daher bereits ein zweiter Sperrgürtel ausgebaut.*

[...]

*Der Besprechung folgte eine Fahrt durch die einzelnen Lager. Hierbei wird von Oberstleutnant von Mirbach das Anbringen von Splitterschutzblenden von der Kellerfenstern der unterkellerten Massivegebäude des Stammlagers angeregt.]*

There are three main points of interest to this document. First, the inspection makes it clear that blackout conditions at least had been “complied with punctiliously.” This implies a long-standing awareness of civil air defense in the camp. Second, the inspection recommends equipping the basements of the existing structures in the base camp with splinter shutters.

The third point is particularly interesting inasmuch as it was overridden later: this concerns von Mirbach's judgment that it would not be possible to build any shelters for the prisoners. Yet the minutes of the meeting from the following June, as well as Document 31, show that this recommendation was at least partly vacated. Further in this respect is the fact that von Mirbach's solution to this problem is to simply call for greater security, an attitude that follows in line with Himmler's February 8, 1943 directive and Pohl's letter to Himmler of April 5, 1944.

## Documents 20/22

### Documents from Fall 1943<sup>38</sup>

These documents include two of the documents that are presented on the website of the British historian David Irving.<sup>39</sup> These three documents consist of two memoranda and a letter by Walter Dejaco, who was an architect of the Central Construction Office. The dates are September 21, October 25, and November 5, all 1943. The letter of September 21 and the memo from October 25 both reference a telex from August 23, 1943.

All of the materials have to do with the production and delivery of concrete shells to be used for trench shelter construction at Auschwitz. The October 25, 1943 memorandum mentions 176 of these shells, while the November 5, 1943 memorandum mentions the “first 500 meters of concrete.” Consequently, we concluded originally that this document referenced the construction of hundreds of air raid shelters in the camp.

However, this conclusion was wrong, first, because the construction of the shells was not understood (they are practically oval) and second because the problem with the high water table at Birkenau was not evident. In addition, whatever the problem with the water table, it seems to be contradicted by the photographic evidence of what appeared to be trench shelters in Birkenau. Still, the minutes of the June 26, 1944 civil air defense meeting, the von Mirbach inspection of December 6, 1943, and some low-level documents below will make clear that these shells were indeed to be used to construct trench shelters for both the SS and the prisoners, including at Birkenau: if not hundreds, then as many as possible.

### Summary

The overall picture that emerges from these mid-level documents is that the attempt to build dedicated trench shelters did not begin until the summer of 1943. In fact, we can reasonably carry the attempt backwards to the telex of August 23, 1943, mentioned in some of the fall, 1943 documents.

From that point on, it appears that the plan to build dedicated shelters was frustrated by various breakdowns and shortages. However, from the point of view of our thesis the number of actual shelters built is not relevant; the intention is what counts, because that enables us to infer a similar intention for the equipment of the crematoriums.

The official record of the June 26, 1944 meeting is very relevant, although it comes late in the chronological scheme. It certainly is of decisive importance in supporting our prior assertions in documents concerning the intent to build shelters for the inmates as well as to use existing basements for civil air defense purposes. However, the von Mirbach inspection of the previous December does not

<sup>38</sup> ZBL, 502-1-401, also 502-1-26.

<sup>39</sup> [www.fpp.co.uk/Auschwitz/documents/LSKeller/MoscowDocs.html](http://www.fpp.co.uk/Auschwitz/documents/LSKeller/MoscowDocs.html).

enable us to extend the implementation of civil air defense measures back indefinitely. To be sure, the document says that blackout conditions have been complied with punctiliously, from which we can reasonably infer several months at least. In this respect, we are reminded of the “30 fittings for red lamps” for Crematoriums IV and V and the fence surrounding Kanada that was referenced in “Technique,” a work order dated August 11, 1943. Since this is just a few weeks after the last of the gastight fixtures were sent to the crematoriums, it seems reasonable to us that the various gastight fixtures were fitted with a civil air defense end in view. But again, while that may be a reasonable interpretation, it may not be the correct one.

Overall, then, we have to concede that while we have top-level documents covering the entire history of the camp, the mid-level documents only take us back to the summer of 1943, and do not carry us back explicitly to the gastight fixtures of the Birkenau crematoriums.

## 2.4 LOW-LEVEL DOCUMENTS CONCERNING BOMB SHELTERS

### Document 23

#### Request for 12 “*Trockenklosette*” for LS-Bunkers, October 4, 1944<sup>40</sup>

A half-page memo to Jostens, the civil air defense leader in the camp, which requests twelve toilets as follows:

*the air-raid shelters by the Waffen-SS house, the Record house, Caesar’s house, Professor Clauberg’s house, as well as for the two trench shelters at the agricultural center at Raisko.*

*[Um Abgabe von 12 Stück Trockenklosette für die LS-Bunker beim Haus d. Waffen-SS, Haus Rekord, Haus Caesar, Haus Prof. Clauberg sowie für 2 LS-Deckungsgräben für die Landwirtschaft in Raisko wird gebeten.]*

The document simply points up the fact that trench shelters were constructed and that “bunkers” were set up either in or by existing buildings.

### Document 24

#### Building Construction Form, October 18, 1944<sup>41</sup>

This is a single-page form describing a work project, listed as “2 *Luftschutzbunker*, BW: 98 E, L.” Under #6, “*Baubeschreibung*,” or project description, there is a brief listing of work to be done, which includes “*Eisentonbedeckte, gasdichte Türe*.”

<sup>40</sup> ZBL, 502-1-401, 114.

<sup>41</sup> ZBL, 502-1-95.

**Document 25****Construction of a Gastight Examination Room, October 17, 1944<sup>42</sup>**

A half-page memo from Bischoff, now with the Waffen-SS building inspectorate, referencing “*Ausbau eines gasdichten Behandlungsraumes und Splitterschutzraumes im ehemaligen Crematorium,*” that is, “Construction of a gastight examination room and splinter-proof shelter in the former crematorium.”

The document supports the contention that makeshift adaptations and conversions would be gastight; there is also a pen notation referencing the work as “BW 98 M,” from which we make the inference that BW 98 was a catchall for bomb shelter adaptations while the letters designated specific locations.

**Document 26****Concerning LS-Bunkers as Trench Shelters, September 20, 1944<sup>43</sup>**

The document concerns the construction of four “LS-Bunker” and describes the equipment of these with emergency exits, the exits to be filled with gravel for security. The document also references the regulations for the construction of trench shelters, the version dated March 1943. The document is useful mostly because it demonstrates that the use of the terminology was interchangeable: bunkers are not normally referred to as trench shelters, and vice versa.

**Document 27****Concerning Construction of Shelters, September 18, 1944<sup>44</sup>**

This is a half-page memo from Jothann to the Commandant describing the detailing of work parties for the four bunkers described in Document 26, including prisoner laborers. The memo also contains a reference to a prisoner work party to repair bomb damage to “*Haus 210.*” This is probably in response to one of the Allied bombing raids on the camp, several of which occurred in late August and early September 1944.

**Document 28****Delivery of Ventilation Pipes for Shelters, September 11, 1944<sup>45</sup>**

This is a single-page letter from Jothann, head of the Central Construction Office, to the BAKO firm in Berlin concerning the delivery of 500 ventilation pipes for trench shelters (*500 Stück Lüftungsrohren für LS-Deckungsgräben*). Apparently, there was a misunderstanding and BAKO had sent ten times as many ventilation pipes as were needed. The letter indicates that there is no use for 400 of the ventilation pipes and asks what should be done with these. The letter concludes with a request for 100 bomb shelter doors (*LS-Türen*).

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<sup>42</sup> ZBL, 502-1-402, 39.

<sup>43</sup> ZBL, 502-1-402.

<sup>44</sup> ZBL, 502-1-402.

<sup>45</sup> ZBL 502-1-401.

**Document 29****Memo and Sketch of Ventilation Pipes, September 11, 1944<sup>46</sup>**

This is an enclosure to Document 28, consisting of a cover memo about ventilation pipes and closures, here called “*Luftschutzverschlüsse*” and a drawing of one, titled “*Gasdichte Lüftungsrohrverschlüsse für LS-Deckungsgräben*,” which shows a typical cylindrical pipe, with a conical cap on top (“*Regenhaube*”) and with a gastight seal at the base. The whole arrangement is strongly suggestive of a “tower” emerging from the roof of the shelter.

**Document 30****Invoice for 45 RM for Prisoner Work on Crematorium II, June 2, 1943<sup>47</sup>**

The very next two pages in this folder consist of an invoice and pay stub made out for 45 Marks for prisoner labor concerning work performed on *Bauwerk 30*, or Crematorium II. The invoice is dated June 2, 1943. There are several written indications that we cannot make out. Overall, the document is a curiosity, and it is not easy to explain why it is found in a folder devoted to civil air defense measures. It may have some relevance, but it would be hard to establish exactly what that would be, under present circumstances.

**Document 31*****Bauliche LS-Massnahmen*, June 9, 1944<sup>48</sup>**

This is a two-page document from early June, that is, prior to Pohl’s visit on June 16 or the air raid shelter conference on June 26. It consists of a memo from Jothann, the head of the Central Construction Office, to Höss, who has returned to the camp to oversee the breakup of the camp into three parts. The memo informs Höss that there are currently plans to construct 20 firefighting reservoirs in Camp I (Auschwitz) and 12 in Camp II (Birkenau). In addition, the memo indicates plans to build 10 trench shelters, each 60 meters in length [sic], in Camp I (Auschwitz) and 10 more in Camp II (Birkenau). The memo goes on to say “*Hiervon sind bereits 10 Gräben bis auf den Einbau der gasdichte Türen fertiggestellt*,” that is, “So far ten of the trench shelters have been built except for the installation of the gastight doors.”

**Document 32****BW 98 LS-Gräben Inventory, May 11, 1944<sup>49</sup>**

The document consists of several pages giving inventories of the work to be done for the construction of trench shelters. There are two entries of particular interest.

First, #12 of the listings (page 42), reads as follows:

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46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 ZBL 502-1-401.

49 ZBL, 502-1-402, 41-52.

Entry shaft to function as emergency exit 2.02 meters in length with 51 cm walls [...]. The shaft is to be covered with a sealant-treated reinforced concrete plate of around 15 cm in thickness, if the entry covers are not delivered. Eight pieces of iron for entry steps are to be delivered and installed.

*[Einsteigschacht als Notausgang 2,02 m gross mit 51 cm strk. Mauern und Fundamenten samt 1 Unterzug gemauert herzustellen. Schacht wird mit einer Eisenbetonplatte u. Estrich cca. 15 cm stark abgedeckt, ohne Lieferung des Einsteigdeckels. 8 Stück Einsteigeisen sind zu liefern und zu versetzen.]*

The relevance is that this description matches the two concrete tubes that lie in the center of the western walls of Morgue #1 of both Crematoriums II and III. These had been identified as emergency exits in “Defending.” Pressac claimed that these had something to do with drainage, but there is no documentary basis for this view. (Pressac referenced Drawing 1300, which shows the drains converging about six to eight feet away from the western wall, which is irrelevant.) Furthermore, these concrete tubes, which still exist today, do not appear on any architectural drawings. Nor do these concrete tubes have any relevance for either the disinfection or the gas chamber thesis.

The conclusion, which we consider unavoidable, is that Morgue #1 of both Crematoriums II and III were adapted by means of these emergency exits to function as auxiliary bomb shelters at some point. We do not have the documents that tell us exactly when these concrete tubes were put in place, but our guess is that it must have taken place prior to Pohl’s inspection of June 16, 1944, because that puts his request for “six mortuaries” into a comprehensible context.

The second entry (page 49) concerns a further draft of #8 of the inventories that reads:

7 inner and outer gastight doors .85 m x 1.75 m to be put in with the help of the locksmith.

*[7 Stück äussere und innere gasdichte Türen 0,85 x 1,75 mit Hilfe des Tischlers einsetzen.]*

### Document 33

#### Felt Needed for Gastight Doors for Trench Shelters March 21, 1944<sup>50</sup>

A half-page memo from the German Armaments Factory (DAW) at Auschwitz requesting felt. The memo reads as follows:

For the trench shelters in the school garden we have prepared in accordance with the previous order four gastight doors, and therefore need 20 meters of felt strip-ping about five millimeters wide.

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50 ZBL, 502-1-408.

[für die Luftschutzdeckungsgräben (Schulgarten), fertigen wir laut obigem Auftrag 4 Stück gasdichte Türen, und benötigen hierzu, 20 lfdm. Filzstreifen ca, 5 mm breit.]

**Document 34**  
**More Felt for Gastight Doors, March 25, 1944<sup>51</sup>**

Another half-page memo, a follow-up to the memo of March 21, 1944, requesting another 20 meters of felt for the gastight doors, because the 20 meters provided was only enough for two doors.

[Mit unserem Schreiben .... forderten wir 20 lfdm. Filzstreifen 2,5 cm breit, 5 mm stark für gasdichte Türen der Luftschutzdeckungsgräben an.]



<sup>51</sup> ZBL, 502-1-95, 60.

The above two documents show that the trench shelters were equipped with gastight doors, and that felt was used to achieve gastightness, and that such doors were made by the German Armaments Factory (DAW). We should keep in mind that the gastight fixtures of the Criminal Traces were also made by the German Armaments Factory, and used felt to achieve gastightness. It is also interesting to note that this follow-up memo was found in a completely different folder from the associated Document 33. This suggests some corruption of the files.

### Document 35

#### Ventilation Pipes and Gastight Doors for Shelters, March 24, 1944<sup>52</sup>

The document is headed “*Zuweisung von Sicherheitsventilen und gassicheren Türen für LS-Deckungsgräben*,” that is, “allocation of safety valves and doors for trench shelters.”

This is a single-page letter from Jothann to the construction suppliers in Kattowitz. The letter, which references a phone call between the architect Walter Dejaco and engineer Andre, involves a request for 80 ventilation pipes and 40 gastight doors (80 *Stück Sicherheitsventilen und 40 Stück gassicheren Türen*) for the ten trench shelters to be constructed. It also requests 24 ventilation pipes and 12 gastight doors for the three shelters already completed.

Besides providing further evidence of the use of gastight doors and gastight ventilation pipes for trench shelters, the letter also indicates something about quantity: apparently, the shelters were rather large, each requiring four gastight doors.

### Document 36

#### Conversion of the Old Crematorium, August 26, 1944<sup>53</sup>

The single-page document sets forth the tasks that need to be performed to convert the “old” Crematorium I to an operating room and air raid shelter. We quote *in extenso*:

Re: Conversion of the old Crematorium for civil defense purposes

Attachment: 1 plan.

In the Attachment I present a plan for the conversion of the old crematorium for civil defense purposes with a request to authorize this conversion.

#### 1. Work Schedule

Demolition of the old chamber ovens and cleaning up the leftover bricks for reuse.

<sup>52</sup> ZBL, 502-1-95, 61.

<sup>53</sup> ZBL, 502-1-401.

Fill the flues and chimneys with the rubble and old material from the demolition of the chamber ovens.

Create the window and door openings.

Install the gastight doors, window shutters, and windows,

Manufacture of the necessary holes in the walls and pipes for the heating ovens as well as for the intake and exhaust ventilation,

Water installation and drainage work,

Relocation of the existing lighting according to the division of space,

Repair of floor and partial replacement with wood surfacing,

Repair the ceiling and painting with sealant

## 2. Material Requirements

500 kg cement, 400 kg bricks, 20 kg iron, 50 meters rail, 24 pcs lumber, 10/15 cm, 4.8 meters long, 10 pcs lumber, 10/15 cm, 3.9 meters long, 102 square meters of board, 25 mm thick, 13 pcs single-leaf windows 60 x 80 cm, 2 pcs doors single-leaf 70 x 200 cm, 16 pcs gas and splinter protective window shutters, 7 pcs gas and splinter protective doors

*[Auschwitz O/S, den 26. August. 1944.-*

*Der Luftschutzleiter*

*As. LS 217 - Jo/B*

*An den SS-Standortältesten als örtl. Luftschutzleiter Auschwitz O/S*

*Betrifft: Ausbau des alten Krematoriums für Luftschutzzwecke*

*Anlagen: 1 Plan.*

*In der Anlage überreiche ich einen Plan über den Ausbau des alten Krematoriums für Luftschutzzwecke mit der Bitte um Genehmigung dieses Ausbaues.*

### *1. Arbeitsvorgänge:*

*Abbruch der alten Kammeröfen und reinigen der dabei anfallenden Ziegel zwecks Wiederverwendung,*

*Auffüllen der Heizschächte und Heizkanäle mit dem beim Abbruch der Kammeröfen anfallendem Schutt und Altmaterial,*

*Durchbruch der Fenster- und Türöffnungen,*

*Einsetzen der Gasschutztüren, Fensterblenden, und Fenster,*

*Herstellung der für die Beheizungsöfen, sowie für die Ent- und Belüftung erforderlichen Mauerdurchbrüche und Schläuche,*

*Wasserinstallations- und Kanalisationsarbeiten,*

*Verlegen der vorhanden Lichtleitung entsprechend der Raumeinteilung,*

*Ausbesserung der Fußböden und Teilverlegung eines Holzfußbodens,*

*Ausbesserung des Daches and Anstrich desselben mit Gudron [Gudron is a kind of pitch—SC]*

## *2. Materialbedarf*

*500 kg Zement, 400 kg Ziegel, 20 kg Rundeisen, 50 m Eisenbahnschienen, 24 St Kanthölzer 10/15 cm, 4,80 m lang, 10 St Kanthölzer 10/15 cm, 3,90 m lang, 102 m<sup>2</sup> Bretter 25 mm stark, 13 St Fenster einflügelig 60 x 80 cm, 2 St Türen einflügelig 70 x 200 cm, 16 St Fensterblenden gas- und splittersicher, 7 St Türen gas- und splittersicher.*

*Der Luftschutzleiter:*

*Josten [pen signature]*

*SS-Obersturmführer*

*[some notations in pencil]]*

There are several points of interest to this document:

The doors and shutters described are identical to those described in the civil air defense literature.

The interior walls and roof are to be strengthened with wooden interior partitions and two-by-fours for roof support; no complicated rebuilding scheme is required, even for this full-scale conversion.

The plan makes specific reference to taking apart the old cremation ovens and using the leftover bricks to fill in the associated holes. Interestingly, there is nothing about filling in any other holes, although there is plenty about creating new ones.

The plan, in its request for gastight doors and shutters, a ventilation system, and heaters, strongly implies that none of these materials were on hand at the time of the morgue's conversion. This would in turn suggest that whatever previous use

may have been made of the morgue of Crematorium I, it was used without gastight doors and shutters, a ventilation system, or heaters.

We note the identification of 16 *Fensterblenden* (window shutters) to be constructed, and these are, apparently, to fill apertures of approximately 60 x 80 cm.

Turning now to Pressac, we find a series of photographs of shutters that Pressac found in the coke storeroom of Crematorium I in 1982.<sup>54</sup> The three shutters depicted show a height/width ratio of about 1:1.20 for the doors of the shutters only, and Pressac confirms this when he gives the measurements for the door of one of the shutters as 52 x 43 cm. It would seem to be logical, given their approximate size, the location in which they were found, and the identity of these fixtures to ordinary civil air defense shutters, that these three shutters are in fact gastight shutters prepared for Crematorium I.

Yet Pressac claims that they were built for Crematoriums IV and V, and that these are three of the “12 gastight doors” fitted at those locations. If we consult the associated architectural drawings, however, we find that all of the relevant apertures at the western end of Crematoriums IV and V are specified as dimensions 30 x 40 cm, and the work order for constructing the “little doors” specifies dimensions of 30 x 40 cm. Yet the shutters depicted by Pressac, at more than 40 x 50 cm, are too large for the apertures. Thus it is very unlikely that these shutters were ever meant for Crematoriums IV and V.

On the other hand, in his description of Crematoriums IV and V Pressac claimed that the openings to the windows of Crematoriums IV and V were enlarged to 40 x 50 cm.<sup>55</sup> If true, this would start to solve the problem, but there is no evidence supporting Pressac’s assertion other than the window shutters that Pressac found. Hence we can reject Pressac’s reasoning here as circular. Therefore, we conclude that these shutters are in fact civil defense shutters prepared for Crematorium I.

There are a couple of serious implications to Pressac’s misidentification. The first is that many observers waxed hysterical over the “discovery” of these shutters by Errol Morris during the shooting of his film on Fred Leuchter.<sup>56</sup> The second is that the defense in the Irving v. Lipstadt trial offered a photo of one of these shutters—to be specific, PMO II-5-64/2—as proof of homicidal gassings in Crematoriums IV and V. Meanwhile, witness van Pelt assured the court in his expert opinion and on the witness stand that this shutter was the “same size” as those used for Crematoriums IV and V, although with the dimensions of the door of the shutter at 52 x 43 cm it clearly could not have been. This indicates something less than precision on the part of the defense upon whose expert knowledge Justice Gray relied.

The final point about these shutters is that they essentially prove the bomb shelter thesis. When we first saw a photo of these shutters, shortly after writing “Technique,” we were amazed at their similarity to civil air defense *Blenden*: and why wouldn’t we be, because that is in fact what they were.

<sup>54</sup> Jean Claude Pressac, *Auschwitz: Technique and Operation of the Gas Chambers*, 426f.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 386.

<sup>56</sup> *Mr Death: The Rise and Fall of Fred A. Leuchter, Jr.*, Errol Morris, director.

## 2.5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The high-level documents indicate that the Central Construction Office at Auschwitz was in receipt of memoranda and guidelines for the implementation of civil air defense measures, both for new shelters as well as for existing buildings, from September 1940. The Heinemann bid indicates that the idea of building dedicated civil air defense shelters even in the concentration camps was already generally prevalent in Germany by the beginning of 1942. The building regulations of March 1942 also assume the implementation of civil air defense measures in new buildings, and they also assume iron-conserving (i.e., wood) construction.

The data from the wider context of occupied Poland, including the order of the Auert doors for Majdanek, make it reasonable to assume that Auschwitz would be at least sensitive to the implementation of civil air defense and gas protection measures from the late summer of 1942. However, it was not an issue of sufficient importance to be mentioned by Pohl in his September 1942 visit.

The Himmler directive to Glücks presumes the implementation of civil air defense measures in the camps, from the beginning of February 1943. General Kammler's detailed guidelines of March 6, 1943 reinforce the idea that civil air defense was becoming important in the camp. In fact, we would consider Kammler's involvement a virtual guarantee of the implementation of civil air defense measures, since Kammler was in close contact with Bischoff in the Central Construction Office. It should be possible to say that somewhere between the fall of 1942 and the spring of 1943 the Central Construction Office at Auschwitz became aware of the need to implement civil air defense measures and began implementing them.

However, the attempt to construct dedicated air raid shelters in the form of trench shelters (*LS-Deckungsgräben*) did not begin until the summer of 1943, which we can see from the telex that initiated discussions over the delivery of prefabricated concrete shells. There appears to have been quite a bit of dithering over this project, and it is not until March 1944 that we begin to see actual references to the completion of such shelters.

Concerning these trench shelters, we can infer from the various memoranda that a number were planned, and we know that they were to be equipped with gastight doors and ventilation pipes. We also know from the minutes of the June 26, 1944 conference that many of these were to be allocated to the prisoners, and that several were to be built in Birkenau. Both the June 26, 1944 conference and the von Mirbach inspection of the previous December make it clear that there were limits on how many dedicated shelters could be constructed, due to the high water table at Birkenau, the overcrowding, and the lack of available space. Nevertheless, the same two documents make it clear that the basements of existing structures were to be used for air raid shelters, and, in the base camp, specifically for the prisoners.

In summary then, we have high-level documents that point to an increasing

awareness of the need for the implementation of civil air defense measures. This awareness seems to reach two peaks, the first in early 1943, with the issuance of the Himmler Order, the Kammler Guidelines, and the first bombing raid on the Auschwitz complex on May 4. The actual implementation of these measures, at least as it pertains to dedicated shelters, appeared to stall after that. The second peak in civil air defense awareness came the following spring, as indicated by the Pohl recommendations, the Pohl letter to Himmler, and the civil air defense conference on June 26. Yet the von Mirbach inspection of December 1943 also makes it clear that a certain level of civil air defense readiness had been achieved throughout the camp, although the document does not specify whether anything other than blackout conditions had been met.

The actual measures implemented in 1944 involved the construction of trench shelters and the adaptation of existing buildings. This was not merely an exercise in humanitarianism, but had also a distinct security component: this is shown in Himmler's February 1943 directive and the reply of Pohl a year later. The trench shelters were for the SS, the workers, and the prisoners, and these shelters were to be supplemented by the use of existing buildings. The existing buildings to be used for auxiliary civil air defense are not specified, either at Auschwitz or at Birkenau, but since the Central Sauna and Crematoriums II and III were all equipped with basements their alternate use for civil air defense purposes seems likely. Indeed, the memorandum from Pohl's June 16, 1944 visit tends to imply that the morgues of Crematoriums II and III were not in use as morgues by that time. The washing and bathing facilities at BW 5a, 5b and Crematoriums IV and V could easily have doubled as decontamination centers in the event of an air raid, which could explain their outfitting with gastight doors in the fall of 1942 and the spring of 1943.

The high-level evidence is solid and continuous, and so is the low-level evidence, at least from the early spring of 1944. What we are missing are mid-level references to the implementation of civil air defense measures from the fall of 1942 to August of 1943, when red lamps were ordered for the newly constructed fence around Kanada and the newly built Crematoriums IV and V. A civil air defense purpose for the gastight listings in the Criminal Traces would be a reasonable interpretation, based on the foregoing documentation. However, considering the contentious nature of the claim, it is necessary to deal with the alternative explanations and the criticisms made by the advocates of those explanations. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that while there are gaps in the mid-level civil air defense documentation, no documentation of any kind has been presented to support the disinfection or gas chamber utilization of these particular gastight fixtures. Bearing that in mind, we now return to the Criminal Traces.

## PART 3: REVIEWING THE CRIMINAL TRACES

### 3.1 OVERVIEW

We have already reviewed the Criminal Traces in detail in “Technique,” and see no point in repeating that analysis here. All we intend to do is to go over some of the Traces to see to what extent we would revise our previous assessments.

Pressac lists 39 Criminal Traces, but actually there are only about 34, with some overlap, which can be summarized as follows:

- The words *Vergasungskeller* and *Gaskammer* (Pressac, 1, 19, 21, 33f)
- The word *Gasprüfer*
- Various references to “gastight” doors and windows (3, 6f, 11, 13-15, 17f, 20, 22-24, 26-29, 32-34)
- The word *Auskleideraum* or *-keller* (4f, 10, 12)
- The word *Drahtnetzeinschiebvorrichtung* (8)
- The word *Holzblenden* (9)
- *14 Brausen* (16)
- The words *drei gasdichte Türme* (25)
- References to heating one of the morgue cellars (30f)

As noted previously, the basic identity of the gastight doors listed above with ordinary bomb shelter doors has never been seriously questioned. This assumes, of course, that the doors being referenced are the doors found at Auschwitz at its liberation, since only a couple of the Traces say anything about the nature of the gastight doors. For example, the “*gasdichte Türme*” letter describes a “*Gastür*” in this way:

Gas door with peephole of double 8 mm glass with rubber sealing and cover.

[*Gastür ... mit Guckloch aus doppeltem 8 mm Glas mit Gummidichtung und Beschlag ...*<sup>57</sup>]

A description which is markedly similar to the above is found in the civil air defense literature:

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<sup>57</sup> Pressac, *Auschwitz: Technique and Operation*, 436, 452.

Every anti-gas bomb shelter door must be equipped with a peephole. [...] The disc of multi-layered glass of at least six millimeters in thickness should be protected from damage on the outside with a perforated steel plate.

[*Jede gassichere Schutzraumtür muß mit einem Guckloch versehen sein. [...] Die mindestens 6 mm dick Scheibe aus Mehrschichtenglas muß durch eine gelochte Stahlscheibe nach aussen gegen Beschädigung geschützt sein.*<sup>58</sup> ]

Research by other revisionists, notably Nowak and Rademacher, has shown that the felt-stripping used for the makeshift doors manufactured by the German Armaments Works at Auschwitz would not have been “gastight” in any sense having to do with fumigation or extermination, particularly with cyanide gas.<sup>59</sup> On the other hand, “gastight” in a civil air defense context was not directed so much against cyanide gas as against aerosols such as mustard gases, for which felt would suffice. Nowak and Rademacher have also produced documents that show that the doors used for disinfection purposes were of a completely different design than the doors found at the camp or described in the Criminal Traces.<sup>60</sup>

Therefore we repeat our judgment that gastight doors with peepholes, either at Auschwitz or at any other camp, are doors that have been constructed in accordance with German civil air defense specifications. In other words, there is no question that such doors are bomb shelter doors.

The gastight doors make up half of the Criminal Traces, and so the question really is whether these civil air defense fixtures were used for other purposes, either for cyanide gas delousing or cyanide gas mass murder.

In addition, there has been discussion about the other Traces, so we summarize them here with some brief comments.

### 3.2 DRAHNETZEINSCHIEBVORRICHTUNG

Pressac translated this as “wire mesh insertion device” and claimed that it was a reference to wire mesh columns into which the Zyklon B was poured in order to kill the victims. The reference to the four “*Vorrichtungen*” occurs on an inventory list for Crematorium II along with a reference to “4 *Holzblenden*,” or four wooden shutters. We know that such shutters were typical for achieving a gas protection seal in the air raid shelter literature. Hence, we concluded that the wire mesh devices were simply wire-mesh screens to fit into windows which the wooden shutters would cover, probably to provide some protection against bomb splinters, such a screen being normally called a “*Splitterschutzvorrichtung*.”

The stem word “*Einschieb*” simply means “insert” in German; it does not mean

<sup>58</sup> R. Scholle, *Schutzraumabschlüsse*, 21.

<sup>59</sup> Hans Jürgen Nowak and Werner Rademacher, “Gasdichte’ Türen in Auschwitz,” *Vierteljahreshfte für freie Geschichtsforschung* 2, no. 4 (December 1998): 248-261.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

something constructed so that something else can be inserted into it. We find it significant that van Pelt, in his expert report for the Irving-Lipstadt trial, avoided this trace altogether, probably because he did not want to have to defend Pressac's translation, although van Pelt did have a lot to say about wire mesh introduction devices. We see no reason to abandon our position on either this trace or the *Holzblenden*, although it is clear that the proper location for such paraphernalia would be vertical wall openings; these have not yet been discovered. It is worth pointing out that the conventional interpretation holds that the wire mesh columns and wooden "covers" had something to do with the holes in the roof of Morgue #1 of Crematorium II, but these holes haven't been discovered, either. It is also worth mentioning that no eyewitness has ever claimed that the holes in the roof were covered with wood.

### 3.3 DREI GASDICHTE TÜRME

As we have seen, the document containing this reference was one of only two documents available to Western historians for many years. At Nuremberg, the phrase was translated as "gas chambers," but it actually reads "three gastight towers"; the key word *Türme* could also mean turrets (the architectural term for turret is "*Türmchen*").

In "Technique" we argued that this was probably a reference to three gastight ventilation chimneys, another common object in the civil air defense literature. Pressac, on the other hand, and also van Pelt, have insisted that *Türme* is a misspelling for *Tür* and that this is a reference to "three gastight doors." Bearing in mind that "gastight doors" are also common in the civil air defense literature, we still find this explanation unconvincing. First, while the first paragraph of the letter has two references to *Türme*, the final paragraph has a specific reference to a gastight door, or "*Gastür*." We find it hard to believe that a stenographer or typist would mishear or mistype a word twice in one paragraph and then hear or type it correctly a minute later. Furthermore, the misspelling, if there was one, involves more than one error: if the word was "doors" it would be typed "*Türen*" instead of "*Türme*." Van Pelt, who relies on this document, claims that it was written as "*Türe*" which reduces the mistakes by one but which compounds the grammatical error: the plural of *Tür* is *Türen*, not *Türe*.

Document 29 presented a picture of a *Luftschutz-Verschlüss*, or gastight seal on a ventilation chimney, of the kind used for the known trench shelters at Auschwitz. Other documents also indicate that gastight chimneys were common at Auschwitz for gas protection. Certainly, such gastight ventilation chimneys could be described as "*gasdichte Türme*," and we remain confident in our interpretation of this trace.

### 3.4 OTHER GASTIGHT DOORS/KRAKOW PROTOCOLS

The discussion of the “three gastight doors” leads us back to the Krakow Protocols, prepared at the time of the late 1946 hearings against Rudolf Höss. Most of Pressac’s references to gastight fixtures come from these protocol lists, which are mainly abbreviated transcripts of work orders passed on to the German Armaments Factory at Auschwitz, but not the work orders themselves. Consequently, we lack the full context in many cases and cannot know if any original purpose was given on the orders. In other cases, we lack the previous orders that some of the work orders refer to, and which would help us reconstruct the intent. Hence, in response to Justice Gray’s comments in this area, there is nothing suspicious about the fact that most of these references contain no explanation of the purpose for the gastight fixtures. The problem has to do with the indirect documentation, the absence of documentation, and possibly, the low-level quality of the evidence.

Pressac, having baptized the “*gasdichte Türme*” as gastight doors, had then to explain how two other orders preserved in the Krakow protocols described the delivery of four tight doors and four gastight doors to the same location: Crematorium IV. His explanation is not very persuasive, involving a hypothetical change of mind as to how many gas chambers there were going to be in Crematorium IV.

The bottom line is that if we look at the Krakow protocols with a view to trying to decipher them we soon find ourselves with a surplus of gastight doors. The work order of April 16 mentions the delivery of 4 gastight doors to Crematorium IV, but none of the spaces identified as gas chambers has four doors. The work order for February 19, referencing an order of January 18, lists the construction of 4 “tight” doors (*dichte*) for Crematorium IV. The “*gasdichte Türme*” letter of March 31 also references this missing January 18 letter. Crematoriums IV and V are also the locations where “24 *Ankerschrauben*” for gastight doors, “210 *Gastürverankerungen*,” as well as the “12 gastight doors” (for the windows), are to be sent.

At this point we have to ask ourselves what the design for the spaces themselves might indicate. Figure 10, below, is from an architectural drawing for Crematorium IV (or V). According to the conventional interpretation, the westernmost room and the larger room directly adjacent were gas chambers. Both spaces have two doors, one leading to the outside. Both spaces have small windows, measuring 30 x 40 cm. Both have small heaters (marked with an “X”) which are fired from outside the room, and both are equipped with drains.

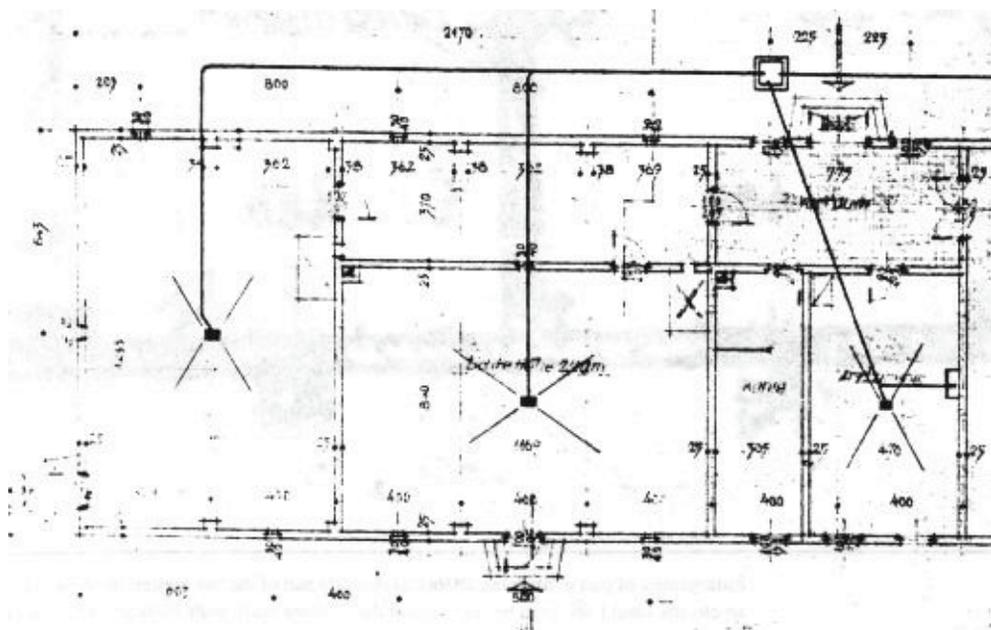


Figure 10: Floor plan of Krematorium IV

While the conventional interpretation is that these spaces were gas chambers, even Pressac has conceded that a gassing sequence for these two rooms would have been absurd. The delivery of the gas through the little windows would have been, in Pressac's phrase, a "circus act." The drains from the gas chambers linked up to the doctor's office two rooms away, making the use of cyanide gas rather risky. Cross-ventilation would have been impossible, because, although each gas chamber had a door to the outside, the inside doors had to pass through two hallways before reaching the open air. Finally, no ventilation systems were installed in these spaces, although apparently something was done about this in the summer of 1944.

It is not our purpose to declare spaces impossible for gassing, but if we were to do so the westernmost rooms of Crematoriums IV and V would be the strongest candidates. We mean this not only in a homicidal sense but also in the usual revisionist sense of full-room exposure to poison gas for disinfection. The same problems with using these rooms under one gassing scenario apply to the other, and, in addition, disinfection gassing installations would not be equipped with little windows that would be of little assistance in ventilation. Yet the fact remains that at least one of these rooms is referred to as a "*Gasskammer*."

### 3.5 GASSKAMMER

In the workbooks for one of the civilian firms that constructed the crematoriums Pressac found two references to "laying concrete in the *Gasskammer*," which Pressac interpreted as references to the construction of a homicidal gas chamber.

The word is a misspelling; the proper German word is “*Gaskammer*.” The problem with these references for the gas chamber thesis is that “*Gaskammer*” is also the common word for spaces in which delousing and disinfection take place. So there is a kind of standoff between the homicidal and disinfection interpretations of this Trace. In “*Technique*,” our interpretation was that there were several repetitions of the “*Gass*” spelling here and elsewhere in the documents, and we interpreted it in a civil air defense context. Thus “*Gasskammer*” was interpreted as a bracket form for a gas shelter, or *Gass[chutz]kammer*.

Bearing in mind the peculiarities of design construction, our best guess remains that these westernmost rooms contained bathing installations of some kind, and hence the drains, the heaters, and the two doors, to allow an entrance and exit. Equipped with gastight fixtures, these spaces, like the showers at the Natzweiler and Dachau crematoriums, could have provided hot showers and would have served as auxiliary gas shelters for decontamination in the event of a poison gas attack.

### 3.6 UNDRESSING ROOMS AND 14 SHOWERS

Pressac defined the undressing rooms in Crematoriums II and III as Criminal Traces, and insisted that the showers installed there were fake. We want to dwell on this issue in detail, and pursue the thesis that the showers were genuine.

The existence of genuine showers or other washing facilities in the crematoriums supports the bomb shelter thesis, since an important function of bomb shelters and particularly gas shelters was to provide treatment for as well as protection from poison gas attacks. We have already noticed the general equipment of spaces with gastight doors: this served primarily to provide collective protection against poison gas. Showers and other washing facilities were an integral part of large air raid shelters, and they were meant not only to serve basic hygienic purposes, but also to be used to cleanse those exposed to poison gas, of which mustard gas was the main agent feared. To that end, as we noted in “*Defending*,” it was customary to adapt existing public baths or laundries to serve as auxiliary decontamination centers. In “*Technique*,” we argued that the most logical explanation for the gastight sections of the crematoriums, and in particular, the basements of Crematoriums II and III, was that they were decontamination centers, because that provided the simplest explanation of the showers and the gastight doors described in the documents. We did not prove in “*Technique*” that the showers in the basement Morgue #1 of Crematorium III were real, but we assumed they were, and we reexamine the issue here.

In his book Pressac cited one document about showers and Crematorium III. This was a telegram from Bischoff, then head of the Central Construction Office, to Kurt Prüfer, who was the head engineer for Topf & Sons, who built the crematorium ovens and attempted to provide a number of other products

to the camp as well. It reads:<sup>61</sup>

Bring Monday [May 17] rough plan for production of hot water for about 100 showers. Fitting of heating coils or boiler in the waste incinerator at present under construction Krema III or system using the high temperatures of the flue gases. It would be possible to raise the brickwork of the furnace to take a large tank. Herr Prüfer is requested to bring the relevant drawings on Monday 15/5.

Sig. Bischoff

This document has been known at least since 1989, when Pressac's book appeared. The general explanation for it has been that the Nazis had plans to set up showers after they had completed their program of gassing and burning their enemies. This explanation, however, doesn't very well explain the urgency of Bischoff's request. It is worth quoting Pressac's commentary on this document:<sup>62</sup>

In this telegram, Jährling requested the urgent study of an installation to obtain hot water from the waste incinerator of Krematorium III, then under construction, to supply about one hundred showers (probably to be located in an annex building built on the southern wall of the Krematorium). Prüfer was supposed to bring the relevant drawings with him on the 17 of May. [*sic!*] [This plan was never implemented, although such installations were built in other camps, for example in the crematorium of K L Natzweiler (Struthof) where the incinerator was the main source of heat for the showers.] Although this request for a hot water system for a hundred NORMAL showers was in no way criminal, it was recorded in the Krematorium III worksite 30a, file under the heading "SONDERMASSN[AHMEN]/SPECIAL MEASURES" because the building was connected with these measures, the killing and cremation of Jews unfit for work.

This interpretation is incorrect in all respects, as we will now show.

The telegram to Topf & Sons is part of a longer report in four parts that is contained in the Central Construction Office files.<sup>63</sup> We simply summarize the contents of that report, and provide some extracts.

The report begins with a cover letter from Bischoff to Kammler that begins:

[*Auschwitz, am 16.5.1943*

28 941/43/Eg/Lm

*Betr.: Sondermassnahme für die Verbesserung der hygienischen Einrichtungen im KGL-Auschwitz]*

<sup>61</sup> Pressac, *Auschwitz: Technique and Operation*, 241.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

<sup>63</sup> ZBL, 502-1-83, 309ff.

In other words, “Special Measure for the Improvement of the Hygienic Conditions in the POW Camp Auschwitz,” that is, Birkenau. The text of the letter begins:

*[In der Anlage wird ein Bericht über die bisher getroffenen Massnahmen für die Verbesserung der hygienischen Einrichtungen im KGL]*

That is, “in the attached is a report on the measures for the improvement of the hygienic facilities in the POW camp completed to date.”

There follows a two-page report headed as follows:

Report

Concerning the Completed Measures for the Implementation of the Special Program Decreed by SS-Brigadeführer and Major General of the Waffen-SS Dr. Eng. Kammler in the POW Camp Auschwitz.

*[Bericht*

*über die getroffenen Maßnahmen für die Durchführung des durch SS-Brigadeführer und Generalmajor der Waffen-SS Dr. Ing. Kammler angeordneten Sonderprogrammes im KGL. Auschwitz]*

The report dates the particular special program to May 12, 1943, and lists seven categories of activity, including work on the sewage treatment plant, cutting the King’s Ditch (the main drainage ditch at Birkenau) through to the Vistula, work on the lavatories (*Abortbaracken*), washing barracks, and so on. The sixth listing is particularly relevant:

Disinfection Station

For the disinfection of the prisoners’ clothing in the several parts of BA II an Organization Todt Disinfection Station is envisioned. In order to achieve a perfect bodily delousing for the prisoners, both of the existing prisoner baths in BA I will be equipped with hot water heaters and boilers, so that there will be hot water for the existing showers. It is further planned to set up coils in the incinerator at Crematorium III, so that the heat can be recovered for the water for the showers to be set up in one of the basements of Crematorium III.

*[Entwesungsanlage.*

*Zur Entwesung der Häftlingskleider ist jeweils in den einzelnen Teillagern des BA II eine OT-Entwesungsanlage vorgesehen. Um eine einwandfreie Körperentlausung für die Häftlinge durchführen zu können, werden in den beiden bestehenden Häftlingsbädern im BA I Heizkessel und Boiler eingebaut, damit für die bestehende Brauseanlage warmes Wasser zu Verfügung steht. Weiters ist geplant, im*

*Krematorium III in dem Müllerverbrennungsofen Heizschlangen einzubauen, um durch diese das Wasser für eine im Keller des Krematoriums III zu errichtende Brauseanlage zu gewinnen.]*

The report is dated May 16, 1943, as is the cover letter. Next, we have a copy of the telegram sent to Prüfer, dated May 14, 1943, by way of supplementing the previous report.

Finally, we have a further three-page report, dated May 13, 1943, which details the job assignments for the “special measures,” now referred to as an “emergency program” (*Sofortprogramm*). Paragraph #9 reads as follows:

Civilian worker Jährling is to carry out the construction of the hot water heaters and boilers in the washing barracks, as well as the showers in the undressing room of Crematorium III. SS-Sturmbannführer Bischoff will confer with the camp commandant, SS-Obersturmbannführer Höss, about the showers. For the delousing ovens the SS-WVHA has still to send an Organization Todt drawing.

*[Za. Jährling hat den Einbau von Kesseln und Boilern in den Waschbaracken durchzuführen, desgleichen die Brausen im Auskleideraum des Krematoriums III. Wegen der Brausen wird SS-Sturmbannführer Bischoff noch mit dem Lagerkommandanten, SS-Obersturmbannführer Höß, Rücksprache nehmen.]*

Note that Bischoff refers to himself in the third person here; since this letter comes three days before the report of May 16, we feel it is safe to conclude that Bischoff had authorization from Höss by that time.

On the basis of the above report, we feel justified in drawing the following conclusions:

*The 14 showers mentioned on the Transfer Documents for Crematorium III were genuine.* We don't see how this conclusion can be avoided. If we argue that the 14 showers in the transfer documents of June 24, 1943 were fake, we would have to conclude that real showers were planned, but then a month later were replaced with fake ones. Indeed, the traditional narrative holds that Morgue #1 of Crematorium II had been used for two months prior to this report to gas people in a room equipped with fake showerheads. Since Crematorium III was supposed to have a comparable function, it would mean that Morgue #1 of Crematorium III was originally meant to have fake showers, then real ones, and then fake ones again. This is not believable.

*“Undressing Rooms” are meant in the ordinary mortuary sense, not in any special sense.* A minor but significant conclusion. Bischoff originally suggested the location of the showers in an undressing room, which means that the room was understood to be an undressing room before the showers were contemplated. This can only mean that the word “undressing room” is being used in an ordinary mortuary

sense, that is, as a space where bodies are cleaned and prepared prior to burial, or in this case, cremation.

*The implementation of hygienic measures took precedence over any other alleged purposes for the crematorium cellars.* We consider this another inescapable conclusion, albeit a very controversial one. The traditional narrative holds that the crematoriums were built to destroy the traces of persons who would be murdered in the basements with poison gas. But the report leaves no doubt that, for the sake of camp hygiene, this undocumented intended purpose of the crematoriums was going to be suspended so that the camp population could take hot showers.

