

# Report by Alfred Wetzler and Rudolf Vrba, two Escapees from Auschwitz (late April 1944)

## Abstract

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On April 7, 1944, the Slovak inmates Alfred Wetzler and Rudolf Vrba managed to escape from Auschwitz, the Nazi regime's largest concentration camp complex. Located in southern Poland, Auschwitz was made up of three main camps and 39 auxiliary camps in which tens of thousands of inmates were worked to death. More than one million people died in what was called Auschwitz II (Auschwitz-Birkenau), the camp's official annihilation center.

Both Wetzler (who later took the name Josef Lanik) and Vrba (actually named Walter Rosenberg) spent approximately two years in Auschwitz. Wetzler had been transferred there from the camp at Sered in southern Slovakia on April 13, 1942, and Vrba had arrived at the end of June 1942, after being held for two weeks at the Majdanek concentration camp near Lublin in Poland. After their escape, Wetzler and Vrba made contact with representatives of the Jewish council in Zilina, Slovakia, and presented the following report, which includes a great deal of detailed information on the organization and functioning of Auschwitz.

Initially drafted in Slovak and translated into German by the Slovak Jewish Council, the report was subsequently translated into numerous languages so that the international community would know what was happening at Auschwitz. The report aimed, in particular, to warn Hungary's Jews of the Nazi regime's imminent plans to annihilate their community. The Hungarian Jews, however, gave little credence to the report, which initially did nothing to prevent the systematic deportation that began in mid-May 1944, two months after the start of the Nazi occupation. Within another two months, approximately 440,000 Jews had been forcibly removed from Hungary, with most having been sent to Auschwitz.

The publication of the report in the Swiss press, however, finally raised so much indignation abroad that, under political and military pressure from the Allies, the Hungarian Regent, Admiral Miklós Horthy, was forced to forbid further deportations in early July 1944. But after the October 15<sup>th</sup> putsch by the fascist Arrow Cross Party [*Pfeilkreuzler*], the persecution of Hungary's Jews continued, with thousands losing their lives on death marches to Austrian work camps.

The Wetzler-Vrba Report was among the most important pieces of documentary evidence presented at the Nuremberg Trials of 1945.

## Source

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### TESTIMONY OF TWO ESCAPEES FROM AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU EXTERMINATION CAMPS AT OSWIECIM, POLAND

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#### I. TESTIMONY OF THE FIRST ESCAPEE[1]

##### 1. Arrival at Auschwitz Camp (Oswiecim, Poland)

On 13 April 1942, some one thousand of us were loaded into closed freight cars at the reception center at

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Sered. The doors of the cars were sealed so that we could not learn the route taken. When the doors were opened after a long journey, we were astonished to see that we had left Slovakia and were at the railway station of Zward, in Poland. The guard, which heretofore had consisted of members of the Slovak Hlinka Guard, was replaced by German Waffen-SS personnel. After some cars were left behind, we proceeded to Auschwitz, where we arrived at night and were shunted onto a siding. The cars left behind had supposedly been dropped because of difficulties in billeting; they followed us in a few days. When we arrived, we were lined up in rows of five and counted. The number of arrivals was 640. We reached the Auschwitz camp after 20 minutes' march, carrying our heavy luggage – we had left Slovakia well equipped.

In Auschwitz we were brought at once into a large barracks. We had to deposit our parcels on one side of the building; on the other side we had to strip naked and to hand in our clothes and valuables. We went naked into a neighboring barracks where our heads and bodies were shaved and disinfected with lysol. As we left this barracks everyone was given a number. The numbers began at 28,600. Holding our numbers in our hands, we were driven into third barracks where the admission proper was made. This consisted of our numbers being tattooed on the left breast in an extremely brutal manner. Many of us passed out during the process. Our personal data were also taken. We were sent from here to a cellar in groups of 100, then into a barracks where we were issued prison uniforms and wooden shoes. The whole procedure lasted until about 10 a.m. That same afternoon our uniforms were taken away and in their place we received second-hand Russian uniforms, or rather rags. Thus equipped, we were led to Birkenau.