*The crematoriums were going to be used to provide ad hoc hygienic measures, prior to the completion of the Central Sauna (which was opened at the beginning of 1944), and possibly at times of high traffic thereafter.* This is an argument that we pointed to in late 1997; it has probably been made by others. In this case, at minimum, it was intended to use the basement spaces of Crematorium III to provide *ad hoc* showers for the camp population, and we know that 14 showers were installed. Here we should note that Mattogno has cited documents from June 1943 which indicate that the water for the showers was not heated in the manner Bischoff envisioned in this report, and that the plans for installing showers covered both Crematoriums II and III. This suggests that the 14 showers in Morgue #1 were not heated, or were heated by other means. Mattogno's data also suggest that Crematorium II may also have been equipped with showers at this time, or even before. The fact that showers were not mentioned on the transfer documents for Crematorium II might be explained by the fact that the showers were not originally planned for these structures, but were improvised. In addition, while Crematorium III was handed over to the camp in late June, that is, after Bischoff's report, Crematorium II was officially transferred to the camp at the end of March. Incidentally, Bischoff would have had no reason to mention Crematorium II in this report, since Crematorium II broke down at the end of April, and was apparently out of service for several months.

*Bischoff's telegram to Prüfer was overly ambitious, and probably deliberately so.* This is a speculative conclusion, but one that seems right. The whole thrust of the report is that Bischoff wished to assure Kammler that, despite the delays in construction, work was proceeding energetically to solve all of the issues related to camp hygiene. We will review more documents of this kind shortly; suffice it to say that just as in January Bischoff sought to convince Kammler that the crematoriums were being completed more or less on schedule, so here he wishes to assure Kammler that meeting hygienic requirements was achievable. Our guess is that 100 showers could never have been installed, but it made an impressive figure to report to Kammler, by way of a copy of the telegram to Prüfer. It also appears that Bischoff seemed to waver on the location: 100 showers would make most sense in

the largest morgue (Morgue #2, the “undressing room”). But in the end a smaller number of showers were installed in the smaller morgue. The modest number of showers actually installed could also be explained by the failure to exploit the high-volume source of thermal energy that the incinerator would have provided.

*The dual use of the crematoriums for hygienic purposes may have included the installation of ad hoc disinfection stations.* We will discuss this speculative conclusion in more detail below: this is essentially one of Mattogno’s arguments, based on two documents that mention disinfestation ovens (that is, hot-air delousing ovens) in documents relating to Crematorium II. The problem with Mattogno’s argument is that we know that these ovens, provided by Topf, were ultimately set up in the Central Sauna. However, the discussion of these ovens in Bischoff’s report, along with the established precedent of ad hoc usage, suggests the dual use of Crematorium II as well, here as the site of ad hoc disinfection.

*The gastight door with peephole on Morgue #1 of Crematorium III had no homicidal or disinfection purpose.* We know that the request for the “gas door” for Morgue #1 of Crematorium III goes back to the March 31, 1943 “*gasdichte Türme*” letter, weeks before Bischoff got the idea about installing showers there. So clearly this gastight door had nothing to do with the installation of the showers. Yet the door was still installed, even in a space with working showers, which would be either superfluous or incompatible with homicidal gassing or disinfection procedures.

This is a very controversial conclusion, but again we don’t see how it can be avoided. To argue the homicidal interpretation for this door, one would also have to argue that the camp was pursuing homicidal and hygienic agendas in the basements of Crematorium III simultaneously, which is not believable. The disinfection thesis similarly fails with respect to the gastight door, because there would be no disinfection of clothing taking place in a room equipped with showers.

In fact, the simplest explanation for the juxtaposition of showers and a gastight door with peephole is that Morgue #1 became, in effect, an auxiliary gas shelter, which would be sealed off from poison gas in the event of an attack, and used to decontaminate poison gas victims afterwards. However, we emphasize that the order for the gastight door came before the installation of the showers. We also note again that the door is identical in all described particulars with an ordinary bomb shelter door. We conclude, therefore, that the door was meant to serve as the door to an auxiliary bomb shelter from the beginning.

*The gastight door on Morgue #1 of Crematorium II likewise had no homicidal or disinfection purpose, since it was identical to the door on Morgue #1 of Crematorium III.* This is probably the most controversial conclusion, yet the letter of March 31, 1943 makes it clear that the doors were identical. Since the doors were identical, we have to consider why the doors were there in the first place. The disinfection thesis fails because to talk about a gastight door in this context implies

that the entire space of Morgue #1 of Crematorium II would be filled with poison gas. Yet the area of the morgue was around 2,000 square feet, much too large for efficient gas dispersal, although we know that on occasion very large spaces could be used for that purpose. Therefore, the idea that a gastight door with peephole would have been installed in either morgue for disinfection purposes seems very unlikely.

The gas chamber thesis is in fact more likely, so long as we follow the line of reasoning that says that the Nazis were simply making things up as they went along. But again, the gas chamber thesis depends on the idea that the crematoriums were intended solely for the pursuit of a killing program, although Bischoff's report makes it clear that camp hygiene took precedence over any alleged program of mass murder, even in the crematoriums themselves.

The fact remains that a gastight door on a space with genuine showers would have no logical homicidal or disinfection purpose. Morgue #1 of Crematorium II was equipped with exactly the same kind of door. To argue a homicidal or disinfection interpretation for the door on Morgue #1 of Crematorium II, one would have to admit that the same kind of door was used for non-homicidal and non-disinfection purposes in Crematorium III. Yet this is the same thing as saying that the presence of a gastight door with peephole is irrelevant to either the gas chamber or disinfection theses. Such a door, however, is not irrelevant to the bomb shelter thesis.

*“Sondermassnahme(n)” have nothing to do with extermination.* Our final conclusion is the least controversial since it is explicit in the document. Nevertheless, it does raise the point, argued elsewhere by Mattogno and even Pressac, that references to *“Sonderaktion”* and other *“Sonder-”* words, in the time frame of 1942 and 1943, need not be construed in a homicidal sense, as they usually are.

To summarize, we feel it is perfectly reasonable to conclude on the basis of the Bischoff Report that the showers cited as a criminal trace by Pressac were authentic showers, and that the “undressing rooms” were ordinary morgues used for corpse preparation. In that case, Morgues #1 would have been originally designed as storage spaces for corpses so prepared, and that in turn would explain the ventilation system in the storage morgue. Many other conclusions may follow, which we also feel are completely reasonable, but the only one we would insist on at this point is that the undressing rooms and the showers were not Criminal Traces.

### 3.7 VERGASUNGSKELLER

As we have seen, this word has usually been interpreted as meaning “gas chamber” or “gassing cellar” by traditional historians. Arthur R. Butz has offered a number of explanations over the years to account for this word, of which “gas shelter” is the most recent. The word is unusual and is not found in any other documents. Hence, there is no real way of knowing what it means. In “Technique,” we tried to

construct etymologically a definition of the term that would be consonant with gas protection, or more precisely the treatment of persons injured in a gas attack. However, we are not satisfied with that construction because we have found no trace of such usage in the civil defense literature. We have maintained since late 1997 that the more likely meaning of the word has something to do with disinfection, and will discuss our reasoning below. In the meantime, we have to recognize that this Criminal Trace, and the gas detectors for cyanide residue, remains as rather forceful evidence in support of the gas chamber thesis.

So far we have found five examples of “*Vergasungs-*” type words that are roughly contemporaneous to the above usage and are focused on Auschwitz and the SS.

First, Mattogno found a reference, dated July 13, 1941, in which the delousing spaces of BW 5a and 5b are referred to as a “*Vergasungsraum*.”<sup>64</sup>

Second, a travel order to pick up Zyklon B from a factory in Dessau, dated July 26, 1942, references “*Gas zur Vergasung des Lagers, zur Bekämpfung der aufgetretenen Seuche, zu holen*.”<sup>65</sup> That is, picking up the gas for the fumigation of the camp in the struggle against vermin. Since the order comes at the height of the typhus and typhoid epidemics, the meaning is clearly not homicidal.

Third, a widely distributed circular from Commandant Höss, dated August 12, 1942, discusses an accident with Zyklon B during the fumigation of a barracks.<sup>66</sup> The one-page special order contains two references to “*vergasen*” words: in one place it refers to “all those who took part in the gassing” (“*allen an Vergasungen Beteiligten*”) in another, to the spaces gassed as “*vergasten Räume*.” A similar order, from Doctor Wirths, dated December 10, 1943, describes a similar incident, but here the words used are “*Entwesung*” and “*entwest*,” which supports the argument that “*vergasen*” was used as a synonym not only for “*begasen*” (fumigate) but also “*entwesen*” (disinfect).<sup>67</sup>

Fourth, the diary of Dr. Kremer, for September 1, 1942, contains the following entry: “*Nachmittags bei der Vergasung eines Blocks mit Zyklon B gegen die Läuse*.” That is, “In the afternoon attended the fumigation of a barracks with Zyklon B against lice.”<sup>68</sup>

Fifth, a circular from Dr. Mrugowsky from the SS Hygiene Institute, dated August 24, 1943, reads as follows:

In the future therefore, cyanide gas may only be used for the fumigation of barracks in the concentration camps.

[*In Zukunft darf daher Blausäure nur noch zur Vergasung von Baracken in Konzentrationslagern verwendet werden.*]<sup>69</sup>

<sup>64</sup> PMO (Auschwitz Museum) 1034/7, 5.

<sup>65</sup> Werner Kalthoff, *Die Händler des Zyklon B*, 176.

<sup>66</sup> Pressac, *Auschwitz: Technique and Operation*, 201, Ref: PMO, no reference.

<sup>67</sup> ZBL, 502-1-8, 25.

<sup>68</sup> Klee, “*Schöne Zeiten*,” 233.

<sup>69</sup> Werner Kalthoff, *Die Händler des Zyklon B*, 124. As a matter of fact, a fuller version of the document, available on

It is obvious that the ordinary meaning of “Vergasung-” type words at Auschwitz, among the SS, and during this time frame, is as a synonym for fumigation or disinfection. Therefore the most likely explanation for the word “Vergasungskeller” is a basement in which fumigation or disinfection is going to take place. We will discuss the matter in more detail below.

### 3.8 GAS DETECTORS

One of Pressac’s Criminal Traces concerns a telegram from the Central Construction Office to Topf & Sons, who built the cremation ovens and sold other equipment to the camp. The telegram was a single-sentence request for ten “gas detectors” for Crematorium II, and, presumably, Crematorium III (the two sets of crematoriums were frequently discussed in pairs). Keeping just to this telegram, the simplest conclusion is that it is a request for gas detectors for the ten cremation ovens for Crematoriums II and III. The two main reasons for this conclusion are the number of detectors requested, and the fact that such gas detectors are common for detecting carbon monoxide as evidence of incomplete combustion. However, in a later book, Pressac presented a letter from the Moscow archives, dated March 3, 1943, from Topf to the Central Construction Office, indicating that the gas detectors were for cyanide gas residues. In “Technique,” we showed that there was a real threat of aerial cyanide gas attack, so in terms of our overall thesis there was no need to pursue the matter.

But there have been a number of interpretations. Butz, for example, considers the document authentic, involving the testing for cyanide gases that might have been generated in the incinerator that was attached to the cremation ovens.<sup>70</sup> Mattogno, on the other hand, considers the document a forgery or falsification, and points out many problems with it.<sup>71</sup>

In spite of revisionist attempts to refute this document, we must admit that on the surface the Topf letter to the Construction Office has a sinister connotation. The problem is that the letter doesn’t really fit the gas chamber thesis. In the first place,

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the Internet, has Mrugowsky use “Vergasung” a total of six times, viz. “.... Bei Vergasungen, Entlausungen usw. werden die Unterkünfte der Waffen-SS und der Konzentrationslager häufig mit Blausäure durchgast. Bisher konnten die angeforderten Mengen Blausäure im allgemeinen zur Verfügung gestellt werden. Aus verschiedenen Gründen ist nunmehr aber eine Blausäuremangellage eingetreten und es ist notwendig, nur die notwendigsten und wichtigsten Entlausungen noch mit Blausäure durchzuführen. Im Allgemeinen erreicht man bei Verlausungen mit einer gründlichen Scheuerdesinfektion dasselbe, wie mit einer Blausäurevergasung. In Zukunft kann Blausäure nur noch zur Vergasung von Unterküften bereit gestellt werden, wenn eine erhebliche Fleckfiebergefahr vorliegt. Nach bisherigen Erfahrungen ist eine solche Lage nur in Konzentrationslagern gegeben. In Zukunft darf daher Blausäure nur noch zur Vergasung von Baracken in Konzentrationslagern verwendet werden.

*In einer Sitzung des Arbeitsausschusses Raumentwesungs- und Seuchenabwehrmittel beim Reichsminister für Bewaffnung und Munition am 11.8.1943 kam zur Sprache, dass auch in der Waffen-SS vielfach zu hohe Konzentrationen angewendet werden. Dabei wird die über das Notwendige hinausgehende Menge Blausäure nur zur Sicherung des Erfolges angewandt. In Zukunft dürfen nur noch folgende Blausäuremengen verwendet ....”*

Without translating the entire passage, I note several parts favorable to a revisionist interpretation: (1) use of the word “vergasen” in a disinfection context, (2) widespread use in the concentration camps and by the Waffen-SS, (3) a current shortage of cyanide, (4) the stipulation therefore that cyanide should only be used where the risk of typhus was highest, and (5) the concentration camps had the highest risk of typhus.

<sup>70</sup> Arthur Butz, “Gas Detectors in Auschwitz Crematory II,” *Journal of Historical Review* 16, no. 5 (September–November 1997): 24–30.

<sup>71</sup> Carlo Mattogno, “Die Gasprüfer von Auschwitz,” *Vierteljahresshefte für freie Geschichtsforschung* 2, no. 1 (March 1998): 13–22.

the request was made after Crematorium II was built. Second, there is no explanation for how ten such detectors would have functioned in the two gas chambers. Third, there is no evidence of their delivery or use, and fourth, there is no evidence that the devices were ever found. No causal chain is ever offered to account for the urgent request, and the ultimate failure of that request.

On the other hand, we consider the Mattogno explanation weak, because there is no causal chain to accompany the claim of forgery or falsification. In other words, if a document is forged, common sense dictates that there be a reason for the forgery. To say that such a document is altered, which isn't explicit in any case, tells us nothing. In order to make the argument for falsification stick, one has to propound a scenario under which it was altered, and why. For example, if the document was used in a judicial proceeding against Kurt Prüfer, that might set us on the proper trail. But Mattogno offers no evidence for this.

Noting the ambiguity of this trace, we leave it aside for now, observing only that superficially it tends to support the gas chamber thesis as opposed to either the disinfection or bomb shelter theses.

### 3. 9 CONCLUSION

In reconsidering the Criminal Traces we have found no reason to abandon a civil defense explanation for most of them. Some, for example, the showers and the undressing rooms, have a completely neutral explanation, and the showers are clearly linked to hygiene, thematic to the disinfection thesis. A few of the more problematic traces, i.e., the *Vergasungskeller* and the gas detectors, have no clear explanation under any thesis, but we are now inclined to think that they too have something to do with disinfection. In the next section of our study we review the disinfection thesis overall.



## PART 4: A DISINFECTION CHRONOLOGY

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

For the past twenty years the standard antithesis to the gas chamber explanation for the gastight fixtures of the crematoriums has been the disinfection thesis. The thesis has been argued in a number of ways, but it has not succeeded in explaining the gastight doors with peepholes or the gastight shutters of Crematoriums IV and V, except in terms of full-room disinfection gassings. As we have already noted, the types of gastight doors normally used for disinfection have nothing in common with the gastight doors found at Auschwitz, most of which were constructed in accordance with civil defense guidelines and were not in a technical sense gastight.

However, the disinfection thesis has its adherents; and is contending, as it were, over the same spaces as the bomb shelter and gas chamber theses. Therefore it deserves attention. Furthermore, the Bischoff Report of May 16, 1943 strongly supports the disinfection thesis in a general way, without at the same time refuting the civil defense interpretation of the gastight doors.

Over the past several years a number of revisionists have obtained documents from the Moscow Archives that touch on issues related to disinfection. We would like to list a number of these below, in order to offer a coherent possible narrative to account for all of the documents, including the Bischoff Report cited above. Afterwards, we will try to see how the gas chamber thesis can be made to fit the same documents. Such a procedure will not only be enlightening but will help clarify the differences among the various theses concerning the gastight fixtures of the Birkenau crematoriums.

The only background we need to keep in mind is that in the summer of 1942 typhus broke out in Auschwitz Birkenau, claiming the lives of several thousand. At the same time, thousands more were deported to the camp, and many of these also died. The crematorium at the base camp (Crematorium I) broke down for two months in this period. The bodies of those who died, perhaps tens of thousands, were buried in large pits to the west of the future Birkenau crematoriums sites and began to contaminate the water supply of the whole camp, increasing the death toll. In response, plans were made to build four crematoriums, a Central Sauna that would be able to accommodate an entire transport of arrivals, a sewage treatment plant, and a drainage system for the camp.

## 4.2 DOCUMENTS ON DISINFECTION

July 9, 1942

### Letter from Berninghause about Gastight Doors for Delousing Chambers

This letter, originally cited by Nowak in his study of gastight doors,<sup>72</sup> makes it clear that the normal design of gastight doors for disinfection purposes has nothing to do with the kinds of gastight doors with peepholes found at Auschwitz. Nowak also agrees with us that the design of the gastight doors at Auschwitz derived from makeshift civil air defense construction patterns.

August 18, 1942

### Memorandum from Ertl<sup>73</sup>

The two-page document describes a visit by Prüfer of Topf & Sons concerning the installation of ovens for Crematoriums II or III. In addition, it discusses installing some furnaces “*bei den ‘Badeanstalten für Sonderaktionen,’*” usually translated as, “near the baths for special purposes.”

The reference is clearly ambiguous, since there are at least two different homicidal explanations for the document. The first, offered by the Soviets in their Special Commission Report on Auschwitz (USSR-08), was that the document concerns setting up the ovens at the baths, which were understood to be gas chambers. The current interpretation, offered by Pressac and van Pelt, is that the document concerns the construction of Crematorium IV near (and thus “*bei*”) the baths, understood to mean the undocumented provisional gas chambers of Bunkers 1 and 2. The problem with the latter interpretation is that the alleged site of Bunker 2 is nowhere near Crematorium IV, but is instead about 1,000 meters away, and Bunker 1 is no closer. On the other hand, the Central Sauna, already planned at this time, and which really was a bath establishment, was indeed built “*bei*” Crematorium IV, about 100 meters away.

The next point concerns what “*Sonderaktion*” means. “*Aktion*” in German can mean an “action” in the sense of a special task, like executions; it can also mean an “operation” in the sense of a task or procedure, like the plunder operation “*Aktion Reinhardt*”; it can further mean movement, as in “*Aktion Mutter und Kind*,” a wartime operation that involved moving German women and children away from the cities to escape Allied bombing raids.

Most of the time “*Sonderaktion*” in an Auschwitz context means “transport operations,” that is, the sorting of incoming transports of prisoners. In a sense, both sides admit that meaning, with the exception that the traditional narrative holds

<sup>72</sup> Hans Jürgen Nowak and Werner Rademacher, “Gasdichte’ Türen in Auschwitz,” 248-261. The overall thesis of the article is that none of the designated “gastight” doors at Auschwitz was gastight in a technical sense. Rudolf thought this distinction important, so he edited my original article accordingly. I do not think the thesis is important for my purpose, that is, in terms of civil defense, since there were a variety of makeshift measures that could be adopted. This article, and a sister article on the German use of shortwave (i.e., microwave) disinfection chambers at Auschwitz were combined in English as “Some Details of the Central Construction Office at Auschwitz,” in Rudolf, ed., *Dissecting the Holocaust*, 311-336.

<sup>73</sup> Pressac, *Auschwitz: Technique and Operation*, 204f, PMO, BW 30/27.

that incoming transports were uniformly, with some exceptions for labor procurement, exterminated with poison gas. In this way, they then argue that “*Sonderaktion*” always means extermination.

The problem with this interpretation is that, at this time, most transports were admitted to Auschwitz almost in their entirety, as we know from the Dutch transports in August 1942. Even though many of these deportees died, they were just as obviously not being killed on arrival, and were being registered in the camp. That is why so many deaths—some 30,000 in all—would in turn be listed in the Death Books in the fall of 1942.

To be sure, sometimes the term “special actions” was used euphemistically for executions. But that was not the sole meaning, as we will see below.

**October 13, 1942**

**Letter from Bischoff about Constructions<sup>74</sup>**

The document makes a reference to the need to build the crematoriums as a result of the “*Sonderaktionen*” (Special Actions). The usual interpretation is that “special actions” means gas exterminations, and that is why the crematoriums were being built. However, the alternative, that the crematoriums were being built as a result of the epidemics aggravated by the arrival of tens of thousands of deportees in transports, is also valid. In our opinion, Bischoff was being euphemistic in this letter, that is, in his formulation he was attempting to explain that the crematoriums were being built as a result of the terrific death toll resulting from the simultaneous epidemics and mass arrivals, but wished not to be explicit about the epidemics because it reflected poorly on the camp’s administration.

Again, we will see that a neutral interpretation of “*Sonderaktion*” is completely justified.

**November 13, 1942**

**Gastight Doors for BW 5 a/b<sup>75</sup>**

We only record this document because of its connection to another reference to special doors, in January 1943. In one of his responses to our work, Mattogno cited this document by way of arguing that other showers had been fitted with gastight doors. However, the explanation for this could still be fitted into a civil defense context without difficulty.

**November 27, 1942**

**A Reference to “*Sonderkeller*”<sup>76</sup>**

On this date there was an attempt to begin installation of the ventilation system in one of the morgues of Crematorium II, which implies that at least one of the

<sup>74</sup> Pressac, *Auschwitz: Technique and Operation*, 197ff.

<sup>75</sup> Mattogno, Response to Crowell, #2.

<sup>76</sup> Jean Claude Pressac and Robert Jan van Pelt, “Machinery of Mass Murder at Auschwitz,” in Yisrael Gutman and Michael Berenbaum, eds., *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp*, 223.

morgues was complete at this time, a few months ahead of the entire structure. Wolter, one of Bischoff's assistants, wrote this note about the attempt to install the ventilation. Another noteworthy point about this document is that, while it concerns Auschwitz, it appears to be part of a collection of papers independent from the files of the Central Construction Office.

It is assumed that the *Sonderkeller*, or "special cellar," is Morgue #1 of Crematorium II. However, the document doesn't tell us why it was special. Ultimately, the relevance of this document depends on how we interpret "Sonder-" words. A problem for the traditional interpretation is that there are ground-level photos of Crematorium II taken in this time frame that show no holes or other structures on the snow-covered roof of Morgue #1, which in turn means that the morgue was complete without any holes.<sup>77</sup>

### December 4, 1942

#### Dr. Wirths Discusses Delousing Stations<sup>78</sup>

Dr. Wirths, who was the chief physician at Auschwitz, had a conversation with a local leader about typhus, and wrote a report about it. He mentioned the existence of three large disinfection and bathing installations, two for the prisoners and one for the SS. The capacity of these facilities was about 3-4,000 persons per day. Zyklon B disinfection had been completely done away with, according to Dr. Wirths, because it was not 100% effective.

It is true that Zyklon B would not be 100% effective, since the substance only killed vermin; it could not destroy bacteria. On the other hand, hot air or steam were much more effective, although still not completely effective. Concerning the three facilities Dr. Wirths mentions, Nowak assumes that BW 5a and 5b are meant for the prisoners; the location of the SS delousing and disinfection station is not specified.

### December 18, 1942

#### *Sonderaktion* for Workers<sup>79</sup>

This is a single-page telex marked "Secret!" (*Geheim!*) sent from Bischoff to General Kammler to tell him that work on the crematoriums had been interrupted several times in December due to delousing and disinfection, and that the Gestapo carried out a Special Action (*Sonderaktion*) among the civilian workers.

It is not exactly clear what the Gestapo did with the civilian workers, but it is conceded that no one was killed, let alone gassed; indeed, they went on Christmas holiday immediately thereafter. Hence, the main import of this document is that, first, the threat of epidemics was continuous, and second, *Sonder-* words need not have a homicidal meaning.

<sup>77</sup> Danuta Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle*, 398.

<sup>78</sup> Hans Jürgen Nowak, "Kurzwellen-Entlausungsanlagen in Auschwitz," *Vierteljahreshefte für freie Geschichtsforschung* 2, no. 2 (June 1998): 87-105; ZBL, 502-1-332, 117ff.

<sup>79</sup> Pressac, *Auschwitz: Technique and Operation*, PMO (Auschwitz Museum) BW 30/27.

**December 31, 1942**

**Request for the Construction of a Provisional Laundry<sup>80</sup>**

A draft copy of a two-page letter, referenced to a Central Construction Office order of November 5, 1942, from the WVHA to the Central Construction Office. The relevance of this order is simply as further evidence of the need to provide more facilities for delousing and disinfection. This is another document that has Kirschneck's name written at the top of the page.

**January 13, 1943**

**Doors for *Sondermassnahmen*<sup>81</sup>**

This is a letter written by Bischoff to the German Armaments Works (*Deutsche Ausrüstungswerke* = DAW), the main supplier of gastight doors and many other fixtures in the camp. We recall that the DAW was also the recipient of the “*gasdichte Türme*” letter of March 31, 1943, and was the main supplier of the Criminal Traces fixtures.

The letter registers a complaint about the non-fulfillment of the carpentry jobs requested and refers to doors ordered on October 26, 1942, which are urgently needed for Crematorium II for “carrying out special measures” (*Durchführung der Sondermassnahmen*). The order from October 26, 1942 has so far not yet surfaced.

Pressac considers this a reference to gas chamber doors, while Mattogno considers it a reference to the cremation of dead bodies. Pressac's view hinges on the interpretation of the word *Sondermassnahmen*, which is utterly arbitrary given the context provided by the other documents in which *Sondermassnahmen* is used in a hygienic sense. On the other hand, Mattogno's interpretation makes no sense, since doors are not necessary for cremation to take place. Our best guess is that the doors originally requested were airtight doors that would seal off the basement spaces for hygienic purposes and possibly disinfection purposes. However, it is also clear that such doors would be replaced within a few weeks by gastight doors with peepholes, so that, according to our interpretation, the basements could serve an auxiliary function as bomb shelters and gas shelters.

**January 29, 1943**

**The “*Vergasungskeller*” Letter<sup>82</sup>**

This is the famous letter from Bischoff to General Kammler, which, toward the end of the first paragraph, describes how the formwork for the reinforced concrete roof of “the morgue” cannot be removed, but says that there is no problem, because “the gassing cellar” can be used “for that purpose,” which we assume to mean storing bodies.

<sup>80</sup> ZBL, 502-1-83, 99.

<sup>81</sup> Carlo Mattogno, “‘Sonderbehandlung’ and Crematory II,” at [www.vho.org](http://www.vho.org), Ref: PMO, BW 30/34, 78; also Pressac, *Auschwitz: Technique and Operation*, 213, Höss Trial Annex.

<sup>82</sup> Pressac, *Auschwitz: Technique and Operation*, 432; Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle*, 317.

Van Pelt has an unusual interpretation of the document.<sup>83</sup> Basing his view on the fact that one of the copies has building leader Kirschneck's name written on top, and that the word "*Vergasungskeller*" is underlined, van Pelt concluded that Kirschneck wrote this letter, which was to go from Bischoff to Kammler, and then had his error of using "forbidden words" pointed out to him by Bischoff. This is a difficult interpretation to sustain. The letter went from Bischoff to Kammler; therefore, if an error was discovered by Kammler the letter first would have had to go from Kammler back to Bischoff. Second, Bischoff was the signatory, so if he saw the error on signing the letter, it would not have gone out (the original of the letter appears to be missing.) Third, Kirschneck is on the distribution list for the letter, so he would have received a copy in any case. The most likely explanation is that the underlined copy of the letter is simply Kirschneck's copy, with a notation specifying the *Vergasungskeller* as the place to use in lieu of the morgue for the time being. One thing is certain: there is nothing unusual about seeing Kirschneck's name on the top of documents.

In terms of the overall theme pursued here, and bearing in mind the documented use of "*vergasen*" words, it seems obvious that the Morgue #1 was envisioned for some kind of special use, but this use is still not clear from the documents. If we interpret "*Vergasung*" in its normal sense, then it means that there was an intention to use Morgue #1 for disinfection, or it was already being used in that manner.

### January 29, 1943 The Swoboda Letter<sup>84</sup>

Discovered by van Pelt, and first discussed in a television broadcast several years ago, this single-page memorandum describes a meeting of an SS officer Swoboda with an electrician Tomitschek concerning the electrical supply of Crematorium II. It contains the sentence:

*This operation can only involve a limited use of the available machines (whereby is made possible cremation with simultaneous Special Treatment), because the [electricity] feed to the crematorium is too weak for the power consumption required.*

*[Diese Inbetriebsetzung kann sich jedoch nur auf beschränkten Gebrauch der vorhandenen Maschinen erstrecken (wobei eine Verbrennung mit gleichzeitiger Sonderbehandlung möglich gemacht wird), da die zum Krematorium führende Zuleitung für dessen Leistungsverbrauch zu schwach ist.]*

The key idea concerns "cremation with simultaneous special treatment" which means to van Pelt that this is a discussion of operating the cremation ovens while gassings are taking place below in Morgue #1. Evidently, the idea is that the fans to

<sup>83</sup> *The Pelt Report*, 200, 237.

<sup>84</sup> *The Pelt Report*, 204, ref: ZBL 502-1-26.

ventilate the gas chambers would take up electricity needed to operate the blowers for the cremation ovens. Van Pelt considers the homicidal meaning “unequivocal,” but there have been several revisionist responses, including from Faurisson and Mattogno.

Since the document clearly concerns the electrical supply, it should be possible to get an idea of what is meant by “*Sonderbehandlung*,” recognizing that, because of the Bischoff Report of May 16, 1943 and other documents, it is not possible to simply assume a homicidal meaning for “*Sonder-*” type words. Mattogno has been most successful in listing the electrical appliances, consisting mostly of fans, in the building at that time. But Mattogno also rather arbitrarily insists that “*Sonderbehandlung*” has to do with the handling of the dead.

Neither of these explanations strikes us as particularly strong. Van Pelt’s interpretation really rests on the translation of the word “*Sonderbehandlung*”; otherwise, his approach doesn’t really cohere, since the ventilation of the gas chamber would only take twenty minutes (according to his eyewitnesses), and that seems a negligible delay for the cremation ovens. Furthermore, it would require something like a day and a half to cremate the victims of a mass gassing (using van Pelt’s assumed cremation rates), and twenty minutes in that time-scale is meaningless. Moreover, the document does not say that simultaneous use is impossible, only that it would be limited. Mattogno holds, on the other hand, that the special treatment concerns people who are already dead, that is, the bodies stored in the morgues, but obviously such a definition of “handling” would be largely static.

A more neutral interpretation would hold that the full use of the electrical system to power the fans for the cremation ovens would preclude extensive use of the basements for whatever purpose, because the ventilation system would be compromised.

### February 8, 1943

#### Order of the Day (2/43) from Commandant Höss<sup>85</sup>

The order describes the total camp quarantine as decreed by General Glücks of the WVHA, due to the appearance of typhus cases. Such a datum does not have much relevance to the gas chamber thesis, but, from a disinfection point of view, it simply underlines the need for delousing and disinfection in the camp.

### February 8, 1943

#### Provisional Laundry and Krema II<sup>86</sup>

The same day that the camp was placed under quarantine, the German Armaments Factory (DAW) sent a note to the Central Construction Office concerning materials ordered on February 5 and 6. Concerning orders 69, 72, and 73, the memo describes the delivery of several doors and windows for the “*Provisorische Wäscherei*

<sup>85</sup> Mattogno, “The ‘Gasprüfer’ of Auschwitz,” (ref: PMO (Auschwitz Museum) D-Aul-1, 46.

<sup>86</sup> Pressac, *Auschwitz: Technique and Operation*, 350, Ref: PMO (Auschwitz Museum), BW 30/34, 92.

*K.L. Auschwitz*” (temporary laundry) as well as two windows for Krematorium II. The document has Kirschneck’s name scribbled on the top.

Pressac quoted this letter merely to reference the role played in the construction of the crematoriums by the German Armaments Factory, and does not comment further. Nor have we been successful in discovering any other explanations for this document: the pages of the Krakow protocols do not include these numbers.

What we find striking in this note is that there it contains a discussion of a provisional laundry, that is, a space where delousing and disinfection would take place, that is going to be equipped with basement windows (*5 Stück Kellerfenster*), when few such buildings were being constructed at Auschwitz aside from the large crematoriums at Birkenau. Arguing the disinfection thesis, what suggests itself is that this document is in fact a reference to Crematorium II throughout, and that the provisional laundry represents the basement spaces of the crematorium. However, this is highly speculative, and the provisional laundry described is probably some other building, in some other location. At the very least, however, the document does set the precedent for establishing delousing and disinfection facilities in basements.

### February 11, 1943

#### An Inspection of the Hygiene Facilities<sup>87</sup>

On February 2, 1943, there was an inspection of the disinfection and bathing facilities at Auschwitz by *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Kother of the Department C VI of the WVHA. This would have been a few days after the *Vergasungskeller* letter. A report of the inspection was drawn up for General Kammler on February 11, with a carbon copy to be sent to the Central Construction Office.

The document describes how gassing apparatuses (*Apparate*) originally meant for cyanide are now being used as hot-air disinfection chambers (*Heissluftapparate*). The inspection notes the wide disparity in temperatures required—30 C for cyanide, up to 95 C for hot air—and says that none of the wrought-iron cyanide gas apparatuses should be used for hot-air delousing.

The document gives instructions on how to obtain the appropriate apparatuses for hot-air delousing, and gives a three-week delivery time. It also indicates that henceforth neither coal nor coke is supposed to be used for the overworked saunas, but only wood.

The document was originally employed by Nowak to argue that there was a general embargo on using Zyklon B for delousing clothing at this time, and this accords with Dr. Wirths’ misgivings, noted above. However, what we find most interesting is the reference to the improper use of cyanide gas cubicles for hot-air delousing, apparently using coal or coke.

We can presume, based on other correspondence, that the inspection notice

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<sup>87</sup> Nowak and Rademacher, “Gasdichte Türen in Auschwitz,” ref: ZBL 502-1-332, 37-38.

could have been received by the Central Construction Office within a couple of days, that is, by February 13, 1943. However, the filing and stamping on this document are peculiar: first, these markings appear at the bottom of the third and final page, rather than the upper right corner of the first page. Second, the routing stamp carries the date “26 Feb 1943.”

### February 12, 1943

#### **Bischoff Informs Kammler about Quarantine**<sup>88</sup>

The letter to Kammler informs him of the quarantine conditions, indicating that all prisoners have to be disinfected, and that this is once again slowing down construction. In other words, the day after the Eirenschmalz inspection report is written, Bischoff writes to Kammler to inform him of the quarantine conditions in the camp.

### February 13, 1943

#### **Bischoff Writes to Eirenschmalz about Quarantine**<sup>89</sup>

The next day, possibly in receipt of Eirenschmalz’ inspection report, Bischoff now informs him of the quarantine conditions.

### February 14, 1943

#### **Order of the Day from Commandant Höss**<sup>90</sup>

Still another document pointing to the need for disinfection, this time stressing that incoming transports have to be disinfected carefully.

### February 17, 1943

#### **A Reference to “Gaskeller” at Topf & Sons**<sup>91</sup>

The reference to this document comes from an article entitled “*Une critique sur le fond*” that appeared in the French periodical *L’Autre Histoire* in October, 1996.

The document is described as a note from Sander of Topf & Sons relating a telephone conversation with Karl Schultze, the engineer in charge of ventilation at Topf, who had just returned from Auschwitz. There is a reference to the missing ventilation system for the “Gaskeller.”

The document follows on the *Vergasungskeller* letter. The gas chamber interpretation would of course consider this further proof of the intended use of Morgue #1 of Crematorium II for gassing people. However, a “Gaskeller” is a “Gasschutzkeller,” or gas protection cellar, that is, a kind of bomb shelter. It would be very useful to have a copy of this document available. From a disinfection point of view, this document simply confirms the various evidence that some kind of disinfection is planned or is being carried out in Morgue #1 of Crematorium II.

<sup>88</sup> Mattogno, “The ‘Gasprüfer’ of Auschwitz,” ref: ZBL 502-1-332, 108.

<sup>89</sup> Mattogno, “The ‘Gasprüfer’ of Auschwitz,” ref: ZBL 502-1-28, 221.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., ref: PMO (Auschwitz Museum) D-Aul-1, 48/9.

<sup>91</sup> “Une critique sur le fond,” *L’Autre Histoire* 6 (October 16, 1996): 9-14.

**February 18, 1943**

**Bischoff to Kammler, Disinfection Complete, Work Continues<sup>92</sup>**

Another letter from Bischoff to Kammler, assuring Kammler that the delousing of the prisoners demanded by the quarantine was completed on February 16, 1943, and that construction work continues.

**February 25, 1943**

**Dr. Wirths Insists More Delousing Needed<sup>93</sup>**

Since this correspondence originated in Auschwitz, we will assume that Bischoff knew about this letter the same day it was written.

This is a letter from Dr. Wirths to Amt D III of the WVHA, which was the medical sanitation office, informing them of the need for a full-scale delousing of the camp along with a three-week quarantine. It is worth noting that Amt D III would be the department to contact if there was any need for Zyklon B, or any peripheral materials.

**February 26, 1943**

**Central Construction Office Telegram to Prüfer—Gas Detectors<sup>94</sup>**

The day after Dr. Wirths sent off his recommendations to the WVHA, and the same day that the Inspection Report of February 11, 1943, was stamped at the Central Construction Office, a brief telegram was sent to Topf & Sons at 6:20 PM, requesting ten “gas detectors.” The request did not come from Bischoff but we assume that he delegated the task to his subordinates.

A gas chamber explanation is typical, but, as we have seen, it has some problems. A possible disinfection interpretation is that Bischoff had tabled the February 11 Kother inspection report and had requested the gas detectors from Topf & Sons informally, probably by the time of the Sander note of February 17. A possible scenario would have been to employ the cyanide gas cubicles referenced in the inspection report of February 11 using the proper medium. The lack of cyanide gas testers for the cubicles could partly explain their improper use prior to this time. The request to Topf for the detectors may have reflected Bischoff’s confidence in Prüfer as a problem solver and go-between in obtaining hard-to-find materials. Dr. Wirths’ letter from the previous day, sure to bounce back to Kammler and then to Bischoff, probably was the decisive factor in sending the telegram.

<sup>92</sup> Mattogno, “The ‘Gasprüfer’ of Auschwitz,” ref: ZBL 502-1-332, 106.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., ref: ZBL 502-1-68, 115f.

<sup>94</sup> Pressac, *Auschwitz: Technique and Operation*, 371.

**March 3, 1943**

**Prüfer Letter to Bischoff—No Cyanide Detectors<sup>95</sup>**

We note that the letter was mailed and filed within two days, as it was received on March 5, which gives us another benchmark for correspondence.

Prüfer wrote back to Bischoff claiming that he had been unable to find any cyanide gas detectors, although he had been looking for two weeks. (Two weeks from March 3 would be February 17 or thereabouts, i.e., the time of the Sander note in the Topf archives.) Our best guess is that Bischoff finally gave up on the idea of using cyanide gas in the basement of Morgue #1 of Crematorium II at this time, because of what follows.

**March 6, 1943**

**Bischoff Letter to Prüfer, Request to Pre-Heat Morgue #1<sup>96</sup>**

The next day, Bischoff wrote to Topf & Sons and requested the forced-draft installations, which, according to the letter, had been previously discussed. These forced-draft installations would draw off the hot air from the crematoriums, which would then be sent down to Morgue #1.

Pressac considered this document a Criminal Trace, because the “warm” air would raise the temperature of the Morgue, facilitating the use of Zyklon B. However, as will be noted below, there doesn’t seem to be any method indicated for regulating the hot-exhaust flow.

On the other hand, if we look at this document as evidence merely of heating a morgue for ordinary temperature-control purposes, that is, to keep it above freezing, then the document can be explained in a variety of ways. However, there is a good reason why such an interpretation is questionable.

**Week of March 11, 1943<sup>97</sup>**

Pressac assumes that during this time Messing’s work in the basements of Crematorium II was related to cyanide-gas fittings. However, given the known request for the forced-draft hot-air blowers, it seems even more likely that Messing was simply hooking up the various ductwork to support them.

**March 25, 1943**

**Agreement to Remove Morgue #1 Hot Air Supply<sup>98</sup>**

Less than three weeks after Bischoff had assented to Prüfer’s plan to draw off the heat from the cremation ovens for use in Morgue #1, the arrangement was cancelled. At the same time the three forced-draft installations were also removed. It was also decided to replace the wooden air extractor fan for Morgue #1 with an

<sup>95</sup> Pressac and van Pelt, “Machinery of Mass Murder at Auschwitz,” in Gutman and Berenbaum, *Anatomy*.

<sup>96</sup> Pressac, *Auschwitz: Technique and Operation*, 375.

<sup>97</sup> Pressac, *Auschwitz: Technique and Operation*, 286, 373, 434.

<sup>98</sup> Pressac, *Auschwitz: Technique and Operation*, 230.

iron one.

What had happened? The language of the memo is rather terse, but it appears that high temperatures caused damage to the forced draft installations, and possibly even a fire. Perhaps even the wooden blower for Morgue #1 caught fire. In any case, we are talking about very high temperatures, far higher than necessary to heat a morgue for either bomb shelter, gas chamber, or even normal mortuary purposes. On the other hand, if the attempt at “pre-heating” represented yet another attempt to use Morgue #1 for disinfection purposes, the siphoning of the hot air from the ovens would make some sense.

**March 31, 1943**  
**“Gastight Towers” and Ten Cubic Meters of Wood**

The *gasdichte Türme* letter has an interesting closing sentence, requesting the delivery of ten cubic meters of wood, in the context of a letter on crematorium fittings. In the context of the Eirenschmalz inspection report, and the clear concerns over disinfection, we now consider this a request for wood to be used in hot-air disinfection or for showers.

**April 1, 1943**  
**Dr. Wirths to Bischoff—Renewed Threat of Epidemics<sup>99</sup>**

Another letter from Dr. Wirths to Bischoff, repeating that the threat of epidemics makes another thorough delousing necessary.

**April 13, 1943**  
**List Entry for Two Topf Hot-Air Ovens (*Entwesungsöfen*)<sup>100</sup>**

A reference to two hot-air disinfection ovens, in the Topf records, and with reference to Crematorium II. This would be consistent with following the recommendation of the Eirenschmalz inspection report, to obtain the proper disinfection ovens for hot-air delousing and disinfection. The document also suggests yet another attempt at implementing ad hoc disinfection procedures in Crematorium II.

**April 18, 1943**  
**Dr. Wirths Once More Warns about Epidemics<sup>101</sup>**

In a letter to the Commandant, Dr. Wirths once more warns about the danger of epidemics, this time with reference to the poor drainage system of the camp.

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<sup>99</sup> Carlo Mattogno, “Leichenkeller von Birkenau ...,” ref: ZBL 502-1-332, 222.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., ref: PMO (Auschwitz Museum) 30/34, 47.

<sup>101</sup> Nowak, “Kurzwellen-Entlausungsanlagen in Auschwitz,” 87-105, ref: ZBL 502-1-332, 219.

**May 7, 1943**

**Dr. Wirths and Bischoff Meet with Kammler<sup>102</sup>**

This is a memorandum which describes General Kammler's visit to Auschwitz on this date, apparently to discuss the competing interests of Bischoff and Dr. Wirths. Kammler agreed with Dr. Wirths' recommendations for more delousing and disinfection spaces, and gave Bischoff until May 15 to come up with recommendations.

**May 9, 1943**

**Bischoff's Memo on the May 7, 1943 Meeting<sup>103</sup>**

This memorandum is Bischoff's version of the meeting on May 7, 1943. Dr. Wirths had indicated that he wanted ten new delousing and disinfection establishments with baths to carry out a complete disinfection of the camp.

**May 16, 1943**

**Bischoff Report on Special Measures Concerning Hygiene**

This is the Bischoff Report discussed in Section 3, concerning, among other things, the installation of showers in the basement of Crematorium III. This is a belated response to the Kammler request of May 7, noted above.

**May 28, 1943**

**Dr. Wirths Requests Six Disinfection Ovens<sup>104</sup>**

The document describes a request by Dr. Wirths for six disinfection ovens, a request that follows on the previous meetings. The location at which the ovens were to be installed is not specified by Nowak, who utilized the document.

**June 4, 1943**

**Bischoff Letter to the WVHA, "Sondermassnahmen"<sup>105</sup>**

The document is a backwards reference to the implementation of the special measures discussed in the report of May 16, 1943. It simply goes to the point that the measures were being implemented.

**June 6, 1943**

**Topf Drawing of Boiler Installation<sup>106</sup>**

Cited by Mattogno, the document is a drawing from Topf describing the attempt to set up a boiler in the incinerators of both Crematoriums II and III.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 87-105, ZBL 502-1-233, 33-38.

<sup>103</sup> Mattogno, "Leichenkeller von Birkenau ...," ref: ZBL 502-1-233, 37.

<sup>104</sup> Nowak, "Kurzwellen-Entlausungsanlagen in Auschwitz," 87-105, ref: ZBL 502-1-332, 28.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 87-105, ref: ZBL 502-1-149, 135.

<sup>106</sup> Mattogno, "Leichenkeller von Birkenau ...," ref: ZBL 502-1-336.

June 1943

**Bischoff Fragebogen**<sup>107</sup>

Also cited by Mattogno, the document is a questionnaire, filled out by Bischoff, apparently in June or later, which asks whether the exhaust gases from the crematoriums were utilized. Answering in the negative, Bischoff then lists as the aim of such use: “für Badeanlagen im Crema. II und III.”

Mattogno assumes that the questionnaire was filled out in June, that is, after a failure of the plan. But which plan? The use of the exhaust gases from the crematoriums is not the same as the plan to use the exhaust from the incinerator. It may be that the forced-draft installations were intended to heat water, as well as to provide dry heat for disinfection. It may be that by June 1943, both Crematoriums II and III supported a modest battery of showers. There are still too many gaps in the documentation. However, one thing is certain: there was an attempt to use both these crematoriums for hygienic purposes. This contradicts the gas chamber thesis.

#### 4.3 ANALYSIS OF DISINFECTION INTERPRETATION

As we attempt to put these pieces together in a manner that supports the disinfection thesis, we want to point out that it is plain that the camp was under the continuous threat of typhus outbreaks throughout this period. The construction of the crematoriums could be seen as related to this, as part of the attempt to control the hygienic conditions of the camp, even if we were to insist that the structures were used for other purposes later.

There are essentially four actors in this exchange of documents: General Kammler, who was the man in charge of construction projects for the WVHA; Karl Bischoff, who was responsible for getting these projects done at Auschwitz; Kurt Prüfer, who was Bischoff’s main business contact; and Dr. Wirths, the chief doctor at Auschwitz.

Bischoff’s main motivation was to get the crematoriums built, and to do so as quickly as possible, because he had other construction projects beckoning, including the construction of the Central Sauna. It appears, however, that from no later than December 18, 1942 (the *Sonderaktion* for the workers) the quarantines and the demands to carry out thorough delousing and disinfection of the camp inmates were seriously interfering with the construction schedule.

These competing timelines are the background to the plans emerging around this time to use the basements of the crematoriums for alternate purposes. It could explain the reference to *Sonderkeller* in November 1942. Our guess is that there was an intention, however vague, to use one of the morgues as a Zyklon B delousing station and for that purpose cyanide gas cubicles were obtained. It appears logical that they would have been set up in Morgue #1 of Crematorium II, but perhaps they were set up in the basement of the provisional *Wäscherei*, referenced

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., ref: ZBL 502-1-312, 8.

on both December 28, 1942 and February 8, 1943. The precise location of this structure is not known, but it may have been referred to under the same rubric as Crematorium II, if, for example, its construction used the same workforce. At any rate, we do know that some cyanide cubicles were improperly used as hot-air delousing chambers at this time.

The projected alternative use of Morgue #1 of Crematorium II would also explain the references to “*Gaskeller*” and “*Vergasungskeller*” at the end of January. For Sander, at Topf, a “*Gaskeller*” would be a colloquialism for a space where gassings of some kind would take place. On the other hand, Bischoff never would have used such a word in correspondence with Kammler. As ex-Luftwaffe officers, they both would have known that a “*Gaskeller*” was a “*Gasschutzkeller*”: therefore, to convey the same idea as Sander, Bischoff created a new word.

When Kother pointed out the improper use of the cyanide cubicles in February, Bischoff attempted to obtain cyanide gas detectors. That much is certain. Bischoff went to Prüfer, partly because he was Bischoff’s main business contact, but also because to go through proper channels would have taken a long time. It is also possible that Bischoff wanted to avoid going through Berlin, where both Eirenschmalz’ report, and Dr. Wirths’ latest complaint, had been sent. Incidentally, we should notice that Bischoff’s responsibilities were expanding. He was not only being held responsible for constructing buildings on time, but also for the proper implementation of hygienic measures, that is, providing acceptable delousing and disinfection spaces on request. This is a somewhat surprising conclusion, but one that is borne out by the report of May 16, 1943. Our guess is that these dual responsibilities were the penalty he paid for having so much trouble constructing the crematoriums, while neglecting the construction of the Central Sauna.

After his plan to obtain proper cyanide detectors fell through at the beginning of March, Bischoff accepted a suggestion from Prüfer to use the hot air (or “warm air”) from the cremation ovens in Morgue #1. The temperatures generated were clearly much higher than necessary for keeping a morgue above freezing or for raising the temperature for cyanide dispersal: this is evident from what happened next. Apparently, there was a fire and the forced-draft mechanisms were damaged, so the entire “*Warmluftzuführungsanlage*” was removed. By the end of March, Bischoff was requesting lumber: we surmise that he was now back at square one, gathering wood to fuel primitive and possibly even improperly utilized disinfection ovens.

The finale came in early May, when Kammler came to the camp, no doubt wondering what was wrong with his construction schedules. At that time, Bischoff asked that he be allowed to finish his crematoriums, apparently emphasizing the need to complete one thing at a time. On the other hand, Dr. Wirths requested that delousing and bathing facilities be established in no less than ten locations—which may have included all the crematoriums—for purposes of camp hygiene. The Bischoff memorandum of the meeting, supplemented by the later material,

makes it clear that Dr. Wirths won the argument: hygiene and disease prevention came before everything else.

We want to stress that the above is a reconstruction on the basis of the available documents, and that some of the presentation, particularly concerning what appears to have been a series of failed disinfection experiments in the “*Vergasungskeller*”—hot air, cyanide, hot-air exhaust—is speculative. Nevertheless, the scenario seems to fit the available data better than the alternative disinfection scenarios. We do not think it likely that there was ever a plan to employ cyanide gas for full-room disinfection of garments in the rooms of any of the crematoriums, because of the associated dangers.

On the other hand, there are elements from the above series of documents that are much less arguable. One is the overriding concern about the spread of disease. Another is the constant demand for more delousing and disinfection spaces. A third concerns Bischoff’s predictable reactions to work stoppages and complaints about the hygienic conditions, involving either requests for materials that fit a disinfection model or letters to Kammler in Berlin, assuring him that everything was proceeding on schedule.

It is precisely the less arguable elements in most of these documents that tend to subvert the gas chamber interpretation of some of these documents. Bearing in mind the concern for the spread of disease, there would be no easy explanation for creating more dead bodies and therefore increasing the threat of disease, which would be the inevitable result of mass gassing. Bearing in mind that the available space for delousing and disinfection was at a premium, it would be hard to justify allocating precious space for the purposes of mass gassing. That would be especially hard to understand if there were already two bunkers supposedly in use for the task of mass gassing, as the oral tradition maintains.

When we consider that Crematoriums IV and V, as well as Crematorium III at least from May, were all probably equipped with washing facilities of some kind, it would make no sense to appropriate such spaces for mass gassing while the camp doctor was clamoring for more showers. Nor would it make much sense to allocate such space for gassing in Crematorium II, considering that its cremation ovens were down during much of this period.

On the whole, a gas chamber explanation for two or three of these documents is contradicted by the overall thrust of all of them, which is clearly concerned with crematorium completion and improving hygienic conditions. There is no hint in any of the other documents that a third agenda—mass gassing—was even being considered. Even the documents that seem to support the gas chamber thesis tend to founder. Cyanide gas detectors may be viewed in the context of mass gassing, yes, but the whole scenario concerning the request is not explained—and, of course, they never arrived.

Similarly, the “pre-heating” may have some connection to warming the morgue

to assist cyanide gas dispersal, but that is difficult to square with the fact that the system was almost immediately removed. Nor can the high temperatures involved in such “pre-heating” be easily explained. If these two elements are considered indicative of mass gassing, then it would appear that mass gassing was a total failure. In the end, the gas chamber thesis is left with eyewitness testimony and two word stems, “*Sonder-*” and “*Vergasung-*,” both of which, in context, turn out to be much more ambiguous than they appear in traditional accounts.

In retrospect, we conclude that the most likely explanation for all of the documents cited is that there were attempts to use the spaces provided by the crematoriums for ad hoc delousing and disinfection, as a kind of compromise solution until the Central Sauna could be built. Yet the compromises brought about by the competition of the dual imperatives of crematorium construction and camp hygiene frustrated the progress of construction. Hence the gas chamber thesis appears even less likely, because it presumes an imperative that is never mentioned in the documents, and for which there appears to have been neither time nor space available.

The unsuitability of the gas chamber thesis does not mean that the bomb shelter thesis is similarly unsuitable. The reason is simple. The adaptation of hygienic spaces, particularly those underground, for alternative civil air defense use would have required only such gastight fixtures as doors and window shutters. Since these materials were created anyway, and since they are not necessary in a disinfection model, we conclude that the crematoriums were in effect alternate bomb and gas shelters from this time.

Returning to the disinfection thesis overall, in reviewing these documents we cannot help but have some sympathy for Karl Bischoff. He was being asked to do several complicated tasks simultaneously. Unable to build the Sauna because of the priority of crematoriums construction, Bischoff ended up having to allocate crematoriums space to serve essentially Sauna purposes. Meanwhile, Bischoff’s construction schedule was constantly interrupted by work stoppages brought on by sporadic typhus outbreaks, unhygienic conditions, and the (highly professional) interference of the chief doctor. It would seem that in the end Bischoff was left with four crematoriums, two of which broke down almost immediately; at least three methods of disinfection, all of which failed; and showers that couldn’t provide hot water. Last but not least, he was left with auxiliary bomb shelters that failed to meet the expectations of the experts.



## PART 5: CRITICS OF THE BOMB SHELTER THESIS

**I**N RECENT YEARS there have been perhaps four people who know more about the Auschwitz camp than anyone else: the current curator of the Auschwitz museum, Franciszek Piper; the Frenchman Jean Claude Pressac; the Italian revisionist Carlo Mattogno; and Robert Jan van Pelt. Frankly, we have been privileged to be reviewed by the latter two authorities. However, we regret to say that while they have done us some honor by studying our views, they have treated the bomb shelter thesis with disdain.

Mattogno's critiques were written in early 1999, and the first was responded to at the time. On the whole, Mattogno's critiques do not merit much space here, not only because they have already been responded to, but also because they contain much that is extraneous.

In the first of these, Mattogno sought to prove that the basements of the crematoriums could not have been bomb shelters. There were certainly some good things in this critique, not least of which were corrections of several inaccuracies flowing from our overreliance on Pressac's presentation. However, Mattogno did not solve the problem of the gastight fixtures as such, for which we chided him in our response. His second response was not to our mind worth much further comment, and we will not elaborate on it here.

For the most part, Mattogno used his critiques of the bomb shelter thesis to argue a highly individualized and eccentric version of the disinfection thesis. We say eccentric, because while Mattogno repeatedly insisted that he had read all of the Moscow documents several times, he never bothered to use the Bischoff report of May 16, 1943, which would have helped his argument immeasurably. Another oddity of his critique is that he insisted that there were no bomb shelters prior to November 16, 1943, basing his judgment on a memorandum from that date. Yet he made no reference to the copious materials pertaining to civil air defense that are in the Moscow archives.

Professor van Pelt offered his critique of the bomb shelter thesis in his expert opinion, and also in his testimony at the Irving-Lipstadt trial. It is much more to the point than Mattogno's analysis but contains many errors. We will simply limit ourselves to a compression of van Pelt's statements, along with our responses. We have chosen not to excerpt van Pelt's expert report *in extenso* out of respect for his copyright, but we have given appropriate reference to both the expert report as well

as the testimony for those who care to check.

Van Pelt first criticizes the bomb shelter thesis in the course of a criticism of Wilhelm Stäglich, who was the first to propound the interpretation, back in the 1970s. Van Pelt's criticism was that the idea of the basements of Crematorium II or III serving as bomb shelters was "nonsensical," first because they were not built as bomb shelters, and second because there would be a problem in taking shelter in a space where dead bodies were stored.<sup>108</sup>

These criticisms repeat Mattogno, but we don't consider either of them particularly strong. In the first place, there appears to be some confusion about what constitutes a bomb shelter: no one has ever claimed that the morgues were designed as bomb shelters. The claim is simply that, as basements, they would be natural for auxiliary bomb shelter use. Since the basements were equipped with gastight doors with peepholes (including 8 mm glass of double thickness covered with clasp), it follows that the doors were air raid shelter doors. Therefore, it is entirely reasonable to conclude that they were adapted to serve a civil air defense purpose, not primarily, but as a secondary, tertiary, alternate, or auxiliary purpose. This point seems to escape both Mattogno and van Pelt.

Comparing the situation of the Birkenau crematoriums with the well-known conversion of Crematorium I of Auschwitz is not a fair comparison. The conversion of Crematorium I was a full-scale conversion: the non-functioning ovens were taken down. But no one has ever claimed that the crematoriums in Birkenau were shut down so that their basements could be used as bomb shelters. Therefore, the adaptations that would be expected would be relatively minor, as indeed they appear to have been, involving the installation of gastight doors, gastight shutters, some screens, and eventually two emergency exits for Crematoriums II and III. In other words, the adaptations did not conflict with the primary purpose of these facilities as crematoriums.

Van Pelt's criticism in regard to the bodies in the morgue also echoes Mattogno and is a valid one: no one wants to think about taking shelter in a morgue with dead bodies. However, the presence of dead bodies would even more clearly frustrate the use of the space for disinfection, let alone for the duping of prisoners about to be gassed. Furthermore, it is difficult to understand how van Pelt can make this argument, since he repeatedly cited the June 28, 1943 document which claims a cremation potential of 1,440 bodies per day for both Crematorium II and III. Under such conditions, the morgues of the crematoriums would be empty most of the time.

Here we feel that both Mattogno and van Pelt fail to understand the difference between fitting out a space for auxiliary air raid shelter use according to higher directives and the actual anticipated regular use of such a space for air raids. While it is true that there are documents to justify the bomb shelter thesis, that doesn't

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108 *The Pelt Report*, 247.

mean that the equipment of the crematoriums with gastight fixtures indicates that the threat of air raids was considered imminent. If the threat of bombing became a pressing concern, there would have been no problem in simply deciding to stop using the morgues as morgues. Certainly, the implication from Pohl's recommendations in June of 1944 is that the morgues of Crematoriums II and III were not being used as morgues by that time.

Incidentally, it is worth pointing out that according to the *Vergasungskeller* note it appears that, at least as of January 1943, Morgue #1 was no longer slated for the storage of corpses at all.

Another one of van Pelt's main criticisms concerns the fact that the basements of the crematoriums were about a mile and a half from the SS barracks.<sup>109</sup>

We consider this criticism a weak one as well, and for several reasons. First, the crematoriums were equipped with basements and were built at the far end of the camp. The use of the basements as bomb shelters would have been strictly secondary. It would be pointless to build the crematoriums next to the SS barracks just so such a secondary use could be facilitated. On the other hand, as new structures, it would have been normal to fit out the crematoriums with civil air defense paraphernalia. To argue that the crematoriums could not have had bomb shelters because they were not convenient to the SS barracks would be equivalent to saying that the Germans had no interest in adapting new or existing buildings for air raid shelter purposes. Nevertheless, that is precisely what they did.

Furthermore, we know from the correspondence between Himmler, Glücks, and Pohl that there was great concern about security in the event of air raids. The crematoriums, along with the Central Sauna, would have been excellent facilities for SS ordered to guard the western perimeter of the camp in the event of a devastating raid and an attempted mass escape. In fact, the crematoriums and Sauna were the only fixed structures on the western perimeter. Finally, the crematoriums and the surrounding areas encompassed some of the busiest parts of the camp, including the crematoriums, the Sauna, the storage barracks of Kanada, and the water treatment and sewage plants. There would normally be large numbers of SS in the vicinity in routine supervisory or security capacities. The presence of SS in the area relates also to the question of who would use the cellars in the event of an air raid. No doubt the shelter space would be allocated just as the camp administration allocated spaces in the June 1944 meeting at which they discussed four reinforced concrete shelters for the SS and the *Blockführer*.

Further on in his expert opinion, van Pelt discusses our own arguments in detail.<sup>110</sup> Van Pelt's rationale for discussing the bomb shelter thesis apparently hinged on the fact that Irving had provided a link to our main essay, and so van Pelt apparently concluded that Irving was our "electronic publisher." Notwithstanding his mistake, van Pelt went on to deal with the bomb shelter thesis in terms of our pre-

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 412.

sentation in that essay, which was very cursory. He did not bother to consult either “Technique” or “Defending,” even though they were both specifically referenced.

First, van Pelt attacks our suggestion that the crematoriums could have served double and even triple purposes, first as morgues, then as bomb shelters, and finally as *ad hoc* delousing and disinfection stations. According to van Pelt, the argument “does not make any sense” and there is “absolutely no indication anywhere”<sup>111</sup> supporting the idea of such dual or triple use.

There is not much to say about this criticism, except that it is completely refuted by the Bischoff Report of May 16, 1943. We have discussed our reasoning about this matter in our reappraisal of the Criminal Traces, above.

A bit further on in his report, van Pelt argues that the bomb shelter thesis was inadequate to explain the aboveground Crematoriums IV and V.

It is of course true that Crematoriums IV and V were built aboveground and would not have offered much protection in an air raid in the case of a direct hit. Probably no shelter at Auschwitz would have. Nevertheless, aboveground shelters and aboveground conversions were common for civil defense purposes. We have also seen that there was a preference to simply use shoring timbers and other materials to reinforce the walls and the ceilings of such structures. Certainly, the western rooms of Crematoriums IV and V, equipped with fireproof sheets of *Heraklith* in their ceilings and gastight window-shutters, would have provided some protection from bomb splinters and incendiaries. In addition, to the extent that both spaces were equipped with washing facilities, they could have served as decontamination centers, in the event of an aerial poison gas attack. In other words, while they would not have functioned very well as bomb shelters, they would have been better than nothing, and they certainly would have worked as gas shelters. Furthermore, in terms of civil air defense intentions, we note that Drawing 2216 reproduced in Pressac<sup>112</sup> clearly shows the outline of a firefighting reservoir, directly to the east of Crematorium IV, as early as March 20, 1943. Of course, such a reservoir could have many purposes, but it certainly would be consistent with civil air defense intentions as well, since we have seen that the creation of such reservoirs was common in the low-level civil air defense documents.

Ultimately, Mattogno’s and van Pelt’s criticisms of the bomb shelter thesis with regard to Crematoriums IV and V have to be looked at in terms of the proposed alternatives. We shall return to these in our conclusions.

Van Pelt’s next criticism is that there was no need for anyone in 1945 or thereafter to remark on the possibility that the gastight fixtures of the crematoriums could be interpreted in terms of air raid shelters.<sup>113</sup> His logic, that there was no reason to do so because there was no reason to do so, is unassailable. However, the documents we have provided in this study certainly show that there would have been some

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 412.

<sup>112</sup> Pressac, *Auschwitz: Technique and Operation*, 381.

<sup>113</sup> *The Pelt Report*, 413.

very good reasons to do so. In the first place, we note that the attendees of the June 26, 1944 conference include a number of prominent Auschwitz officers, including Kramer, Höss, Baer, and even Dr. Münch. All of these individuals were put on trial after the war, and all of them must have known what a gastight door at Auschwitz was. Yet it appears that none of them ever bothered to try to mitigate his own guilt by pointing out the potentially benign interpretation of such fixtures. That alone is unusual, and says something about the conditions under which these individuals were tried.

In the second place, the documents presented here make it very clear that from the spring of 1944, gastight doors with peepholes were being used for trench shelters to protect the SS and some of the prisoners from poison gas attacks. Nevertheless, according to the traditional narrative, the same kinds of doors were being used at the same time to kill about half a million other prisoners with poison gas. Such a dual use of gastight doors with peepholes is something that certainly should have deserved comment, not only by Polish investigators in 1945, but by every historian of Auschwitz since.

Next, van Pelt accuses us of “accusing Auschwitz scholars of suppressing (non-existent) evidence” relevant to our understanding of the gas chambers.<sup>114</sup>

We consider it rather basic that confronted with an object that was allegedly used to kill hundreds of thousands of people one would want to know where it came from, who made it, according to what design, and why. Even if the consensus were to conclude that many people were gassed to death with the help of air raid shelter doors, the civil air defense origin of these doors would certainly be of some importance in determining when the putative murder program was decided upon, and how. A gastight door with peephole is an air raid shelter door, no matter what it was used for, and the argument made by previous historians (and by the Polish, Soviet, and German courts) that such doors are *prima facie* evidence of gas chambers simply cannot be sustained in the light of current knowledge.

Van Pelt wraps up his remarks on our cursory presentation of the bomb shelter thesis by claiming that it could not stand up to serious criticism, because it made “little sense” and because it avoided the “entailed consequent of the hypothesis,” such as determining the nature of gastight fixtures for other crematoriums in other camps, and that therefore the bomb shelter thesis is “without any value.”<sup>115</sup>

There is some merit to this criticism, because comparing the facilities at different camps would have been a preferred way of proceeding, were it not for the fact that the materials concerning these other camps are currently even more inaccessible than the records for Auschwitz. However, we pursued this matter to some extent in “Defending” and in our private studies thereafter, and it does indeed seem that there were comparable levels of civil air defense and gas protection in other camps. Besides, everyone knows that the equipment of crematoriums with showers was

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 413.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 413.

common, and furthermore everyone knows that the showers at Dachau and Mauthausen were both equipped with gastight doors. If Professor van Pelt wishes to argue that these other showers were gas chambers, it would certainly assist his presentation if he were to provide the “entailed consequent” to his own thesis.

In his trial report van Pelt next continues a discussion of the bomb shelter thesis in the context of considering the three documents from Moscow, which we sent to the British historian David Irving in early 1998. These included, we recall, our extemporaneous comments about them, which in fact comprise the sole presentation of our work on his site.

Van Pelt argues that the 176 pre-fabricated concrete shells described in the two 1943 documents were meant exclusively for one- or two-man shelters around the perimeter of the camp, and not for larger shelters, let alone gastight shelters.<sup>116</sup>

Once again, van Pelt is wrong, not only because the report on von Mirbach’s inspection refutes him but also because the documents make it clear that the trench shelters were supposed to be gastight. True, we overestimated the number of shelters involved, as well as the ability of the Birkenau terrain to sustain them. However, we did not misread the intention to provide shelter for the prisoners.

Next, van Pelt moves on to a general criticism of the thesis as it pertains to the crematoriums, this time claiming that none of the blueprints show gas locks or emergency exits.<sup>117</sup> In addition to misnaming architectural drawings “blueprints,” van Pelt seems unable to distinguish between design and alternative use. In fact, all four crematoriums had foyers (*Vorräume*) that would have easily functioned as gas locks, and all four of the crematoriums had emergency exits. In the case of Crematoriums IV and V, the “gas chambers” had extra doors, and in the case of Crematoriums II and III, the emergency exits, in the form of concrete tubes, were actually installed. We would point out that these emergency exits were identified in Part 2 of “Defending” a long time ago.

Van Pelt goes on to argue that the Germans would never have built shelters for the prisoners, supporting his argument by quoting Primo Levi’s memoirs.<sup>118</sup> Once again, the documents presented here make a response superfluous: the Germans planned a number of shelters, and many of these were for the prisoners.

In the same way, van Pelt claims that the only fixed structure adapted for air raid shelter purposes was Crematorium I.<sup>119</sup>

It is clear from the von Mirbach inspection of December 1943, as well as from the minutes of the June 26, 1944 conference, that it was intended to make significant use of existing structures for air raid shelter purposes, for the SS and for the prisoners. The equipment of these existing structures with standard civil air defense fixtures, such as gastight doors, is a logical inference. In addition, the minutes from the June

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116 *Ibid.*, 414.

117 *Ibid.*, 414.

118 *Ibid.*, 415.

119 *Ibid.*, 416.

26, 1944 conference indicate that a number of trench shelters were planned for the prisoners, and it is clear from other documents that these trench shelters were equipped with gastight doors and gastight ventilation chimneys. There is frankly no reason why the existing structures would not have been similarly equipped.

Van Pelt concludes his discussion of the bomb shelter thesis by challenging us to provide some evidence of the “hundreds” of gastight air raid shelter doors that we referenced in our correspondence with David Irving. He claims that he knew of only a few such references, and that they all had to do with homicidal gas chambers.

It is certainly possible that in our correspondence with Irving we overstated the number of gastight doors that we would expect to find; still, just based on the documents discussed in this study, we have found reference to between 150-200 gastight doors explicitly for air raid shelter purposes. We stress that this is a casual counting, derived from only fragmentary records, and that there is the possibility of some double counting. Still, a more complete accounting might reveal even more gastight doors used for air raid shelter purposes. In cases such as this, it is the amateur who poses the challenge to the highly paid and lionized expert, not the other way around.

To summarize the criticisms of the bomb shelter thesis, we consider the efforts of Mattogno and van Pelt to be rather weak because they are solely negative in character. Instead of working from the uncontested observation that the gastight fixtures of the Criminal Traces were identical to civil air defense fixtures, they proceeded from the premise that the crematoriums could never have fulfilled an air raid shelter function. Instead of working within the structure of the argument, they both preferred to simply look for reasons to reject it. We do not consider this very productive or intelligent scholarship.

It seems to us that the proper point of departure would have been first to check whether the gastight fixtures in the Birkenau crematoriums were in fact identical to civil air defense fixtures. Once that was established, the follow-up would have involved asking why that was the case, or rather, how it was possible that that could be the case. Apparently complacent about their expert knowledge and their command of the 80,000 pages of the Central Construction Office files, neither expert made any serious effort to test or verify the grounds for their rejection. Neither expert noticed the extent of the civil air defense procedures, directives, recommendations, let alone descriptions of fixtures or structures, that are in fact littered all over the Central Construction Office files. We find this both surprising and regrettable.

We conclude that neither Mattogno nor van Pelt succeeded in diminishing the bomb shelter thesis in any serious way, not least because so many of their statements could be refuted by the very documents that they claim to know so well. In particular, nearly all of van Pelt's statements concerning the bomb shelter thesis are either obtuse or have been proven wrong on the basis of the documents presented here.

We are loath to criticize the work of other historians, especially when they have specialized in the subject under discussion for many years. That Mattogno and van Pelt rejected the bomb shelter thesis out of hand is no problem, except insofar as it prevents us from getting at the truth. Looking at the criticisms leveled by van Pelt in particular, we cannot escape the knowledge that his judgments, based on a dismissal of the bomb shelter thesis, and a failure to investigate the relevant subject matter, may have had some wider ramifications. We do not choose to criticize van Pelt, because we are sure that he is a dedicated and committed professional who is moreover devoted to his subject. Nevertheless, it seems clear that his treatment of the bomb shelter thesis was overly dismissive, and that historical scholarship and the best interests of justice could have been better served.

## PART 6: CONCLUSIONS

**W**HEN WE FIRST PROPOSED a more global civil air defense explanation for the gastight fixtures at Auschwitz Birkenau, we expected that the experts on this subject would investigate the matter, confirming what elements of the interpretation were true and what elements false. In the end, the experts did nothing.

The basic argument of “Technique and Operation of German Anti-Gas Shelters in World War II” was that the gastight fixtures comprising the Criminal Traces of Pressac were identical to ordinary German civil air defense fixtures. That basic argument, concerning the identity and therefore the source of these fixtures, has never been successfully refuted and we doubt if it ever will be.

Building on “Technique,” we then attempted to elaborate the theory by looking for evidence of such gastight fixtures and other civil air defense fixtures at Auschwitz and elsewhere. That search has been continued in the present study.

Some thirty documents, out of hundreds if not thousands of such documents from the Central Construction Office at Auschwitz, have been presented and these demonstrate:

- That Auschwitz, and in particular its construction office, was in receipt of high-level civil air defense memoranda, directives, and instructions throughout the war,
- That these documents spelled out the manner in which civil air defense measures were to be implemented, including recommendations involving the use of new and existing buildings for auxiliary bomb shelter use,
- That Auschwitz received high-level directives on air raid shelter measures in February and March of 1943, that is, simultaneous with the completion of the crematoriums and the fitting of gastight doors and shutters at those locations,
- That the planning of dedicated trench shelters began in the summer of 1943, only weeks after the last of the gastight fittings had been delivered to the crematoriums,
- That these trench shelters were meant for the SS, the workers, and for the prisoner population both at Auschwitz, Birkenau, and all of the other sub-camps,

- That the building of more shelters at Auschwitz and Birkenau was frustrated by overcrowding, lack of space, and the high water table at Birkenau,
- That even so several trench shelters were built or planned at Birkenau,
- That all of these trench shelters were to be equipped with gastight doors, and such trench shelters were being completed as early as March 1944,
- That it was assumed existing buildings would also be used for civil air defense, including their basements,
- That the preparation of existing buildings for civil air defense was satisfactorily advanced by the end of 1943, and had been—at least with respect to blackout preparations—for a long time by then,
- That the basements of the buildings in Auschwitz were specifically allocated to the prisoners for civil air defense,
- That camp security was an important element in the civil air defense measures applied at Auschwitz.

On the basis of the above we feel it reasonable to conclude that the high-level civil air defense directives from 1940 through 1944 were implemented with increasing attention throughout 1943 and 1944, and possibly even from the fall of 1942. Moreover, we feel justified in drawing some other conclusions.

First, that the crematoriums and the Central Sauna, as the only fixed structures on the western perimeter of the camp, were natural sites for civil air defense since they formed the only bulwark against prisoner risings or attempted mass escapes in the event of an air raid.

Second, that the Central Sauna and Crematoriums II and III, because they were equipped with basements, were natural and indeed inevitable candidates for civil air defense adaptation, a matter which must have reached a critical stage by June 1944. This last conclusion implies that the basements of these facilities would not be used either for their normal functions or for any extraordinary function. This implication is supported by the recommendations of General Pohl in June 1944, when he recommended that six mortuaries be built.

We may provisionally conclude, then, that the bomb shelter thesis has proved its value in explicating the source, origin, or nature of gastight fixtures at Auschwitz Birkenau. However, that does not prove the purpose of the gastight fixtures of the four Birkenau crematoriums, so we return to that question.

Again, the gastight fixtures included in Pressac's *Criminal Traces* are identical to civil air defense fixtures and there can be no real doubt as to their origin in civil air defense design. Compelling proof emerges since it now appears that the "little doors" of Crematoriums IV and V, found by Pressac in the coke storage room of Crematorium I in 1982, have nothing to do with those Birkenau crematoriums at

all. The shutters are too big, and are almost certainly the remnant of the *gassichere Fensterblenden* built for the Crematorium I bomb shelter conversion in 1944.

The question remains as to the plausibility of the bomb shelter explanation of these gastight fixtures versus the disinfection and gas chamber explanations. Again, this is really no longer a question of what the fixtures were, but rather why they were fitted in late winter and early spring of 1943.

With regard to the disinfection thesis, it is certainly clear that camp hygiene, with a view to controlling the death rate in the camp, was a pressing concern to the Central Construction Office from the summer of 1942 on. The intended dual use of the crematoriums for disinfection purposes, including the installation of showers for the camp population, has been demonstrated. Other documents have been noted, and together we feel that the disinfection thesis properly explains some of the Criminal Traces. However, the gastight fixtures are superfluous to the disinfection thesis, not only for Crematoriums IV and V, where the absence of mechanical ventilation is significant, but also for Crematorium III, where the presence of a gastight door with peephole is not needed with genuine showers. In addition, there is nothing in the disinfection literature or in the documents revealed so far that attests to the disinfection use of bomb shelter doors and shutters at Auschwitz.

With regard to the gas chamber thesis, the use of the basements of Crematorium III for showers, and the apparent use of the basements of Crematorium II for the same purpose and perhaps other disinfection purposes, suggests a conflict that undermines the credibility of that thesis. In addition, the actual physical arrangement of Crematoriums IV and V frustrates any argument that seeks to claim that these structures were somehow “specially designed” for mass murder.

Therefore the crux of the gas chamber thesis remains, not documents, but testimony. Insofar as the advocates of the gas chamber thesis are willing to admit that documents concerning disinfection and civil air defense do not advance their thesis, nothing prevents these historians from basing their interpretation on the words of those who survived the camp or who confessed to mass gassings.

Yet the documents we have reviewed raise some serious doubts about the fundamental trustworthiness of the apparent convergence of testimonies. For example, the showers of Crematorium III were almost certainly genuine, and, if so, this contradicts the eyewitnesses, including all of the witnesses relied on by van Pelt. Second, the conversion of Crematorium I to a gastight operating theater and bomb shelter lists all of the work to be done on that structure and all of the materials needed. It mentions filling the holes in the roof of the oven room, but nothing about the morgue. It mentions the need for air raid shelter doors, heaters, and ventilation, but says nothing about any such equipment being on hand. Therefore, the credibility of witnesses who claim gassings in Crematorium I is similarly compromised. One is left to conclude that any gassings that took place at Crematorium I must have taken place without heaters, ventilation, gastight doors, or holes in the roof.

Finally, the June 26, 1944 conference had many of the leading personalities at Auschwitz in attendance, many of whom were tried after the war. All of them must have been familiar with the ordinary meaning of a gastight door with peephole, but apparently none of them ever hinted at the identity of these bomb shelter doors with the doors that were supposedly used to gas hundreds of thousands. Nor did the eyewitnesses ever note the similarity. Such a glaring omission in postwar accounts is no trifling matter: it indicates either willful suppression or a climate that encourages the suppression of material facts.

While the disinfection and gas chamber theses will continue to have their adherents, we still feel that the gastight features of the Birkenau crematoriums, fitted in early 1943, were attached with a civil air defense end in view. There are numerous arguments that are persuasive to us, beyond the obvious one, namely, that the fixtures are of a civil air defense origin.

First, both Crematoriums II and III were equipped with emergency exits. The concrete tubes on the western wall of both Morgue #1's are clearly emergency exits; the only question is when they were attached. Our best guess is no later than the spring of 1944.

Second, Crematorium III and possibly Crematorium II were equipped with showers. The showers with a gastight door with peephole effectively refute both the disinfection and gas chamber interpretations of gastight fixtures in one instance, which can then be extrapolated to cover the other gastight fixtures.

Third, Crematoriums IV and V appear to have had more gastight doors than either disinfection or gas chambers would require. There are other structural problems with these crematoriums. It should be obvious that, without ventilation, and with a drain leading to the doctor's office, the exposure of the western rooms to poison gas, either for disinfection or mass gassing, would be fraught with danger and difficulty. Hence, the gastight fixtures covering these rooms, and apparently, several others, had nothing to do with either disinfection or gas chambers.

Fourth, Crematorium IV had a firefighting reservoir planned for the eastern end of the structure by March of 1943. Fire-fighting reservoirs could be used for a number of purposes, and we are not forgetting the danger of fires. Still, the construction of such reservoirs is strongly associated with the implementation of civil air defense measures at Auschwitz.

Fifth, Crematoriums IV and V were fitted with blackout lamps a few weeks after the last gastight door was sent to the crematoriums. We feel the juxtaposition in time and space of these blackout lamps with the gastight fixtures derived from civil air defense is too close to be dismissed as coincidence.

Sixth, and finally, we feel it is important to consider the personalities involved. Both Kammler and Bischoff were ex-Luftwaffe, and were well aware of the requirements of German civil air defense. We consider it highly unlikely that Bischoff would not have implemented the guidelines passed down to him, and

if he had failed to make the attempt we are certain that Kammler would have reminded him.

In conclusion, we feel that the bomb shelter thesis has been substantially proved. There is no doubt that German civil air defense literature is an important key to interpreting gastight fixtures at Auschwitz Birkenau. The essential identity of gastight doors, shutters, and ventilation pipes has been shown, whether for the Birkenau crematoriums, or the base camp crematorium, or any of the many trench shelters. Finally, the civil air defense intent of these civil air defense fixtures in the Birkenau crematoriums seems to be the only logical explanation, and the only one that can be even indirectly proved with the documents.

Of course, we could still be wrong. Future researchers could easily test the record by comparing the files of the Central Sauna for the presence of gastight fixtures, or files from the other concentration camps, particularly regarding their crematoriums. Unable to do more, we await the work of these other researchers. We hope that their work is more comprehensive and does more justice to the subject than have the efforts of the world's greatest authorities on Auschwitz.

It should also be said that the proof of the bomb shelter thesis does not necessarily disprove the claim that hundreds of thousands of people were gassed at Auschwitz. But that claim, which was never really based on documents, is not likely to be refuted with documents. Nor is it our intention to prove that "no one was ever gassed at Auschwitz," although we do not believe that was the case. The issue here has been to accurately determine the nature of the Criminal Traces; and our conclusion is that the vast majority of them are still best explained in terms of German civil air defense, while the remainder are best explained in terms of disinfection.

In choosing not to aggressively argue whether gassings took place, either here or elsewhere, we recognize that the belief in gassing is a strong one. It must be also admitted that such a belief serves as an explanation to those who survived and lost their families. The belief in gassing is also a kind of psychological index of what survivors experienced in the camps: to question the gassings appears to deny their state of mind at the time, as well as their losses. It follows that the belief in gassing is not something that can be dethroned by rational argument. We can approach the conclusion; but it is best for each to come to his own.

Holocaust revisionists have been cruelly treated in many Western countries. In many of these it has been made a crime to express revisionist views. In others, such as the United States and Britain, while the expression of revisionist views is not a crime, those who express such views become the target of persons bent on destroying them. Hence, revisionists have good reasons to be angry.

Still, we would suggest that to deny the gas chambers in a cavalier or obtrusive way is not likely to be very persuasive; it simply stiffens the polarization already existing. The Jewish people had much to fear in the twentieth century: rightly or wrongly those fears doubtless influence the conduct and attitude of many Jews

with regard to revisionism. But in the last analysis revisionism is not aspiring to the Good if it seeks merely to make its opponents fretful, or to goad them into doing stupid things. To be sure, the manipulation of whatever happened in the camps, for political, ideological, or economic purposes, frequently with a pronounced anti-German slant, is bound to rouse anger and lead to inappropriate remarks by revisionists. But it is not right to forget what the Jewish people did suffer, just because Western historians have often allowed the suffering of everyone else in the Second World War to be forgotten. The remedy for historical or historiographical injustice is not to get even, but to be fair.

Therefore, while we consider the gassing claim to be one of the most pervasive and ultimately tragic of historical delusions, it does not follow that the purpose of historical study should be to make broad negative statements. We would prefer that the purpose of historical study would be simply to increase our understanding, and understanding is not achieved by trying to prove something false. It is achieved by trying to prove something true. For our part, there is no need to say that there were no gas chambers. It is enough to say that there were bomb shelters in Birkenau.

PART 3

THE BOMB SHELTER  
THESIS REVISITED

A Postscript  
to "Bomb Shelters in Birkenau"



“**B**OMB SHELTERS IN BIRKENAU” was the last of several articles that I wrote to advance the idea that German civil defense was relevant to the gastight fixtures at Auschwitz, Birkenau, and probably many other locations. For ease of reference, I referred to this idea as the “bomb shelter thesis.” However, the first article promoting the relevance of German civil defense, either to air raid protection or to gas warfare protection,<sup>1</sup> was contributed by Professor Arthur Butz of Northwestern University in August of 1996, under the title “*Vergasungskeller*.”<sup>2</sup> The following March, I published “Technique and Operation of German Anti-Gas Shelters in World War II” (“Technique”), followed by “Defending Against the Allied Bombing Campaign” (“Defending,” in two parts), in July 1997. In early 1998, I sent a brief and challenging email to the British historian David Irving after I received third-hand documents concerning the construction of trench shelters at Auschwitz from someone who claimed to have actually built them (“Documents”), and I filed a brief response to one of Carlo Mattogno’s many critiques of my work about a year later (“Response”).

“Bomb Shelters in Birkenau” was written at the end of May 2000, shortly after the receipt of numerous primary source documents that I had been trying to obtain for almost a year, and was posted on the Internet a few days later. Since I did not expect to be able to carry my research forward, I was content to leave the matter, and I assumed that some interested party would engage the issue in detail.

There has been some follow-up. In July 2001, Carlo Mattogno wrote another critique of the bomb shelter thesis in general, and in early 2002 Robert Jan van Pelt published his book *The Case for Auschwitz* which discussed my writings in detail. I wrote a review of Professor van Pelt’s book immediately on reading it in early 2002; however, by that time I was no longer conducting research or writing on this or any other Holocaust-related topic. In spring 2002, Joseph Robert White published the article “Target Auschwitz” in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, which of course did not reference my writings but which is the only other writing known to me that touched upon the issue of civil air protection at Auschwitz.<sup>3</sup>

In early 2007, the website for the Committee for Open Debate on the Holocaust (CODOH) published a brief article on the long sought *Gaskeller* memorandum. In coordination with this, Arthur Butz contributed a further article, “*Vergasungskeller*:

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1 In German, *Luftschutz* (air protection) and *Gasschutz* (gas protection); several other revisionists, including Wilhelm Stäglich, Fritz Berg, and Robert Faurisson had commented on, or developed, evidence concerning German civil air defense but Professor Butz’ article was the first to rise to the level of an exposition.

2 The article first appeared online on Professor Butz’ home page, but was later published as “The Nagging Gas Cellar Problem” in *Journal of Historical Review* 16, no. 4 (July–August 1997).

3 Mr. White says essentially nothing about gas protection in his article, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 16, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 54-76.

Final Chapter?,” which constitutes his final word on the subject.<sup>4</sup> I know of no other articles on the subject of German civil air defense or gas defense in the concentration camps in the past fourteen years, although I note that in the past decade a large number of books published in Germany have detailed World War Two German civil defense in all of its particulars.

I have been asked to review the thesis. Although it has been ten years since the publication of the original article, I see little need for extensive comment today. I plan to restrict my remarks to listing some relevant evidence that has emerged in the past decade, to discuss in some detail the *Gaskeller* document, first revealed in 2005, and to address some of the criticisms of the thesis that appeared in 2001.

Before I begin, however, I would like to define the three competing theses on the evidence regarding gastightness for the crematoriums, which is what the argument is about. I will use as a point of reference Jean Claude Pressac’s famous juxtaposition: a gastight door with peephole on a room equipped with showers.

The gas chamber thesis (which is the normative historical thesis) argues that the gastight door with peephole indicates the intent to gas people in the sealed space, and, as a corollary, that the showers are fake (although, logically, they need not be fake). This interpretation rests entirely on testimony and affidavits.

The disinfection thesis argues that the gastight door with peephole indicates the intent to use the space to fumigate objects. Support for this argument comes first from the apparent use of gastight doors with peepholes for fumigation vaults at both Auschwitz and Majdanek, and the fact that one basement equipped with a gastight peephole was referred to as a “*Vergasungskeller*”; “*Vergasung*” was definitely used in a disinfection context at Auschwitz, as I showed in Part III of “Bomb Shelters in Birkenau.” Another piece of indirect evidence comes from the fact that the camp was definitely concerned about disinfection in this time frame, and apparently intended to use at least one of the basements in Crematorium II for hot-air delousing installations.

However, there are obvious problems with the disinfection thesis in this case. First, gastight doors with peepholes are not necessary for fumigation spaces where cyanide is used. Second, use of any of the spaces in any of the crematoriums for regular gassing with cyanide would be just as dangerous and impractical as using the same spaces for gassing people. Third, the disinfection thesis doesn’t address the gastight door with peephole and the showers at all: Showers are part of the disinfection sequence, but they don’t involve gassing. Hence, the gastight door with peephole remains unexplained.

The bomb shelter thesis holds that there is nothing unusual about the juxtaposition of a gastight door and showers, since it was typical for showers to be equipped with gastight doors, and specifically bomb shelter doors, so that such spaces could serve an auxiliary purpose as decontamination centers in the event of an aerial

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<sup>4</sup> Both articles were posted January 7, 2007.

poison gas attack. All of this has been extensively documented in my various bomb shelter articles, as well as in the November 2000 revision of “The Gas Chamber of Sherlock Holmes.”

### VARIOUS CRITICISMS

I know of two direct criticisms and one partial criticism of the bomb shelter thesis subsequent to the publication of “Bomb Shelters in Birkenau.” There was the criticism of Mattogno in 2001. There was van Pelt’s book, but he did not discuss “Bomb Shelters in Birkenau.” However, also in 2001 van Pelt contributed an affidavit in rebuttal of an affidavit Germar Rudolf had prepared for David Irving in his appeal of the judgment in the Irving-Lipstadt libel case. Rudolf, in turn, had relied heavily on the documents in “Bomb Shelters in Birkenau.” However, Rudolf tried to use them in the context of his overall argument that gassings did not take place. Yet the bomb shelter thesis is not designed to refute the claim of mass gassing; it attempts to correctly identify the gastight trappings of the crematoriums and the purpose for which they were employed. Hence, Rudolf’s use of the material was disconnected and unpersuasive.

Rather than try to rebut the various criticisms in detail as they were presented, I will try to restate in my own way what I think the basic issues are, which should cover the same ground.

There are two basic problems with the general criticisms of the bomb shelter thesis.

Problem #1 – Auschwitz as it existed in spring 1943, or in fall 1943, was not the same as it was in January 1945. This should be common sense, but this simple fact seems to evade my critics. Almost everything we know about Auschwitz today, from a material or forensic point of view, and including the vast majority of photographs, comes from the period after the camp was liberated in January 1945. Therefore, if we wish to properly interpret the material or forensic evidence, as well as most of the photographs, we need to include in our thinking everything that took place in the camp up to and even subsequent to its liberation. Setting an arbitrary date, say, in October or November 1943, to stop looking at documents is bound to lead to problems in perception and interpretation.

I will provide two examples.

The first concerns the gastight doors in Pressac’s book on Auschwitz. Every single one of these photos comes from the post-liberation period. Most of these doors are clearly gastight doors with peepholes constructed out of wood in accordance with the patterns of makeshift bomb shelter door construction, as I have shown and as Nowak and Rademacher understood.<sup>5</sup> So then the question is: why were there so many bomb shelter doors at Auschwitz? Pressac clearly had no answer; he simply

<sup>5</sup> Hans Jürgen Nowak and Werner Rademacher, “Gasdichte’ Türen in Auschwitz,” *Vierteljahreshefte für freie Geschichtsforschung* 2, no. 4 (December 1998): 248-261; for an augmented English version consult “Some Details of the Central Construction Office at Auschwitz,” in Germar Rudolf, ed., *Dissecting the Holocaust*, 311-336.

assumed that they were all doors to disinfection chambers. But we now know that there were numerous bomb shelters at Auschwitz and Birkenau, and we can therefore assume that most of these doors were in fact the doors to gastight bomb shelters.

My critics continue to assume that gastight doors with peepholes are either for gassing things or gassing people, simply because by not looking at the documents after the fall of 1943 they are not aware that there were many gastight doors with peepholes constructed in 1944 for bomb shelters or trench shelters for the guards and for some of the prisoner population. However, anyone can look at these documents, listed in detail in Section 2.4 of “Bomb Shelters in Birkenau,” and draw their own conclusions. One obvious conclusion is that by the spring of 1944, if my critics are right, identical gastight doors with peepholes were being used to gas people, gas things, and function as bomb shelter doors.

A further example concerns a number of manholes that exist in various parts of the camp, and of which there are two centered along the western walls of Morgue #1 for both Crematoriums II and III. My critics, even going so far as to enlist the services of a plumber, have agreed that these are manholes. Indeed. The real question, however, is the purpose, intent, and function of these manholes. Since my critics refuse to consult the documents from late fall 1943 forward, however, they are unable to cite documents or find references that answer the question. Yet I referenced in “Bomb Shelters in Birkenau” at least two documents (#26, #32) that describe manholes remarkably similar in description to the ones we know that exist; these manholes were meant to function as emergency exits for bomb shelters. Indeed, one of these documents specifies several pieces of iron planned to be used to form steps in the emergency exit. Indeed, by consulting the manhole at Crematorium III, we know they were never installed.

I would imagine that the freestanding manholes that still exist on the grounds of Birkenau today are the relics of the gastight trench shelters that we know were built from 1944 documentation, as well as the photographic evidence for the existence of such shelters that I included in “Defending.” However, I will leave that research to someone else, turning instead to the other main problem of my critics.