## 2. Description of the Auschwitz camp.

Auschwitz is actually a reception center for political prisoners, for those “in protective custody.” In April 1942, at the time of my assignment there, there were about 15,000 prisoners, mostly Poles, German nationals, and Russian civilians. A few of the inmates were criminals or hoboes.

The Birkenau labor camp, as well as the agricultural settlement at Harmansee, are subordinate to the Auschwitz camp command. All prisoners come first to Auschwitz, where they are provided with appropriate numbers; they are either kept there or are sent to Birkenau; only a few go to Harmansee. Prisoners are allotted numbers in the order of their admittance. Numbers are used only once, so that the last number shows the total number of prisoners admitted up to that date. At the time of our escape from Birkenau, at the beginning of April 1944, this [highest] number was about 180,000. Numbers were at first tattooed on the left breast, but later, as these numbers became illegible, on the left arm above the wrist.

All categories of prisoners receive the same treatment, regardless of nationality. But for ease of control they are distinguished by different-colored triangles located on the left side of the upper garment, under the prison number. The nationality of the prisoner is indicated by initial letters (i.e., P for Pole, etc.) placed inside the triangle. The colors of the triangles indicating the various categories are:

red	-	political protective custody
green	-	incorrigible criminal
black	-	work derelict (mostly Russians)
pink	-	homosexuals
purple	-	member of the sect of Bible Researchers

The markings of Jewish prisoners differ from the insignia described above only in that the triangle, which is red in most cases, is converted into a Star of David by the addition of a small yellow triangle.

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There are several factories and workshops in the vicinity of the Auschwitz camp, among others a DAW[2], one Krupp, one Siemens plant, and a complex called “Buna,” several kilometers long, in process of construction, which is outside the camp area proper. These plants are manned by prisoners.

The dwelling-area of the camp, that is, the actual concentration camp, covers an area approximately 500 by 500 meters in size. This zone is fenced off by two rows of concrete columns about 3 meters high. The columns are connected with each other by high-tension wires supported by insulators. Between these two fences, about 150 meters apart, there are watch towers about 5 meters high, equipped with machine guns and searchlights. In front of the inner row of high-tension columns there is a barbed-wire fence. Touching this ordinary fence is answered by machine gun fire from the watch towers.

The camp itself consists of 3 rows of buildings. The camp road runs between the first and second row of buildings. There was previously a wall between the second and third rows of buildings, and until August 1942 Jewish girls from Slovakia, who had been deported in March and April 1942, were billeted in the structures behind this wall. There were about 7,000 of these girls. After they were taken to Birkenau, the wall was pulled down. At the entrance of the camp was the following sign in big letters: “*Arbeit macht frei.*”[3]

Within a radius of about 2,000 meters the whole camp is surrounded by watch towers at a distance of 150 meters from each other. In contrast to the guard installations called *Kleine Postenkette*, which are described above, this system is called the *Grosse Postenkette*. [4] The various factories and shops are located between these two guard belts.

Watch towers of the small (inner) belt are manned only at night, at which time the double fence is also charged with electric current. Sentries of the small belt are relieved in the morning and the towers of the large belt are manned. Escape through these two sentry belts is nearly impossible. To get through the inner belt during the night is out of the question, since the towers of the large belt are so close to one another (only 150 m., with each tower guarding a radius of 75 meters) that one cannot approach the belt without being observed. Anyone approaching is shot without warning. Relief of the guards in the big belt takes place at night only after the roster has been checked in the small belt zone, and it is ascertained that all prisoners are within that area. If, at the roll call, any prisoner is found missing, an alarm is given by sirens.

When a prisoner is missing, the guards of the outer belt remain in their towers and the guards of the inner belt also take up their posts. Hundreds of SS men with bloodhounds search the area between the two guard belts. The sirens alert the whole region, so that even after miraculously breaking through the two guard belts the escaping prisoner faces the danger of falling into the hands of numerous German police and SS patrols. Escaping prisoners are greatly handicapped by their shaved heads and marked clothes (rags painted red). The population of the area is so intimidated that, at best, it is passive to escaping prisoners. Death is immediately meted out to all those giving any aid to an escaped prisoner, even to those who fail to report instantly the location of such a person.

If a prisoner is not caught after three days, the guards of the outer belt leave their posts, since it is assumed that the prisoner was successful in breaking through both guard belts. If the escaped prisoner is caught alive, he is hanged in the presence of the entire camp. If he is found dead, his body is exposed at the gates of the camp. In its hands is placed a sign which reads: “*Hier bin ich.*”[5]

During our two years imprisonment many attempted to escape, but with the exception of two or three all were brought back dead or alive. We do not know if those not brought back succeeded in escaping, but we do know that we are the only Jews brought from Slovakia to Auschwitz or Birkenau who did escape.

### 3. Arrival of the First Escapee at Birkenau.

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As I said before, we were sent to Birkenau on the first day of our arrival in Auschwitz [mid-April 1942]. There is in reality no community called Birkenau; this is a new name probably originating from the nearby beechwood "Birke." The area known as Birkenau is called "Rajska" by the local population. The center of the Birkenau camp is four kilometers from Auschwitz, the outer guard belts of the two camps being separated by a railroad track only. At that time we knew nothing about Neuberaun, a town about 30 to 40 kilometers from Birkenau which for unknown reasons was given as our mailing address.

#### 4. Description of Birkenau camp.

When we arrived at Birkenau, one large kitchen, capable of handling 15,000 people, and two other buildings had already been completed and one additional house was under construction. All these buildings were enclosed by ordinary wire fence. The last-mentioned buildings were used for the reception of prisoners and were built according to the same plan. Each was about thirty meters long and eight to ten meters wide. The walls were scarcely more than two meters high, the roof reaching the disproportionate height of five meters. Such a building resembles a stable with a hayloft perched on top. Since there is no ceiling, the inside height is about seven meters. An inside wall, with a door in the center, divides each house lengthwise into two parts. The house-walls and the dividing wall support balconies running lengthwise at a height of 80 centimeters above each other. These balconies are divided into small cells with three persons to each cell. There are layers of cells on each wall. The dimensions given [sic.] show that the cell is not long enough to permit a person to lie down stretched out and is just high enough to enable him to sit up. Since the height of a cell is 80 centimeters, it is impossible to stand up in it. Approximately 400 to 500 persons are billeted in each house or, as they call it, block.

The Birkenau camp at this time covered an area of 850x1600 meters. Like Auschwitz, a small or inner guard belt surrounds it. Beyond this inner belt a new, much larger camp was under construction. Upon completion, it was to be incorporated in the camp already functioning. We do not know the purpose of these large-scale preparations. As at Auschwitz, the Birkenau camp is surrounded at a distance of 2 kilometers by an outer belt of guard-posts. The guard system is similar to that of Auschwitz.

#### 5. Arrival of 12,000 Russian POWs and 1300 French Jews Previous to April 1942.

The buildings that we found in Birkenau upon our arrival had been built by 12,000 Russian POWs who were brought there in December 1941. They worked under such inhuman conditions during the extraordinarily cold weather that nearly all had died by the time we arrived. They had been given numbers from 1-12,000, but this was outside the numbering system for other inmates. When additional Russian POWs arrived, they did not receive subsequent numbers like other prisoners, but were allotted numbers between 1 and 12,000 vacated by deceased Russian POWs. It was impossible, therefore, to estimate by means of this numbering system the total number of Russian POWs received at the camp. Russian POWs were assigned to Auschwitz and Birkenau for punishment only.

We found the surviving Russians in a terrible state of degradation and neglect. They were billeted in the unfinished buildings, were exposed to the weather, and died in great numbers. Their corpses were superficially buried by hundreds and thousands. Later we had to dig up these corpses and bury [burn?] them.

The first French male transport also reached Auschwitz before ourselves. It contained 1,300 naturalized French Jews. The numbering of these French Jews began at about 27,500. As I mentioned before, our numbers began with 28,600, therefore, no male transport had arrived in Auschwitz between the French and ourselves.

(Women were processed separately and were numbered parallel with men; the girls from Slovakia who arrived before us were given numbers 1000-8000). We found the survivors of the French Jewish transport

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in Birkenau, about 700 men in a state of total exhaustion. The remainder died within one week.