Problem #2 – Constructing a new building so that it meets civil air defense requirements is not the same thing as retrofitting an existing building so that it meets those requirements, let alone building new dedicated bomb shelters. Before I obtained the primary source documentation on the gastight bomb shelters constructed at Auschwitz and Birkenau, I argued in “Defending” that the crematoriums would meet civil air defense requirements simply because of the construction code from November 1940, which specified, among other things, that

*All new constructions, particularly in buildings for the armaments industry, are henceforth to be equipped with bombproof air raid shelters. Such shelters are to have the same priority as the structure being built itself.<sup>6</sup>*

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<sup>6</sup> Crowell, “Defending,” Part 1; Foedrowitz, *Bunkerweltern*, 10-11, provides a facsimile of the document, see Section 5.

As I stated back in 1997, these requirements would cover all four of the crematoriums, as well as the Central Sauna. Therefore, the existence of gastight doors or gastight shutters at any of these locations, or the fitting of gastight doors on showers, or gastight ventilation pipes, would have amounted to nothing more than *pro forma* compliance with these air defense directives. Given that both Kammler and Bischoff were ex-Luftwaffe, such compliance would not and should not be surprising. At the same time, such compliance would not generate much documentation. Tacit understandings rarely do.

Of course, the way around this, for my critics, would be to show definitively that these directives were not complied with for other new structures, either at Auschwitz or elsewhere. Yet it appears that shower rooms at Dachau, Mauthausen, Natzweiler, and of course Crematorium III at Birkenau were all equipped with gastight doors, and photographs of the piping for the first two indicate contraptions very similar to hand-cranked ventilation systems, showing at least the capability of rendering the shower spaces gastight. There appear to have been gastight doors at the BW 5a and 5b disinfection building in addition to those needed for fumigation, as John Zimmerman has noted.<sup>7</sup> As Mattogno argues, the drying room at the Bath and Disinfection complex at Majdanek can also be rendered gastight, due to the wooden gastight doors at that location.<sup>8</sup> The Heinkel-Werke at Oranienburg (Sachsenhausen), as Benz informs us, had a low building with an undressing room on top and washing facilities and a *Gasschutzkeller* below,<sup>9</sup> a configuration reminiscent of Mauthausen. The basement of the Central Sauna appears to be equipped with an emergency exit in its basement and could have functioned as a bomb shelter. Again, I raised several of these points ten years ago when I wrote “Bomb Shelters in Birkenau,” and I assumed that someone would investigate it further. No one has, not even my critics. This is unfortunate.

The point of all this, however, is that there are certainly reasonable grounds to expect civil defense compliance for the crematoriums, and that such compliance is not the same as building dedicated bomb shelters. To be sure, in my email to David Irving in early 1998 I overstated the importance of the concrete shells listed in the August and September correspondence. However, I did not overstate the importance of these documents in “Bomb Shelters in Birkenau.”

Another common criticism concerns the *Auert* bomb shelter doors on the disinfection building at Majdanek. In “Defending,” Part 2, I speculated that these doors were used on an impromptu gas shelter. However, in “Bomb Shelters in Birkenau” I simply stated that these were bomb shelter doors and that they were sent to Majdanek in the fall of 1942. I have yet to be corrected on that point.

Nor is it likely I will be. The doors were constructed by the Firma Erwin Auert in Berlin, specifically, Erwin Auert, Fabrik für Feineisenkonstruktionen, Berlin-

<sup>7</sup> John C. Zimmerman, *Holocaust Denial: Demographics, Testimonies, and Ideologies* (Internet edition).

<sup>8</sup> Graf, Mattogno, *Concentration Camp Majdanek*, 124, 150, 308-309.

<sup>9</sup> Wolfgang Benz, Barbara Distel, Angelika Königseder, *Der Ort des Terrors*, 247.

Weißensee, Franz-Joseph-Straße 9-11 and, as a contemporary ad shows, they specialized in the construction of bomb shelter doors.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the doors at Majdanek are bomb shelter doors, and, again, I can only present the evidence, I cannot compel recognition.



Ad for the Auert firm, Berlin

The next question is why these heavy bomb shelter doors were sent to Lublin in the fall of 1942. I seriously doubt that the administration at Majdanek, seeking gastight doors for their disinfection chambers, would have sent to Berlin, four hundred miles away, to obtain doors that could have been constructed on site. Yet perhaps that was the case; I am still waiting for information on this issue.

As to why these doors were installed on the disinfection building: I have discussed this in the later revisions of “The Gas Chamber of Sherlock Holmes,” beginning in 1999. The key source is the testimony of Bruno Tesch and Carl Weinbacher at their trial, at which they argued that the gas chambers at Majdanek had been modified in 1944 for the use of Areginal, a non-lethal gas,<sup>11</sup> the use of which at Majdanek would explain many other modifications to the structure, including the bomb shelter doors (to allow for thermometer consultation), the piping along the floor of the chambers, and the metal cylinders, which would typically contain the gas and carbon dioxide as a dispersant.

Still another common criticism concerns the above-ground nature of the gastight spaces for Crematoriums IV and V. The argument seems to be that since these spaces provided inadequate protection from bombs, they could not function as bomb shelters. In this respect, I should have stressed in my earlier writings that while bomb shelters and gas shelters frequently overlap in function, and completely overlap functionally in the basements of both Crematoriums II and III, they often-times do not: Bomb shelters are not always gastight, and gas shelters are not always bombproof. In fact, “gas shelters” can often be nothing more than any room, or even

<sup>10</sup> *Luftschutz Taschkalender* 1941, located in the BDC (Berlin Document Center); location: 50.23 NSDAP-RLB. Largely a collection of advertisements; the Auert ad appears on 378. (An advertisement for Auer-Gasschutz appears at the front.)

<sup>11</sup> *Tesch-Weinbacher Trial*, Public Records Office, London, WO235/83.

a tent set up out of doors, that can be made gastight.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the argument that the showers in Crematoriums IV and V could not have been “*Gasschutzkammer*” because they did not provide bomb protection is completely without merit. On the other hand, putting gastight doors on any space with showers immediately converts that space into an auxiliary gas shelter.

For the most part I consider the kinds of criticisms discussed here to be relatively weak, because in all cases they derive from sources which are artificially restricted in their documentary scope and because they refuse to recognize the difference between auxiliary use and dedicated construction. Some of these criticisms reflect a lack of appreciation in the evolution of my own thinking, as well as ignorance of my writings on the issue, which have been available for many years. Moreover, the constrained and obtuse nature of these criticisms causes me to lack confidence in their suggested corrections.

### RELEVANT EVIDENCE

At the beginning of this note I itemized the three interpretations of the gastight fixtures for the Birkenau crematoriums: the gas chamber thesis, the disinfection thesis, and the bomb shelter thesis. I note that the three theses, by their nature, are going to approach evidence in different ways. The gas chamber thesis, for example, will use any evidence from any source to argue by inference that the gastight fixtures of the crematoriums concern homicidal gassings. That is why exponents of the gas chamber thesis always invoke NO-365—not because they seriously intend to pursue the idea of gas chambers at Riga, but because the Wetzel-Lohse correspondence is practically the only document they have in which a “*Vergasung*—” type word is used with an arguable homicidal intent.

The disinfection thesis, on the other hand, is based on documents at Auschwitz only, and does not generally use evidence from outside the documents for the camp, and also does not generally use eyewitness testimony at all.

The bomb shelter thesis uses any and all evidence that might shed light on the issue of civil air defense in Germany, including defense against gas warfare, as well as civil defense construction anywhere in the German sphere, either for air protection, gas protection, or some combination thereof.

The reason the net of the bomb shelter thesis is cast so wide is because the fundamental issue here is the divination of intent on the part of the designers and equippers of these crematoriums. This means we have to reconstruct their mentality. This means we have to guess what kinds of things would be on their minds. To the extent that the ever-widening circle of documentary terrain supports an interest, concern, or intent to address issues of civil air defense, to that extent the bomb shelter thesis is supported. Therefore I now list some evidence that I have come

<sup>12</sup> *Baulicher Luftschutz*, (October 1937):49; see also K. E. Kunze, “Luftdurchgang durch Wände und Fugen von Gasschutzräumen,” *Baulicher Luftschutz* (July 1938):66-70; and many others; “New Shelter for Poison Gas Tested in France,” *Popular Science*, vol. 121, no. 4 (October 1932): 38; *Popular Science*, vol. 135, no. 4, (September 1939):71, *Scientific American* 136-137, (1937): 302-303; compare also *Life*, March 14, 1938, 5.

across subsequent to writing “Bomb Shelters in Birkenau.”

The first bit of relevant information pertaining to civil defense comes from the testimony of Walter Schreiber, an engineer at Huta who was involved in the construction of the crematoriums. This interview appeared just a couple of months after I completed “Bomb Shelters in Birkenau.” The interview was conducted by Walter Lüftl, a noted Austrian engineer who is also the author of the revisionist *Lüftl Report*. The interview took place in 1998, but was not published until after Walter Schreiber’s death in 1999.<sup>13</sup>

The following exchange is relevant:

Lüftl: In which areas were you active?

Schreiber: As senior engineer I inspected the civil projects of the Huta Corporation and negotiated with the Central Construction office of the SS. I also audited the invoices of our firm.

L.: Did you enter the camp? How did that happen?

S.: Yes. One could walk everywhere without hindrance on the streets of the camp and was only stopped by the guards upon entering and leaving the camp.

L.: Did you see or hear anything about killings or mistreatment of inmates?

S.: No. But lines of inmates in a relatively poor general condition could occasionally be seen on the streets of the camp.

L.: What did the Huta Corporation build?

S.: Among other things, Crematoria II and III with the large morgues.

L.: The prevalent opinion (considered to be self-evident) is that these large morgues were allegedly gas chambers for mass killings.

S.: Nothing of that sort could be deduced from the plans made available to us. The detailed plans and provisional invoices drawn up by us refer to these rooms as ordinary cellars.

L.: Do you know anything about introduction hatches in the reinforced concrete ceilings?

S.: No, not from memory. But since these cellars were also intended to serve as air raid shelters as a secondary purpose, introduction holes would have been counterproductive. I would certainly have objected to such an arrangement.

Of course, Schreiber’s testimony is not the best evidence: It cannot stand on its own. Parenthetically, I would add, most testimonial evidence from this historical period can never be used in isolation, but on the one hand it can yield clues for further investigation that may lead to documentary evidence, or, on the other

<sup>13</sup> Schreiber’s testimony first appeared as Werner Rademacher, “In memoriam Dipl.-Ing. Dr. techn. Walter Schreiber,” *Vierteljahreshefte für freie Geschichtsforschung* 4, no. 1 (June 2000): 104-106. The translation is from an English version from *The Revisionist* 2, no. 3 August 2004, entitled “Engineer’s Deathbed Confession: We Built Morgues, Not Gas Chambers.”

hand, it may serve as a supplement to other evidence that has already been developed. I am aware also that skeptics may regard this evidence with suspicion.

Nevertheless, Schreiber's testimony does raise an interesting question, which is, why were Crematoriums II and III equipped with two morgues, and why were these intended to be underground, and why was Morgue #1 (the *Vergasungskeller* morgue) set at an L-shaped angle so that it would be perpendicular to the main building? In other words, what was the intent of these design features? Since the crematoriums were designed in 1941, it is clear that nothing about their design would have involved a contingent use either for gassing people or gassing things, since both the gas chamber thesis and the disinfection thesis claim that these *ad hoc* aims were not even contemplated until sometime in the fall of 1942.<sup>14</sup>

Another piece of relevant information involves the first bombing attack on Auschwitz, which took place on the evening of May 4–5, 1943.<sup>15</sup> The raid, which did little damage, involved American bombers coming from the northeast which then turned and flew off to the east.

Datum:	Darstellung der Ereignisse.
Mittwoch, d. 5. 5. 43	<p>In der Nacht vom 4. zum 5. 5. 1943 von 23,44 bis 0,27 Uhr war für Kattowitz Fliegeralarm. Laut Angaben des Luftwarnkommandos Kattowitz flogen amerikanische Maschinen aus Nordost in das Ostoberschlesische-Gebiet ein und kamen bis Sosnowitz. Von hier flogen sie über Trzebinia nach Auschwitz und später nach Bielitz. Sodann erfolgte Abflug nach Osten.</p> <p>Abgeworfen wurden über Auschwitz 9 Bomben, davon ein Blindgänger. Personen- und Sachschaden war keiner zu verzeichnen. Wie verlautet, soll erst nach erfolgtem Abwurf und Überflug über Auschwitz Fliegeralarm gegeben worden sein. Um solche Fälle zu vermeiden, hat der Wehrwirtschaftsoffizier Auftrag erhalten, beim Luftgaukommando in Krakau vorstellig zu werden.</p>

Record of the first bombing of Auschwitz, May 4–5, 1943

The document about the first Auschwitz bombing ties into other issues related to bomb shelters and gas protection, such as are outlined in the construction minutes for the IG Farben plant in Monowitz, where it was a constant concern since 1941, because the Monowitz plant was to be involved in the production of synthetic rubber, and therefore was a likely target for bombing raids. After a bombing raid

<sup>14</sup> The rebuttal would involve the claim that the crematoriums were designed specifically for gassing; the only argument I know in this regard is by Michael Thad Allen, "The Devil in the Details," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 16, no. 2 (Fall 2002): 54-76, which I find unpersuasive.

<sup>15</sup> NARA (National Archives), T 77, Roll 622, Frame 1811661.

destroyed the synthetic rubber plant at Hüls in June of 1943, a growing concern about a future bombing raid on Monowitz was reflected in the minutes of the frequent meetings on civil defense issues.

Another piece of evidence, in terms of German expectations, is the affidavit by Professor Otto Bichenbach, deposed by the French in 1947<sup>16</sup> (NO-3848), who claimed that the German tests of poison gases on concentration camp inmates took place because:

*At that moment, the military situation was bad for the Reich. The Allies had landed in North Africa and the Abwehr knew that 50,000 tons of phosgene gas was stored in Africa. [...] The gas war seemed inescapable. The supreme command of the Wehrmacht was convinced at that moment that the Allies would be compelled to use gas to force "Fortress Europa."*

Still another relevant piece of information involves an Enigma decode discovered by the American historian Richard Breitman and commented on by me in my review of *The Bombing of Auschwitz*.<sup>17</sup> The British historian David Irving thereupon obtained the document,<sup>18</sup> which reads as follows:

*Bezug: dort. Funk vom 19.11.42. Die Kdtr. KL. AU meldet zu obigem Bezug, dass folgende Waffen und Gerät dringend für Ausrüstung der Rekruten benötigt werden: 490 Gewehre, 490 Seitengewehre, 600 kompl. Gasmasken und 960 Reinigungsgeräte.<sup>19</sup>*

We note that the request for 600 gas masks is greater, by an order of magnitude, than the number of gas masks that would have been needed to fulfill either the gas chamber thesis or the disinfection thesis. It follows that there can be no doubt that these gas masks were being procured for a civil air defense or gas warfare purpose. At the same time, however, since the request is being made in the context of normal weapons procurement, it could easily be argued that the request was not being made due to concern of an imminent threat of gas attack. I note in passing the use of the word "*dringend*" (urgent) in the context of the request.

Among previously published documents not addressed by my critics, there is Document 30 in "Bomb Shelters in Birkenau," which discusses remuneration for prisoners working at Crematorium II, and covering the month of May 1943. Mattogno claims the document "proves nothing." However, the pen notation on the invoice, translated by David Irving, reads "The prisoners were employed at clearance work at Crematorium II" (*Die Häftlinge wurden mit Aufräumungsarbeiten*

<sup>16</sup> NO-3848, presented during the Medical Trial (aka Doctor's Trial), the first trial of the Nuremberg Military Tribunal, one of twelve trials under American auspices.

<sup>17</sup> Discussed in the review of Michael Neufeld and Michael Berenbaum, *The Bombing of Auschwitz*, "An Exercise in Futility," *Journal of Historical Review* 20, no. 2 (March–April 2001).

<sup>18</sup> PRO decode at [www.fpp.co.uk](http://www.fpp.co.uk).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. Telegraph from November 19, 1942. "The commandant of KL Auschwitz reports to the above reference that the following weapons and materials are urgently required for the arming of the recruits: 490 rifles, 490 sidearms, 600 complete gas masks, and 960 sets of cleaning equipment."

*beim Krematorium II beschäftigt*); the document (502-1-401) is to be found in the middle of a 241-page file on air raid shelter preparations, which in turn derives from the air raid shelter holdings of the Central Construction Office. The relevance is obvious, the meaning less so, but the conclusion is hard to dispute: prisoners were doing work on bomb shelter construction at Crematorium II in May 1943.

### THE MEANING OF “GASKELLER”

With respect to the bomb shelter thesis, three words are at issue. There is the word “*Sonderkeller*,” which stems from a November 1942 document; the word “*Vegasungskeller*,” which stems from a January 1943 document; and the word “*Gaskeller*,” from a February 1943 note which we referenced in “Bomb Shelters in Birkenau” but which only came to light in 2005.

Of the three, the latter two are the only really contentious ones. A *Sonderkeller* is a “special cellar”; it could be special in any number of ways. *Vergasungskeller* is more problematic; the usage has been known since the discovery of the *Vergasungskeller* letter, but no one has ever succeeded in finding any other usage of the word. *Gaskeller*, according to World War Two military dictionaries, means “gas shelter,” and Arthur Butz used that connection, along with architectural and contextual analysis, to conclude that *Vergasungskeller* also meant “gas shelter.” What we want to do here is analyze the word *Gaskeller* more closely.

In 2002, a German historian named Jörg Friedrich published *Der Brand* (*The Fire*), a book about the strategic bombing of Germany in World War Two that focused on the experience of the German people under the bombs. To get his point across, Friedrich used a highly allusive if not deliberately provocative vocabulary: People who died of carbon monoxide in their cellars were described as “gassed” (a figure of speech I had also used in “Defending”), Allied bombing squadrons were described as “*Einsatzgruppen*,” and so forth. In two places Friedrich described people running into and out of flaming bomb shelters, and the word he used was “*Gaskeller*.”<sup>20</sup> That usage, along with several others, was taken as a provocation by several German or German-speaking academics who reviewed his book, for they felt that he was deliberately using Nazi terminology to evoke the Holocaust.<sup>21</sup>

Therefore it is clear that among German-speaking professors today the word *Gaskeller* only means “gas chamber”; that was probably why Pressac’s *Gaskeller* document was made available in a brochure in 2005 prepared for an exhibition on Topf & Sons in Germany, in the context of a Holocaust memorial exhibition at the Berlin Holocaust Museum which took place from January to April in 2006.

<sup>20</sup> Jörg Friedrich, *Der Brand*, 290, 338.

<sup>21</sup> Aleida Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit*, 188, 200; Hannes Heer, *Vom Verschwinden der Täter*, 299; Wilfried Wilms, University of Denver, H-Net review at [www.h-net.org](http://www.h-net.org), July 23, 2007.

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**Topf** An J. A. TOPF & SOHNE Erfurt den 17.2.43.

Auftrag Nr. SONDERAKTEN

Abteilung B - Haupteinkauf.

Unser Zeichen: D/Sa./hes.

In Sachen: Zentral-Bauleitung der Waffen-SS, Auschwitz /Ost-Oberschl.

Betrifft: Be- und Entlüftungs-Anlage.

17.2.43 Es ruft an Herr Schultze und teilt folgendes mit:

1). Das Belüftungs-Gebälse Nr. 450 für den Gaskeller ist dort nicht aufzufinden, obwohl es angeblich bei uns abgegangen ist. Herr Heinemann hat inzwischen festgestellt, dass das Gebälse tatsächlich am 18.11.1942 abgegangen ist, es müsste also eigentlich dort vorrätig sein. Da es aber lt. Herrn Schultze nicht aufzufinden ist und dringend gebraucht wird, sollen wir es sofort nochmals aufgeben und beschleunigt anfertigen.

2). Es fehlen noch 20 Stück Handwinden von der Firma Schieß-Defries, die dringend benötigt werden. Unser Einkauf habe schon vor kurzem bei der Lieferfirma gemahnt, Herr Schultze bittet dringend darum, dass nochmals angerufen und die unmittelbare Übersendung nach Auschwitz veranlasst wird.

*L. Pöhlly v. 15/1.42.*  
*M. MI 141/2435/1.*  
*Jörg Friedrich*

17 FEB 1943  
 Zur Beantwort. Beschwört

Eigener Brief. Formular 5  
 11-42-5000-1/2211

The Gaskeller document

Since I have already referenced the document in “Bomb Shelters in Birkenau,” there is no reason to repeat that description here. The *Gaskeller* document is a typed office memorandum and represents the record of a telephone conversation. Someone is asking for blowers for the *Gaskeller*, and there is a reference back to the November 1942 correspondence, so we now know that the *Gaskeller* is also the *Sonderkeller* referenced at that time. There are requests for other materials, including blowers, hand winches, piping, and so on. There really is nothing here that supports either the gas chamber thesis or the disinfection thesis; however, as we have noted, the word *Gaskeller* by definition supports the bomb shelter thesis.

Now, let us return to Jörg Friedrich. In 2003, the year after publishing *Der Brand*, he published another book, *Brandstätten* (*Fire Sites*), which is a pictorial volume showing the destruction of German cities along with photos of suffering Londoners, Poles, and Jews. The photos are surrounded by evocative essays and occasional quotes. One quote is especially relevant:<sup>22</sup>

*Hamburg 4.2.1943*

*Die Flammen und das Flugfeuer bedrohten das Gaskeller. Während dieser Zeit stürzte das Treppenhaus ein. Die Feuerbrunst hatte eine Gewalt von Windstärke 10. Ich ging zum Angriff über.*

*Hauptwachmeister Boje der Feuerschutzpolizei*

<sup>22</sup> Jörg Friedrich, *Brandstätten*, 69.

[The flames and flying embers threatened the gas shelter. During this time the staircase collapsed. The conflagration had a force of windstrength 10. I went on the attack.

Captain Boje of the Firefighter's Police]

In this quote, a Hamburg fire warden describes his activities during a bomb-induced fire, and his use of the word “*Gaskeller*” clearly means “gas shelter” or, to be more precise, a gastight bomb shelter. We also note that this usage of *Gaskeller* in Hamburg comes less than two weeks before the *Gaskeller* memo was typed in Erfurt. On this basis we can safely conclude that the normal common meaning of *Gaskeller* was “gas shelter,” at least in this time frame.

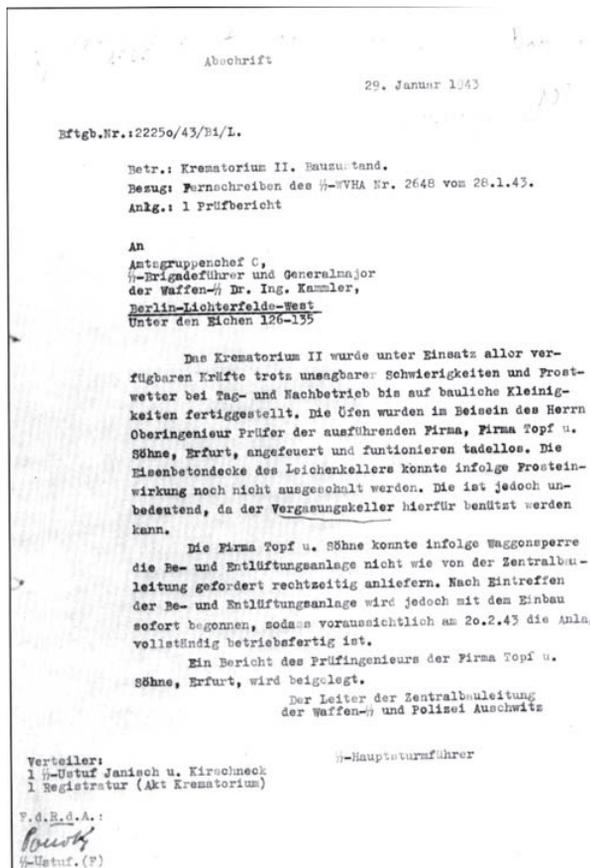
We can anticipate the response of the advocates of the gas chamber thesis and disinfection thesis. They will say that the reference means nothing, that it is a freak single-case word usage, that *Gaskeller* can mean anything, so long as it involves a basement and some gas, and so on. In response I would say that these advocates are welcome to find one unambiguous reference to “*Gaskeller*” used in either a homicidal or a disinfection context in 1943 or earlier. Meanwhile, here are some other usages of the word “*Gaskeller*”:

1. –*Gasschutz und Luftschutz* (2, no. 1 [January 1932]), p. 23: *Gaswart. Gaskellermannschaft. Entgasungstrupp*. A description of the contents of a civil air defense bulletin.
2. –Walter Mueller, *Wenn Wir 1918 ... eine realpolitische Utopie* (1930) p. 451: “*unterbrechen jetzt die Sitzung, ziehen um in Gaskeller*”—“[We now] interrupt the meeting to move into the gas shelter” (in the context of a present-tense description of a war with gas weapons.)
3. –*Unterrichtsblätter für Mathematik und Naturwissenschaften*, volumes 39-40 (1933), p. 154: “*Wie groß muß ein Gaskeller sein, in dem zehn Personen zwei Stunden lang von der Außenwelt völlig abgeschlossen zu bringen können? ... Wenn künftig für alle Häuser Gaskeller eingerichtet werden, ...*: — “How large must a gas shelter be for ten people to be able to spend two hours sealed off from the outside world there?” ... “If in the future gas shelters will be furnished for every house ...” (in the context of describing the need for gas shelters and how they are to be constructed.)
4. –Friedrich Wolf, *Das trojanische Pferd: ein Stück vom Kampf der Jugend in Deutschland* (1937), p. 116: “*Schnell, Kollegen, sorgt überall für unsre “Gaskranken”, denn es ist Krieg, fordert überall Zuteilung der geräumigen Gaskeller der Reichen auch für die Millionen Armen, denn es ist Krieg; versteht ihr, es ist Krieg - sagt man - Krieg!*” — “Quick, comrades, prepare everywhere for our gas victims, since it is war,

demand everywhere the subdivision of the spacious gas shelters of the rich for the millions of poor, since it is war, do you understand, war, do you hear me, war!” (In the context of an anti-fascist play about youth rebellion in Germany.)

5. –*Militärwissenschaftliche Mitteilungen*, vol. 68 (1937), p. 374: “*Ausrüstung, für Gasschutzmasken, für Gaskeller usw.*” A list of the materials needed for civil air defense.
6. –Konrad Heiden, *Europäisches Schicksal* (1937), p. 214: “*Wenn in den Städten die Sirene erschallt, stürzt ein ganzes Volk in die Gaskeller; niemand sieht mehr ein Flugzeug, ohne an Bomben, brennende Häuser, vergiftete Straßenzüge zu denken.*”—“When the siren sounds in the city, the entire people rushes to the gas shelters, no one sees a plane anymore without thinking of bombs, burning houses, and poisoned streets.”
7. Deutsche Pharmazeutische Gesellschaft, *Mitteilungen*, v. 9-10 (1932), p. 194: “*In jedem Haus muß sich ein besonderer Gaskeller befinden. Jeder einzelne müßte sein eigenes Atemschutzgerät und seinen Gummianzug gegen Gelbkreuznebel besitzen.*”—“In every house there should be a special gas shelter. Everyone should have a breathing apparatus and a rubber suit against Yellow Cross mist [mustard gas].” (In the context of civil defense.)
8. –Peter Riss, *Die grosse Zeit: Stahlbad anno 17* (1931), p. 378: “*Wir haben unsere Gewehre auf dem Platz vor dem Gaskeller zusammengestellt.*” — “We stacked our weapons in front of the gas shelter.” (In the context of soldiers preparing to test their gas masks in a gas shelter: note here the reversal of the function of a “Gaskeller.”)
9. –Curt August Haegler, *Gotthard: September 1939* (1940), p. 28: “*Gasmasken werden gefaßt und anprobiert. Es geht in den Gaskeller – die erste ...*”—“Gas masks were put on and sealed. And go into the gas shelter – the first ...” (Again, in the context of soldiers testing their gas masks in a gas shelter.)

All of the above references support the bomb shelter thesis, but cannot be made to support the alternatives. The two military usages, #8 and #9, in which gastight bomb shelters were appropriated so that soldiers could test their gas masks, does invert the normal meaning; however, such gassings are not fatal, they require the cooperation of those being gassed, and they involve the use of very small amounts of standard war gases, not the novel appropriation of fumigant gases for homicidal purposes. I also note that I applied the same search mechanism that yielded the above nine references and could find no references to “Gaskeller” in a disinfection context at all, and only one reference in a homicidal context, that being a reference to none other than the 1907 Danish silent film, *Sherlock Holmes im Gaskeller*.

The *Vergasungskeller* letter

## VERGASUNGSKELLER

At this point I would like to go back to the word “*Vergasungskeller*.”

Arthur Butz has studied this word for many years, and has offered many interpretations of it, all in an attempt to figure out what the word means in context. In his 1996 “*Vergasungskeller*” article, he argued that since the word “*Gaskeller*” yoked the notion of gas and a cellar in a civil defense context, and since the verb *vergasen* was known to be used in the context of gas attacks, the equivalence of *Gaskeller* and *Vergasungskeller* could be achieved. His final explanation, from 2007, did not attempt to substitute the word “*Gaskeller*,” but reached the same conclusion, based on Robert Jan van Pelt’s argument that the handwritten notations on the note suggest that the word *Vergasungskeller* was not supposed to be there, and second, the publication of the *Gaskeller* document.

When I wrote my first article on the bomb shelter literature (“Technique”), I argued on complicated linguistic grounds that *Vergasungskeller* could mean what we would normally call a “decontamination center,” that is, a “*Gasschutzkammer*” or “*Gasschutzkeller*.” By the end of 1997, however, I had not found any usage of nouns rooted in the verb *vergasen* in a civil defense context, while I had found

many usages supporting a fumigation context, many but not all of which were summarized in Part 3 of “Bomb Shelters in Birkenau.” Therefore, I began to argue not that the bomb shelter interpretation was incorrect, but rather that the usage of *Vergasungskeller* pointed to the attempted or projected usage of the space for fumigation in a very general sense, as well.

The notion that the Morgue #1 of Crematorium II had been projected for three purposes, that is, morgue, gastight bomb shelter, and delousing and disinfection center, sounded odd, but I stuck with the idea because my research for “Defending” suggested an essential identity of disinfection, decontamination and corpse handling paradigms. There was an additional development in early 1999, when Carlo Mattogno, in the context of his criticisms of my articles, began to offer evidence that there was indeed an attempt to appropriate the space of Morgue #1 of Crematorium II for the use of hot-air disinfection ovens. However, I have never been able to accept the idea that the entire Morgue #1 was ever planned for exposure to cyanide gas, which is why, in Part 4 of “Bomb Shelters in Birkenau,” I tried to provide a more or less complete exposition of the disinfection thesis with a view to showing that it need not contradict the bomb shelter thesis, and also to argue that the word *Vergasungskeller* could apply to the disinfection use of the basement, provided that *Vergasung* was meant as identical to the more normal *Entwesung*, that is, that the use of poison gas would not be required.<sup>23</sup>

#### A SIMPLER SOLUTION TO THE MYSTERY OF VERGASUNGSKELLER?

In recent years I have managed to consult much more of the German civil defense literature and have found dozens of usages keyed to both *vergasen* and *Vergasung*.<sup>24</sup> Thus I am comfortable in reverting to my original hypothesis that *Vergasungskeller* would refer to a *Gaskeller* or *Gasschutzkeller*. Indeed, I have even found a reference to *Vergasungsraum* in a civil defense context as follows:<sup>25</sup>

*Daneben stehen für die Lehrgänge ein Vergasungsraum im Keller, die Ausstellungsgruppe für Atemschutz und Feuerschutz sowie eine Versuchsgelegenheit für im freien zur Verfügung.*

[In addition, a gas room in the cellar, the demonstration team for respiratory protection and fire prevention, and an opportunity for outdoor testing are available for instructional purposes.]

The above reference brings to mind the previously cited Enigma decrypt from November 1942, with the request for 600 gas masks, and makes me wonder if Morgue #1 of Crematorium II was ever contemplated for the testing of gas masks,

<sup>23</sup> I also interpolated a complicated footnote in the “The Gas Chamber of Sherlock Holmes” to try to explain this triple use.

<sup>24</sup> The entire runs of *Gasschutz und Luftschutz* as well as *Baulicher Luftschutz* are now online and can be consulted by interested parties. [www.bbk.bund.de](http://www.bbk.bund.de)

<sup>25</sup> *Reichsarbeitsblatt*, Part 3 (*Arbeitsschutz*), C. Heymann, 1934, p. 222.

as outlined in examples #8 and #9 of *Gaskeller*, above. It certainly would not be unusual, based on the known literature, to appropriate a gastight bomb shelter to expose recruits to poison gas. The reasoning would be that use of the personal gas mask in a controlled exposure to poison gas is a standard training technique. The aim is to become adept at gas mask usage, alert to the symptoms of poison gas exposure, and above all to overcome the anxiety people have about poison gas exposure. In such a case, a *Gaskeller* certainly would become a *Vergasungskeller*.

Of course the above speculation about the use of the word *Vergasungskeller* is possible, but that doesn't explain why the word was underlined in the text and why Kirschneck's name was written on top. In "Bomb Shelters in Birkenau," I pointed out that Kirschneck's name was written on several documents, but that doesn't address the issue of the underlining. Van Pelt, like most adherents of the gas chamber thesis, holds that the underlining was due to the fact that *Vergasungskeller* was the wrong word to use in that context, and Arthur Butz, as noted, in his article in January 2007, agrees ("The Vergasungskeller: Final Chapter?"). The difference, of course, is that Professor Butz has the word "*Gaskeller*" on his side, since the Topf telephone memo makes it clear that the word that should be there is *Gaskeller*, the meaning of which is now thoroughly established.

In short, we have abundant linguistic evidence to show that *Vergasungskeller* can mean a space where fumigation can take place, a space where chemical warfare decontamination can take place, and a space where exposure to poison gas can take place. Nonetheless, the *Vergasungskeller* is identical to the *Gaskeller*.

### **"GASKELLER" AGAIN**

Now let us return to the word *Gaskeller*. The references supplied above leave no doubt that the normal meaning of the word to a German in the Second World War and for many years prior was "gas shelter" or "gastight bomb shelter." There is absolutely nothing in the Topf telephone memo to indicate any other meaning of the word, other than the normal one, and there is also no chance that the many people in the Topf offices who read this memo would have construed a "*Gaskeller*" as anything other than a gastight bomb shelter. It follows, therefore, that Morgue #1 in both Crematoriums II and III was a gastight bomb shelter. Corroboration comes from the fact that both of these facilities were equipped with gastight air raid shelter doors with peepholes, as well as showers, which is thematic to the bomb shelter thesis but not to either the gas chamber thesis or the disinfection thesis.

As a matter of fact, we can also prove the point using Michael Shermer's "convergence of evidence" model. The first data point is the word *Gaskeller* itself. The second data point is the "Gas door with peephole of double 8 mm glass with rubber sealing and cover," which is identical to the description of a bomb shelter door in the civil defense literature, as described in "Technique." The third data point, or set of points, refers to the general construction of the morgue, which was originally

meant to be fully underground. A fourth data point is the testimony of Walter Schreiber, which, while *ex post facto* testimony, harmonizes completely with the documentary and physical evidence. Thus by using a variety of data from different sources Arthur Butz' original hypothesis has been proved.

Now let us return to Crematoriums IV and V. The rooms normally designated as gas chambers have been described as shower rooms, and have small windows that can be made gastight. They have explosion-proof lights, which is normal in a shower environment, or any other humid environment; they even have coal-fired heaters that are fired outside in the hallway, an arrangement specifically meant to reduce the threat of carbon monoxide exposure in the shower area. Work orders specify some spaces in these buildings as "*Gasskammer*" [sic]. My argument has always been that these areas were "*Gass[chutz]kammer*," that is, "gas shelters," and that "*Gasskammer*" was merely a bracket form of the word. More to the point, the identification of the bomb shelters in Crematoriums II and III, and the use of the bracket form *Gasskammer*, supports the analogy to Crematoriums IV and V.

I have argued since "Defending" was published in the summer of 1997 that the similarity between the normal delousing and disinfection sequence, as found in the camps, and in municipalities, and the decontamination sequence as found in the civil defense literature, strongly support the notion that spaces to serve the former would have been adapted to serve the latter as an auxiliary purpose simply by the addition of a few gastight doors with peepholes or gastight shutters. In other words, the bomb shelter thesis explains the presence of gastight bomb shelter doors in Crematoriums IV and V, but also in the Central Sauna, as well as the delousing station at BW 5a 5b, both of which had a surplus of such doors.

WHEN I WROTE “Bomb Shelters in Birkenau” ten years ago I felt that the bomb shelter thesis had already been proved beyond a reasonable doubt. Of course, I was including the 1944 data, which my critics have ignored, in my evaluation.

I do not believe that the advocates of the disinfection thesis have a response to the arguments presented here, which essentially make the bomb shelter thesis all-inclusive in terms of gastight fixtures at the crematoriums in Birkenau, as well as several other locations in the camp. They cannot argue that “*Gaskeller*” means a space where clothing was fumigated, because they have not shown any such contemporary usage; at least, not yet. They cannot argue that cyanide gas was ever used in the aboveground crematoriums, because these never had any ventilation systems and the layout would not be conducive to such use except with great difficulty. They cannot argue that the use of bomb shelter doors for fumigation was normative, because the usage of the Auert doors at Majdanek was extraordinary, for the reasons given, and furthermore was meant for the use of a nonpoisonous and non-cyanide gaseous product.

Nor can the advocates of the disinfection thesis argue that the underground morgues were ever meant to be used as “gas chambers” for delousing clothing with poison gas. It is true that the advocates of the disinfection thesis hold that there were attempts to use the basements of Crematoriums II and III for hot-air delousing and for showering. Indeed, I have made that argument myself in Part 4 of “Bomb Shelters in Birkenau.” However, showers have nothing to do with poison gas, and neither does hot air delousing, and a shower room with a gastight door with peephole simply does not fit the disinfection model.

As a matter of fact, with regard to the word “*Gaskeller*,” the advocates of the gas chamber thesis have an easier time of it, since at least their theory involves poison gas. However, to be consistent the advocates of the gas chamber thesis would now have to argue that the Nazis systematically appropriated civil air defense terminology, objects, and materials to pursue a homicidal agenda that is indicated nowhere in the documents. I have to confess that that is what I expected to see, back in 1997 when I first presented the civil defense literature in “Technique.”

I promoted the bomb shelter thesis not only because I felt it was a true and valid interpretation but also because I was attempting to promote freedom of speech for Holocaust revisionists. I immediately recognized that here was a species of literature which revisionists had worked with but which the establishment had ignored. I thought that by developing the theme I might force the establishment to recognize the value of Holocaust revisionism, and recognize its contributions to Holocaust historiography. That is why I wrote my articles the way I did and

that is why I posted them to a revisionist website. With the exception of Robert Jan van Pelt I was unable to establish the kind of dialogue that I thought would be the best guarantee against censorship. However, I am gratified that the movement toward censorship has receded in the English-speaking world and I therefore feel that I accomplished what I set out to do. Once more, I leave the thesis to others to pursue.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> While preparing this article for publication I came across an article in the *American Hebrew and Jewish Messenger* (Volume 144, Issue 25) for 1939, containing the following reference: "In one case, 65 Jews, including women and children, were assembled and gassed from German war aeroplanes, with the result that 46 of them died instantly, 12 were seriously injured and only seven escaped with light injuries." From the point of view of the bomb shelter thesis, I consider such references to be not only unsurprising but also completely predictable, inasmuch as the dread of aerial poison gas attack would naturally make it a component in the imagined, if not the real, torment of the Jewish people by Nazi Germany. It is however bracing to note, that if this material had been submitted at Nuremberg, it would, by the rules of evidence obtaining in post-war tribunals, have been accepted as a fact of common knowledge, and would then come down to us today not as an odd rumor but as indisputable historical fact, even though, in either case, there is no actual factual basis for the claim.

PART 4

THE HOLOCAUST  
IN RETROSPECT

A Historical and Revisionist  
Assessment



## 1. INTRODUCTION

I FIRST ENCOUNTERED the literature of Holocaust Revisionism, also called “Holocaust Denial,” in the early 1980s in the course of my graduate studies and work-study assignments. At that time, it struck me as typical of a certain genre of nationalist history, the kind that tends to minimize a nation’s crimes and extol a nation’s achievements, while omitting all unpleasantness.

Several years later I heard that the French were going to criminalize such literature in their country: I remember the legislation was going to be put into effect around Bastille Day, which struck me as amusing. Several years after that, I found out that there was a movement to criminalize revisionism in the United States, in Britain, and on the Internet. I also found out that several Europeans had been put on trial for revisionist writings, some given heavy fines, and some even sent to prison for several years. I learned that a prominent revisionist had been severely beaten on the street and that another revisionist had been threatened with death. I was no longer amused.

As far as I know, no one really “denies” that the Germans persecuted, plundered, deported, and killed large numbers of Jews during the Second World War. It is true that revisionists tend to minimize Jewish deaths, and minimize the responsibility of the Nazi government, which was a German government, for their deaths. Yet all national histories do that sort of thing: Anyone who has ever read a volume of American history which describes the Native American exterminations as “regrettable” or the institution of slavery as “tragic” is encountering such apologetic tendencies in full force. Just a few years ago, an American wrote a history of the Japanese internments in the Second World War with the specific aim of justifying this mistreatment. There were complaints, but no one tried to put her in jail.

My position, as a lifelong student of history, is that Holocaust Revisionism is nothing other than the left-handed history of the Holocaust, the flip side, the complement, the vocal minority, the devil’s advocate, which spurs the dominant school to research, discovery, and, yes, revision. Such opposition exists for any other subject, not only in history, but in any realm of intellectual endeavor. Holocaust Revisionism is the footnote to the statement of fact in the main text that says, “On the other hand, others have argued differently.”

Admittedly there are certain characteristics of Holocaust history and Holocaust Revisionism that are unusual. The most prominent characteristic is the orthodox

rigidity of Holocaust history. Most of what we know about the Nazi destruction of the Jews comes from a selection of documents that were gathered from German archives and used in trials against the Nazi leadership in the first five years after the war ended. This means that the same documents, and the same interpretation of those documents, have remained unchanged for over sixty years. This never happens in normal historiography.

A second characteristic is the absolute polarization of the two sides. Holocaust historians rarely revisit their fundamental assumptions about the destruction, and when they do, they bury their dissent in footnotes, and even more rarely entertain—in print—revisionist objections. Holocaust revisionists, on the other hand, carry their radical skepticism to extremes, not only rejecting or reinterpreting questionable evidence, but categorically rejecting virtually all evidence that turns on the killing of Jews. If Holocaust historians accuse revisionists of “denying the Holocaust,” revisionists must admit that some of their number have provided similarly vacuous slogans: “The Holocaust didn’t happen,” “The Holocaust is a hoax,” and so forth.

A third characteristic is the level of passions involved. To Holocaust historians, anyone who challenges any portion of the by now decades-old narrative is a “crank,” “crackpot,” “fruitcake,” or plague-spreading rat, if not an outright Nazi or anti-Semite. Holocaust revisionists, on the other hand, are similarly abusive, tending to blame the inaccuracies or possible inaccuracies of Holocaust history on Zionists, and then the State of Israel, and finally Jewish people as such.

From the above it is not too difficult to see why most people find revisionism unpleasant, morally objectionable, and deserving of ostracism. That taboo status, in turn, is what lies behind the movement toward criminalization. I see essentially two motives for such criminalization. The first reason, and this applies to Germany, is the belief that Holocaust revisionism might inflame German nationalist passions and even revanchist passions at a time in history where Germany is seeking to submerge its dominant role in a pan-European context. The second reason, and this applies to most other countries as well as to the movement to criminalize revisionism in the English-speaking world, is that revisionism might inspire anti-Semitism.

Now, from my point of view, if someone wanted to pass a law making German national chauvinism a crime, or making the public expression of anti-Semitism a crime, that would be one thing. I could accept the sentiments behind such legislation although I would still oppose it, because I think all such attempts to tinker with freedom of thought are bound to fail. What I cannot accept is the idea that any fact or idea is sacrosanct and cannot be subjected to criticism or revision, whether it be the Holocaust or any other subject under the sun. The problem, however, is that the laws against Holocaust revisionism do not, in fact, forbid either German nationalism or even anti-Semitism: They criminalize contesting the facts as estab-

lished by the Nuremberg trials over sixty years ago.

My previous writings on this subject, completed many years ago, attempted to address these problems. On the one hand, I tried to promote a form of Holocaust revisionism that avoided extravagant conclusions, that sought to respect the sensitivities of all parties, and that attempted, as much as possible, to be grounded in documents that anyone could inspect. I cannot really tell how successful my efforts have been, except that I know that the movement to criminalize Holocaust revisionism has largely retreated in the English-speaking world and I am very grateful for that outcome.

For the record, it is not my interest either to “deny” or “affirm” the Holocaust. The Holocaust in common parlance, and to speak bluntly, is about Germans killing Jews, and certainly this took place. But I cannot endorse Holocaust history with what I consider its ossified approach to its sources, and its unwillingness to entertain doubt or alternative explanations for parts of the historical narrative. At the same time I cannot endorse Holocaust revisionism, if it were conceived as some unified “school,” because of its habitual tendency to downplay the fact that not only did the Germans, under Nazi leadership, kill or cause the deaths of probably several million Jews, but also brought about the uprooting and erasure of Jewish communities which had flourished in Eastern Europe for many hundreds of years.

In my previous writings I was focused mainly on making revisionism non-threatening so as to defend its free speech rights; and, indeed, that is still my primary concern. As a result, however, I did not discuss a number of Holocaust themes or issues except to make glancing reference to them in footnotes. Also, in the ten years or so since I last wrote on the subject, there have been some developments in the field. Consequently, my publisher asked me if I would be willing to provide an overview of the subject as well as the current state of the field and thus the purpose of this essay is to provide just that kind of overview.

To begin, in Section 2, “Two Worlds,” I want to discuss some of the meta-historical issues that surround the Holocaust. This may seem to take us far afield, but actually I think not, because much of our understanding of history, or anything else for that matter, is overwrought with biases and problems of perception. This will culminate in a discussion of historiographical models, in particular, Michael Shermer’s “convergence of evidence” model.

Next, in Section 3, “Proving the Holocaust,” I want to take the method outlined in the previous section and apply it to some documents, or types of documents, to show that a revisionist interpretation of these is likely in some instances, unlikely in others, and probably false in still others. This section will also address much of the typical evidence we have for the “existence” of the Holocaust, tending to omit, however, evidence that I have discussed elsewhere. I will entertain most of the evidence adduced by Shermer and Grobman in their book *Denying History*, as well as a few other documents of timeless interest.

In Section 4, “Forensic Issues and Revisionism,” I will deal with the various technical and forensic issues surrounding the Holocaust, and in particular the mass gassing claim, which I believe is the core issue of the dispute between Holocaust historians and Holocaust revisionists.