#### 6. Experiences at Birkenau April – May 1942

The following were billeted in the 3 completed blocks:

- (a) The so-called “prominents,” i.e., professional criminals and older Polish political prisoners who were entrusted with the leadership of the camp;
- (b) Survivors of the French Jews (about 700);
- (c) Jews from Slovakia, 634 at first, to which were added a few days later those who had stayed behind in Zward;
- (d) Surviving Russians who were living in the half-completed houses or had no shelter at all, and whose numbers diminished so rapidly that they did not constitute a group to be accounted for.

We Jews from Slovakia had to work with the Russian survivors. French Jews worked separately. After three days I was sent with 200 Slovak Jews to work in the Auschwitz Deutsche Aufrüstungswerke. We were billeted at Birkenau and went out to work early in the morning. Food was given us twice daily, one liter of carrot soup at noon and thirty dekagrams of bad bread in the evening. Working conditions were hard beyond imagination, so that most of us could not stand it. Weakened as we were from starvation and the inedible food, the death-rate took on frightening proportions; in our working group of 200, from 30-35 died each day. Many were simply beaten to death by the work supervisors and the so-called “capos.”<sup>[6]</sup> The daily shortage caused by deaths was made good from the groups staying in Birkenau.

Returning from work at night was difficult and dangerous for us. We had to carry home, a distance of 5 kilometers, our tools, firewood, heavy cooking bowls, and the corpses of our comrades who had died or had been beaten to death during the day. We had to march in military formation with this heavy load. The capo punished what he considered unmilitary marching with cruel beatings or even by beating the culprits to death. By the time the second transport arrived, 14 days later, only about 150 of us were alive. We were counted off every night. Corpses were loaded on small carts and taken to the near-by birchwood, where they were burned in holes several meters deep and 15 meters long.

Every morning on our way to work we met 300 Jewish girls from Slovakia who were in a labor gang known as a *Kommando*, and worked in the vicinity at some kind of digging. These girls were dressed in old rags of Russian uniforms and wore wooden clogs. Their heads were shaven. Unfortunately we could never talk to them.

#### 7. Experiences at Birkenau May 1942 – January 1943.

By the middle of May 1942 a total of four Jewish male transports had reached Birkenau from Slovakia. All received the same treatment as ourselves. From the first and second transports, 120 of us were sent to Auschwitz on orders of the Auschwitz camp command, which had asked for doctors, dentists, university students, and professional administrators and clerks. After one week at Auschwitz 18 doctors and nurses, as well as three clerks, were selected from the 120 professionals. The doctors were assigned to the Auschwitz hospital and the three clerks, including myself, were sent back to Birkenau. Two of my companions, Laszlo Braun from Nagyszombat and Grosz from Verbo, both of whom have since died, went to the Slovak block. I went to the French block, where we were given administrative work. The remaining 99 persons were sent to work in the Auschwitz quarry where they perished within a short time.

Shortly afterwards a so-called hospital (*Krankenbau*) was established in one of the buildings. This was the notorious Block No. 7. I was assigned there as head-nurse at first; later I became the manager. The head of the hospital was Victor Mordarki, No. 3550, a Polish political. This hospital was nothing other than an assembly point for those awaiting death. All prisoners unable to work were sent here. Naturally, there could be no question of medical treatment or nursing. Every day about 150 people died and their

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corpses were sent to the Auschwitz crematorium.

At the same time, the so-called “selection” was started. The number of prisoners who were to be gassed and their bodies burned was determined twice weekly, on Monday and Thursday, by the camp doctor (*Standortarzt*). Selectees were loaded on a truck and taken to the birchwood. Those who reached there alive were gassed in the big barrack built for the purpose and located next to the hole for burning bodies, and then were cremated in that hole. Approximately 2000 from Block No. 7 died each week, of which about 1200 deaths resulted from “natural causes” and about 800 from “selection.” Death reports on those dying from natural causes were made out and sent to camp HQ at Oranienburg. Selectees were marked up in a book labeled SB[7]. I was manager of Block No. 7 until 15 January 1943, during which time I could observe what was going on. About 50,000 prisoners were destroyed during that period, either from “natural causes” or through “selections.”