In Section 5, “*Aktion Reinhardt* and the Legacy of Forced Labor,” I will discuss this neglected aspect of Holocaust history as well as the manner in which further study supports an alternative Holocaust narrative. In Section 6, “Recent Literature, Broader Concepts, and the Convergence of Evidence,” I will discuss recent developments in Holocaust research, as well as the “convergence of evidence” model in the light of the evidence adduced. This discussion will include my comments on likely future trends. Finally, in Section 7, I will offer my conclusions.

## 2. TWO WORLDS

C RITICS OF HOLOCAUST REVISIONISM frequently deploy various counterarguments that make claims about knowledge, truth, memory, reason, and history. For example, Deborah Lipstadt has linked revisionists to the “relativism” of postmodernism and deconstruction and Richard Evans has quoted Lipstadt approvingly, making it sound as though the traditional history of the Holocaust is the last bulwark against intellectual anarchy. Michael Shermer, in various articles in *Skeptic* magazine, as well as in his two treatments of Holocaust revisionism, has also made similar criticisms about revisionist skepticism and has even offered his own model for epistemological certainty, what he calls the “convergence of evidence.” Lastly, in his lengthy study for the Irving-Lipstadt trial as well as in his book *The Case for Auschwitz*, Robert Jan van Pelt offered a complex argument about epistemology, making the remarkable concession that while there was not “epistemological certainty” about the gas chambers at Auschwitz there was “moral certainty” which evidently he felt was sufficient. It is therefore clear that the defenders of traditional Holocaust are stepping into deep waters and it also seems clear that those of us who feel that revisionism has merit should follow them there.

What I want to do at this point is to unpack and describe some of the factors involved in “knowing” and “certainty,” something we can do rather easily from the history and sociology of philosophy and religion. This will make it possible to define some of the ways in which it has been long accepted that our knowledge of the world is inexact and requires interpretation, but that interpretation is not the same as the facts we observe. It will also be possible, at that point, to define the terms used in the discussion: “Holocaust,” “Denier,” and so on. Finally, such a discussion will make it relatively easy to identify the pitfalls that threaten many who study, and write, not only about this subject but many other subjects as well.

The first point we have to insist on is that it is understood from the beginning of civilization that the world we live in is not the only world that exists. R. J. Hollingdale called this the “Two Worlds Hypothesis” and we will use that locution here.<sup>1</sup> The fundamental notion is that we live in a world of appearances and that beyond, outside, or underneath there is a more basic “real” reality. The classic exposition from ancient times is the parable of Plato’s Cave, in which people are chained in a

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<sup>1</sup> Hollingdale described the concept in an introductory essay to *Schopenhauer: Essays and Aphorisms*, a collection of short pieces by Schopenhauer in English translation. Hollingdale probably got the idea from Nietzsche’s “How the ‘True World’ Finally Became a Fable” in *Twilight of the Idols*, which in turn is reminiscent of what I am presenting here.

cave with their backs to the entrance; they only see the shadows on the wall, not the actual activity at the entrance or outside the cave. The shadows make up the world we live in, that which casts the shadow is the “real” world, and the role of the philosopher is to interpret the reality to those who can only see the shadows. And, as we know from Plato, this is achieved by reasoned, logical dialogue.

Most of us are not familiar with the Platonic notion of reality in our daily lives. But virtually everyone is familiar with the notion as it comes down to us from Christianity, which was heavily influenced by later Platonic philosophy, that is, Neoplatonism. Notions of Heaven, Hell, Kingdom Come, the place where the Christ sits at the right hand of the Father, even the Deity itself, the source of the Tablets, morality, law, right, wrong, good, evil: All these things come, not from the world we live in, but some other place. And, again, we require an intermediary—here, a priest or pope—to explain that higher reality to the rest of us.

Of course this is a highly simplified presentation. I have not included other possible sources of the notion of other-worldliness, including Zoroastrianism, or Judaism, which seems to have imbibed some ideas from the former during the time of the Babylonian Captivity. I have not discussed the anthropological notions of the idea of “another world,” whether it be the state of sleep, the imagination, or simple memory. Nor have I mentioned the notion of unseen causes of other kinds, namely, various pagan gods, angels, demons, demigods, or the numerous household gods, such as elves, gnomes, and so on.

I am however trying to establish three points: the first is that the notion that our knowledge is incomplete because the world we live in is not “real” is as old as civilization. The second point is that this other world, however we construe it, is the source of agency, either for good or ill, in our day to day lives. The third point is that, typically, we get our knowledge of the real world from individuals who claim to know the real one. In other words, in most things, knowledge is legitimized by authority.

A final point I would like to make about the Two Worlds Hypothesis is that it is, I believe, the source of most of what we consider to be “conspiracy theory” in our own times. Whenever anyone talks about a conspiracy theory it inevitably involves a small group of people operating, at it were, invisibly, causing things to happen and covering the traces of their activity. Thus, for example, 9/11 Truthers are people who are convinced that the United States government was somehow involved in the terrible events of September 11, 2001. To that end they devise a complicated theory involving secretly placed explosive charges at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, concealed evidence of this, as well as concealed evidence of the shooting down of Flight 93. It is not hard to understand why such people as the 9/11 Truthers exist: the events were traumatic and led to an expansion of federal power. Therefore, anyone who was traumatized by the events or is suspicious of the government will look for an explanatory model that satisfies their anx-

ieties. However, there are two points to make: first, there is no material evidence to support the theory, a basic characteristic of all conspiracy theories. Second, the theory, again like all conspiracy theories, demands the belief in unseen or invisible agency, which is able to accomplish its work without leaving behind clear material traces of its misdeeds. In short, those who believe in conspiracy theories are no different from those millennia of humans who attributed terrible events to demons, devils, or other invisible supernatural beings.

If the notion of two worlds is long-standing, it is also important to keep in mind that the world of history is also, as it were, another, metaphysical world. Outside of metaphor, the past is not present, one cannot see it, or touch it, or experience it. On the other hand, there are people for whom the world of the past is ever living and more important than the actual world we perceive. Whenever a public intellectual argues that some present-day unpleasantness or injustice has to be looked at “in context” what they are really saying is that the world of the past—that is, history as interpreted by a public intellectual—trumps the world of the present. Thus pressures are created to make historians political advocates on the one hand or high priests on the other.

The idea that our knowledge of reality is limited because the world we live in is different from some other “real” world is not an easy concept to grasp. The situation becomes even more difficult once we focus on the human subject, that is, individual human beings attempting to understand the world. When we look at the thinkers who have attempted to understand the world from our own subjective basis, the most important person is probably Immanuel Kant.

Kant was attempting to address the radical skepticism of another philosopher, David Hume. The only part of Kant that concerns us here is the notion that our ability to know the world is mediated by the actual structure of our mind. Kant derived a number of such structures in his famous critiques in the 1780s. Thus, our perceptions of numerical operations were innate to the mind, our notion of cause and effect was also innate, so too our ability to ask questions that we could not answer, such as whether or not God exists (this last was very controversial at the time). The most fruitful of these Kantian notions is merely the idea that our knowledge of the world is mediated by our mental structures. There are two important consequences: First, it becomes possible to identify innumerable structures of one kind or another that impinge on our ability to know, and, second, it puts the world as it is, that is, the “real” world as it is “in itself” (Kant’s phrase) permanently outside our ability to comprehend.

The latter sounds a little complicated but it really isn’t. If we recognize that our ability to know the world—just one world, now—is limited by our senses and the way our mind operates, then it must follow that we can never know the world except through our senses and our minds. From which it follows that we can never know the world as it is. So much for “Truth” and “Certainty,” and Kant was writing

over two hundred years ago.

For the sake of convenience we can say that the Kantian “structural revolution” has had three main consequences, in sociology, in psychology, and in linguistics. I want to say a word about all three of these, to put modern thought, and modern historiography, into context.

The sociological consequence probably owes as much to Hegel and Marx as it does to Kant, but in all cases the root is the notion of social structures, social arrangements, and economic relations determining human conduct, social organization, mores, beliefs, culture, values, and so on. If we follow the Kantian or Hegelian lead, we get an emphasis on all types of social structures, which includes classical sociology, and most famously Max Weber. If we follow the Marxist model we get an emphasis on economic relations as being the prime mover in determining social structures, and therefore human societies, and therefore what we know and how we know it. But in both cases the idea is the same: human beings exist in specific groups at specific times in specific social and economic structures, therefore their perceptions, and therefore their knowledge, cannot be entirely free from outside influence.

The psychological approach is very fruitful, insofar as much of psychology well into the twentieth century, including the writings of Freud, is concerned with identifying the various psychological structures that inhibit our ability to “know” or to think and act with reason. If I were asked to trace this lineage, I see a clear descent from Kant via Schopenhauer to Nietzsche to Freud, and, for that matter, from Freud to L. Ron Hubbard. Regardless, there is a general recognition that human beings have various mental impediments to objective knowledge, including such things as repression, denial, false memory syndrome, and projection or inversion.

The concept of denial is of course a very relevant mental impediment. There is a telling passage in Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil* which describes the state:

“I have done that,” says my memory. “I could not have done that,” says my pride, and remains inexorable. Finally, my memory yields. [Section 68]

The underlying idea of denial is that there is a reality, and for psychological reasons a person does not want to acknowledge this reality. Therefore, they suppress it. As such, the concept of denial can be carried back to Freud’s theory of repression, that is, the idea that we reflexively suppress unpleasant facts. Freud’s treatment of repressed memory has an important role in the manner in which Holocaust Denial is discussed.

In addition to the overall theory of repression, Freud at one point in his career offered the Seduction Theory. In this, Freud was attempting to explain hysterical symptoms (mostly in women) by claiming that it was caused by repressed memories of infantile sexual abuse. However, he abandoned the theory in the late 1890s because he was finding so many “repressed memories,” that is, memories of sexual

abuse recovered through analysis, that he decided that such prevalence was unlikely. In short, Freud abandoned the Seduction Theory because he disbelieved the indicated high incidence of childhood sexual abuse among his patients.

Now we have to fast forward several decades to the late 1970s and early 1980s when the discussion of the Nazi atrocities against the Jews, that is, the Holocaust, became prevalent. By then there were many critiques of the German “repression” of the Nazi past; among others, Walter Kaufmann, Peter Viereck, Peter Gay, and even Erica Jong had addressed the issue at one point or another in the postwar period. It was in this context that Geoffrey Moussaieff Masson publicized, beginning in 1981, his interpretation that Freud had abandoned the Seduction Theory out of self-interest; that Freud, in effect, denied childhood sexual abuse in order to advance the fledgling discipline of psychoanalysis. In 1981 Karl Menninger could write:

Why oh why couldn't Freud believe his own ears? Why did he knuckle under to those who said, “Oh, people don't do those dreadful things to children.” They are still saying that, just as some people say there was no holocaust, is no torture, etc.<sup>2</sup>

Masson's accusation that Freud was “in denial” had several ramifications. One is that the notion of denial and suppressed memory became much more widely discussed. Second, the notion of repressed memory—particularly of childhood sexual abuse — became widely prevalent, so much so that in the course of the Day Care Sex Abuse Hysteria epidemic of the 1980s memories of improbable abuse were “recovered” in abundance. Indeed, that particular hysteria—which involved memories recovered, or perhaps better, coaxed, from small children—emerged in 1982 and 1984, tracking the presentation of Masson's ideas closely.

It is not my intention to treat the Day Care Sex Abuse Hysteria in any great detail except to note that many of the accusations that were made were completely untenable from any material or physical point of view. In other words, they required a conspiracy theory in order to correspond to reality. Eventually, the numerous trials involved in the epidemic caused the thesis of repressed memory to create its antithesis, in the form of false memory syndrome, most closely associated with Elizabeth Loftus.

To recapitulate, we have been discussing psychological impediments to our ability to know reality. This led us to theories most closely associated with Freud, which led us to the notion of denial involving Freud himself, and the linkage of the concept of denial with the Holocaust. The title of Masson's 1984 book setting forth his theory was *The Assault on Truth: Freud's Suppression of the Seduction Theory*. Deborah Lipstadt's book, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory*, was published in 1993.

Among psychological structures there is one more I would want to emphasize:

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<sup>2</sup> *New York Times*, August 25, 1981.

the tendency people have to see what they expect to see. This is probably a matter of how our mind processes knowledge; encountering something new, we compare it to something we already know, by analogy. Often these analogies can be false. A neat summation of the process was made by Israel Zangwill in his *Big Bow Mystery*, the first and perhaps the most famous of the locked room mysteries:

“Sir, everything depends on our getting down to the root of the matter. What percentage of average evidence should you think is thorough, plain, simple, unvarnished fact, ‘the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?’”

“Fifty?” said the Minister, humoring him a little.

“Not five. I say nothing of lapses of memory, of inborn defects of observational power—though the suspiciously precise recollection of dates and events possessed by ordinary witnesses in important trials taking place years after the occurrences involved, is one of the most amazing things in the curiosities of modern jurisprudence. I defy you, sir, to tell me what you had for dinner last Monday, or what exactly you were saying and doing at five o’clock last Tuesday afternoon. Nobody whose life does not run in mechanical grooves can do anything of the sort; unless, of course, the facts have been very impressive. But this by the way. The great obstacle to veracious observation is the element of prepossession in all vision. Has it ever struck you, sir, that we never see anyone more than once, if that? The first time we meet a man we may possibly see him as he is; the second time our vision is colored and modified by the memory of the first. Do our friends appear to us as they appear to strangers? Do our rooms, our furniture, our pipes strike our eye as they would strike the eye of an outsider, looking on them for the first time? Can a mother see her babe’s ugliness, or a lover his mistress’ shortcomings, though they stare everybody else in the face? Can we see ourselves as others see us? No; habit, prepossession changes all. The mind is a large factor of every so-called external fact. The eye sees, sometimes, what it wishes to see, more often what it expects to see. You follow me, sir?”<sup>3</sup>

To this point we have been talking about structures that inhibit our knowledge of reality. There is the notion of Two Worlds, which requires expert and authoritative interpretation, and which provides the source of conspiracy theories, even in our secular age. There is the notion of mental structures that inhibit our perception of reality, social structures that determine our perception of reality, and psychological structures that filter our understanding, and even cause us to deny reality. There is one more relevant category we need to discuss: linguistic structures and what I will call the fact versus baggage distinction.

Of course the idea of linguistic structures determining our perception of reality could be considered an offshoot of the sociological interpretation or of the analysis of Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus*. However, most writers credit the focus on linguistics-

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<sup>3</sup> Israel Zangwill, *The Big Bow Mystery*, Gutenberg e-text.

tic structures to Saussure, a French Swiss who as a young man was deeply involved in determining the inclusion of Hittite in the Indo-European family of languages. Saussure articulated three points about any word: There is the sign, that is, the sound of the word; there is the signifier, that is, the meaning of the word, which can be very variable and multi-layered, depending on context; and then finally there is the thing to which the word refers.

We can dispense with the issue of word soundings for the most part. It is interesting to note, as Willard Espy once claimed, that the most beautiful sounding word in the English language is “gonorrhea,” which right away reminds us that the sound of a word may have little to do with either its meaning or the thing to which it refers. I have also found it interesting to note, in terms of poetry, that rhyme schemes in different languages are going to depend heavily on chance. For example, American popular songs make great play with rhymes like “together” and “forever,” but you cannot make such rhymes in most other languages. On the other hand, you can rhyme “horse” and “square” in Russian, “heart” and “pain” in German, “nice” and “wet” in Hungarian.

On the other hand, the mere sound of words can have some relevance to the Holocaust—especially when we are looking at German words, particularly when we have been thoroughly prepared to be looking for a specific type of reality. Thus words like “*Luftschutz*,” “*Gaskeller*,” “*Vergasungskeller*,” “*Vergasungsapparat*,” or even “*Organization Todt*” can certainly sound sinister, if we expect them to be.

The meaning of words is very elastic and can involve all types of coding and doublespeak. This is where we turn to George Orwell, Stuart Chase, and Semantics. The key insight is that words are not the things they describe. This is so in two ways: First, because words are frequently misused for rhetorical effect, whether euphemism or exaggeration. Second, because the generalized concepts we create with words are not the same as the things being described, and abstract words in particular tend to take on a life of their own, untethered to any kind of reality whatsoever. This leads us to what I call the fact versus baggage distinction.

If we have a document, or a temperature reading, or an experimental result, or an eyewitness testimony, then we have a fact. As such, the fact is simply there, and has no meaning. The meaning of a fact comes only after it has been analyzed, and interpreted. A fact has no innate value; indeed, a fact may be true or false. A fact has no innate narrative importance. All of this is, and must be, imposed from without, by the interpreter. All of this should be obvious from the foregoing: we need to impose structure on facts. Yet it follows that in imposing structure on facts, we can easily be led into thinking that our imposed structure is the reality, whereas the only reality is the facts we are interpreting.

This is well known in all of the ideas I have been setting forth here. It follows naturally from the Kantian scheme. The German historian Wilhelm Dilthey, who came out of the Kantian tradition, always admonished historians never to confuse

the scaffolding with the building, that is, never confuse the interpretation we are imposing on the facts with the facts themselves. Alfred Korzybski, the founder of General Semantics, counseled that we should not confuse the map with the terrain, that is, we mustn't confuse the words we use with the reality we are describing. And we have already covered Saussure's analogous notion of sign and signifier, a distinction popular in African American studies to this day.

I call these distinctions the fact versus baggage distinction to cut short the need to go into tedious detail about the fact-value distinction, the fact-interpretation distinction, the fact-truth distinction, not to mention other issues, such as the distinction between the context of discovery and the context of justification. All of these things may impinge on the bare reality of a fact, and while we must, by necessity, impose some kind of structure to make facts intelligible, we should never confuse the facts with the structures we are imposing. What this means in practical terms is that our knowledge should always be modest and open to alternative explanations. Post-World War Two intellectual trends, such as structuralism, hermeneutics, deconstruction, and semiotics, all understand these limitations.

To summarize, our perception of reality, our ability to know things, is heavily mediated in many ways: by our assumptions about reality, by our perceptual apparatus, by the way we think, by the social and economic structures in which we live, by our psychological makeup, by the language we use; and the understanding that our ability to know is profoundly limited has been one of the more enduring aspects of the Western approach to the life of the mind for over two thousand years. It follows therefore that those who believe that there are absolute truths, knowledge, and reality are simply ignoring the history of ideas.

But what about values? That brings us to what is I believe the real key here: Most of the time when people talk about the inviolability of certain facts they are really talking about the inviolability of the *interpretation* of certain facts, or, more precisely, the *moral interpretation* of certain facts. In other words, with regard to the Holocaust, disputing facts is taken by many as disputing a particular moral interpretation of the Holocaust. This involves a confusion of the fact versus baggage distinction, specifically, the fact-value distinction.

Now that I have described, admittedly in a very cursory fashion, the various ways in which our knowledge is limited, we can ascertain *how* it is that we know. And the answer is that most of the time we know something because we are told something. All societies are hierarchical in nature, and so we tend to grant authority to knowledge outside of our personal sphere of action when it comes from the government or the most authoritative media; although, naturally, the authority we invest in such sources will depend on their concordance with our individual political, religious, or ideological predispositions. Thus, all other factors being equal, if we hear a thing is true on the radio, or on television, or in the newspaper—hard copy or online—or if we hear it from the government, we will accept it as true.

When reading books, we grant authority based on the strength of what reviewers have said, as well as the authority we are inclined to give such reviewers.

In short, knowledge and truth, for most of us most of the time, come from sources that claim authority. On the other hand, there are other sources of knowledge, for example, gossip, water cooler or back fence chatter, and of course the Internet. These sources have very little authority but may be believed or disbelieved, depending on the susceptibility of individuals or groups of individuals at certain times. In addition, we cannot omit the fact that individuals will have absorbed in the course of their lives myriad other cues that may influence their acceptance or non-acceptance of disseminated information; for example, the voice, inflection or even appearance of the person disseminating the information, or the formal manner in which the information is presented, or whether the information appeals directly or indirectly to privately held vanities or prejudices.

It appears that most moral panics, mild hysterias, or mass delusions are rooted in such indeterminable individual susceptibilities as well as the vagaries of casual oral transmission, and since these things are rarely written down it is virtually impossible to track their development. It is only in recent times that folklorists, anthropologists, and sociologists dealing with what we now call folk myths or urban legends have made strides in understanding these phenomena.

Now finally I have to say a few words about history, or more precisely, how history is structured. History is essentially a narrative; it tells a story of what happened at a specific point in time. But no history can include everything that happened in a specific point in time; furthermore, even if such a history could be written, it would be necessary to decide in what order to present the data. Finally, no historical narrative would be readable if it did not have some kind of theme that guided the narrative—with such a theme, by the way, helping to determine what to include, omit, or highlight.

The notion that history is therefore a structured work of some kind is well known.<sup>4</sup> This insight can lead in many different directions. Is the historian biased by a certain perception of reality, a certain political agenda, or even certain esthetic values? This kind of argument can easily lead to an *argumentum ad hominem* but it is still a fair question to ask. Another question is, just what kind of overarching theme is the historian describing, and is that a valid interpretative model? The most typical model for historical narratives is a variation of what Butterfield called “The Whig Interpretation of History.” According to this model, history is always progressing to greater democracy, prosperity, and triumphs against injustice and inequality. Variations of this model of course go back to Hegel’s philosophy of history, and probably to any history prior to Hegel that pointed to the gradual triumph of Christianity and Enlightened Monarchy, and such models persist to this day, any time a historian or politician describes the progress of history as leading to a “shining city on the hill.”

<sup>4</sup> I do not explore the writings of Hayden White, whose *Metahistory* is very important here, because I see White as contending primarily with literary structures and esthetics rather than with structure as I am discussing it here.

Skeptical or pessimistic interpretative models are also common, and are usually articulated either by outsiders or by individuals who are promoting a progressive social agenda. Spengler definitely belongs to this group, but so do historians like Howard Zinn, and many minority points of view, including feminist, postfeminist, gay or queer, African American or Black, Latino, and so forth. Sometimes the interpretative models that underlay these narratives are—to put it in one word—overextended, but in my experience they almost always highlight some data that had been hitherto unexplored and therefore represent a valid and interesting contribution to historical knowledge. They certainly should not be denigrated or criminalized simply because they tilt against prevailing points of view.

By far the most common structure to historical narrative is national history. According to this model the historian proceeds under the conceit that national groups actually exist in a meaningful way across historical time, then the current status of a national group is told from the distant past to the present day. Everyone who has ever read a textbook on American history is familiar with this model. The model is essentially designed to inspire patriotism among national groups—or even cultural or religious groups—and to make people feel that they are fortunate to be members of a very special group of human beings. Of course, looked at in this way, it begins to sound trivial. And, indeed, it is.

The primacy of national history is important in generating “master narratives,” that is, interpretative models for what to include in a history, what to leave out, and, above all, the curve or sequence of events that should be followed. For example, one could speak of an American master narrative, which begins at Plymouth Rock and ends with the election of Barack Obama. Or one could speak of a pre-World War One German master narrative, which would begin with the defeat of the Romans at Teutoberger Wald and culminate in the wars of unification leading to Germany’s military and economic dominance at the turn of the twentieth century.

Of course, Germany’s defeat in the First World War would require another master narrative, and in this case, the new narrative focused on allegations of betrayal, but it reminds us that master narratives are contingent on historical events and are not unchanging. A Polish master narrative, prior to the First World War, would by necessity be pessimistic. The current Polish master narrative would be much more optimistic, especially if that narrative argued that the dimensions of the Polish state in the ninth century are almost exactly the same as that of the Polish state today. Finally, the Jewish master narrative—and that includes the Holocaust—is today largely optimistic insofar as the creation of the State of Israel is often described as the redemption and deliverance from the Holocaust, as well the bulwark against the repetition of such destruction. I make these distinctions because I will have occasion to refer to the various national master narratives, each of which, of course “has a right to exist” and from each, of course, one can learn much, but none of which is absolute, or should be defended by the force of law.

After all of the foregoing we can now return to the original problem, that is, defining the Holocaust, defining its denial, and defining the way historians should treat the subject.

The first thing we notice is that the Holocaust is not a fact, it is a sign; a sign laden with a very specific significance. What we call the Holocaust was in fact a congeries of events involving millions of people spread over an entire continent. Only the specific events should be of interest to the historian or serious student of the subject. Locutions like “The Holocaust happened” or “The Holocaust didn’t exist” are fundamentally illiterate.

The second thing we notice is that, as a bundle of events, the truth or falsity of one event or some events need not have any bearing either on the sign or the significance of the Holocaust. Alternatively, the sign has nothing to do with the significance and vice versa.

Suppose we say that the Germans persecuted and killed many Jews during the Second World War. Everyone will agree with that statement, even the dreaded “deniers.” Now suppose we say, the Germans killed six million Jews including many in gas chambers in the Second World War. Holocaust revisionists will not accept that statement. Now let us say further that the Germans killed six million Jews including many in gas chambers in the Second World War, but that was nothing compared to the millions of Soviet citizens who died in the 1930s as a result of Stalinist policies or the millions of Germans who died in the expulsions in the latter stages of the war and after. Not many Holocaust historians would accept that statement.

In short, when discussing the Holocaust we are not only dealing with what the Germans did to the Jews, we are discussing the specifics of what the Germans did to the Jews, and we are discussing the proposed importance, value, and morality of what the Germans did to the Jews. These are important distinctions to keep in mind.

The history of the Holocaust, as we normally encounter it, is a master narrative of Jewish history. There are competing views of the Second World War among Poles, Hungarians, Russians, Ukrainians, and virtually any other national group involved. Yet it is mostly the Jewish master narrative that we encounter, a narrative that has also been incorporated into the American master narrative of World War Two. My argument here is not to impugn the right of the Jewish people to tell their history as they wish. Of course, they do, and we should respect this. The real question is whether alternative master narratives should be respected as well.

Holocaust revisionists are actually arguing what is in effect a German master narrative, from a conservative and patriotic point of view. It is true that Holocaust revisionism has a certain attraction to many others who question the overbearing nature of the Jewish or American master narratives, including Arabists, antiwar thinkers of all kinds, hyperempiricists, and even dissident Israelis, but the German

focus is clear simply by the volume of published work. Of course, there is another German master narrative, defended by law, in Germany today. That narrative purposely downplays nationalist sentiment and promotes Europeanization. I have no problem with this narrative model either, and it is probably preferable for the future of Germany. However, once again that does not justify the criminalization of opposing points of view.

Understanding that Holocaust revisionism is essentially a conservative nationalist master narrative of German history makes much of the dispute about the Holocaust easier to understand. Revisionists are skeptical and demand hard evidence for the massacre of Jews at a given time or location: but how would a nationalist of any other stripe react to a similar accusation? Nationalists always respond to accusations of national misconduct with skepticism, a demand for heightened scrutiny, a denial that things were quite as bad as portrayed, either qualitatively or quantitatively, and a certain defensiveness about the conduct of their national group.

Consider Americans, and specifically Southern historians and their interpretations of the Civil War, including the notion of the Lost Cause and the institution of slavery. Consider Israelis and their interpretation of Deir Yassin, the bombing of the King David Hotel, the activities of the Irgun, or the assassination of Count Bernadotte. Consider Americans, again, and the allegations concerning the numbers who perished in the Native American exterminations, or the conduct of Americans during the Philippine Insurrection, or in Vietnam. In all these cases, and many more, there will be some, within the context of a national historical narrative, who will highlight certain misdeeds, or exaggerate alleged crimes, and there will be those whose skepticism will drive an antithetical interpretation. Holocaust revisionism is no different than any other school of historical interpretation in this respect—except that it is the only such school that is explicitly against the law.

Generally, Holocaust revisionists do not dispute that the Germans persecuted all the Jews under their sphere of influence, put them into camps, plundered their wealth, subjected them to forced labor, killed many, and caused the deaths of many more. Revisionists tend to advance three points: that the number killed was much less than six million, that people were not killed in gas chambers, and that there was no plan to kill all of the Jews of Europe, let alone the world. But, to be fair, that's not all revisionists tend to say. They also tend to downplay and minimize the criminal and indeed immoral nature of this destruction, and at best relativize it with regard to the myriad other atrocities that took place in eastern Europe before, during, and after the Second World War.

My view is that Holocaust revisionists are compelling on the subject of mass gasings and on the intention to kill all of the Jews of Europe. I think they understate the number of casualties and, while I agree that the Holocaust needs to be put into context with other Central and East European atrocities, it is simply disre-

spectful and counterproductive to ignore the extent and the experience of Jewish suffering.

If the Holocaust is a vast collection of events, describing the German persecution and massacre of the Jewish people, then what constitutes Holocaust denial? The answer appears to be in the eye of the beholder: Lipstadt never clearly defined the term in her book. Generally speaking, anyone who disputes any part of the standard master narrative runs the risk of being called a denier. In the case of the British historian David Irving, the accusation appears particularly egregious: Irving accepts that millions of Jews died or were killed, and even that gassings took place. Yet he was marked as a “denier” not so much for denying facts of the Holocaust as for his right-wing affiliations, his occasional public comments showing disrespect for the Holocaust and the Jewish people, and his interpretation that Hitler was not involved in the mass killing of the Jews.

The term “denier” has been used in other contexts as well. Thus, the German historian Ernst Nolte, who writes from a nationalist apologetic slant, but who disputes no atrocities, has been accused by Lipstadt of engaging in “softcore denial.” Lipstadt has even accused critics of Israel of a “form” of “denial,” especially if it involves a comparison of Israel with the Nazi state.<sup>5</sup>

What’s going on here? It seems clear that “denier” has become an all-purpose epithet, used as a malediction or anathema against anyone who disagrees, not just about facts, but even about interpretations. Thus “denier” has become the more ornate and forbidding “denialist,” and is applied to anyone who disagrees with a specific interpretation about virtually anything. Thus we have Global Warming “denialists” who refuse to accept the consensus interpretation about climate change, stem cell “denialists” who question the value of fetal stem cell research, and Evolution “denialists” who refuse to accept the standard interpretation about how species differentiate. And, as if to add force to the arguments, such “denialists” are often compared to Holocaust deniers.

The degeneration of the original concept is striking. Denial originally involved the involuntary repression of facts about reality with which the individual could not cope. Today, denial or denialism involves the implied deliberate refusal to accept the validity of someone else’s arguments, and moreover, from a deliberately malicious or at any rate socially destructive stance. In other words, it is an accusation of bad faith. Instead of persuasion and reconciliation in our intellectual discourse, we have introduced distance and denunciation.

Some might suggest that the use of the concept of “denial” and “denialism” comes largely from the left or progressive side of the political spectrum, so that to “deny” “denial” is in effect the refuge of the right-wing critic. However, the right-wing already has words to describe the obdurate refusal to accept someone else’s version of reality, words like “heresy” and “blasphemy.” To put “denial” in the company of

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<sup>5</sup> “Denial of the Holocaust and Immoral Equivalence,” The Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (August 1, 2003).

such words, along with tracing its roots to similar Leninist, Stalinist, and Maoist techniques of denunciation, is entirely appropriate: All intellectual bullies should stick together.

The concept of denial or denialism, as it has now polluted our intellectual life, should be seen for what it is: a sign of failure. I have noted that truth, knowledge, and reality, for most of historic time, required the interpretation of an intermediary: a priest, a philosopher, someone in a position of authority. Yet that is not enough anymore, since the fragmentation of communities, and the progressive opening up of avenues of communication, has reduced the voices of authority to the level of voices among voices.

It is not enough to say that a “consensus” accepts the validity of one interpretation over another: That amounts to nothing more than saying that “most people believe” something, which is no cause for comfort, given the documented history of human stupidity. The only way in which an official, or quasi-official, position can be defended, the only way “truth” can actually be achieved, is by the original method of the ancient Greeks: by dialogue. Yet the accusation of “denial” says that there is no need for dialogue, the issue of the truth or falsity of a specific point of view is settled, final, not to be discussed. This may be fine for core moral values, but to introduce the idea into general intellectual discourse is to betray a degenerate reactionary tendency that traduces the entire Western tradition of intellectual life.

### 3. PROVING THE HOLOCAUST

**T**HE BEST-KNOWN ARGUMENT for proving the Holocaust comes from Michael Shermer, who has written several articles and books since the 1990s developing the concept of the “convergence of evidence.” According to this model, we know the historical truth of a thing because various types of evidence point to a central conclusion, in this case, the central conclusion being: It happened. There is a certain circular reasoning involved here, as I noted when I reviewed *Denying History* ten years ago:

*Shermer’s “convergence of evidence” argument appears to be rather that, if various classes of evidence do not contradict the central assertion, these other classes of evidence corroborate, or converge, on that central conclusion. In the same way, an old woman in the seventeenth century could have been shown to have gamboled in a midnight glade with Satan—and then been burned at the stake, so long as a broom and a cat were produced.<sup>6</sup>*

Of course, given the discussion above, I think anyone who seeks to “prove” the Holocaust, let alone “deny” it, is playing with empty shapes, since the Holocaust is just a word. However, in the course of his exposition Shermer, and co-author Grobman, set forth a lot of documentary evidence and I will cover most of it here, insofar as I have not covered it before, and insofar as I consider it important.

I should stipulate at the outset that I do not think that the two sides are that far apart, with the exception of the mass gassing claim, which I have covered elsewhere and concerning whose forensic features I will cover a bit farther on. I should also stipulate that I do not question—I don’t think many revisionists do—that Nazi Germany was an anti-Semitic state which persecuted all Jews under its control and, especially after the invasion of the Soviet Union, began to kill them, or otherwise cause their deaths, in large numbers. There is a major argument between the two sides as to how many Jewish people perished. I have nothing to add to that argument, since it is largely a statistical argument, rather than a historical one.

#### 3.1 THE MASSACRE AT BABI YAR (SEPTEMBER 29–30, 1941)

In late September 1941, shortly after the Germans had taken the city of Kiev, there were some explosions with some casualties in a building occupied by the

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<sup>6</sup> “Denying History,” *Journal of Historical Review* 20, no. 1 (January–February 2001): 45.

German army, and, in addition, there was a fire that de-housed approximately 25,000 non-Jewish residents of the Ukrainian capital. A “situation report” by one of the *Einsatzgruppen* (Special Groups) describes what happened next:

Partly because of the better economic situation of the Jews under the Bolshevist regime and their activities as informers and agents of the NKVD, partly because of the explosions and the resulting fires, the public feeling against the Jews was very strong. As an added factor it was proved that the Jews participated in the arson. The population expected adequate retaliatory measures by the German authorities. Consequently all Jews of Kiev were requested, in agreement with the city commander, to appear on Monday, 9/29/1941 by 8 o'clock at a designated place. These announcements were posted by members of the Ukrainian militia in the entire city. Simultaneously it was announced orally that all Jews were to be moved. In collaboration with the group staff and 2 Kommandos of the police regiment South, the Sonderkommando 4a executed [exekutiert] on 9/29-30/1941, 33,771 Jews.<sup>7</sup>

The massacre described is better known as the massacre at Babi Yar, a ravine on the northern end of the city.

I see no reason to doubt this report as it stands. There were explosions, and a fire, and for reprisal reasons, and other reasons, a massacre was perpetrated. The only really unique feature about this massacre is the number of victims, which, at thirty-three thousand, ranks as perhaps the worst shooting massacre of World War Two.

The first revisionist objection to this reported massacre is that there may have been alteration of the report. Unfortunately, this is possible, since all of the German records were captured, and were used in trials after the war with the specific intent of repudiating the Nazi regime. Hence, any fair observer has to recognize that the possibility of forgery or alteration is high.

On the other hand, I can give several reasons why the report is probably accurate.

The first is that the Germans carried out reprisal and hostage shootings in both world wars. In 1914, some two thousand Belgians were shot in reprisal for attacks on German soldiers that were not recognized as legitimate by the German government. In World War Two, there were several other reprisal or hostage shootings carried out in the west that are well known. For example, the 2<sup>nd</sup> SS Panzer Division (*Das Reich*) carried out collective punishment reprisals at Tulle and Oradour-sur-Glane in June 1944, killing about 600, after an SS officer had been captured and some 40 German soldiers had been captured, killed, and mutilated by French resistants. Another well known example was the reprisal shooting of 335 Italians after an improvised explosive device killed thirty-three German soldiers in Rome. In other words, the Germans had a tradition, borrowed from European tradition, that justified the shooting of hostages and reprisal shootings and they followed that tradition in the Second World War.

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<sup>7</sup> Ernst Klee, ed., “Schöne Zeiten,” 66-70.

Another reason is that I find the idea of doctoring or forging large quantities of documents farfetched and hard to sustain without evidence. This doesn't mean that some documents were not forged; but the *Einsatzgruppen* reports comprise several thousand pages and the notion that they were systematically gone through to inject incriminating material doesn't strike me as very credible.

Still another reason why I believe the report is probably accurate is because it can be triangulated with much other data, exclusive of the *Einsatzgruppen* reports, that indicate that the Germans were engaged, often with the help of the local population, in the wholesale massacre of Jews. The Jäger report, for example, itemizes the shooting of 137,346 people, the vast majority of them Jewish, by one of these special German units in Lithuania, and since the report is an itemization of the number shot on successive days the notion that a forger could have prepared it with sufficient self-discipline to make it plausible strikes me as extremely remote. There are radio signals, Enigma decodes, private letters, and even photographic evidence of massacres of this type, involving Jewish men, women, and children. It is possible that some of this evidence, and in particular, some of the photographs, are inauthentic in terms of what they represent, or have been cropped or retouched so many times that the original imagery is hard to retrieve. However, even setting aside the questionable documents, the corpus of evidence is large, multilayered, and therefore likely to be true.

Returning to Babi Yar, a further objection by revisionists is that no one has ever identified the grave site. This is, in fact, a serious objection. In November 1943, two years after the massacre, the Soviets reoccupied the city and showed the site of Babi Yar to journalists, along with some bodies. No one has ever excavated the site where the original 33,000 were slain, and, over the years the number claimed to have been executed at Babi Yar during the German occupation has risen to 100,000, and even as high as a quarter of a million. A certain amount of skepticism over these escalating claims is fair. In his interrogations, Paul Blobel, who was supposed to have been in charge of the unit that carried out the massacre, denied that he was even in Kiev at the time of the massacre but later relented and admitted his involvement. Still, he claimed that the total wasn't 33,000 but "no more than half that."<sup>8</sup>

The tremendous range of potential victims at Babi Yar opens the door to variable assessments of the extent of the massacre. Many people, who equate history with moral judgment rather than historical understanding, consider any attempt to clarify or rectify the number of dead at Babi Yar as immoral and an attempt to apologize for the Nazi regime. In some cases, this might be true. But it is certainly not true that people who are skeptical of body counts are only on one side. For example, after the firebombing of Dresden in February 1945, a variety of casualty

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<sup>8</sup> NARA (National Archives), Paul Blobel affidavit (NO 3947), June 6, 1947, which in turn is based almost entirely on the interrogations of May 26–27, 1947. In the first of these interrogations, Blobel claimed that the 33,000 death toll was impossible and claimed no involvement. In the second interrogation, Blobel was asked about the 33,000 total as a final question, and simply claimed that the total was too high. In both interrogations, Blobel claimed that the report of the massacre—like all such reports—was prepared in Osnabrück in Germany with an implication of its unreliability.

statistics were offered, ranging from about 35,000 to 250,000. David Irving's book on Dresden, published in 1963, suggested 135,000 as the true total. Various opponents of Irving, ranging from Lucy Dawidowicz, to Deborah Lipstadt, to Richard Evans, have always picked the lowest possible body count for Dresden, somewhere between 25,000 and 35,000, and those totals are based on an actual body count. Meanwhile, a couple of years ago, Irving located an Enigma decode at the Public Records Office in London indicating that in the aftermath of the bombing 100,000 Dresdeners were missing, which means that higher casualty totals are not altogether without merit.

My point is twofold. One cannot determine with complete confidence the number of dead in any incident of mass death in the absence of thorough forensics: attempts to establish accuracy almost always are based on an ideological preference either to inflate, or to diminish, a well-known total. The second point is that such arguments about number are almost always best interpreted as an attempt to make a moral evaluation, rather than to establish historical fact; as if the cruelty, malignant or negligent, of any instance of mass killing were tied to a specific number.

In the end, the only fact we have at our disposal about the massacre at Babi Yar is that the Germans claimed to have executed 33,000 Jews there in September 1941, as a reprisal, and that claim will stand unless and until some contrary evidence is found. At the same time, we must keep in mind that this massacre took place within a larger context in which hundreds of thousands of Soviet Jews were shot in 1941, something which the *Einsatzgruppen* reports, and many other documents, support.

### 3.2 THE WETZEL-LOHSE MEMORANDUM (OCTOBER 25, 1941)

The Wetzel-Lohse memorandum, better known as NO-365, is one of three documents that come from the files of Alfred Rosenberg, who was the chief theorist of the Nazi party and by 1941 was also the Reichskommissar for the Occupied Eastern Territories of the Soviet Union. I have discussed the document extensively before, but I would like to cover some other ground here. I should note that Shermer and Grobman do not use this document. Some background to the document is necessary.

When the Allies captured German records they would process them in order to extract potentially incriminating documents. Since the purpose was to use German documents for trial purposes, this is understandable, but it creates massive problems of context for historical coherence. In this case, documents were found among Alfred Rosenberg's papers and were processed. Three documents were considered especially promising and were submitted to prosecutors for possible accessioning. For the trials, selected documents were given a code number; thus, "501-PS," the gas van documents, represents the 501<sup>st</sup> document accessioned by Colonel Storey at the War Crimes Investigative Unit in Paris. Other series include "L" (processed in London), "NO" (Nuremberg Organizations, processed in Nuremberg) and "NI"

(Nuremberg Industrialists, also processed in Nuremberg). Documents would usually be filed in the following format: a staff analysis consisting of a summary of the document and its proposed value, in English; an English translation of the document; and then finally a copy of the original document.

Erhard Wetzel was a legal advisor for Rosenberg's office, and Hinrich Lohse was the Reichskommissar of Ostland, roughly covering the current Baltic states plus the northern half of Belarus, and thus a deputy of Alfred Rosenberg. The draft Wetzel-Lohse memo was therefore essentially an interoffice communication between Wetzel and Lohse, which explains why the draft ended up in Rosenberg's office. The memo was given the number "NO-365," meaning simply it was the 365<sup>th</sup> document accessioned in that series. The other two pieces were accessioned much later, the first of which is NO-997, a two page memo draft meant to introduce NO-365, and referencing a meeting among Wetzel, from Rosenberg's office, Dr. Brack, from the Führer Chancellery and also the nominal head of the euthanasia program, and Adolf Eichmann, from the RSHA of the SS and actively involved in Jewish deportations. The second document is NO-998, which is a handwritten draft of NO-997. I consider NO-997 and NO-998 to be genuine and therefore I have no question about NO-365, either. I note in passing that NO-365 in turn references a document from Lohse dated October 4, 1941, but no one as yet has found this document.

NO-365 is a two-page memo and contains these excerpts which are the object of the entire discussion:

*With reference to my letter of October 18, 1941, this is to inform you that Oberdienstleiter Brack of the Führer Chancellery has agreed to collaborate in the production of the required shelters and gassing devices [der erforderlichen Unterkünfte sowie der Vergasungsapparate]. At this time, the envisaged devices [Apparate] are not available in sufficient quantity; they will first have to be manufactured. Since in Brack's opinion, the manufacture of the devices [Apparate] in the Reich will cause much greater difficulties than doing it on the spot, Brack considers it most expedient to send his people to Riga, especially his chemist Dr. Kallmeyer, who will effect all further steps there. Oberdienstleiter Brack points out that the procedure in question is not without danger, so that special protective measures are necessary.*

[....]

*According to information from Sturmbannführer Eichmann, camps for Jews are to be set up in Riga and Minsk, to which Jews from the Old Reich territory may also come. At this time, Jews are being evacuated out of the Old Reich to Litzmannstadt (Lodz), and also other camps, to then later be used for labor in the east insofar as they are capable of work.*

*As things now are, there are no objections if the Jews who are not capable of work,*

are eliminated with the Brackian remedy [*Brackschen Hilfsmitteln*]. In this way, events such as those that, according to a report in front of me, took place on the occasion of the shootings of the Jews in Vilna, and which, considering that the shootings were carried out in public, can hardly be excused, will no longer be possible. On the other hand, those capable of work will be transported for labor in the east. It goes without saying that the male and female Jews capable of work will be kept apart.

I have provided the original German for the controversial words. I was taken to task for making, in “The Gas Chamber of Sherlock Holmes,” what I considered to be the common sense observation that, in a disinfection context, the document refers to constructing delousing stations with fumigation vaults that would use Zyklon B. I responded at that time, but continued to look at the issue, and want to recapitulate what I have found out.

The first thing I should say is that, in terms of word usages, the only translation of “*der erforderlichen Unterkünfte sowie der Vergasungsapparate*” that is not strained is “the necessary buildings as well as the fumigation vaults.” Of course, an “*Unterkunft*” may be a barracks or a hut, it is however construed as a relatively simple building. A “*Vergasungsapparat*” is simply a kind of “gas chamber” for disinfecting objects.

KEMPER(H.). **Ein neuer Vergasungsapparat zur Schwefeldioxydherzeugung.** [A new Gas Generator for producing Sulphur Dioxide.]—*Z. Desinfekt.*, xxi, no. 12, pp. 301–302, 1 fig. Dresden, December 1929.

A reference to a “*Vergasungsapparat*” in a disinfection context



Vier nebeneinander liegende Vergasungskammern (Foto: B. Tesch)

A bank of fumigation vaults

The first time this document was apparently used by the Nuremberg prosecutors was in the cross-examination of Viktor Brack in May 1947. First, he was baited with NO-997. He did not recognize the document, so then they submitted NO-365

for his review. He claimed to know nothing about this memo, or the meeting, and objected to the use of his name in the phrase “*Brackschen Hilfsmitteln*” which was being proposed as identical to the “*Vergasungsapparate*” but which I consider a generic reference to euthanasia.<sup>9</sup>

None of the other people mentioned in the document ever endorsed its contents either. Eichmann, for example, denied its contents at his trial, and his lawyer was prepared to question its authenticity, before being stopped by the Jerusalem court. That court, on the other hand, did not see the exact relevance of the document since, after all, no one claims that anyone was ever gassed in Riga. Lohse was aggressively interrogated on the document several times, but claimed to have no knowledge about it. Kallmeyer was deposed during Brack’s trial but said nothing about it. Only some years later, around the time of the Eichmann trial, did Wetzel finally make a vague reference to a gas van.

There is no question that the prosecution at Nuremberg considered the document to be about building homicidal gas chambers in Riga. No one connected to the document has ever confirmed this. Early postwar accounts of Nazi atrocities, including Poliakov’s *Harvest of Hate* and Reitlinger’s *Final Solution*, both assumed the document pertained to homicidal gas chambers. Only in the late ’50s was the argument made that the document referred instead to “gas vans” and this only on the strength of the fact that gas vans were supposedly in Riga. However, there is no way to get “gas vans” out of “*der erforderlichen Unterkünfte sowie der Vergasungsapparate*” without a completely arbitrary mangling of the German language.

Further research that I have conducted over the years confirms that there were in fact gas chambers in Riga; however, these were fumigation vaults or other spaces that had been converted for the fumigation of clothing and furniture. Evidence can be found in the transcripts of the Tesch-Weinbacher trial that show that Tesch employees went to Riga in the fall of 1941 to instruct people on how to use Zyklon B for disinfection; the discovery, by the British historian David Irving, of an Enigma decode in the PRO files that confirmed the visit by Tesch personnel to Riga; and a cache of correspondence between Tesch and Riga over quantities of Zyklon and how it was to be used. (This latter cache was misunderstood by Raul Hilberg and led him to make the erroneous assertion about the existence of later grades of Zyklon D, E, and F.)<sup>10</sup>

In short, I have found nothing in my research to contradict my previous conclusion that this document is authentic and concerns the construction of delousing and disinfection installations at Riga for disinfection purposes.

Clearly the only reason why the document was ever used in the first place is

<sup>9</sup> See my response to a critic, “Response to J. McCarthy on NO-365, The Wetzel-Lohse Correspondence.” Brack’s testimony about NO-365 and surrounding documents is at NARA, M 887, R 8, F 1004-F 1010.

<sup>10</sup> On the Tesch Weinbacher trial, consult *Tesch-Weinbacher Trial*, Public Records Office, London, WO235/83; on PRO decodes consult documentation on David Irving’s website, [www.fpp.co.uk](http://www.fpp.co.uk); for Raul Hilberg’s misconstrual consult *The Destruction of the European Jews* (3rd ed.), 955; for the original documents consult NARA, T 459, Roll 3, scattered references throughout, but in particular F 696-697.

because it refers to gassing (*Vergasung*) in such a way that a homicidal use can be construed. However, in the past 15 years there have been numerous discoveries of that same word in a perfectly innocuous fumigation context, so the interpretation of the memo has been undercut. In this respect, I have to note that the German historian Christian Gerlach, in a footnote to an article about the quality of Eichmann's postwar accounts (which Gerlach assessed as low), claimed that the meeting of Wetzel, Brack, and Eichmann "probably never took place," which in this context can only mean that documents NO-365, NO-997, and NO-998 were forged. However, I think Gerlach was only led to that conclusion because he doesn't believe that the meeting was about gas chambers. And it wasn't: it was about erecting Zyklon B gas chambers for fumigation, but, in the immediate postwar climate, and for many years thereafter, no leading Nazi would want to confess to having had anything to do with Zyklon B disinfection gas chambers.<sup>11</sup>

### 3.3 THE WANNSEE CONFERENCE (JANUARY 20, 1942)

The Wannsee Conference took place on January 20, 1942, and involved Reinhard Heydrich, Adolf Eichmann, and a dozen other top Nazi officials. Long assumed as a "starting point" for the extermination of the Jewish people, it is rarely construed that way anymore, and since Shermer and Grobman also quote Yehuda Bauer, who considers that interpretation a "silly story," I see no reason to belabor the point. The best known passage of the minutes of the conference is as follows:

*Under proper guidance, in the course of the final solution the Jews are to be allocated for appropriate labor in the East. Able-bodied Jews, separated according to sex, will be taken in large work columns to these areas for work on roads, in the course of which action doubtless a large portion will be eliminated by natural causes. The possible final remnant will, since it will undoubtedly consist of the most resistant portion, have to be treated accordingly, because it is the product of natural selection and would, if released, act as the seed of a new Jewish revival.<sup>12</sup>*

There is nothing in this passage about killing people, but there is explicit reference to deaths as a result of forced labor. This indicates a lack of concern for Jewish life, and even, as awful as it sounds, a hope for a large-scale dying off of Jewish deportees. However, in all fairness this passage cannot be construed as either a plan or policy to kill all of the Jews of Europe. Therefore the passage can be better understood as a prelude to the deportations that will follow, from western Europe to Poland, and from Poland elsewhere. It is also worth noting that some thousands or tens of thousands of Jews were later forced to work on various highways in the occupied Soviet Union: the work on *Durchgangsstrasse IV* (Highway 4) in Ukraine being the best known, which coincides with the above quote.

<sup>11</sup> Christian Gerlach, "The Eichmann Interrogations in Holocaust Historiography," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 5, no. 3 (2001): 428-452, note 52.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Shermer and Alex Grobman, *Denying History*, 220; for Bauer's criticism, 211.

### 3.4 GOEBBELS' DIARY (MARCH 27, 1942)

Hitler's propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels kept a diary throughout the war. At the end of the war, the glass plates containing the full diary disappeared, but there were enough available hard copy extracts to publish large parts of the diary in the 1950s. In the early 1990s, the British historian David Irving located and authenticated the original glass plates and used these as a basis for his biography of Goebbels. The source has since been used by others, notably Ian Kershaw in his two-volume biography of Adolf Hitler.

There are several entries in the diary that make it clear that both Goebbels and Hitler wanted the Jews out of Europe, by one method or another. In addition, there are several entries in Goebbels' diary that show his awareness of the anti-Jewish measures in the east. The most well-known is the following:

Mar 27, 1942 (II.3.561)

Beginning with Lublin, the Jews in the General Government are now being evacuated (*abgeschoben*) eastward. The procedure is a pretty barbaric one and not to be described here more definitely. Not much will remain of the Jews. On the whole it can be said that about 60 percent of them will have to be liquidated (*liquidiert*) whereas only about 40 percent can be used for forced labor.

The former Gauleiter of Vienna, who is to carry this measure through, is doing it with considerable circumspection and according to a method that does not attract too much attention. A judgment is being visited upon the Jews that, while barbaric, is fully deserved by them. The prophecy which the Führer made about them for having brought on a new World War is beginning to come true in a most terrible manner. One must not be sentimental in these matters. If we did not fight the Jews, they would destroy us (*vernichten*). It's a life-and-death struggle between the Aryan race and the Jewish bacillus. No other government and no other regime would have the strength for such a global solution of this question. Here, too, the Führer is the undismayed champion of a radical solution necessitated by conditions, and therefore inexorable. Fortunately a whole series of possibilities presents itself for us in wartime that would be denied us in peacetime. We shall have to profit by this.<sup>13</sup>

As with any diary entry of this type, the first thing we have to do is establish context. We know from previous diary entries (referencing "11 million Jews" to be deported) that Goebbels was familiar with the minutes of the Wannsee conference. We know that by March 27, 1942, "Aktion Reinhard" had been underway for about two weeks. The "former Gauleiter of Vienna" is a reference to Odilo Globocnik, who was in charge of "Aktion Reinhard."

It seems clear that mass destruction of some kind is contemplated, hence "bar-

<sup>13</sup> Stäglich, *Auschwitz*, 88-89, is one of several sources for this diary entry, in German and English.

baric.” It is also clear that Goebbels is privy to some preliminary estimates, which indicate that somewhat less than half of the deportees are envisioned as being used for forced labor, with the remainder “liquidated,” which I presume means killed. However, the 60/40 split cannot be considered anything other than a secondhand preliminary estimate passed on to Goebbels, who was, in any case, hardly an insider on what was actually happening to the Jews being deported. In short, the diary entry indicates that Polish Jewry will be deported, some of them will be killed, and others will be put to work. That seems to me the simplest and most obvious explanation for this entry, and accords with the quote from the Wannsee Conference.

### 3.5 HIMMLER TO HITLER, NO-1128 (DECEMBER 29, 1942)

This document, also known as “*Meldung Nr. 51*” (Report No. 51) is a tabulation of antipartisan activity in the occupied Soviet Union, specifically Southern Russia, Ukraine, and Bialystok. Under the heading “2.) Partisan Helpers and Presumed Partisans” there is an enumeration under subhead c.) which reads: “Jews executed” (*Juden exekutiert*) with monthly totals as follows:

August	31,246
September	165,282
October	95,735
November	70,948
Total	363,211

Offhand, I see no reason to question this document. It records the execution of 363,000 Jews in the occupied Soviet Union, we know such shootings took place, and we know that Jews in the Soviet Union were involved in partisan activity.

The document reminds us of some other documents: a notation in Himmler’s calendar from a meeting with Hitler where it is scribbled, “*Judenfrage—als Partisanen auszurotten*” (“The Jewish Question—to be exterminated as partisans”) from December 1941, as well as the famous affidavit and testimony of Friedrich Hermann Graebe, describing the executions that occurred in Dubno, Ukraine, around October 5, 1942, which fit the time and the location of the above document.

Revisionists tend to contest the document because it is usually shown on its own, without any surrounding context, and therefore the document could have been altered or forged. As with any captured German document, this is possible. However, the proper method when confronted with a document of this type is neither to assume its validity nor its falsity but to do some research to see where it can fit into a documentary base.

As it happens there is a large secondary literature, based on documents, that describes the antipartisan activities of the Germans in the fall of 1942, as well as the liquidation of Jewish ghettos in Volynhia-Podolia during this time frame. Various groups of Germans, ethnic Germans, and large numbers of local Poles, Ukrainians,

and Belarussians were involved in these exercises, and the numbers one arrives at by a cursory inspection are of an order of magnitude that matches the report's totals. To be sure, there are those who will argue against the secondary evidence: the interpretation of the Himmler notation, for example, or the Graebe affidavit. However, that doesn't undercut the large amount of primary data, most of it made available in recent decades, which support the contention that large numbers of Jews in the occupied Soviet Union were shot in the fall of 1942. Therefore I see little reason to question either that these shootings did in fact take place or that this report is an accurate summary of those shootings.

A further argument could be made that these shootings were after all in the form of antipartisan warfare, and therefore did not constitute an attempt to exterminate all of the Jews in the Soviet Union, or in Eastern Europe. There is some merit to this objection. For example we know that these mass shootings were taking place when the exploitation of Jewish labor was becoming common in the Government General in occupied Poland. In addition, we know that other ghettos and concentration camps in the north and east of the occupied Soviet Union would continue in operation for another year or more. As a matter of fact the suggestion that several hundred thousand Jews were slain in the occupied Soviet Union by shooting undercuts the notion that it was necessary to kill the Jews of Poland by some method other than shooting, because the mass deportations of Polish Jews were happening simultaneously with these massacres.

However, if we look at it from another point of view, the mass shootings summarized in this report can easily be construed as simply more killing of Jews because they are Jews. After all, the *Einsatzgruppen* reports give manifold reasons for shooting Jews: because they were communists, because they were plunderers, because they constituted a threat of disease, because there needed to be reprisals for attacks on German troops. Adding partisan activity could easily be seen as just another pretext. The result was the same: large numbers of Jews were killed. At some point one can look at the end result, with hundreds of thousands of Jewish deaths, and conclude that it was that result alone that guided policy. A final assessment may be more nuanced, but that is certainly a justifiable point of view.

### 3.6 HITLER'S REMARKS TO ADMIRAL HORTHY (APRIL 17, 1943)

On this date, Adolf Hitler and his foreign minister Joachim Ribbentropp continued their discussions with the Hungarian regent. At one point, Hitler, according to the minutes, launched into the following tirade:

*Where the Jews were left to themselves, as for example in Poland, gruesome poverty and degeneracy had ruled. They were just pure parasites. One had fundamentally cleared up this state of affairs in Poland. If the Jews didn't want to work, they were shot. If they couldn't work, they had to perish. They had to be treated like tuberculosis bacilli, from which a healthy body can be infected. That was not*

cruel; if one remembered that even innocent natural creatures like hares and deer had to be killed so that no harm was caused. Why should one spare the beasts who wanted to bring us bolshevism? Nations who did not rid themselves of Jews perished.

This is a relatively straightforward quote, and reveals not only Hitler's anti-Semitism but also his ruthlessness with regards to the Jewish people. However, this is not an extermination plan either: the killing of Jews, or allowing them to die, is clearly being contrasted against forced labor. This is consistent with Goebbels' diary from March 1942, and the Wannsee Conference of January 1941.<sup>14</sup>

### 3.7 HIMMLER'S SECRET SPEECHES (OCTOBER 4, 6, 1943)

On October 4, 1943, Heinrich Himmler, the head of the SS, and the man most responsible for the treatment of the Jewish people under the Third Reich, gave a speech to a group of SS leaders. In the three-hour speech, he made the following well-known statement:<sup>15</sup>

I shall speak to you here with all frankness of a very serious subject. We shall now discuss it absolutely openly among ourselves, nevertheless we shall never speak of it in public. I mean the evacuation of the Jews, the extermination of the Jewish people [*die Ausrottung des jüdischen Volkes*].

It is one of those things which is easy to say. 'The Jewish people are to be exterminated,' says every Party member. 'That's clear, it's part of our program, elimination of the Jews, extermination, right, we'll do it.'

And then they all come along, the eighty million good Germans, and each one has his decent Jew. Of course the others are swine, but this one is a first-class Jew. Of all those who talk like this, not one has watched, not one has stood up to it. Most of you know what it means to see a hundred corpses lying together, five hundred, or a thousand. To have gone through this and yet—apart from a few exceptions, examples of human weakness—to have remained decent fellows, this is what has made us hard. This is a glorious page in our history that has never been written and shall never be written.

I see no reason to question this quote, because, as Stäglich notes, Himmler spoke on the basis of outline notes, and in another speech, given two days later, he said essentially the same thing as the above, but in slightly different words. Stäglich and others question the document and believe it to be altered, and as I noted above that is possible with any captured German document, but I do not consider it likely.

Another tack of criticism is that "*Ausrottung*" means something other than "extermination" in the above, and I don't consider that a valid criticism either. At the same time, it is clear from the historical context that "extermination" was some-

<sup>14</sup> Shermer and Grobman, *Denying History*, 195, is one source for Hitler's remarks, slightly different from the one quoted here.

<sup>15</sup> Stäglich, *Auschwitz*, 62-76, contains all the material in this section in German and in English translation.

times used in a figurative context. The easiest way to see this is how Americans discuss the extermination of the Native Americans. Everyone uses the phrase, but no one uses it with the assumption that all of the Native Americans were killed, or meant to be killed. Frankly, the possibility of the ambiguity of the word in German must be clear, since both Adolf Hitler and Robert Ley—if not others—made public speeches in which they called for the “*Ausrottung des jüdischen Volkes*” and party members in Germany wouldn’t have used the word casually in the way Himmler attributes to them if it manifestly meant killing. Put another way, Himmler is saying that the evacuation of the Jews is equal to the well known phrase “*Ausrottung*” of the Jewish people, and he is disclosing to his audience the reality of what that phrase means.

The first two paragraphs of the extract make little sense if we do not admit a figurative meaning to the word “*Ausrottung*.” There would be no reason for Himmler to prepare his audience, or adjure them to silence, if the word did not have a dual meaning, the more homicidal aspects of which he was about to reveal. The paragraphs also support the contention that the German people were deliberately kept in the dark about how the Jews were being treated in Eastern Europe, although there is plenty of evidence that soldiers returning home from the Eastern front brought stories of the mass shooting of Jews and there were plenty of rumors circulating about mass gassings.

I note the reference to the hundred, five hundred, or thousand bodies lying there. This is in a secret speech to top SS officers, but clearly few were involved in the actual mass killing of Jews; otherwise Himmler would have had no need to make such a disclosure to them. In his speech two days later, Himmler—to a number of Nazi party officials—omits mention of the bodies but transposes a sentence about the bombing of German cities. Hence, Butz’ supposition, that the reference to the dead bodies does not refer to killed Jews as such, is not completely without merit.<sup>16</sup>

Farther on in another version of the speech—and Himmler apparently gave this speech several times—there is another incriminating quote:

Whenever I was forced to take steps against the partisans and Jewish commissars in some village—I’ll say it for the information of this group only—I made it a point to give the order to kill the women and children of these partisans and commissars.

I consider all of these speeches to be authentic and I draw from them the conclusion that the “*Ausrottung*” of the Jewish people entailed the killing of hundreds of thousands of Jewish men, women, and children, which is consistent with the *Einsatzgruppen* reports, *Meldung No. 51*, and many other documents. However, I do not think one can extract either an extermination plan or policy to kill all European Jews from these Himmler speeches, not least because such a plan or policy is contradicted elsewhere.

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<sup>16</sup> Arthur Butz, *Hoax of the Twentieth Century*, 265.

The two most interesting things about these speeches to me are, first, the way the tone and content of the speech change depending on the audience, as well as the various pretexts and justifications offered—as grotesque as they may be—and secondly the reason why Himmler would be making these disclosures at all. My guess is that Himmler, well aware of Allied propaganda, and well aware that the eastern front was contracting, was getting out in front of the story to various German leadership cadres in order to undercut expected accusations from the Soviet Union and the other Allies as mass graves were found, and to ensure that the responsibility for these deaths would be attributed to him alone, rather than Hitler.

### 3.8 THE GERSTEIN STATEMENT (APRIL–MAY, 1945)

The Gerstein Statement refers to various documents prepared by the SS disinfection officer Kurt Gerstein in late April and early May 1945. For several decades, Gerstein's statements were the main source for gassing descriptions regardless of context or location. I discussed the factual difficulties and probable derivation of many of the claims in the statement in “The Gas Chamber of Sherlock Holmes” and do not wish to repeat those criticisms here. Shermer and Grobman, while briefly mentioning Gerstein, do not adduce his statements as proof, so all I want to do here is discuss the statements in a general context. The only serious study of Gerstein to date is the study of Henri Roques, which is a painstaking and serious academic analysis, but which is studiously ignored by mainstream Holocaust historians.<sup>17</sup>

It appears that Gerstein surrendered to the French in the Black Forest region of Germany and was put on parole in Rottweil from around April 26, 1945. The fact that the war was not yet over may have had something to do with the laxity of his confinement. While at Rottweil, according to the top secret OSS report, Gerstein met some American intelligence officers on May 5, 1945, and handed them a copy of his statement plus several Zyklon B invoices which he had signed. The American intelligence officers, based on their report, do not seem to have been particularly enthusiastic about Gerstein or his statement.

By the end of June he was a prisoner of the French War Crimes Investigative Bureau and was interrogated on June 26, 1945. By July 4, 1945, the Gerstein Statement was being leaked to the press because on that date the French newspaper *France-Soir* published a summary of the statement filed by a correspondent in Stuttgart. From this point on Gerstein and his statement were well known. The next day, Gerstein was imprisoned in the military prison at Cherche-Midi, and was interrogated on July 13 and July 19. On July 20, Gerstein was put in solitary confinement. On July 26, Gerstein was found dead in his cell.

Concerning Gerstein's death, two points are worth noting. First, the American prosecution attempted to enter his statement into the trial record at the Medical Trial at Nuremberg, which ran from the fall of 1946 until the spring of 1947. When

<sup>17</sup> Except the list of SS personnel, all the materials presented in this section may be found in Henri Roques, *The “Confessions” of Kurt Gerstein*.

preparing to introduce the document, the prosecutors were asked to produce Gerstein, but they claimed that they did not know where he was, although they had made inquiries. The second point worth making with regard to Gerstein's death is that his spouse was not notified of his death until three years later, in June 1948. Consequently, I conclude that the circumstances of Gerstein's death were quite likely suspicious, and that, at least, there was a deliberate effort to suppress information.

However, the strange circumstances surrounding Gerstein's death are one thing, and the disappearance of several of his final documents from French custody is another. Neither of these has any necessary bearing on his statements.

Let's just assume for the sake of the argument that Gerstein's statement is vaguely true, that is, that Gerstein went to Belzec and saw a diesel gassing there. We have discussed the defects in his account, so let's look at the statement in general.

The first thing we notice is that Gerstein's statement is very excitable in its tone and also very reckless. For example, he implicates a number of Germans and also claims a close association with a number of members of the anti-Nazi resistance, including Otto Dibelius and Pastor Martin Niemöller. Stressing, as Gerstein does, that he has been sending cigars to Pastor Niemöller in Dachau sounds more like a man very anxious to demonstrate his anti-Nazi *bona fides* than a prisoner of war confident about his innocence and what he has seen. In terms of context it seems to me inescapable that we have to acknowledge the fact that Zyklon B was considered solely a mass murder agent at this time, and that Gerstein was deeply implicated in the handling of this substance. Therefore I conclude that the overall intention of Gerstein's postwar conduct was to aggressively preempt accusations against him because of his handling of Zyklon B by deflecting the issue away from Auschwitz and away from cyanide as an agent of mass murder. And, indeed, both ends are achieved in Gerstein's statements.

Another issue comes up when we look at the narrative, and Gerstein's interrogations. Gerstein claimed that he was given a secret order to go to Kolin, in Bohemia, to pick up 44 bottles of cyanide (*not* Zyklon B, but bottles of cyanide), travel to Lublin, meet with Globocnik, and go to Belzec to assist in the disinfection of clothing and also to try to persuade the people there to convert from diesel exhaust to cyanide gas for killing humans. According to Gerstein's interrogations, he parked 1,200 meters from the camp leaving the cyanide bottles in the car. He spoke to the Belzec commandant, who did not want to change his gassing method and who was terrified of cyanide gas. So then Gerstein left the camp without accomplishing his mission, poured out the cyanide somewhere, returned to Berlin, and continued with his duties, and was never asked about it.

Personally, I find the above pretext for Gerstein's visit to Belzec and the Lublin area to be completely unbelievable, and I am not alone in this, as his interrogator didn't believe it either:<sup>18</sup>

*You were charged with a mission. You tell us of not having fulfilled it at all. Likewise you tell us that the commandant of the camp where you have to complete this mission did not want you to complete it at all. You stated this morning that on your return to Berlin you did not report to anyone on the results of your mission. We have every reason to think that such things were not exactly customary in the German army.*

and

*You did then, by your own admission, receive at Berlin an important mission, and this in your capacity as a technician; this mission was so important that you had to accomplish it as a state secret; you visited three camps, you were received in audience by a general who, granted the purpose of your mission, believed himself bound to recount to you even the intentions of the two great Nazi chiefs.*

*How can you persist in making us believe:*

*That you did not even accomplish the purpose of your mission;*

*That you reported to no one on this;*

*That no one moreover questioned you at all on this subject.*

Although Gerstein's statements are rarely used nowadays they still have some defenders. Christopher Browning, for example, believes they contain a core of truth because they are corroborated elsewhere, by which he means that Gerstein's reference to Obermeyer is consistent with a man who was in "Aktion Reinhard" and the fact that Dr. Pfannenstiel, who was heavily implicated by Gerstein, later corroborated Gerstein's statement after being interrogated about it several times.

However, I consider this once again a failure to look at the events in context. Obermeyer appears on a list of "Aktion Reinhardt" personnel, available on the Internet, where "SS *H-Stuf. OBERMEYER*" is listed as the head of the "*Bekleidungs-lager Lublin (alter Flughafen)*," that is, the clothing depot at the old airport in Lublin. This site is known as a place where the clothing seized from deportees was disinfected, and indeed disinfected in Zyklon B fumigation vaults. In addition, there are some claims that Heckenholt (for whom the Belzec gas chambers were supposedly named) was stationed there. In other words, since Gerstein's job was sanitation, and since that involved the disinfection of clothing, there is every reason to believe that he would have been to Lublin, not once, but several times in the fulfillment of his duties, which could have provided ample opportunity to meet the people involved and visit the various locations. However, such an admission on his part would have entailed admitting the use of Zyklon B in Lublin

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<sup>18</sup> Roques, "*Confessions*," 106-107; the photostats of the interrogations precede the translation.

province. Under the circumstances, that would have been an impossible admission to make. Hence, I conclude, he concocted the rationale for his visit to cover his actual reasons for going there.

The problem with Pfannenstiel's "corroboration" is that it came after being interrogated on the basis of the Gerstein Statement not once but several times. Once he corroborated the statement, Pfannenstiel was generally unmolested thereafter, although he did testify at a couple of trials, usually simply recapping the content of Gerstein's statement. Some have proposed that there would be no reason for Pfannenstiel to corroborate Gerstein. In fact, there's a very simple reason for Pfannenstiel to corroborate Gerstein, because it enabled Pfannenstiel to control the narrative. We recall that Gerstein implicated Pfannenstiel deeply in a number of cruel and unfeeling remarks. While attesting to the reality of a gassing, Pfannenstiel was also able to claim that he made none of the comments attributed to him by Gerstein. Thus, when Gerstein's statement was first published in postwar West Germany in 1953, all of the comments attributed to Pfannenstiel were removed from the text.<sup>19</sup>

So what is the reality behind the Gerstein Statement? It is hard to say. There is no reliable corroboration, as many seem to agree. The tenor of the statement does not inspire confidence but rather skepticism, the details are clearly wrong or exaggerated, and the overall context of Gerstein's visit to the "Reinhard" camps is very hard to believe. As evidence, it is poor, and that is the reason why it is rarely referenced today.

### 3.9 ASSESSING THE DOCUMENTS

An overall assessment of the kinds of documents Shermer and Grobman reviewed leaves no question that the Nazi German policy against the Jews involved deportation, plunder, forced labor, and killing. This is indicated in many of the documents, including at the highest level Hitler's remarks to Horthy. Nowhere, however, in these documents is there any indication that there was either an extermination program or policy to kill all Jews. Yet at the same time, the documents make clear that hundreds of thousands of Jews were killed by shooting.

There is no reliable evidence here of gassings. Indeed, the documents about gassings I discussed here were not even used by Shermer and Grobman in their convergence of evidence. I mentioned them here because of their prominence in the historiography of the Holocaust, but also because they demonstrate just how deficient is the case for mass gassing, once we turn to the documents. We shall later encounter the argument that the gassing evidence doesn't exist because the Nazis involved went to great pains to hide it. On the other hand, the evidence for mass shootings is abundant; they didn't bother to hide it. I don't find this kind of reasoning persuasive.

<sup>19</sup> In "Augenzeugenbericht zu den Massenvergasungen" (ed., Hans Rothfels) in *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 1, no. 2 (April 1953): 177-194.



## 4. FORENSIC ISSUES AND REVISIONISM

**I**N NORMAL PARLANCE, forensics pertains to the analysis of crime scenes, including ballistics, autopsies, and other material analysis. In the context of the Holocaust and revisionism, forensics embraces all the physical evidence for mass killing but also archaeological evidence as well as technical information about the purported processes of mass killing and body disposal.

I have not touched on these issues previously, even though I think the revisionists have the upper hand in this area. One of the reasons is that the issues have been handled well by others. However, for the sake of completeness, I will rehearse the substance of the various technical issues here. These issues concern the properties of the agents of mass killing on the one hand and the logistics of body disposal on the other.

### 4.1 ZYKLON B

Zyklon B was a fumigant developed in the early 1920s for killing insects. The “B” meant it was the second version in the series. There was nothing mysterious about Zyklon; it was merely cyanide in liquid form absorbed into a support and sealed into a can. The support usually consisted of a kind of gravel one quarter to one half inch in diameter, which in turn would be made of some kind of porous material such as diatomite, gypsum, or silica gel, although there was a version of Zyklon which used beer coaster-sized paper discs. Normal usage involved sealing the space in which the gas would be used, opening the cans, emptying the gravel onto a large piece of foolscap, and leaving the space for several hours.

There are three facts about Zyklon that are relevant to understanding the claims about its use. All of these facts were developed by revisionists after the 1950s, and all of these facts have more recently been conceded by mainstream Holocaust historiography.

The first fact about Zyklon is that it was a timed release gas. When cyanide was first used on a large scale for killing insects, around the turn of the twentieth century, the normal method of generating the gas involved the “barrel method,” in which a quantity of cyanide salts (usually sodium cyanide) was dumped into a tub of sulfuric acid, from which the gas would be generated in large invisible clouds (this is the same method used to this day in execution gas chambers in the United States). However, this is a relatively unsafe method, because the gas is generated

so quickly; also, the rapid generation of the gas tends to over-concentrate the gas, causing it to condense into liquid and thus limiting its effectiveness. On the other hand, the use of the carrier material in Zyklon B slowed down the generation of the gas, allowing it to distribute more evenly through the space being fumigated.

The first revisionists to note the timed release characteristic of Zyklon were Robert Faurisson and Walter Lüftl, although both made mistakes. In the mid-1990s Fritz Berg and Germar Rudolf obtained analyses by R. Irmscher that were published in 1942, and these made it clear that Zyklon took two to three hours to outgas at 59 degrees Fahrenheit (15 C).

The timed release nature of Zyklon creates problems for most testimonies and confessions about its use. Virtually all of these claim that death ensued after 5-20 minutes and that body disposal began shortly thereafter. However, this is impossible under the two- to three-hour time line. As a result, the current argument, given by van Pelt, Keren et al., and Friedländer, is that the Zyklon was removed from the gas chamber after 5-20 minutes and then was taken someplace else to fully outgas. I do not find this argument convincing. In the first place, removing the contents of several cans of Zyklon from a gas chamber after 5-20 minutes would be extremely dangerous, because at this point the Zyklon would be exuding large invisible clouds of poison gas. Moreover, since cyanide gas is to some extent a contact poison, it could easily be absorbed into the skin of the people extracting the poison and cause illness if not death. Furthermore, removing the Zyklon from the chamber presupposes some method for extraction, but such a method of extraction is only alleged for two of the locations where gassings are supposed to have taken place. Finally, there is no testimony or confession that describes the extraction of the Zyklon from the gas chamber while the cyanide was still outgassing. Therefore, the current argument appears to me to be a contrivance designed under the assumption that the 5-20 minute time line cannot be wrong.

It should be pointed out that some individual gassing claims use a time line that corresponds to the actual properties of Zyklon. For example, the first gassing at Auschwitz, which is supposed to have happened sometime between September and December of 1941, took two to three days. Kurt Aumeier, a member of the political section at Auschwitz, and whose interrogation papers were first discovered and published by the British historian David Irving, also attested to a gassing at Auschwitz which took twenty-four hours. These narratives coincide with the properties of Zyklon and therefore to that extent could be true. On the other hand, we have to note that Aumeier, like some other Nazis in captivity, initially denied that anyone was gassed at Auschwitz.<sup>20</sup>

The second important characteristic of Zyklon is that it was overwhelmingly

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<sup>20</sup> The materials associated with Kurt Aumeier, including his first statement, in which he denied that gassings took place, as well as a later statement, in which he described the beginning of the gassing of prisoners who were ill or incapable of work beginning in the fall of 1942, are available at David Irving's site at [www.fpp.co.uk](http://www.fpp.co.uk). Another former Auschwitz official who initially gave a statement denying any gassings but then gave a later statement describing them was Josef Kramer; see Butz, *Hoax*, 355-376.

used for non-homicidal purposes. The realization of this aspect of Zyklon took some time to develop; Rassinier remarked on the non-homicidal use in his memoirs of Buchenwald, but even Raul Hilberg continued to insist well into the 1980s that “very little was used for fumigation.”<sup>21</sup>

That most Zyklon was used as an ordinary fumigant was pointed out first by Rassinier; his insight was developed extensively by Butz (for whom it was a core argument) and Faurisson in the 1970s. Hence, by 1988, when Pressac published his massive study of Auschwitz, he would concede, from an anti-revisionist perspective, that 97 percent of the Zyklon delivered to Auschwitz was used for non-homicidal purposes. Van Pelt, following Pressac, lowers that percentage to about 85 percent; he argues that about five sixths of the Zyklon at Auschwitz was used for fumigations.

The realization that the use of Zyklon was overwhelmingly benign took a long time to develop because it contradicted popular beliefs as well as the statements of various Nazis in captivity. The hold of popular belief was so strong that even in 1948 an American colonel, writing in the Army medical journal, *Military Surgeon*, would feel constrained to express himself with the following circumlocution:

*This camp [Buchenwald] had a battery of modern fumigating vaults which employed gaseous cyanide. Had these been used according to their intended purpose the louse and typhus problems in this camp could well have been controlled. This may account for the fact that typhus had merely smoldered in this camp for several months without ever reaching the epidemic proportions which occurred elsewhere. Rumor, however, has it that the fumigators were used for other purposes than those of louse control.*<sup>22</sup>

As an example of the inaccuracy of Nazis in captivity, we have the following:

*I cannot recall the exact quantities of Zyklon B which we received from Tesch & Stabenow, however I estimate at least 10,000 cans, that is, 10,000 kilos had been supplied by them in the course of 3 years. This figure is arrived at by computing the number of 2 ½ million gassed people and the consumption of an average of 6 cans for every 1,500 people.*

The above quote, regarding Auschwitz, is false in several respects. First, because the records show that Auschwitz received almost 20,000 kilos of Zyklon from Tesch & Stabenow in 1942 and 1943 alone (compared to hundreds of thousands of kilos delivered to all recipients in those two years), second, because current estimates of those gassed at Auschwitz lie somewhere between 500,000 and one million, and

<sup>21</sup> Butz, *Hoax*, 151, referencing the first edition of Hilberg's book; the source Hilberg was citing was the very dubious testimony of Sigismund Bendel at the Tesch-Weinbacher trial. In *Destruction* (3rd ed.), 955n, Hilberg expanded this note to acknowledge the use of some Zyklon for disinfection.

<sup>22</sup> Hartwin A. Schulze (Lt. Col.) “Typhus on the Western Front in World War II,” *Military Surgeon* 101, no.6 (December 1947): 489.

third, and most important, because it implies that no Zyklon was used for fumigation. The source of the quote is notable since it comes from an affidavit of Rudolf Höss, prepared in late May 1946, and it is clear that some of these false statements were interpolated or calculated by his interrogators. Hence, a fourth problem with the above quote is that it casts further doubt on the quality of evidence offered by the former commandant of Auschwitz.<sup>23</sup>

That Zyklon was largely used for non-homicidal purposes has been conceded by standard Holocaust historians, beginning with Pressac, followed by van Pelt, and more recently by Hilberg and Friedländer (in a long endnote).<sup>24</sup> The most important implication of this concession, however, is that if 99 percent of the Zyklon produced was used for non-homicidal purposes, and at least 5/6ths of the Zyklon at Auschwitz was also used for non-homicidal purposes, then it means that somewhere between 85 percent and 99 percent of the references to Zyklon throughout the German sphere of influence, including Auschwitz, are totally innocuous. This works against the standard interpretation, which, for many years, was content to simply offer a can of Zyklon, or an invoice referencing Zyklon, as proof of mass killing.

The third and final characteristic of Zyklon that has been developed by revisionists is that Zyklon, like any cyanide product, has a tendency to leave blue stains in the presence of iron.

The relationship of cyanide to blue stains carries us back to the discovery of cyanide in the eighteenth century. In the early 1700s, a Berlin dyer, attempting to make a red paint, took cochineal (a red pigment made from crushed Mexican insects) and combined it with a preparation made by a colleague that included oxblood. However, instead of getting a deep red, he was surprised to find that the result of his mixture was a deep, dark blue that was extremely durable. The resulting dye was called “Berlin Blue” because of its place of origin, then “Prussian blue” because it was adopted for the uniforms of the Prussian army; and it was the first synthetic dye. Several decades later, while investigating the dye, the chemist Scheele accidentally discovered the cyanide in the dye, which, because of its source, he called “Blue acid,” and that is why to this day cyanide in German-speaking countries is called *Blausäure*. In the case of Prussian Blue (or Midnight Blue, as it is now known in the box of crayons), the coloration resulted from the combination of the cyanides in the ingredients with the iron in the oxblood.

Concrete, cement, and mortar all derive from limestone and therefore contain some iron, and so do most bricks. If a structure made out of those elements is exposed to cyanide gas, then, by a process explained by the revisionist Germar Rudolf, the cyanide molecules will condense on the surface of these materials, in-

<sup>23</sup> Hilberg references this source as NI-03, *Destruction* (3rd ed.), 955n, but it appears to be identical to the affidavit NI-34, which in turn was based on NI-36, the original German interrogation. The affidavit should be read in conjunction with the interrogation.

<sup>24</sup> Hilberg, *Destruction* 3rd ed., 955n; Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939–1945*, 717n, and also retails the stray cat story referenced below.

teract with the iron, and form Prussian blue stains. It is not clear how long this process can take; in the case of buildings at Auschwitz, it apparently took several years, if not decades. On the other hand, there are cases where a one-time exposure to cyanide can cause the interior mortar-covered walls of a structure to be heavily stained in blue. It is also not clear how much exposure is required; in some cases, blue staining is immediate, but in other cases not.

The presence of blue stains in walls exposed to cyanide is merely a symptom of the fact that using cyanide in a space with concrete, cement, mortar, or brick will likely produce durable traces of its use. The first person to develop this idea was the revisionist Fred Leuchter, who, in the late 1980s conducted tests at Auschwitz. First, he tested buildings where Zyklon was known to have been used as a fumigant, and found high levels of cyanide in the mortar and brick, which was not surprising since the walls of these buildings were mottled with blue stains. Then he tested the walls of the extant homicidal gas chambers and found minuscule to nonexistent traces of cyanide there, which was also not surprising since there was no blue staining in these spaces.

On the basis of his test results, Leuchter wrote a report (the well-known “Leuchter Report”) and argued for these and other reasons that no one was gassed in the spaces identified as gas chambers. This report was written in 1988 in support of a German resident of Canada, Ernst Zündel, who was on trial for Holocaust denial. Leuchter, who designed execution systems in the United States, continued his revisionist work and eventually saw his career ruined: he was later made the subject of a documentary by Errol Morris (*Mr Death*, 1999). The fundamental premise of his work—comparing cyanide traces in fumigation chambers and alleged gas chambers—was replicated several times, most meticulously by the revisionist Germar Rudolf, a Ph. D. chemist from Germany. All test results indicated that the cyanide levels in the fumigation chambers were higher, by at least three orders of magnitude, than those in the sites identified as gas chambers, but only if the blue stains were included in the analysis. The Poles conducted two analyses, the second of which deliberately excluded the blue stains, and therefore came up with comparable levels of cyanide for both spaces. However, the reason for the Polish exclusion of the blue stains—they claimed they didn’t know where these stains came from—is not credible.

The revisionist argument since Leuchter’s original report is that no one was gassed in the basement of Crematorium II at Birkenau because the cyanide traces are so low. This claim has been the subject of extensive indirect debate between revisionists and non-revisionists. However, the point, it seems to me, is that given that 85-97 percent of the Zyklon at Auschwitz was not used for killing people, it follows that the presence of cyanides cannot prove mass killing. On the other hand, since no one has as yet been able to predict exactly how much cyanide over what period of time is required to generate durable cyanides in the form of blue stains,

it follows that the absence of blue stains does not prove that no one was killed with poison gas in a given location. However, the absence of blue stains in the basement of Crematorium II—a space in which half a million people are supposed to have been killed—is definitely counter-intuitive.

Our understanding of Zyklon B is on a much firmer footing now than it was sixty years ago. We now know that it was a timed-release gas that took hours to evolve from its carrier, that it was overwhelmingly used for innocuous fumigations, even at Auschwitz, and that it tends to leave traces of its use. All of these facts were developed by Holocaust revisionists. None of these facts was understood, or even known, by Holocaust historians until the revisionists had made their arguments. All of these facts have been subsequently conceded by Holocaust historians, albeit with some changes in the structure of their narrative, as for example in the proposed recovery of the Zyklon 5-20 minutes into a gassing. Thus Holocaust revisionists, in just this one case of Zyklon B, have enhanced our understanding of the Holocaust. A clearer reason for why revisionism should not be criminalized could not be found.

#### 4.2. DIESEL ENGINES AND GAS VANS

Because of the recent reductions in the estimated death tolls of the camps such as Majdanek, Stutthof, and the various camps in Germany, Auschwitz remains the only camp where the charge of systematic mass gassing with Zyklon can still be made. However, there were four other camps in which systematic mass gassing was supposed to have taken place: Chelmno, which is supposed to have used gas vans, and Treblinka, Sobibor, and Belzec, where diesel-engine gas chambers were supposedly used. I did not talk about these camps much in my prior writings because I was interested in pursuing the mass gassing claim, and for most of these camps, until after the end of the war, the methods said to be employed for mass killing were not gas chambers, but rather electric chambers, steam chambers, or vacuum chambers.

The idea that Treblinka, Sobibor, and Belzec used diesel engines goes back to the Gerstein Statement, which is discussed elsewhere. Some testimony was later offered to support the claim. The problem is that diesel engines emit practically no carbon monoxide, which is supposed to have been the actual poison gas involved here. True, it is possible to put a load on a diesel engine to achieve lethal levels of carbon monoxide, but it is not an easy process, and the use of diesel engines is therefore highly unlikely for the efficient gassing of hundreds of thousands (or millions) of people. The line of argument has been developed mostly by the revisionist Fritz Berg.<sup>25</sup>

In response to Berg, the typical argument offered nowadays is that Gerstein and most of the testimony is mistaken, and that ordinary gasoline engines were used. At this point it seems to me that we have to ask what we really know about the setup

<sup>25</sup> Fritz Berg, "Diesel Gas Chambers: Ideal for Torture—Absurd for Murder," in Germar Rudolf, ed., *Dissecting the Holocaust*, 435-470.

of these engine-exhaust chambers.

There are no documents about the gas chambers at these camps, so we cannot know with any precision what they looked like. The testimonies offered, beginning with Gerstein, describe banks of gas chambers that are identical in construction to ordinary fumigation vaults, and indeed are identical in their arrangement to the disinfection gas chambers known to exist at Majdanek. There is no agreement among the witnesses as to how many gas chambers existed in these banks, whether 3, or 5, or 6, or 10. However, it is a safe bet that whoever constructed these gas chambers used a row of disinfection gas chambers as a model.<sup>26</sup>

To this model, the witnesses claim that air raid shelter doors were attached, since these were the gastight doors with peepholes which provided the “hermetic seal” which is universally attested. Then the engine was attached to the chambers by a pipe, and the exhaust was let into the chambers, causing rapid death. So we have here an unusual and indeed unique combination of disinfection, air raid, and automotive technology in the construction of these gas chambers. I say “automotive” because surely the engines employed would have had to have been ordinary gasoline engines, although there continue to be advocates of the diesel engine theory, and there are also those who claim, following Gerstein, Eichmann, and some others, that the engines came variously from captured tanks, submarines, or airplanes.

However, the presence of a “hermetic seal” defeats the purpose of the gas chambers as alleged. What is being described here are ordinary automotive carbon monoxide poisonings conducted on a massive scale. Yet the exhaust from an engine will soon back up and stall the engine; unlike carbon monoxide released from a bottle, the engine is generating the exhaust containing the carbon monoxide and needs to vent the resulting pressure.

In 1943, the British director Alfred Hitchcock released *Shadow of a Doubt*, a film about a serial killer. At one point in the film, deciding that his niece is on to him, the killer attempts to poison her by locking her in the family’s garage with a car running inside. As we watch, we can see the young woman coughing and slowly overcome by the clouds of exhaust. We can see the clouds of exhaust billowing from under the garage door just before she is saved. This is the reality of automotive carbon monoxide poisonings: a hermetic seal on a room into which automotive exhaust was being piped would be pointless and self defeating.

Of course, this does not prove that millions of people were not killed with automotive exhaust. It does mean, first, that attempting to associate engine exhaust gassings with bottled carbon monoxide gassings betrays ignorance, and second, it means that this method of execution, for which there is no physical evidence in any case, is distinctly unlikely.

The discussion of the diesel gas chambers at Treblinka, Sobibor, and Belzec leads naturally to a discussion of the gas vans, which were also supposed to be diesel

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<sup>26</sup> On the variable number of gas chambers see Hilberg, *Destruction* (3rd ed.), 937n.

powered, as well as the stationary gas vans at Chelmno.

Unlike the diesel gas chambers, for which there is no documentary or physical evidence, there is some documentary evidence for gas vans. The evidence was summarized in a five-page article by Matthias Beer about twenty years ago.<sup>27</sup> The evidence consists of a short stack of documents, of unknown provenance, which was offered at Nuremberg as document 501-PS, with a few additions. Most of the documents are ambiguous, but two of them do appear very incriminating about the use of gas vans for killing people. Not surprisingly therefore, revisionists, and especially Ingrid Weckert, have argued that these documents are inauthentic.

The origin of the gas van claim comes from Soviet propaganda, principally the trials at Krasnodar and Kharkov in the summer and fall of 1943, after the Katyn revelations. According to the Soviets, they were used to kill Soviet citizens. But also according to the Soviets, Adolf Hitler was upset that people had found out about these gas vans and ordered all the documentation about them to be destroyed, which is supposed to explain why there is no further documentation and why no one has ever been able to produce a gas van. I consider this explanation completely unconvincing and yet another example of conspiracy theory.

One of the problems with the gas van claim is that the proponents of the claim never bother to investigate alternative explanations. As I described in “The Gas Chamber of Sherlock Holmes,” the Germans used trucks for mobile disinfection units and mobile showers in the First World War, and these vehicles in turn had given rise to rumors and then false propaganda about “Travelling Gas Chambers” as far back as 1917. The Germans used the same vehicles in World War Two, and they could have been improperly understood once more.

In addition, the Germans had real “gas vans” (*Gaswagen*), which were basically run on wood gas, or “producer gas.” These vans, the information concerning which again has been largely developed by the revisionist Fritz Berg, had a burner on the back of the vehicle that burned wood chips, producing wood gas, which was then piped to the engine in the front of the vehicle to power its operation. These vehicles were notoriously slow, and were used by the Germans and the SS for low-level transport of civilian detainees—usually women, children, and elderly—as well as political prisoners. For example, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was transported in such a producer gas vehicle to the camp where he was ultimately executed, and Victor Klemperer, in his diary, also describes a painfully slow journey to Munich at the end of the war in one of these “gas vans.”<sup>28</sup>

Even so, the two incriminating documents from 501-PS do exist, and there’s another document that appears to reference them, a letter (with a covering letter) from SS General Harald Turner to SS General Karl Wolff. The letter itself is not

<sup>27</sup> Matthias Beer, “Die Entwicklung der Gaswagen beim Mord an den Juden,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 35, no. 3 (July 1987): 403-417; Ingrid Weckert, “The Gas Vans: A Critical Assessment of the Evidence,” in Rudolf, ed., *Dissecting*, 215-242.

<sup>28</sup> Berg, “Diesel Gas Chambers: Ideal for Torture—Absurd for Murder,” in Rudolf, ed., *Dissecting*, 435-470; on Bonhoeffer, see Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy*, Chapter 31; on Klemperer, see *Ich will Zeugen ablegen bis zum Letzten*, April–May, 1945.

particularly incriminating, but on the second page (third page including the cover letter) there is a reference to handling the women and children in a camp with the help of a “delousing van” (*Entlausungswagen*). The word is in quotes in Turner’s original, from which most readers assume he is speaking in code, and is claiming that these people were actually being killed in a gas van.

I don’t find this explanation very convincing simply by inspecting the letter. In the first place, the letter size is wrong: German stationery is A4 in size, slightly longer and narrower than the American size, but these letters are on 8.5” by 11” stationery. On the other hand, Turner had American roots and the pages do bear his letterhead: perhaps he received some letterhead from an American relative as a gift.

Another problem is that the typewriter used for the letters lacked any SS runes. Even if we were to accept the argument that an SS general could not find a German typewriter with SS runes, we then have to contend with how the runes were created in these letters.

Normally, if a German had to type a letter without SS runes he simply used two capitals, thus “SS.” For these letters, however, the facsimile of the SS runes was created by a complicated series of keystrokes involving two slashes, two dashes, then four backspaces, a half-line drop, then two more staggered slashes. Of course, to do this properly meant that the entirety of both letters had to be double spaced. I have never seen such contorted typography in a document, and would need to see more such letters in Harald Turner’s files before I could accept this one. Woodrow Wilson is famously supposed to have been such a perfectionist that he would retype correspondence which his secretaries had prepared. However, without some supporting evidence it is just not credible that an SS general would engage in the kind of typing gymnastics described here.<sup>29</sup>

The evidence for the gas vans is weak. There is testimony, but there are no gas vans, except the producer gas vans which were used for low level transport. Producer gas vans, by the way, would have been excellent for killing people but no one alleges that they were so used; the gas vans, according to all of the testimony, were diesels. There are a few documents of unknown provenance. The documents are strange. This is all we have for the machines that are supposed to have been used to kill hundreds of thousands.

### 4.3 MASS GRAVES

The forensic evidence in support of Zyklon B and diesel engines or automotive engines is not dispositive and certainly vague enough to allow doubt. However, these were merely the means of execution for millions of people. What happened to the remains of these people once they were killed?

Keeping in mind that millions or tens of millions of people are said to have been

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<sup>29</sup> NARA (National Archives), BDC file, Harald Turner.

killed in Eastern Europe during World War Two, we should be careful about excessive skepticism here. There is no listing of where the vast number of people who died in the war must be buried. However, in the case of the camps the issues are much easier, because the claim is that all of these people were killed in these camps, and, excepting Auschwitz, were buried there and later exhumed and then burned in an improvised fashion. Consequently, we should expect clear evidence of mass graves commensurate with the death tolls at all of the camps.

The standard claim is that the death tolls at the various extermination camps, and excluding Auschwitz, were, in very round numbers, Chelmno, 150,000, Treblinka, 900,000, Sobibor, 250,000, and Belzec, 400,000. What should we expect to find there?

To claim that a half million people were killed is one thing, but claiming that half a million people were killed and buried in a specific location is something else. In the latter case, we should expect vast amounts of forensic evidence for the bodies buried there, even if they were later exhumed and burned. We should also expect the mass graves to correspond to other mass graves that we know about.

John Ball, a revisionist who specialized in aerial photography, addressed the issue of mass grave size in his writings, and attempted to come up with some rule of thumb values for mass graves in two dimensions, since that would be the limit for air photo analysis. He described the size of various known mass graves, for example, the mass graves for the victims of the Hamburg bombing in 1943 (about 40,000), the camp at Bergen Belsen (about 4,000), and the killing site in Katyn forest (about 4,000). By comparing the size of these mass graves he was able to determine that the general surface area of a mass grave will be about ten bodies per square meter. Ball's constants appear reasonable precisely because he looked at the dimensions of several different mass graves from several different contexts.<sup>30</sup>

Another source is the Australian archaeologist Richard Wright, who excavated a killing site in Ukraine where Jewish women, children, and old men were buried. The site was 40 meters by 3 meters, so there would be an estimated 1,200 bodies using Ball's constant. However, the total count was 550, yielding a constant of about 4.58 bodies per square meter. From this it follows that Ball's 10 bodies per square meter is a reasonable and conservative number.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to Ball's constant, we have information about other Soviet mass graves at Vinnitsa (discovered by the Germans in 1943), as well as Kurapaty, Bykivnia, and several others in the former Soviet Union, which were discovered during the *Glasnost*' period.

What has forensics revealed about the mass graves at Treblinka, Sobibor, and Belzec? Human remains, but nothing commensurate to the claims. There were several attempts by the Soviets and the postwar Polish communists in the immediate postwar period to locate the mass graves of the 900,000 who were supposedly

<sup>30</sup> John C. Ball, "Air Photo Evidence" in Rudolf, ed., *Dissecting*, 269-282.

<sup>31</sup> Richard Wright, "Where Are the Bodies? In the Ground," *The Public Historian* (32, no. 1 February, 2010): 96-107.

killed at Treblinka. These diggings found the remains of a few hundred, some ash, and mostly sand. Excavations at Belzec were carried out in 1998; these revealed human remains and ash, which, if taken to the maximum extent, comprised about 6,000 square meters of potential burial space, which would yield about 60,000 dead using Ball's constant. Finally, excavations at Sobibor in very recent years suggest burial space for about 20,000.

At this point we have to step back and try to look at the camps of Treblinka, Sobibor, and Belzec as a whole in order to look at the allegation in a more global sense. Treblinka and Sobibor were both about 600 meters by 400 meters in size; the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum specifies the dimensions of Treblinka as "a trapezoid of 1,312 by 1,968 feet." Anywhere from two-thirds to three-quarters of the camp area would have been assigned to living quarters for the Germans, the Ukrainian guards, and the prisoners who lived at each camp, although the numbers are not large: Altogether only about a hundred Germans were involved in the operation of these three camps, perhaps a couple hundred former Soviet POWs as guards, and a few hundred Jewish prisoners who sorted the belongings of the deportees. In other words, the camps were very small, and the number of personnel assigned to these camps was also very small. When we combine these facts with the makeshift nature of the gas chambers, we have a situation in which a small number of Germans assisted by a small number of former Soviet POWs situated in the Polish countryside in small camps contrived methods to kill, bury, exhume, and cremate millions of people, leaving hardly any evidence of the operation, and apparently with minimal supervision.<sup>32</sup>

The burial space at all three camps is very small for the number of victims, and also very small compared to the grave sites in the former Soviet Union. The burial space at Kurapaty, for example, occupies an area of about 30 hectares (about 75 acres), three times the total size of Treblinka, yet the total number of dead at the site has been estimated at 30,000 at the lower end and 250,000 at the higher end. If we limit ourselves to the area at Treblinka where the burials were supposed to have taken place, that is, about 2.5 acres (10,000 square meters), we are looking at a disparity in size with Kurapaty approaching thirty to one.

The typical rejoinder is that the Germans who operated the extermination camps used the small amount of available space to ingeniously bury all of the bodies. But there would have been no need to be so ingenious. All three of these camps lay in the countryside, and could have been expanded at will, particularly so in the case of Belzec, whose main burial site corresponds to a large antitank ditch that had been constructed a year or two before and which extended far beyond the boundaries of the camp. There is simply no reason for the few dozen Germans scattered among these camps to have engaged in such compacting of human remains when there was unlimited space available to expand the grave space. In short, the asser-

<sup>32</sup> Hilberg, *Destruction* (3rd ed.), 961, cites a document from Globocnik mentioning 92 men involved in *Reinhardt*; also 962, distribution of manpower among the camps; 964, distribution of non-German guards, estimated at about 90 per camp.

tion that the Germans must have somehow managed to compress huge amounts of human remains into very small spaces, like the explanation that the Zyklon must have been removed after 5 to 20 minutes, comes across as an obvious attempt to force the forensic evidence to fit preconceived assumptions.

If we grant that the size, area, and manpower of Treblinka, Sobibor, and Belzec do not seem consistent with any well-planned or well-conceived project of mass killing, and if we grant that the human remains, or simply areas of disturbed earth where they would have been initially buried, are not consistent with the claimed number of victims, and if we grant that the documentation and even forensic evidence for the gas chambers is wholly absent, then the question must be, what were these camps for?

The revisionist explanation is that these three camps were transit camps for deportees who were deprived of their luggage, jewelry, and other belongings, via a system of sham vouchers that were later destroyed, broken up into labor groups as specified in the minutes of the Wannsee conference, and sent on their way to destinations in the occupied Soviet Union or in Lublin province. There is some evidence to support all of these contentions, which I will discuss a bit farther on when we discuss "Aktion Reinhard." However, the main point is that the transit camp explanation harmonizes better with the size of the camps, the number of people stationed there, and the lack of forensic or physical remains.

In short, the relative absence of mass graves at Treblinka, Sobibor, and Belzec tends to undercut the argument that millions of people were gassed at these camps. This does not mean that the people deported to these camps did not perish, one way or the other, at the hands of the Nazis. It simply means that they were not killed at these locations. To argue otherwise, I would suggest, is to adhere to dogma at the expense of material fact.

#### 4.4 BODY DISPOSAL

The absence of mass graves at the extermination camps excepting Auschwitz requires an explanation, and that explanation usually involves the notion that the Germans managed to burn the remains of all of their victims and cause them to disappear. The means for that destruction, in turn, is supposed to have been a unit called "*Sonderkommando 1005*."

*Sonderkommando 1005* was supposedly formed in early 1942 with the express purpose of erasing the traces of mass shooting sites. It was broken up into several detachments and was under the control of Paul Blobel, a former SS commander of one of the *Einsatzgruppen*, who were involved in the shootings of hundreds of thousands of Jews after the invasion of the Soviet Union in June of 1941.

The only study on *Sonderkommando 1005* is the article by Shmuel Spector of Yad Vashem, published in 1990. It is, at any rate, the only study that others reference when they discuss the existence and activity of this special unit. However, there

are hardly any documentary references in the article: the only reference to “1005,” for example, comes from a letter in February 1942 that includes “1005” in parentheses. Furthermore, Spector makes numerous assertions about the activities of *Sonderkommando 1005* and Blobel at places such as Sobibor, Belzec, and Treblinka which are completely unsourced.<sup>33</sup>

Curious about this, I went back and read the interrogations of Blobel when he was in American custody (Blobel was eventually hanged for his *Einsatzgruppen* activities in 1951). When specifically asked about 1005, he replied that the designation had no special meaning. When asked about his activities exhuming and burning bodies, he described several projects. In one case, he described opening a mass grave, 55 meters by 3 meters, and burning the bodies to ash over the course of two days. Using Ball’s constant for mass graves, we could estimate 1,650 bodies in this mass grave. However, when he was explicitly asked about the number of bodies in a later interrogation, Blobel ran through the dimensions out loud and finally answered, “two to three hundred,” which again tends to support the conservatism of Ball’s calculations.<sup>34</sup>

The lack of evidence for *Sonderkommando 1005* is part of the general conspiracy theory that holds that the Germans were killing millions of people and disposing of the remains in such a way as to leave no trace of the crimes. It is a convenient explanation for the almost total absence of documentary and physical evidence for these mass killings and the explanation itself relies on virtually no documentary evidence.

There would of course be logistical problems in the burial, exhumation, and burning to ash of millions of human beings. There has been a great deal of discussion about these matters: how the bodies were burned, how much heat and therefore fuel would be required, how long it would take to carry out such burnings, how and where the resulting ash from millions of outdoor cremations would be hidden, and so on. Thomas Dalton’s recent summary of revisionist positions is a good guide in this area, but I consider that line of argument not particularly interesting insofar as it has yet to be shown where the bodies were buried in the first place.<sup>35</sup>

The crematoriums at Auschwitz have received a great deal of attention over the years. Like all of the other camps that were part of the German concentration camp system, Auschwitz was equipped with crematoriums for the body disposal of inmates who died in captivity. However, Auschwitz, along with the huge camp at Birkenau, had no less than five separate crematorium buildings.

The original crematorium was located in the main camp at Auschwitz. It was shut down in 1943 when the crematoriums at Birkenau went on-line, and was con-

<sup>33</sup> Shmuel Spector, “Aktion 1005—Effacing the Murder of Millions,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 5, no. 2 (1990): 157-173.

<sup>34</sup> NARA (National Archives), M 1019, Paul Blobel interrogation, June 6, 1947. Blobel was interrogated six times in 1947: May 26 and 27, June 6 and 18, August 18, and November 14. *Commando 1005* was raised in the August 18 session, mass shootings and mass graves in the first three sessions. Two affidavits resulted, as of June 6, 1947, and as of June 18, 1947.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas Dalton, *Debating the Holocaust*.

verted into an air raid shelter in the late summer of 1944. In Birkenau, there were four crematoriums: two massive brick structures of sophisticated design, including several underground compartments, and two aboveground crematoriums of relatively straightforward construction. The two larger buildings, usually referred to as Kremas II and III, had 15 ovens apiece; the two smaller buildings, usually referred to as Kremas IV and V, had 8 ovens apiece, so that there were 46 ovens in all available at Birkenau for the disposal of human remains.

The entire discussion about the Birkenau crematoriums concerns the number of bodies that can be cremated over time: the higher the number, the more people were theoretically gassed. In this way, the discussion of the crematoriums at Birkenau turns into a simple arithmetic exercise.

Arthur Butz pointed out thirty-five years ago that it takes about one hour to cremate a body, so the Birkenau crematoriums could have theoretically disposed of about 1,100 bodies per day. However, for many years, Holocaust historians have relied on a document that claims that the capacity of all five crematoriums would have been 4,756 per day, which averages out to fifteen minutes per body. There is no real-world substantiation for this claim, and there are many problems with the document, including its provenance, and many details in the single-page memo.

Excepting the document described above, the projected rates of incineration from all other documents more or less correspond to the one hour per corpse rate. There is much testimony concerning multiple cremations, that is, putting more than one body into the oven at the same time. These could have reduced the time of cremation by about 40 percent, but this theoretical gain is offset by the fact that Krema IV was permanently out of commission after just three months. However, the commingling of remains of more than one inmate could raise the theoretical rate of cremations to about 1,500 per day. Following the logic all the way through, if all of the crematoriums operated around the clock seven days a week for the entire eighteen months of their operation, something in the neighborhood of 900,000 bodies could have been consumed.

Yet there are two reasons why these rates are meaningless. The first is that in the case of any hypothetical gassing, additional gassings, and thus, additional cremations, would have required clearing the spaces where the gassings had taken place. This would require downtime, and the equipment would require downtime on a regular basis in any case, simply for maintenance. The second reason is that after the Birkenau crematoriums were built there was no opportunity to test these alleged capacities. In other words, for two-thirds of the time they were in operation, the Birkenau crematoriums never would have been tested to their limits; there simply were not enough arrivals to the camp from the spring of 1943 to the spring of 1944.

The argument about the overcapacities of the Birkenau crematoriums has been made by several revisionists, including myself, and derives from the lowered death toll for that camp. For many years, Auschwitz was held to be the site of the gassing

and cremation of somewhere between one million and four million human beings. However, in 1989, around the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the number was officially revised to about one million. Yet the standard narrative holds that at least 600,000 of those who arrived at Auschwitz—the Hungarian Jews and thousands of Polish Jews—only arrived from May 1944.

The person who has made the clearest exposition of these matters as they relate to Auschwitz cremations is the German author Fritjof Meyer. A foreign policy expert and former editor of *Der Spiegel*, Meyer made his first contribution to the discussion in an article in the journal *Osteuropa* in May 2002. After some criticism, he published a further article in December 2003. Finally, in 2009, Meyer published an audio recording setting forth his views in his own voice, entitled *Tatort des Grauens: Auschwitz in neuer Sicht*.<sup>36</sup>

The position of Meyer is consistent across all three presentations. First, he rejects the document calculating 4,756 cremations a day, and agrees with Irving that the document is probably spurious; he subsequently determined that the limits of the crematoriums were in fact about 1,000 per day. Second, as a result of the diminution in prisoner traffic in 1943, the crematoriums were adapted for other uses: disinfection, showers, and air raid shelters. Gassings still took place, Meyer argues, but they took place in the bunkers that were situated behind the crematoria because the scale of traffic from the spring of 1943 made the use of the crematoria buildings unnecessary. Further, Meyer clearly and logically criticizes the narratives of Höss, Nyiszli, and other alleged eyewitnesses to gassings. Finally, Meyer arrives at a final total of about five hundred thousand dead at Auschwitz Birkenau, including about 350,000 gassed.

Of course, Meyer's efforts are not the last word on Auschwitz, or Auschwitz forensics. But I feel comfortable in leaving the discussion at this point. Meyer comes to several of the same conclusions I arrived at in "Bomb Shelters in Birkenau," and even quotes, extensively and to good effect, the documents concerning the showers in the basements of the crematoriums that I first presented in Section 3.6 of that article.

Yet the most important part of Meyer's contributions has been the sequel. No right wing extremist, Meyer entered the discussion of Auschwitz revisionism simply to set the record straight, according to his views. To my mind, he did this with an eye on his responsibilities as a German citizen, seizing the narrative of Holocaust revisionism in order to tame it. Although I have heard that there was an attempt to charge Meyer and some others with incitement in the wake of his initial articles, the charges were dropped, and he has continued to publish. Otherwise, there have been no negative repercussions: no trial, no fines, no prison, and no censorship. Since my primary aim in defending revisionism against criminalization was to achieve just such an outcome, there is nothing more for me to offer at this point but respectful silence.

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<sup>36</sup> Both of Meyer's articles have been translated and are accessible at David Irving's website, [www.fpp.co.uk](http://www.fpp.co.uk); *Auschwitz: Tatort des Grauens* comprises two audio CDs issued by Kai Homilius Verlag.



## 5. AKTION REINHARDT AND THE LEGACY OF FORCED LABOR

**A**KTION REINHARDT OR EINSATZ REINHARDT (“Operation Reinhardt” in both cases) was the official name given to the deportation activities in occupied Poland beginning in March of 1942, and extending to October 1943. According to the traditional point of view, “Reinhardt” was simply the name for the deportations to Treblinka, Sobibor, and Belzec, with some deportations to Majdanek, which were done solely for the purpose of mass murder.

As I noted in a long footnote written many years ago, the revisionist position is that while the Korherr Report (March 1943) makes it clear that close to two million were sent through the “Reinhardt” camps by the end of 1942, the purpose of these camps was the sorting of the deportees into labor groups (as per the Wannsee Conference), possibly the delousing and disinfection of the deportees, but above all the seizure of their wealth and other belongings, hence the storehouses full of clothes and other personal belongings. Afterwards, revisionists hold, the deportees continued on to ghettos, camps, and work camps in southern Poland and occupied Russia, where doubtless many died or were killed. In this interpretation there was no “*Aktion Reinhard*,” supposedly named in honor of Himmler’s deputy Heydrich, but rather “*Aktion Reinhardt*,” named after the German state secretary of finance, Fritz Reinhardt, whose policies of appropriating deportee belongings were established even before the war.

There are six documents that I believe are particularly pertinent to understanding “Reinhardt” and I will discuss each of them briefly. They are: (1) 4024-PS, a final report on the status of *Aktion Reinhardt* [sic] from the head of the operation, Odilo Globocnik, to Heinrich Himmler; (2) a final paragraph missing from most versions of this document, but discovered by Robert Faurisson; (3) the Höfle Telegram, discovered only in late 2000, which ties into (4) the Korherr Report of March 1943, of which there were three versions, one missing; (5) a two-page description of mass murder at Auschwitz allegedly written by Albert Franke-Gricksch, an SS adjutant who made a visit to Poland in May 1943, and (6), the actual travel journal of Franke-Gricksch, authenticated only in 2010 by the British historian David Irving. Together, these six documents support the revisionist interpretation that *Aktion Reinhardt* was about wealth seizure and SS control of Polish Jews, chiefly for labor purposes: It was not about mass murder. Moreover, the discussion of Reinhardt naturally leads to a discussion of German forced labor practices, particularly as

it involved Polish Jews, which has finally led to the concession by establishment historians that forced labor—or slave labor—was conducted for war-important economic interests, not as a prelude to mass murder.

### 5.1 GLOBOCNIK REPORT TO HIMMLER, 4024-PS

Globocnik's report to Himmler is dated at the beginning of January 1944, and provides a detailed discussion of the economic aspects of the *Reinhardt* operation, above all enumerating the wealth seized from the deported Jews—about 100 million RM, equal to \$40 million USD at that time. The report itemizes the deportation, employment of manpower, exploitation of property, and the seizure of hidden goods. Unfortunately, the document, except on money matters, is light on details, so it is hard to establish with any certainty the fate of the Jewish deportees. Of course, the traditional view insists that the “deportation” was merely code for mass murder, but Globocnik says nothing about exterminations in this top-secret report. On the other hand, the report also makes clear that tens of thousands of Jews are being employed at a variety of camps, among those mentioned Poniatowa, Budzyn, Trawniki, Radom, Plaszow (outside of Krakow, the site of *Schindler's List*), and several camps in the vicinity of Lublin, but not including Majdanek.

The value of the report to traditional historians is that it outlines the plunder aspect of Reinhardt. I would suggest that the value of the report to revisionists is that it outlines the true nature of *Reinhardt*: a program for seizing, registering, and processing Polish Jews in camps and ghettos, along with some population transfers of Poles, ethnic Germans, and Ukrainians in southeast Poland. The document is also important because it describes many sites of Jewish forced labor, which bear further study. Furthermore, the bulk of these Jewish forced laborers must have been “processed” through the *Reinhardt* camps at Treblinka, Sobibor, and Belzec, which means that *Reinhardt* could not have been an extermination program, at least not in a complete sense.

### 5.2 GLOBOCNIK REPORT, ADDENDUM

At the end of the document Globocnik itemizes seven points with roman numerals. For some reason, roman seven (VII) is missing from the most commonly available version of the document, but Robert Faurisson located it 25 years ago. It reads:

VII. The office is considering giving to relocated persons a certificate of what they will have left behind in the way of houses, farms, livestock and belongings of which inventory may be made, without, however, making any commitment for an obligatory compensation thereof. The future will decide whether such compensation must ensue some day in Brazil or in the Far East. It is only necessary to give transferred persons the feeling that there will ensue, later on, an indemnity for possessions left behind.

It is not obvious why this paragraph has been omitted, but the truncating of documents from the time of the Nuremberg trials is not something that should surprise. The typical source for both the International Military Tribunal (IMT) and the twelve trials of the Nuremberg Military Tribunal (NMT) is three sets of books produced under American auspices that in most cases provide severely edited versions of both documents and testimony. Since the Americans were prosecutors, it is to be expected that the sets would show the selective bias of the prosecutors. However, all of the materials, including the complete transcripts, document collections, and preliminary interrogations, are available at the United States National Archives (NARA), and it is there that Faurisson made his discovery.

The missing paragraph supports the idea that the deportees are still living. On the other hand, since Globocnik's report also includes some discussion of ethnic German and Polish population movements, one could argue that this paragraph pertains to them. However, the reference to future compensation in places like Brazil and the Far East presupposes emigration, and therefore I am fairly certain that Globocnik had in mind the future claims of plundered Polish Jews.<sup>37</sup>

### 5.3 THE HÖFLE TELEGRAM

While Globocnik's report to Himmler is light on statistics, Korherr's report from March 1943 is much more detailed. However, a very important contribution to understanding the Korherr report came from two amateur historians, Peter Witte and Stephen Tyas, in 2000, when they located, among the Enigma decrypts in Britain's Public Record Office, a brief telegraph message which has become known as the "Höfle Telegram." The message reads:

*State secret! To the commander of the Security Police, for the attention of SS Obersturmbannführer HEIM, CRACOW. Re: 14-day report operation REINHART [Einsatz Reinhart]. Reference: radio telegram from there Recorded arrivals until 31 December 42, L 12761, B 0, S 515, T 10335 totaling 23611. Situation [gap] 31 December 42, L 24733, B 434508, S 101370, T 71355, totaling 1274166. SS and police leader of Lublin, HÖFLE, Sturmbannführer.*

There is actually a typo in the text, but we can set that aside: the total for "T" does not add up. Assigning values to the letters we get the following tabulation of deportations by December 31, 1942:

Lublin	24,733
Belzec	434,508
Treblinka	713,555
Sobibor	101,370
Total	1,274,166

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<sup>37</sup> Faurisson discussion of Globocnik paragraph on his blog, [robertfaurisson.blogspot.com](http://robertfaurisson.blogspot.com).

The ordinary reading of this document is that 1.274 million Polish Jews had been deported to or through these four camps by the end of 1942. Lublin is assumed by Witte and Tyas to mean Majdanek, since that camp lay on the outskirts of Lublin, but that need not be so, since there were several camps under Globocnik's control in the city. Perhaps Witte and Tyas jumped to that conclusion because no allegations of exterminations are made for the other Lublin camps, and they insist that the listing above refers to exterminations only. However, the most important thing about the Höfle Telegram is that it explains the source of an important number in the Korherr Report.<sup>38</sup>

#### 5.4 THE KORHERR REPORT

There are three versions of the Korherr Report, which was a statistical report on the reduction of the Jewish population of Europe as of the end of 1942. The original version was presumably the same as the most commonly known long version, except for the rephrasing of one passage. The third version was an executive summary for Adolf Hitler's perusal. The most famous passage in the report is the following tabulation:<sup>39</sup>

1. Evacuation of Jews from Baden and the Palatinate to France	6,504
2. Evacuation of Jews from the Reich territory including the Protectorate and Bialystok district to the East	170,642
3. Evacuation of Jews from the Reich area and the Protectorate to Theresienstadt	87,193
4. Transportation of Jews from the eastern provinces to the Russian East	1,449,692
The following numbers were sifted through the camps in the General government	1,274,166
through the camps in the Warthegau	145,301
5. Evacuation from other countries, namely:	
France (insofar as occupied before 10.11.1942)	41,911
Netherlands	38,571
Belgium	16,886
Norway	532
Slovakia	56,691
Croatia	4,927

<sup>38</sup> Peter Witte and Stephen Tyas, "A New Document on the Deportation and Murder of Jews during 'Einsatz Reinhardt' 1942," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 15, no. 3 (Winter 2001): 468-486. It is worth mentioning here that the National Archives (NARA, M1019) contains an interrogation of Hermann Höfle on December 15, 1947. Höfle claimed that he had "nothing to do with those people," i.e., Jewish deportees, and also claimed that he was not associated with RKFDV, although he claimed he was involved in the construction of strong points and billets in the East in such locations as Smolensk, Mogilev, Baranavichy and Minsk in 1941 through 1943: all potential sites for deportation.

<sup>39</sup> The Korherr Report materials are included in NO-5193 through NO-5198.

Evacuations total (including Theresienstadt and including special treatment)	1,873,549
w/o Theresienstadt	1,786,356

There are some other parts to the report. 633,300 Soviet Jews are listed as “evacuated”; they are assumed by most researchers as representing those shot in the East, from which the conclusion is reached that evacuation is always a code word for killing, although this would not follow because Point #1 is a reference to the concentration camp in Gurs in the French Pyrenees, which was not an extermination camp, and neither was Theresienstadt.

The remaining Jewish inhabitants of Poland are listed as follows:

<b>DISTRICT</b>	<b>NUMBER</b>
Krakow	37,000
Radom	29,400
Lublin	20,000 (estimated) [ <i>geschätzt</i> ]
Warsaw	50,000
Lemberg [ <i>Lviv</i> ]	161,514
Total	297,914

Point #4 in the above table shows the tie-in with the Höfle Telegram. Context indicates that the original version of the report had some wording about “special treatment” in the heading “Transportation of Jews from the eastern provinces to the Russian East,” but that subsequent correspondence shows that Korherr was directed to remove the phrase “special treatment” (*Sonderbehandlung*), although it remains in the total enumeration. Since “special treatment” was at times used to mean execution, it is also assumed that extermination is meant here.

If we add the 633,300 Russian Jews listed as evacuated to the 1,786,356 evacuees excluding Theresienstadt, we arrive at a figure of 2,419,656 Jews who had been deported by December 31, 1942, and, if we assume that all of these were killed, we have an aggregate death toll of about 2.5 million European Jews at that date.

However, I would like to make several challenges to this interpretation. First, the motive for the report: Himmler wished to present a short report to the *Führer* showing how the Government General of Poland was now free of Jews; that is the clear import from a comparison of the short report and the longer one. In the same manner, the number of Polish Jews remaining, about 300,000, corresponds precisely to the benchmark that Himmler indicated in July 1942 that he wanted to achieve by the end of the year. In other words, there was a powerful incentive for the numbers in this report to be cooked.

A second point has to do with the likelihood of double counting, a likelihood increased when we reflect on the fact that since the Höfle Telegram was the source of Point #4, there is no guarantee that its totals would not overlap with other statistical sources. For example, the number of Jews evacuated from the eastern province of Galicia stood at 434,329 according to a report by SS General Katzmann, dated June 30, 1943.<sup>40</sup> Based on location, Belzec would be the natural place for the Galician Jews to be sent, and indeed we know that most were sent there; in fact, we know that precisely 434,508 Jews were sent there. We also know that Belzec had been shut down by the end of 1942.

Yet the Korherr Report indicates that there were 161,514—a carefully enumerated number, not an estimate—of Jews living in Galicia at this approximate time. This precise enumeration—unlike the round estimates for the other provinces—suggests that these people had already been processed by *Aktion Reinhardt*. But who might this population have included, if not Jews who had been processed through Belzec in 1942?

The population could not include Jews, or at least not many, from Germany, Austria, or the present-day Czech Republic. Drawing on Polish sources, Graf and Mattogno have made it clear that those 217,000 deportees were distributed to Theresienstadt (87,000), Lodz (19,000), and occupied Poland (36,000), with the remaining 75,000 to occupied Russia. Thus only 36,000 would be available to contribute to the calculation in Galicia. The mystery deepens when we reflect that the aforementioned report by General Katzmann indicates that only about 35,000 Jews were employed in camps in Galicia by June 1943. We conclude that Katzmann's boast of Galicia being "*Judenfrei*" (free of Jews) in June of 1943 does not mean that there were no living Jews in Galicia at that date, but rather that there were no unconfined Jews at that time; moreover, there is a strong suggestion that there were large numbers of nonworking Jews confined there as well.<sup>41</sup>

A further problem with the Korherr Report is that there were deportations, on some scale, of Polish Jews to many sites in the territory of the Soviet Union, including Bialystok (a province made part of the Reich, and adjacent to East Prussia); Grodno (later made part of Bialystok); Kovno and Riga to the north; and Mogilev, Bobruisk, Minsk, and Smolensk to the east. All of these Polish Jews must be included in the enumeration of Point #4; they cannot be accommodated anywhere else in the tabulation. The sources that describe these Polish Jewish deportations—mostly oral histories of the Russian ghettos, but also some documentary references found by Christian Gerlach—include reference to deportees from Germany and Western Europe as well. Unfortunately, these unofficial, fragmentary, and so far in-

<sup>40</sup> General Katzmann's report of June 30, 1943, also known as Nuremberg document L-18, can be found in abridged form in Berenstein, et al. eds., *Faschismus, Getto, Massenmord*, 358-363. I am aware of a full and annotated version of this report recently published in Poland but have been unable to obtain it.

<sup>41</sup> Jürgen Graf and Carlo Mattogno, *Treblinka*, 242-244, for the breakdown of deportations. I note that Raul Hilberg in a late article before his death also had difficulty in tracing the 161,000.

completely researched sources give us no sense of the actual numbers involved.<sup>42</sup>

Another problem is that there are several testimonies from Polish Jews and Western Jews, e.g. Dutch Jews, about passing through Treblinka and Sobibor. These survivors must also be included in the above tabulation, but it is unclear whether they should be included under Point #4. In addition, we know that there were hundreds of postcards sent by Jews deported from, among other places, the Netherlands and the Warsaw ghetto. The conventional interpretation is that these postcards were all forged, or prepared under duress, to coincide with the conspiracy theory of the Nazi intent to commit mass murder. However, it seems to me that a more likely explanation is that these postcards were in fact authentic, and were prepared by deportees at a stopping point during their journey: perhaps at a transit camp of some kind, perhaps at a point in the journey where the rail cars had to be converted from standard European gauge to Russian gauge. These postcards indicate deportations from Belzec to Pinsk (for land reclamation) and Krivoi Rog (for agriculture), and from Warsaw to Bialystok, Brest, Pinsk, Kosov, Kovel, Malkinia, Smolensk, and other cities and towns. It is worth mentioning in this regard that during the summer of 1942 Emanuel Ringelblum was indignant over reports that Jewish women, children, and elderly were being sent to camps in Lublin province or in Lemberg (Lviv) or Sokol in Galicia.<sup>43</sup>

Finally, the Korherr Report's estimate for Lublin province, 20,000, with the weasel word "estimated" (*geschätzt*) is demonstrably false. The proof of this assertion lies in the Franke-Gricksch report, recently authenticated by the British historian David Irving.

### 5.5 THE FRANKE-GRICKSCH REPORT

The Franke-Gricksch report that most people are familiar with is a two-page document purporting to be an "extract" from a larger report. This two-page extract is titled "Resettlement Action of the Jews," and is typed in German with several errors. It was first quoted by an American historian and then subsequently used as a centerpiece in Gerald Fleming's *Hitler and the Final Solution* in 1987. The value of the extract, if authentic, is that it would constitute the sole contemporaneous eyewitness document describing a gassing at Auschwitz.

Some background is necessary. Alfred Franke-Gricksch was an officer in the SS Personnel Office, working under SS General Maximilian von Herff. Together they took an inspection tour of SS camps in occupied Poland between May 4 and May 16, 1943. The two-page document about Jewish exterminations purports to be an extract of the travel diary for that tour. Revisionists have disputed the document for twenty years, the most thorough dissection of the document coming

<sup>42</sup> Christian Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Mord*, 747-763, and especially 761-763 for Polish Jews in occupied Russia.

<sup>43</sup> Postcards: Yisrael Gutman and Ina R. Friedman, *The Jews of Warsaw: 1939-1943*, 219; for Ringelblum's reaction, 220; also Reitlinger, *Final Solution*, 236, 253.

from the Canadian Brian Renk in 1991.<sup>44</sup>

Extracts from a purported alternative version of the Franke-Gricksch report have circulated on the Internet for several years. Finally, in 2010, the British historian David Irving located the entire report, along with a British summary analysis, and several other documents explaining the provenance of the report (it was found in von Herff's papers when he was taken into British custody in May 1945), the source of the extant English translation (a single German-language original which has vanished), and the timing of the discovery and preliminary analysis (the transfer documents are dated May 24, 1945).<sup>45</sup>

The surrounding documents show that the English translation is complete, since the British intelligence summary matches the report point for point. Moreover, the complete report provides exactly what one would expect to find from an inspection journal written by a personnel officer in the SS, namely, a detailed discussion, along with recommendations, concerning SS personnel issues. There is nothing in the report about mass killings, as noted in the British intelligence summary. In fact, the inspection report begins at Auschwitz on May 4, 1943—the first bombing of Auschwitz took place that night—and then moves along the southern tier of Poland to Lemberg (Lviv) in Galicia. There is no place in the report for a separate codicil or appendix to describe gassings at Auschwitz; the British intelligence officers make no reference to it, although they clearly had the entire report on hand, and furthermore a description of gassings would be completely at odds with the tenor of the report as it stands. It follows therefore that the two-page “extract” from the Franke-Gricksch report, relied upon in succession by Sydnor, Fleming, and Pressac, is a spurious document.

But how was this spurious document created? A possible explanation lies in the fact that the British files no longer contain the German language original. We can surmise that the original was passed on to other parties who were in the process of preparing prosecution documents for the Nuremberg trials, and then someone in the chain of custody decided to withdraw the original report and substitute an inauthentic extract. Somewhere along the line the false document fell into the hands of the American who later provided it to Sydnor in the mid-1970s, and then it was conveyed to Fleming.

Although there is nothing about mass killing in the authentic Franke-Gricksch report, there is extensive commentary about Jewish forced labor, much of it accompanied by a breezy and smug anti-Semitism, with occasional flashes of hatred, as in the passage where the Jewish fighters in the Warsaw Ghetto rebellion are described as “the scum of the earth.” Other parts of the report definitely support a revisionist interpretation. For example, *Aktion Reinhardt* is explicitly described as

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44 Brian A. Renk, “The Franke-Gricksch ‘Resettlement Action Report’: Anatomy of a Fabrication,” *Journal of Historical Review* 11, no. 3 (Fall 1991): 261-279.

45 Franke-Gricksch report, PRO file WO 309/374; the intelligence summary, including the surrounding documentation that establishes the provenance and completeness of the report, is at PRO file WO 309/224.

a plunder operation, as the British intelligence summary conceded. At one point, Franke-Gricksch remarks that Jewish deportees at Poniatowa who have recently arrived from the Warsaw Ghetto uprising “know that as long as they work and as long as they are able to work, nothing will happen to them,” which does not concur with the traditional narrative.

The greatest contradiction with standard historiography comes from Franke-Gricksch’s description of the number of Jewish camps and their prisoner populations, including several camps in Lublin, Lemberg (Lviv), as well as Poniatowa, where he claims that 50,000 to 80,000 Jews were imprisoned, which, remarkably, is even greater than the total population of Auschwitz, given at 54,000 in May 1943. Poniatowa and most of the other camps mentioned in the report were in the Lublin district, which directly contradicts the claim in the Korherr report, issued just one month previously, that the Jewish population in the province of Lublin could be “estimated” at 20,000.

There is further independent corroboration of the statements in the Franke-Gricksch report. In the well-known Stroop Report (1061-PS), describing the destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto, the word “*vernichtet*” (“destroyed”) is repeatedly used to describe the captured Jews, and, furthermore, groups of Jews are said to have been “*vernichtet*” by transport to “T II,” which the American staff analysis of the document confidently but erroneously identifies as the “extermination compound of the Trawniki camp near Lublin.” Yet in his postwar interrogations Stroop insisted that to his knowledge the Jews captured in Warsaw were sent to Lublin, although it is unclear whether he meant the city or the province. In fact, the survivors of the Warsaw Ghetto were distributed among Poniatowa, Trawniki, Majdanek and several other camps, and, in reference to “T II”—which actually is a reference to Treblinka—via that camp.<sup>46</sup> Thus the Franke-Gricksch Report, the Stroop Report, and Stroop’s postwar interrogations all point to the distribution of the participants of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising to camps in Lublin province, even though they had been in violent confrontation with German troops, and even though they passed through a camp supposedly designed for their extermination.

There is a footnote to add. In 1977, Korherr wrote to *Der Spiegel* protesting the claim that the 1.274 million in Point #4 referred to Jews who had been killed. He claimed that he had called Himmler’s offices precisely because he did not know the meaning of the phrase “special treatment” (*Sonderbehandlung*) in this context. He went on, “I received the answer that it referred to Jews who were to be settled in the district of Lublin.” The authentic Franke-Gricksch report confirms this claim.

## 5.6 JEWISH FORCED LABOR IN OCCUPIED POLAND

The extent to which Jewish labor was exploited by the Nazis has only begun to

<sup>46</sup> Juergen Stroop Interrogation (NARA M1019) September 7, 1946. Barbara Schwindt, *Das Konzentrations- und Vernichtungslager Majdanek*, 209-220, provides detailed footnotes about all of the trains from the Warsaw Ghetto to numerous other camps, but she does not dispute that “T II” was the extermination camp Treblinka, nor does she appear to accept that the trains that ended up in other camps transited “T II.”

receive attention from Holocaust historians. Part of the problem is that the immediate postwar narrative made no real distinction between labor exploitation and killing. It alleged that those who were kept alive were deliberately killed by overwork, and this concept of “extermination through work,” which was designed to kill Jewish slave laborers within weeks or months, long dominated the field. Even so, after Peter Longerich repeated the concept in his *Politik der Vernichtung* (1998), Peter Black, in 2001, could write in review:

The somewhat less oppressive conditions in the camps set up for Jewish labor in 1943 (Poniatowa, Trawniki and Budzyn in Lublin district, for example), induce speculation as to whether the Germans intended to “annihilate” these Jews “through labor” at all.<sup>47</sup>

What was the scope of this forced labor and what were the living conditions like for the Jewish prisoners? Felicia Karay, an Israeli, has written two books about Jewish forced labor, including a volume, *Death Comes in Yellow* (1996), describing the living conditions of Jews employed in an ammunition factory in Skarzysko Kamienna, Radom province, which alone appears to have employed tens of thousands of Jews. In 2006, Wolf Gruner published *Jewish Forced Labor Under the Nazis*, which summarized, with some specialization, the developing literature on Jewish slave labor and which contained the following observations:

The same [i.e., regarding the thesis of irrationality—SC] is essentially true for the thesis of “destruction through work.” This assumes that the prime objective of forced-labor measures is the death of the persons obligated to perform labor, not exploitation of potential labor. This is definitely not the case [...] from 1939 to 1941, but is also doubtful for forced labor in the Polish territories.

and

In striking contrast to the thesis of destruction through work, upon closer examination the forced labor camps were the last places where Jews were exempted, at least temporarily, from the extermination program.

I don’t want to give the impression that Gruner questions the extermination program. He clearly believes the standard narrative, and assumes the code meaning of words such as “evacuation.” This leads to an odd passage describing conditions in 1944:

The SS “evacuated” most of the Jewish prisoners westward when the Soviet army advanced in Poland, because their labor was needed.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Review of Peter Longerich, *Politik der Vernichtung*, by Peter Black, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 15, no. 3 (Winter 2001): 487-492.

<sup>48</sup> Wolf Gruner, *Jewish Forced Labor under the Nazis*, 291-292, 293, 273 for the three quotes.

Apparently, the habitual use of scare quotes around words like “evacuated” will eventually result in a situation in which the code meaning of a word will be identical to its normal meaning.

A further contribution to the literature comes from Christopher Browning, whose *Remembering Survival* was published in 2010. This concerns survivors from another Jewish slave labor camp, in Starachowice, also in Radom province. The methodology involves statements made by survivors in the 1960s compared to interviews Browning conducted in the 1990s. The book provides a detailed oral history, presented as a thematic narrative, of the experience of these Polish Jews.

It is a fascinating overview. Approximately 2,000 Polish Jews were involved, including men, women, and some children. Conditions were harsh, and during the outbreak of typhus epidemics, there were some peremptory shootings. On the other hand, prisoners were allowed some unstructured time at the end of the workday and one year flour was provided for Passover matzohs. In the summer of 1944, the inmates of Starachowice were loaded onto trains and were dispatched to Auschwitz. They were neither selected nor gassed, but were all—men, women, and children—put into barracks. They were subsequently selected and sent on to other camps. The death toll from this group was high, but there were numerous survivors.

In providing an overview of work conditions, Browning remarks, concerning the concept of “extermination through work”:

*The position I am arguing, and which is joined by several other historians who have recently published on the subject, is that the German use of Jewish slave labor was not a matter of consensus and varied so much according to time and place that no single phrase (such as “destruction through labor”) can capture some presumed consistency and essence of Nazi policy. Thus, even during the period of systematic extermination, when ideological goals enjoyed their greatest priority over utilitarian considerations, there always were exceptions.<sup>49</sup>*

The study of Jewish forced labor, or slave labor, either in Poland or elsewhere in the Nazi sphere of influence is still in its infancy. For example, most of the camps that I have enumerated in the past two sections are not even mentioned in most histories of the Holocaust, and were not part of the concentration camp empire as such. Yet the existence of such large cohorts of Jewish labor, rationally exploited, contradicts the notion that an extermination program or policy ever existed. This does not contradict the mass killings that took place in occupied Russia or anywhere else: We should not delude ourselves into thinking that the official Nazi ideology valued Jewish life.

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<sup>49</sup> Christopher Browning, *Remembering Survival*, 153.



## 6. RECENT LITERATURE, BROADER CONCEPTS, AND THE CONVERGENCE OF EVIDENCE

### 6.1 OVERVIEW OF RECENT LITERATURE

Over the past ten years there have been only a few books that focus on the contrast between Holocaust history and Holocaust revisionism. John Zimmerman's *Holocaust Denial* (2000) fell out of the ambit of my research, since Zimmerman's emphasis is on demographics and cremations, so I did not respond at that time: However, Zimmerman's work has been the subject of numerous critiques by Germar Rudolf, Thomas Dalton, and especially Carlo Mattogno, so those interested in those topics can consult them.<sup>50</sup>

The other two books that explored the contrast, van Pelt's *The Case for Auschwitz* (2002) and Shermer and Grobman's *Denying History* (2000) were both reviewed by me, and those reviews, combined with this overview, constitute my response to them. On the revisionist side, there has been only one volume, Thomas Dalton's *Debating the Holocaust* (2009), which is an ambitious summary of the debate that is clear and comprehensive, and which rebuts the factual arguments of the Holocaust histories cited above, although Mark Turley's *From Nineveh to Nuremberg* constitutes an eloquent defense of German identity as well as a sharp critique of the seemingly endless warring that appears to be a primary legacy of the Nuremberg trials.

Other books from the revisionist side are largely supplementary, but contribute much to our knowledge. The revisionist Carlo Mattogno, often in conjunction with Jürgen Graf, has written several books in the past decade, and, in particular, their volumes on Majdanek, Treblinka, and Belzec are very handy compilations of data from a wide variety of sources.<sup>51</sup>

In terms of overviews of the Holocaust, there have been few. Most of these are heavily indebted to secondary sources, which means that for the most part they do not provide any new information. For example, Richard J. Evans provided a *pro forma* review of the Holocaust in the third volume of his series on Nazi Germany, and not without inaccuracies: thus the "main constituent" of Zyklon B is said to be "sulfuric acid." Evans is not a reliable guide on other topics either; this is probably the only

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<sup>50</sup> Dalton, *Debating*, engages Zimmerman specifically and cross-references the writings of Rudolf and Mattogno.

<sup>51</sup> Jürgen Graf and Carlo Mattogno, *Concentration Camp Majdanek: A Historical and Technical Study*; Carlo Mattogno and Jürgen Graf, *Treblinka: Extermination Camp or Transit Camp?*; Carlo Mattogno, *Belzec in Propaganda, Testimonies, Archaeological Research, and History*.

book you will ever read in which the postwar *Metamorphosen* of Richard Strauss is described as “limpid” and “Mozartian.”<sup>52</sup> Saul Friedländer provided a second volume to his history of the Holocaust, relying mostly on contemporary documents, such as diaries. Raul Hilberg provided a third edition of his definitive work in 2003, four years before his death. The discussion of mass gassing in none of these books was improved from prior efforts; none so much as referenced van Pelt’s massive book defending the traditional interpretation of Auschwitz, and Hilberg referenced no recent secondary scholarship. None of the three implicitly or explicitly engaged revisionist arguments about mass gassing. As for the descriptions of mass gassing at Auschwitz itself, both Evans and Friedländer relied on a brief “research note” by three non-historians that simply tried to show that there were holes in the roof of a basement in one of the Birkenau crematoriums, but which at the same time provided a thoroughly unsourced narrative for how the gassings took place.<sup>53</sup> Evans made a glancing and approving reference to another highly impressionist effort, which relied almost entirely on postwar interrogations. I consider this to be a rather unusual retreat from the subject of mass gassing.<sup>54</sup>

Friedländer’s treatment, in *Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Extermination*, is eloquent and far-reaching, but while extremely interesting and deeply textured provides little of probative detail about gassings. In some respects he follows the same chronology of the emergent knowledge of gassing that I provided in “The Gas Chamber of Sherlock Holmes”; the difference is that while I considered such contemporary evidence as proof that the notion of mass gassing was widespread, he appears to consider such evidence as proof of mass gassing as such. For example, Friedländer quotes the Cornides diary, one of several eyewitness descriptions of the deportations in the Belzec region in the summer of 1942, which were originally published in the 1950s.<sup>55</sup> Yet these documents do not even remotely prove mass gassings; they only prove that the suspicion of mass gassing was widely shared among Jews and non-Jews alike at the time, which exactly accords with my thesis. In fact, in this particular case, the suspicion of gassing arose because the passengers of a train passing by Belzec noticed a stench coming from the camp. Yet, as

<sup>52</sup> Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich at War*, 297 (Zyklon, stray cat), 753 (Strauss).

<sup>53</sup> Daniel Keren, Jamie McCarthy, and Harry W. Mazal, “The Ruins of the Gas Chambers: A Forensic Investigation of Crematoriums at Auschwitz I and Auschwitz-Birkenau,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 18, no. 1 (2002): 68-103. For example, the article argues that the Zyklon was removed from the gas chamber after fifteen minutes but provides no evidence in support of this assertion. Turning to the well-known conversion of the Auschwitz I crematorium into an air raid shelter, the authors allege that the conversion “mainly” involved plugging in Zyklon introduction holes and putting up wooden partitions, whereas the actual document describing the conversion had been freely available on the Internet for four years via Crowell, “Bomb Shelters in Birkenau,” Document #36.

<sup>54</sup> Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich at War*, 799n. Michael Thad Allen “Not Just a ‘Dating Game’: Origins of the Holocaust at Auschwitz in the Light of Witness Testimony,” *German History* 25, no. 2 (2007). Among other things, Allen accepts via footnote references to Gerlach, Breitman, and Hilberg the nonsensical idea that Zyklon B was especially formulated to kill human beings. With regard to the wire mesh contraptions that were to be secured to the holes in the roof of the basements of Crematoriums II and III, for which there is trace of neither holes nor contraptions on any architectural drawing, he simply declares: “No conclusions can be drawn from this lacuna one way or the other. The absence may be due to the SS’s explicit, if ineffective, orders to keep the Holocaust secret,” before offering another unconvincing explanation.

<sup>55</sup> Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews: 1939–1945*, 399–400, originally published as “Zur ‘Umsiedlung’ der Juden im Generalgouvernement,” in *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 7, no. 3 (July 1959): 333-336.

I showed in “The Gas Chamber of Sherlock Holmes,” the association of an odd odor with poison gas is a typical folk belief, and has nothing to do with any gas or exhaust gas that is supposed to have been used at any camp.

## 6.2 THE DEATH MATRIX

In 2009, Thomas Dalton published *Debating the Holocaust*, which provides a lucid and wide-ranging summary of the current literature. In my remarks here, I have tried to avoid overlap with his treatments, which in terms of the forensic issues, and including such topics as mass gassing, cremation, and body disposal, are logical and direct in their engagement with Holocaust historians.

There is one element to Dalton’s treatment that is completely new, in that he has gone to the trouble of graphing the typical Holocaust claims across time, to show the actual implications of the standard narrative. It has long been noted, for example, that if the standard history is true, there must have been two apexes of mass murder in the camps, one in the summer of 1942, and one in the summer of 1944. The first curve corresponds to the deportations of *Aktion Reinhardt*, the second corresponds to the deportations of the Hungarian Jews, but also an indeterminate number of deportations from Poland through Auschwitz, such as the liquidation of the Lodz Ghetto, the labor camp at Starachowice, and many others. Viewed in this manner, the likelihood of the total extermination of these deportees—either as a plan or as a policy—seems distinctly doubtful because the high volume would surely have overtaxed the abilities of these facilities beyond any rational measure.

However, there is another way of looking at these two gigantic curves. If we understand that the killing of Jews was incidental to expelling them from German zones of proposed settlement, and that such killing was in fact in contradiction to the rational exploitation of Jewish labor, we can say that the first curve—*Aktion Reinhardt*—corresponded to their settlement in Lublin and the ghettos in the occupied Soviet Union, while the second curve—focused on Auschwitz, but also, in all likelihood, Stutthof to the north—was focused on the forced return of these deported Jews to areas under German control, as the Eastern front contracted, including labor-capable Jews, and the importation of Jews from Hungary and elsewhere.

Why would the Germans retrieve these deported Jews? That is unclear, although labor would appear to be a prime reason, as Wolf Gruner noted. It may be also that, after the first murderous outbursts in 1941 and 1942 in the occupied Soviet Union, Himmler—who, regardless of Hitler’s inside knowledge, was clearly the main architect of the Jewish ordeal—began to change the rules for how the Jews were to be treated, or mistreated. It is well known, for example, that Himmler was well aware of the atrocity propaganda concerning mass killings no later than November 1942. Such awareness no doubt contributed to his order of March 1943, rescinding “Aktion 14 f 13,” which was the program whereby persons in the concentration

camps who were invalided or otherwise incapable of work were put to death.

There are other indications that Himmler's treatment of captive Jews changed over time. For example, after the uprising in the Bialystok Ghetto in August 1943, the residents of the ghetto were sent to several camps, via Treblinka and Majdanek. It is said that over a thousand children were sent from the Bialystok Ghetto to Theresienstadt (and are further said to have been killed at Auschwitz at a later time). Similarly, in late 1943, the children and elderly of the Kovno Ghetto were also sent to Auschwitz, while the rest of the inhabitants were distributed to various work camps. Such population movements would have been senseless if Himmler had had no reservations about killing the Jews under his control.

Furthermore, it is a certainty that many Jews perished in the later days of the war under circumstances that were not planned. The traffic from the East overloaded the *cordon sanitaire* that existed in the camp system, with the result that typhus, typhoid, and other diseases broke out in many camps, the direct cause of the piles of corpses that are the indelible images of the Holocaust for most of us. Allied fighters and fighter bombers on constant patrol paralyzed German road and rail traffic, again with devastating results in the concentration camps. SS men, in camps that were to be abandoned, had to make choices about taking charge of their inmates, and leaving the camps. They knew that if they continued to guard their prisoners their reward could be a peremptory shooting by an Allied soldier or a hangman's noose at some later time. In some cases, it appears they simply murdered their inmates in small groups so that they could escape and hide.

Meanwhile, as Germans were evacuated along the Baltic coast, captive Jews must have been among their numbers as well. In two cases, German evacuation ships were sunk by the Soviet navy, with appalling casualties. The *Wilhelm Gustloff* was sunk on January 30, 1945, with about 9,400 deaths, the greatest disaster in maritime history, some six times the victims of the *Titanic*. The *Goya* was sunk on April 16, 1945, with approximately 7,000 deaths. Surely those victims must have included helpless Jews who had already been shunted from camp to camp to camp: We know that the RAF sank the *Cap Arcona* a few weeks later, killing some five thousand Jews. Here I have to register my curiosity about an alleged massacre at Palmnicken, supposed to have occurred on January 31, 1945. The proof of the massacre came from bodies of dead Jews washing up on the shore that day. It was understood by witnesses to have been a case of the SS forcing Hungarian Jewish women to run into the surf before machine-gunning them. But it is hard not to speculate that what the eyewitnesses saw were bodies from the *Wilhelm Gustloff* washing ashore, since it had been sunk the night before, and its port of departure was only 10 miles south of Palmnicken. If there is a connection, it is a terrible one. If there is none, it is a dreadful coincidence.<sup>56</sup>

Finally, as my studies of the aerial war against Germany indicate, perhaps as many

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<sup>56</sup> *New York Times*, "Yantarny Journal," January 31, 2000.

as 750,000 German civilians died as the result of Allied bombing raids. Yet military and prisoner casualties appear to have been calculated separately. It is likely that large numbers of Jewish prisoners also lost their lives in these raids. In one, at the Boelcke Kaserne near Buchenwald, about three thousand prisoners perished. Thus the Allied bombing of Germany provided another opportunity for the Jewish victims of Nazism to die a lonely and anonymous death far from family and home.

In his novel *2666* the late Chilean novelist Roberto Bolaño provided a mammoth canvas unified by a search in Mexico for the mysterious German author Benno von Archimboldi, perhaps a *Doppelgänger* for B. Traven. As bookends to the quest are atrocities, first, a reflection of the ongoing issue concerning the mass murder of hundreds of women and girls in Ciudad Juarez, and second, toward the end, revelations about what Archimboldi saw and heard on the eastern front in World War Two. This leads into a narrative about a petty Nazi official named Sammer who describes running a small office for labor procurement in a dingy Polish town. One day a trainload of five hundred Greek Jews is dumped in his lap. Dutifully he calls around for ways to employ them. He finds food and accommodation. He employs the deported Jews in sweeping streets. He cannot find anything to do with them. Eventually he gets some local police and gendarmes together and starts having his Jewish captives taken out of town, a dozen or so a day, in order to shoot them. Of course, Bolaño's book is fiction, but the description in a general sense rings true. Removed, by deportation, from a context in which they had identity and meaning, many Jewish deportees no doubt felt purposeless even as their masters were convinced that they were superfluous. Probably, it was in just such a gray and hopeless atmosphere that most Jews lost their lives.

### 6.3 THE HOAX CONCEPT

Because of the irregularities and scarcity of evidence for the mass gassing claim, combined with the fact that the mass gassing claim requires a complicated conspiracy theory to operate, it has been argued that the claim required the propagation of the legend by people knowing it to be untrue: that is, that the claim is a hoax. The associated idea that “the Holocaust is a hoax” derives from this concept.

The person most associated with the hoax concept is Arthur Butz, whose *Hoax of the Twentieth Century* remains the most thoroughgoing exposition of the revisionist approach. Since its first publication, Butz has elaborated on his use of the word. In part, the use of the word was meant for its shock appeal, because Butz, having focused mostly on the extermination camp claims, came to the conclusion that a jolt was needed to force people to shake off their confused beliefs in this area.<sup>57</sup> Another reason is because in his examination of the Allied leadership, as well as the Zionist leadership, he concluded that no one was acting as if mass exterminations were actually taking place.

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<sup>57</sup> Butz, *Hoax*, 402.

There is some support for Butz's point of view. The deportations during *Aktion Reinhardt* and during the summer of 1944 met with little resistance from the deportees: they were convinced they were going to work camps, which, as we have seen, was probably the case. Even the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto, in May of 1943, only took place after five sixths of the ghetto had been deported. In addition, it is known that David Ben Gurion, in 1944, ended up opposing the bombing of Auschwitz, even though the propaganda at that time insisted that the Hungarian Jews were being deported solely to kill them. Finally, it was prior to the deportation of the Hungarian Jews that the "Blood for Goods" negotiations took place involving Adolf Eichmann, Joel Brand, and Rudolf Kasztner, and potentially involving a deal with the Allies for trucks and other materials in return for the release of the Hungarian Jews. Yet nothing came of these negotiations, an outcome hard to accept if there was a strong belief that failure meant death for the Jews of Hungary.

On the other hand, I think Butz's position is too severe. No prominent Jew, either in Hungary, Switzerland, London, or the United States could be sure what was happening in occupied Poland or elsewhere. True, they may have received conflicting messages. But they must have believed that the worst messages—of mass death and mass killing—were at least partly true, as indeed they were. How better to get attention for the suffering of the Jewish people, than to emphasize precisely the worst reported aspects of the persecution and killing? Historians would, after all, sort it all out later.

Thus I would not characterize the actions of the Zionist leadership or the American Jewish leadership as a hoax. I see their actions rather as those of men who were desperate to save their coreligionists, at a time when all means must have seemed legitimate. After the war a specific narrative of Nazi atrocity took hold, and was confirmed by a series of tribunals. That same narrative—popularized in films like *Night and Fog*, and *Judgment at Nuremberg*, and in books like Shirer's *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*—became dominant to such an extent that no possible advantage could come from challenging it. Yet the recriminations among Jews, in thrall to this narrative, would follow for a long time. Thus Rudolf Kasztner would be assassinated in 1957 because of the claim that he had withheld information about the extermination of the Hungarian Jews, demonstrating the depths of animosity even among Jewish survivors in Israel. Thus two of John Demjanjuk's Israeli attorneys would be victimized, one in an apparent suicide and the other by an attack with acid during Demjanjuk's first appeal in the early 1990s, after he had been erroneously identified by several eyewitnesses as a sadistic killer at Treblinka and found guilty by the Israeli courts.<sup>58</sup>

To clarify the discussion of the hoax concept, I would like to back up and associate the concept with the discussion of "conspiracy theory" earlier in this article.

A hoax is generally understood to be false information that is developed by

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<sup>58</sup> Yoram Sheftel, *Defending "Ivan the Terrible,"* describes in detail the pressures involved in defending Demjanjuk.

parties with the knowledge that what is being purveyed is untrue. Most hoaxes that we normally encounter are small scale conspiratorial deceptions, the media being commonly involved, for example, the Men in the Moon Hoax of 1835, or the Edgar Allan Poe authored Balloon Hoax of 1844. Sometimes hoaxes are devised as a joke against specific individuals, which then gain widespread attention, for example the story of Drake's Plate of Brass, or Piltdown Man. Other hoaxes seem to involve attempts at nothing more than personal aggrandizement, such as the Balloon Boy Hoax of 2009, or Benjamin Wilkomirski's memoirs. Still other hoaxes are meant to indict entire peoples, such as the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion." In all cases, the deliberate intent to deceive is the key element.

However, a second key element to a hoax is the predisposition to believe it among the population being hoaxed: that is why one speaks of the "wish fulfillment" aspect of hoaxes. No hoax can gain traction if it does not appeal to dispositions or expectations that already exist. Yet a "conspiracy theory" as we normally encounter the concept also refers to a body of belief that flows out of such preexisting dispositions and expectations.

### 6.3.1 THE CONSPIRACY CONCEPT

Now let us turn to the distinction between conspiracy and conspiracy theory. Certainly we know that conspiracies exist: the Lincoln assassination, the 9/11 hijackings and attacks, and many others. Sometimes the release of data pertaining to a given conspiracy can take years or even decades to emerge. In this respect we have to note that the planned extermination of the Jewish people, in the sense of killing them, is also a conspiracy claim, but one which, after sixty-five years, lacks the documentary or material support one would expect.

On the other hand, a conspiracy "theory" as I discussed earlier is an alleged conspiracy which depends on the unseen nature of the conspiracy's agents and the deliberate concealment of evidence by those engaged in the conspiracy. One could take the tack, therefore, that the difference between a conspiracy and a conspiracy theory is that the evidence for the latter simply has not yet emerged. However, I am convinced that the roots are deeper and are part of our common mental makeup.

The linkage of conspiratorial thinking to mental disorders spawned by anxiety and fear is, for example, well known. Thus when the American historian Richard Hofstadter attempted to describe those who attributed a conspiratorial "motive force" to human events, he titled his study "The Paranoid Style in American Politics." The British author G. K. Chesterton had similar insights in his book *Orthodoxy*:

*The last thing that can be said of a lunatic is that his actions are causeless. If any human acts may loosely be called causeless, they are the minor acts of a healthy man; whistling as he walks; slashing the grass with a stick; kicking his heels or rubbing his hands. It is the happy man who does the useless things; the sick man is not strong enough to be idle. It is exactly such careless and causeless actions*

that the madman could never understand; for the madman (like the determinist) generally sees too much cause in everything. The madman would read a conspiratorial significance into those empty activities. He would think that the lopping of the grass was an attack on private property. He would think that the kicking of the heels was a signal to an accomplice. If the madman could for an instant become careless, he would become sane. [...] Indeed, the common phrase for insanity is in this respect a misleading one. The madman is not the man who has lost his reason. The madman is the man who has lost everything except his reason.<sup>59</sup>

I want to suggest that conspiratorial thinking does not arise out of mental illness *per se*, but rather out of the cause-seeking nature of the human mind. Just as Kant would insist that the notion of cause and effect is innate, I would suggest that the human mind will seek to create causal nexuses for events that seem arbitrary and capricious, especially when they are destructive on a grand scale. To this extent the human mind is always potentially schizophrenic: perceiving a world full of confusing and unpredictable action, yet understood by a mind that refuses to accept a lack of pattern or structure. When Einstein wrote to Max Born and declared that God “does not throw dice,” he was speaking not as a scientist but as Everyman.

If conspiratorial thinking is therefore rooted in a desire to make sense out of a confusing and frightening world, it should follow that times of great social upheaval will give rise to the belief in conspiracies. But it is also true that these notions of unseen or invisible agency are normally, through human history, articulated through religion: After all the function of religious theodicies is to show the hand of God in all events, to demonstrate the justice and necessity of why things happened the way they did. Yet concomitant with the great upheavals of the last hundred years there has been a decline in religious belief; so that traditional religious explanations, which canalize and control this impulse for explanation, have been superseded by conspiratorial explanations of all kinds. A further factor that probably promotes conspiratorial thinking is the fact that, due to the post-industrial division of labor, large parts of our lives are determined by agents we will never see and factors of which we know nothing: In effect, we really are having our lives affected by unseen actors.

This human thirst for patterned and comprehensible order is characterized by David Aaronovitch in his definition of a conspiracy theory as an “attribution of deliberate agency to something that is more likely to be accidental or unintended.”<sup>60</sup>

My argument here, as it relates to the Holocaust, is that just as the Germans after World War I blamed their defeat on a Jewish conspiracy, the Jewish people, in attempting to account for their own destruction, have, in parts of their narrative, relied on a Nazi conspiracy in turn. This is especially clear in terms of the mass gassing claim. What reveals these conspiratorial claims as conspiracy theo-

<sup>59</sup> Gilbert Keith Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, “Chapter II: The Maniac,” Internet edition.

<sup>60</sup> David Aaronovitch, *Voodoo Histories*, 6.

ries—that is, nonexistent conspiracies—is the lack of material evidence, the tendency to force all errant data into the assumed conspiracy matrix, and finally the preexistence of a model or belief that drives the conspiratorial claim: in the first case, a belief in the conspiratorial tendencies of the Jewish people, along with anti-Semitism, and in the second case, the preexistence of the gassing narrative, along with the widespread anxiety about the usage of poison gas, the practice of cremation, the disinfection paradigm, and lastly, and most important, the anxiety of the Jewish people in the twentieth century to survive as a people while pressed from all sides, including the strident calls for their destruction by the leadership of the Third Reich.

I would further propose that the belief in a conspiracy theory is driven by exactly the same forces that drive the belief in a hoax: in both cases the predisposition to believe is paramount. The promoters of a conspiracy theory are rarely accused of a deliberate intent to deceive: that is the hallmark of a hoax. But what happens if the promoters of a hoax actually believe the false information they are promoting? Then I would suggest that what they are promoting is not a hoax, but rather a conspiracy theory. In short, the proposed explanation for the Jewish catastrophe of the Second World War, according to which the Germans were secretly attempting to kill all of the Jews in Europe, and were using mass gassings to achieve this end, is a conspiracy theory.

As I see it, then, there are three main problems with the hoax concept. The first problem is the problem of nomenclature; conspiracy theory covers the same ground as hoax. The second problem is that it easily feeds into the malicious stereotype of Jewish mendacity and conspiracy. Even though Butz explicitly rejected such an expansion of the concept, it is nevertheless easily achieved, and as a result the hoax idea tends to create a defensive posture not only among Jewish people but also among the many that would rise to defend them from further harassment. The third problem with the hoax concept is that, at first glance, it tends to demean the suffering of the Jewish people: This, too, yields defensiveness and blind support. Of course, one could say that any kind of Holocaust revisionism would yield such a result. Very possibly that is true, which is why my main concern is to keep the gates of free speech open; I have no illusions or even particular concern about the acceptance of revisionism in the short term.

#### **6.4 THE “NO GASSING” CONCEPT**

A common argument made by Holocaust revisionists is that the Germans killed no one with poison gas. Paul Rassinier, a former Buchenwald inmate, was the first person to argue in that direction in the 1950s. He was followed by Robert Faurisson, another Frenchman, in the 1970s. Faurisson is famous for arguing in many articles that the Germans gassed no one at Auschwitz or anywhere else. Most revisionists follow him, and to the extent that “orthodoxy” can be used to describe Holocaust revisionism,

rejection of the gassing claim is the closest one gets to an orthodox position.

As we have seen, there is no documentary or forensic evidence for gassings at the Reinhardt camps. The documentary and forensic evidence at Auschwitz has been arguably misconstrued. Small scale or singular gassings are alleged, usually on the basis of eyewitness testimony, at several concentration camps in Germany.

I think we have to step back and view the gassing claim in terms of what it is supposed to connote. There is after all no question that the Germans were persecuting and killing Jews in large numbers. So what difference does it make whether the Germans gassed people or not? One might consider it an important, signature element in the destruction of the Jewish people, yet, as István Deák of Columbia University once wrote:

*Others would say, however, and I tend to side with them, that when the Stalinist regime deported or shot the children of the so-called kulaks for no crime other than former ownership of land by their peasant parents, then it, too, judged people on the basis of biology. It is true that the Soviets did not use gas chambers, but they had in northern Russia and Siberia a vast natural freezing chamber in which huge numbers of political prisoners died of cold and malnutrition. Nor can there be any doubt that the Soviet regime was as determined to kill off entire groups of human beings—the Polish intelligentsia, for example—as was the Nazi regime.<sup>61</sup>*

So therefore the argument could be made that the destruction of the Jewish people was not so unique after all. It might also be argued that the gas chambers are crucial to demonstrate the intentionality to kill all of the Jewish people, yet along these lines we cannot fail to note the observation of Princeton University professor Arno Mayer:

*from 1942 to 1945, certainly at Auschwitz, but probably overall, more Jews were killed by so-called “natural” causes than by “unnatural” ones.<sup>62</sup>*

Accordingly, the argument could also be made that the destruction was not wholly intentional either. I won't pretend that Professor Mayer did not receive harsh criticism for the assertion quoted above. Nor do I claim that the statements of these two professors somehow settle the matter. I am inclined to think, however, that the focus on gas chambers has to do with the conviction that the Jewish destruction was part of a plan to kill all of the Jewish people, and that the plan was carried out, as Shermer put it, via “a highly technical, well-organized extermination program.”<sup>63</sup>

As to the first point, the rational utilization of Jewish labor throughout the war undermines the notion that the German state was ever pursuing a deliberate policy

<sup>61</sup> István Deák, “Memories of Hell,” *New York Review of Books*, June 26, 1997.

<sup>62</sup> Arno Mayer, *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken*, 365.

<sup>63</sup> Shermer and Grobman, *Denying History*, 100.

to kill all of the Jews of Europe, regardless of how many perished otherwise due to Nazi policies. Hence the gas chambers are irrelevant to the argument.

As to the second point, I cannot believe that anyone who has seriously studied this matter would ever conclude that there was anything “highly technical” or “well-organized” about the destruction of the Jews, even in the assumption that Holocaust revisionists are wrong on all counts. For the *Reinhardt* camps, we have a situation in which about one hundred Germans are supposed to have killed close to two million Polish Jews with the exhaust gases of engines captured at random, in fumigation vaults constructed by no known engineers, to which, for no clear reason, bomb shelter doors were attached. The nearly two million corpses were then supposed to have been ingeniously buried by hand, exhumed several months later, and cremated with locally procured fuel, in order to hide the traces of these mass murders, after which the ashes were hidden somewhere to conceal the traces of the enormous crime.

For Auschwitz, we have a situation in which four crematoriums were built, not only for the purpose of burning the bodies of those dying on a regular basis at Auschwitz, but also for those who would be deliberately killed there. The planning for these crematoriums were far advanced before a chance occurrence—involving an SS man in one case, a stray cat in another—gave the authorities the idea to appropriate the fumigant Zyklon B and use it as an agent of mass murder. Two of the crematoriums either were or were not designed to have holes in the roof to receive the Zyklon poison; if the former, they were so designed before they had decided on the means; if the latter, they would have had to punch holes in the roof for the method to work. Meanwhile, the other two crematoriums had no conceivable means for retrieving the Zyklon once it was cast inside. Moreover, the architectural drawings for none of the crematoriums reveal a single design feature that would make any of their spaces more suitable for gassing human beings than any other enclosed space. Finally, after the crematoriums were built, the traffic to Auschwitz never reached the level where the designated spaces would have been needed for the mass gassing of human beings, which is why Fritjof Meyer concluded that the gassings must have continued—in two Polish cottages that stood nearby.

Hence, even if the gassing claim is unequivocally true, there is no conceivable manner in which the destruction of the Jews can be described as either highly technical or well organized; it can only be described as a stunning feat of purely local improvisation. The only problem then, if that is the case, is how anyone can claim that the top echelon of the German government was in any way involved in the process.

I think the main reason the gassing claim was originally questioned by Rassinier was because he considered it a grotesque calumny against the German people, even though he had been imprisoned in a concentration camp by them, and had been brutally tortured after his wartime arrest while serving in the French underground.

I infer that Butz rejected the gassing claim partly because of the alleged dual use of Zyklon B, partly because of the occasional portrayal of fumigation vaults as gas chambers, and partly because of the unreliability of the witnesses. Faurisson quickly followed, and in addition to Butz's observations included on-site inspections of all known gassing sites. The judgment of these three investigators is what determines the revisionist position that no gassings took place.

In my view in terms of gassings, we have to distinguish between the possibility of occasional *ad hoc* gassings on the one hand and the alleged mass gassings of thousands of people on a daily basis. True, neither possibility has any support, beyond testimonial evidence, and arguably all of that comes from the postwar period. By contrast, the material, documentary, and even forensic evidence for gassings is at best ambiguous.

It seems to me that there are two issues here. The first is whether, based on the paucity of evidence, gassings may be doubted. I think that question can only be answered in the affirmative. The second question is whether some possible small-scale or occasional gassings bear any relationship to the mass gassings that are supposed to have taken place. In my opinion they do not. Nevertheless, it is a fact that mass gassing claims of a widespread nature were made for several camps during and after the war. The totals allegedly killed in 1945 have been severely reduced for many camps. The evidence for gassing, or even mass killing, at the key sites is lacking. So we have a tremendous disparity between the scope of the allegations and the evidence supporting them. The explanation for that discrepancy is essentially a conspiracy theory, which cannot suffice.

## 6.5 THE CONVERGENCE OF EVIDENCE

I reviewed the evidence from Shermer and Grobman's *Denying History* in Section 3. The evidence points to the mass killing of Jews in the Soviet Union and the exploitation of their labor throughout Europe. In addition, the evidence points to the assumption that large numbers of Jews who are incapable of work or who are unwilling to work will be killed or will otherwise perish. In short, we have one imperative that ends up with the Jews being killed or dying, and we have another imperative that has the Jews being exploited for their labor. One can already guess how this will play out. Those who wish to emphasize the deaths or killing of Jews will minimize the extent of labor exploitation, particularly now that the entire notion of "extermination through work" has been put into question. On the other hand, those who wish to minimize the extent to which Jews were killed or died will emphasize the extent of forced labor or slave labor. A balanced evaluation of the one imperative versus the other will take some time to achieve. However, to the extent that there were two imperatives, it follows that there was never a plan or policy to kill all of the Jews of Europe.

Shermer and Grobman also offered a convergence of evidence for the mass

gassing claim. There are six elements to this convergence, as follows: (1) Zyklon B invoices, (2) Zyklon B traces, (3) Ground photos at Auschwitz, (4) Aerial photos of Auschwitz, (5) Current ruins at Auschwitz, and (6) Eyewitness testimony.

The references to Zyklon B can be dismissed outright because there was nothing inherently sinister about either Zyklon B or the stains that might result from its use. None of the photographic evidence really points anywhere, except to the reality of crematoriums at Auschwitz and Birkenau. Other photographs, for example, of about 20 dead naked bodies, also do not prove mass gassing. The holes in the roof of one of the basement morgues are actually not as probative as one might think, and while there have been many exertions in this area—with no agreement about which holes are which—the fact remains that the presence or absence of these holes is irrelevant to the claim that hundreds of thousands were gassed at Auschwitz. Proof of this contention comes from the arguments of Fritjof Meyer, who argues that the crematoriums were used for very few, if any, gassings, but who still argues that 350,000 people were gassed at Birkenau.

Hence, Shermer and Grobman cannot really offer a convergence of evidence, except by testimony. In this respect, they follow van Pelt, Zimmerman, and many others in arguing that the various testimonies from Auschwitz (and elsewhere) independently corroborate each other. For example, Shermer and Grobman argue that the similarities in the gassing descriptions of Pery Broad and Rudolf Höss can only be explained away by arguing for a secret meeting between the two at which they would have concocted their story.<sup>64</sup> But this simply ignores the surrounding context. Broad's testimony was featured at the *Tesch-Weinbacher* trial that took place the week before Höss was captured, and both the trial and the capture took place in the northern end of the British zone of occupation. As a result the possibility and even the likelihood of cross-pollination or cross-contamination cannot be discounted. The same could be said for all postwar eyewitness accounts, as I set forth in "The Gas Chamber of Sherlock Holmes."

Eyewitness testimonies have to be evaluated for factual accuracy, and then judgment must be used to establish the credibility of what is being described. Factual accuracy, in turn, has to go back to documents and forensics, because of the problem of the cross-influence of testimonies. For example, in the case of gassing claims for the Auschwitz main camp, I cited a document (#36) in "Bomb Shelters in Birkenau" describing materials needed for the bomb shelter conversion of its crematorium. Among other things the work order specified the need for gastight doors and shutters and a ventilation system and says nothing about filling in any holes in the roof. This strongly suggests that there were neither gastight doors, nor shutters, nor a ventilation system, nor any holes in the roof prior to this work order dated August 26, 1944. As a result, this document refutes the testimony of Pery Broad, Hans Stark, and any other eyewitnesses to gassings in the base camp crematorium.

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<sup>64</sup> Shermer and Grobman, *Denying History*, 139.

In other words, their testimonies are factually inaccurate and cannot be true. The only way such testimonies could be represented as truthful would be by recourse to another conspiracy theory arguing that at some stage prior to its bomb shelter conversion all of the materials associated with gassings in the crematorium were removed and concealed. As with all such conspiracy theories there is no documentary evidence.

Concerning testimonial evidence for gassings as a whole, the question naturally arises why so many people—actually, only some dozens of people—would attest to something that didn't take place. I think Paul Rassinier had the best explanation for that. One of the main reasons Rassinier got involved in Holocaust revisionism is because he was an inmate at Buchenwald and was certain that no one was gassed there. When he read that the Abbé Jean-Paul Renard was attesting to such gassings, he confronted the priest, who replied: "Right, but that's only a figure of speech ... and since those things existed somewhere, it is of no importance."<sup>65</sup>

That is the fundamental quandary of the gassing claim: it must have happened somewhere, but the evidence is unambiguous nowhere.

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<sup>65</sup> Paul Rassinier, *Debunking the Genocide Myth*, 96.

## 7. CONCLUSION

IT IS IMPORTANT to realize that the stress lines between Holocaust historians and Holocaust revisionists concern matters that are relatively arcane. In some ways, the Holocaust as discussed here is simply a subset of real or alleged German atrocities carried out under its Nazi government, which in turn is a subset of the history of Germany in World War Two, which in turn is a subset of the history of Nazi Germany, which in turn is a subset of German history in the twentieth century. I can personally attest to the fact that it is possible to study German history and even the history of the Third Reich for decades without ever dealing with the kinds of issues discussed here.

On the other hand, from the point of view of Jewish history, the Holocaust is extremely important, because the experience of the Jewish people under Nazi dominion defines the end of Ashkenazi Jewry as a distinct cultural unit in Eastern Europe. True, the argument can be made that the “World of Our Fathers” as romanticized by photographers like Roman Vishniac was on the way out, with or without the Nazis. The removal of civil disabilities in the nineteenth century did much to encourage assimilation in either nationalist or communist regimes in Eastern Europe, and the various baggage of the modern state—industrialization, urbanization, bureaucratization, secularism—also helped discourage the particularities of Ashkenazi existence as it had evolved over centuries. However, Germany, under its Nazi leadership, cannot escape a great deal of the responsibility for the destruction of Jewish life in eastern Europe, not least because Germany publicly sought this outcome and even boasted about it throughout the war.

If we look at initial conditions and end states, the destruction of ethnic diversity, and the social structures that allowed such diversity, is the most dramatic result of fifty years of turmoil in Eastern Europe, as I suggested many years ago in my conclusion to “The Gas Chamber of Sherlock Holmes.” Tens of millions were plundered, deported or forced to flee, with accompanying mass death, between 1914 and 1948, including millions of Ukrainians, Poles, Belarussians, Germans, and hundreds of thousands of Latvians, Lithuanians, and Hungarians. I see no reason to question that millions of Jews also lost their lives. Yet, of all of these catastrophes, the destruction of the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe was the most complete; and when we talk about the Holocaust we are really talking about the destruction of these communities, since they comprised about 90 percent of all Holocaust victims.

Excepting the Roma, and excepting those Jews who were willing to submerge their identity in some other prevailing identity, whether nationalist or ideological, the Jewish people during this time were the only people in Eastern Europe who had no home to call their own. Hence, I conclude, their destruction has some uniquely terrible qualities.

It seems to me that, in this larger context, the destruction of the Jews at the level I am describing it is the most important result of the first fifty years of eastern European history in the twentieth century, certainly for the Jewish people and also for the people of eastern Europe. Within this context, I would further argue that the exact number of victims and the exact manner in which they died is not very important, and so I conclude that there is good reason why the arguments between Holocaust historians and Holocaust revisionists have been relegated to the sidelines.

There are certain people on both sides of the dispute who feel that revising exactly what happened to the Jewish people, or what the Germans were doing to them, is somehow extremely important and could revolutionize our perceptions of modern European history. Some, like Shermer and van Pelt, argue that if the history of Auschwitz, for example, is revised, the history of World War Two will “make no sense.” Others, like the revisionist Jürgen Graf, have taken the position that revising the Holocaust will somehow have massive repercussions not only in Europe, but in the Middle East. I think all of these arguments are completely overwrought.

Even if we assumed revisionist theses to their maximum extent, we would still be dealing with about a million dead European Jews, who died as a direct result of Nazi persecution, plunder, forced labor, deportation, and yes, mass killing. We would still be dealing with a situation in which, after the war, the Jewish communities in most parts of Europe, and particularly eastern Europe, had ceased to exist, and those that survived—however many that may have been—either fled or were forced to abandon their Jewishness in a climate not seen in Europe since the days of the Alhambra Decree in Spain. I cannot see how even this minimalist version of the Holocaust can be taken as anything other than a repudiation of Nazi racial politics and a shameful and disgraceful chapter in German history.

The typical revisionist counter-argument is that the Jewish people were not the only ones to suffer these indignities, including mass death and mass killing. Indeed, the argument that German Nazi atrocities should be put into context with other East European atrocities is made not only by Holocaust revisionists but even by conservative German historians like Ernst Nolte. I think this criticism is quite correct: there is no question that hundreds of thousands and even millions of others, especially Ukrainians, Poles, and Germans, suffered destruction remarkably similar to what the Jewish people experienced. Yet in the end this is simply changing the subject. If the suffering of other Europeans in the twentieth century has not received sufficient attention, then that deficit should be addressed by in-

terested historians. Yet that recounting will not offset the suffering of the Jewish people, which is the proper subject of the Holocaust.

That brings us back to the specific tensions between Holocaust historians and Holocaust revisionists. Aside from challenging some well-known legends—the soap, shrunken heads, and lampshades—the arguments come down to three issues, all having to do with extermination, in the sense of mass killing. Again, I don't think these are issues of world historical importance, but I think they are valid areas of dispute, and I will repeat their status as they stand today.

The most basic revisionist claim has always been that the Germans, and their Nazi leadership, never sought to kill all of the Jews of Europe. In a sense, the idea has been entertained in standard historiography since the introduction of the intentionalism versus functionalism debate in the early 1980s, an occurrence I see as directly due to revisionist challenges. Today, the evolving literature of Jewish forced labor has moved toward an ever more functionalist position. The Germans used Jewish labor throughout the Second World War, and profited by such use. In fact, such labor exploitation is assumed or explicitly described in many documents, including nearly all the documents that are used to prove an extermination program. However, since it is now also argued that the German use of Jewish forced labor was rational, and not guided by an “extermination through work” concept, the notion of an extermination policy or program falls away.

The next argument pertains to the extermination camps, that is, camps to which hundreds of thousands, or millions, of Jews (and others) were sent solely to kill them. The claims made on behalf of these camps have steadily reduced in the past few decades. It was not that long ago when historians casually claimed two to four million dead at Auschwitz, and a million and half dead at Majdanek (James Michener doubled that number in his novel *Poland*.) The reduction of those numbers, in terms of noncriminalized discussion, have lowered to about 500,000 per Fritjof Meyer for Auschwitz, and about 80,000 for Majdanek, according to Polish historians. It follows that one can no longer talk about the Germans systematically exterminating either the Poles or the Soviets in these camps. On the other hand, there is still the argument that some millions of Jews were killed at these camps.

Yet this notion has also been weakened in the evolving literature, first of all, because there were sizable numbers of Jews who were sent to Auschwitz, Treblinka, Sobibor, and Belzec who were not killed there. The second reason why we know that the extermination camps could not have been as they are described is because of the limits on body disposal: there is a limit to how many could have been cremated at Auschwitz, and there's a limit to how many people could have been buried at Treblinka, Sobibor, and Belzec. It is because of such limits that Fritjof Meyer argued that the death toll at Auschwitz should be lowered, because there are limits to what could have been achieved, given the actual traffic to the camp, and given the cremation capacities. Applied to the Reinhardt camps, only about 200,000, by

any conventional measure, could have been killed there, based on the known grave space. It follows therefore that about 85 percent of the people sent to the Reinhardt camps were not killed there. This does not mean that these people did not perish under other circumstances: it means that the extermination camp narrative has received far too much attention in the history of the Holocaust.

The final central claim of Holocaust revisionism concerns the method of mass killing, that is, the gas chambers. The material, documentary, and forensic evidence is slight, and its nonexistence has given rise to a complicated conspiracy theory that I find unpersuasive. In addition, my research has shown that the gassing claim has a long lineage in the culture of Eastern Europe, predating the Holocaust by many decades.

The conclusion of my research is that the gassing claim is at root a folk belief. Yet, from its existence in the collective mind of East Europeans, mass gassing is only supposed to have become empirical fact for a brief period of three to four years, before returning to the cloud of folk belief from which it sprang, leaving virtually no evidence of its earthly visitation. I find this way of thinking conspiratorial and supernatural. Hence, I conclude that the narrative of mass gassings is largely if not completely delusional, and does not correspond to objective reality.

Of course, clarification of what happened during the Holocaust is a function of how much the Holocaust is discussed in detail. Such discussion has waned in recent years, as witnessed by the refusal of Holocaust historians to even reference, in their writings, the refutations that van Pelt's and Zimmerman's books were supposed to provide. A metahistorical criticism of the Holocaust made by revisionists for many years was that these atrocities were used for political and economic gain. However, the idea of such abuse of Jewish suffering as well as the idea of a "Holocaust industry" was mainstreamed by Peter Novick and Norman Finkelstein over ten years ago.<sup>66</sup> There is no reason, therefore, for revisionists to repeat an argument that has by now been long conceded.

The future study of the Holocaust, in my estimation, will involve clarifying the experiences of the Jewish people in terms of the eastern ghettos and forced labor camps throughout Eastern Europe, and particularly Poland. This will be achieved not only by a microscopic analysis of the various shooting actions and antipartisan actions in Eastern Europe but also by a ghetto by ghetto and camp by camp survey of where Jews were sent, how they were employed, and what happened to them. Wendy Lower on the Holocaust in Ukraine, Martin Dean on East European collaboration, Barbara Schwindt on Majdanek and forced labor in Lublin province, and Christian Gerlach on German activities in Belarus, to name a few, have all demonstrated the proper scholarly approach in terms of their discovery and utilization of hitherto ignored primary source materials. On the other hand, all of these writings are disfigured, in my view, by various *pro forma* concessions to the

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<sup>66</sup> See also Samuel Crowell, "Making Room for Revisionists," *Journal of Historical Review* 20, no. 1 (January–February 2001).

extermination conspiracy theory. But that is completely offset by the demonstration of the kinds of research materials that are available. The primary sources that these other authors have used require further work and integration.

In the same way, there will probably continue to be more attempts to place the Holocaust in a more global synthesis: Mark Mazower's *Dark Continent* and Timothy Snyder's *Bloodlands* come to mind. Both books argue provocative and interesting theses about how to understand what was happening in East Europe in this time, but such books can only be as accurate as the secondary studies upon which they rely, and insofar as they both show a tendency to depend on questionable Holocaust histories they cannot be regarded as completely satisfactory. We should also recognize that all such syntheses represent attempts to provide a kind of theodicy for the tortured first half of the twentieth century in this region, as well as attempts to simplify the course of events through large generalized concepts. Even so, I think we should recognize that such explanations will have great difficulties in addressing the master narrative yearnings of all of the peoples involved. Regardless of whatever larger canvas we use, the fact is that different groups are bound to view the war in the east in different ways. Poles will view it as a dual betrayal, Balts and Ukrainians will view it as a rebellion of promise for their freedom that was only redeemed in the 1990s, Russians will regard it as a war to protect the Motherland, Germans will see it either as the worst excrescence of their culture or, along with other conservative Europeans, as a pitiless crusade against Communist dominion. It was all of these things; and it was also, in the Jewish point of view, a war against the Jews. Encouraging respect among these points of view is, I believe, a civic duty for historians of this region.

I doubt if we shall see much about the extermination camps that is new. Regardless of the reality, there is, in the end, no history to the gas chambers. They are simply mysterious agents that caused millions of Jewish people to disappear. Doubtless they will continue to be referenced, in an obligatory manner by historians and in a more heated manner by political commentators. But I would expect that such references will decrease over time, as they have in fact decreased over time. Then, someday, someone will attempt to understand the matter, and they will consult the revisionist literature. That future scholar will still have to contend with the taboo surrounding this subject. The very least we can do today is ensure that he or she will not also have to contend with legal prohibitions.

Otherwise, the discussion of the Holocaust will probably remain the province of websites and Internet bulletin boards, where it has become something of a fixture in the past 15 years. It appears that the virulent reaction against revisionist arguments is a thing of the past, at least in the English-speaking world; everyone knows where revisionist materials can be found, and that is as it should be. On the other hand, Europeans, and particularly the Germans and Austrians, continue to imprison sometimes quite elderly citizens for the crime of expressing doubts about the

legacy of Nazi atrocity. Such actions are saddening because they betray a complete lack of confidence, not only in the authority of their governments, but in their own people. I do not see much of a leadership role for Europe so long as it continues to promote human rights in the abstract while violating them in these cases.

Those who wish to accept and repeat the decades old historical narrative will continue to do so, although, as Benjamin Netanyahu's recent display of Auschwitz documents at the UN General Assembly showed, few want to hear it and few consider it relevant to the political realities of today (a further irony attaches to the fact that the documents Netanyahu waved from the podium did not even support the master narrative he sought to promote). On the other hand, those who are curious about the details of the Jewish catastrophe will study both sides, and make up their own minds.

World War Two and the Holocaust ended over 65 years ago. The hatreds of that war have ebbed, and that ebbing has been accelerated by the ongoing War on Terror which began on September 11, 2001. Hatred of Germany, and poisonous characterizations of Germans and their culture, has largely diminished not only because of the passage of time but also because such characterizations bear no relation to the interactions people have with Germans today. The Jewish people outside of Israel have migrated, integrated, and assimilated to various degrees. They are rarely the subject of persecution or discrimination. The Jewish state of Israel, now over 60 years old, has various problems but the solution of these has nothing to do with an aggressive recounting of the suffering of the Jewish people in World War Two. Thus the emotion that surrounds the Holocaust, or any other species of Nazi atrocity, has given way as the war and its atrocities retreat into the historical past.

The destruction of the Jews in World War Two will remain an important object for study and commemoration among the Jewish people and the German people. The wars, revolutions, ethnic cleansings, famines, epidemics, and grand experiments in social engineering that dislocated many tens of millions of human beings, and killed a large proportion of them, and of which the Holocaust was a part, will be remembered by everyone who has a stake in the European inheritance. Like any series of events, it will be romanticized. Like any series of events, it will be mythologized. And, like any series of events, it will be properly understood only after the passage of time.





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The most important sources for historical study are contemporaneous documents, or other publications or material evidence that is also roughly contemporaneous. For the Third Reich, its atrocities, and by extension, the Holocaust, the most important documents therefore would be the documentary record of the Third Reich in its entire extent. The documentary record of the Third Reich is scattered all over the world, in various archives, and even in private hands.

The most important collections in the United States would be at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in College Park, Maryland, and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington, D.C. In addition, there are several critical files contained in the Public Records Office (PRO, but now officially known as “National Archives”) in Kew in southwest London, Great Britain.

The relevant holdings at NARA comprise RG (Record Group) 238, which includes all the materials associated with the IMT (International Military Tribunal) which ran from late 1945 to late 1946, and the NMT (Nuremberg Military Tribunal), twelve trials under American auspices that ran from 1946 to 1948. Much of this material, including trial transcripts, has been converted to microfilm over the years so it is most typically accessed through microfilm guides, which are referred to by their “M” number, the microfilm roll (“R”), and then the relevant microfilm frames (“F”). Thus “M 887” refers to the microfilmed records used for the Medical trial, the first of the Nuremberg Military Tribunals, while M1270 and M1019 are appropriate guides for postwar interrogations. It is important to note that the method of accessing materials has changed over the years; in the immediate postwar period, it was more usual to refer to documents by their various lettered names, thus, 615-PS or NO-365, but nowadays one could also theoretically reference documents by M, R, and F references. This can sometimes create problems when trying to cross-reference footnote references in older books.

The second relevant record group at NARA is RG 242, which comprises vast amounts of captured German records, many with no relevance to the Holocaust or Nazi atrocities as such. Among the most important papers in this collection are the Himmler files, under the “T” heading (there are many “T” listings) of “T175” and comprising 678 microfilm rolls, and the Berlin Document Center files (BDC) which include service records for many Nazis with many choice documents. Again, these files have been reorganized over time and references in older books are very difficult to cross check. It is my understanding

that all of the files in this group have been microfilmed and returned to Germany, with the result that all of these files will have a separate and different classification in German archives.

The files at the USHMM have been steadily growing since the opening of the facility in the 1990s. Among the most relevant are a more or less complete collection on microfilm of the files for the Central Construction Office at Auschwitz, and selections from many east European archives which have only begun to be utilized in recent years.

The files in the British National Archives (PRO, from the older “Public Records Office”) include numerous files pertaining to postwar interrogations and postwar trials (e.g., the Tesch-Weinbacher trial) under British auspices, and various other important documents (e.g., the authentic Franke-Gricksch report, various “Ultra” or “Enigma” decodes of German radio ciphers.) The following files were particularly useful and are highlighted:

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