## II. TESTIMONY OF BOTH THE FIRST AND SECOND ESCAPEES

### 8. Transport Arrivals at Auschwitz-Birkenau, Early 1942 – December 1942.

In view of the fact that prisoners were given consecutive numbers, as we said before, we are in a position to determine with considerable exactness the order of arrival and fate of the various transports. The order of arrival ran as follows:

<b><u>Numbers</u></b>	<b><u>Transports</u></b>
c. 27,400 – 28,600	First transport of naturalized French Jews.
c. 28,600 – 29,600	First Jews from Slovakia, our own transport.[8]
c. 29,600 – 29,700	100 Gentile men from various transit camps.
c. 29,700 – 32,700	Three complete Slovak Jewish transports, 3000 men.
c. 32,700 – 33,100	400 habitual criminals (Gentiles) from Warsaw.
c. 33,100 – 35,000	Approximately 2000 Jews from Cracow.
c. 35,000 – 36,000	Gentile Poles, political prisoners in protective custody.
c. 36,000 – 37,300	1330 Slovak Jews arriving from Lublin-Maidanek in May 1942.
c. 37,300 – 37,900	600 Gentile Poles, with few Jews, coming from Radom.
c. 37,900 – 38,000	100 Gentile Poles arriving from the Dachau reception center.
c. 38,000 – 38,400	400 naturalized French Jews with their families, the entire transport numbering about 1600 people. Of these only about 400 men and 200 women were assigned to the camp. The remaining thousand, including women and older men, were sent directly to the birchwood, where they were gassed and cremated without being entered on the records and assigned numbers.

After this time, all incoming Jewish transports were handled like the French transport. About ten percent of the men and five percent of the women were assigned to the camp, the remaining being immediately exterminated. Polish Jews had been handled this way even earlier. Trucks from the various Polish ghettos arrived continually for months, going directly to the birchwood, where these Jews were gassed and cremated by the thousands.

c. 38,400 – 39,200	800 naturalized French Jews, a great many of whom were destroyed in the way described above.
c. 39,200 – 40,000	800 Gentile Poles, political prisoners in protective custody.

c. 40,000 – 40,150	150 Slovak Jews with their families. With the exception of 50 women, who were sent to the women's camp, the majority of the transport was gassed in the birchwood. Among the 150 men were Zucker and Vilmos Sonnenschein, both from Eastern Slovakia.
c. 40,150 – 43,800	Almost 4000 naturalized French Jews, mostly intellectuals. About 1000 women of this transport went to the camp and 3000 persons were gassed in the birchwood.
c. 43,800 – 44,200	400 Slovak Jews from the Lublin camp, including Matyas Klein and Meilech Laufer, both from Eastern Slovakia. This transport arrived on 30 June 1942.
c. 44,200 – 45,000	This transport contained 1000 persons. A few women were sent to the women's camp and all others went to the birchwood. Among the men sent to the camp were Jozsef Zelmanovics, from Snina; Adolf Kahan, from Bratislava; Walter Reichmann, from Sucany; and Eszter Kahan from Bratislava. I had occasion to speak with the latter on 1 April 1944. She is block-inspector in the women's camp.
c. 45,000 – 47,000	2000 French Gentiles, including communists and other political prisoners, among them the brothers of Thorez and Leon Blum. The latter were specially tortured, and then gassed and cremated.
c. 47,000 – 47,500	500 Dutch Jews, among them many German emigres. About 250 persons from this transport went to the birchwood.
c. 47,500 – 47,800	About 300 Russian civilians ( <i>Schutzrussen</i> ).
c. 48,300 (sic) – 48,620	320 Slovak Jews. About 70 women went to the camp and the remainder of the transport of 650 persons were sent to the birchwood. This transport contained 80 persons who were deported to Sereď n/V. by the Hungarian police. In this group were: Dr. Zoltan Mandel of Presov, who later died; Holz (first name unknown), a butcher from Pistany who was later sent to Warsaw; Miklos Engel of Zilina; Chaim Katz of Snina, whose wife and six children have been gassed, and who at the present time works at the morgue.
c. 49,000 – 64,800	15,000 naturalized French, Belgian, and Dutch Jews. This number accounts for no more than ten percent of the transports arriving between 1 June and 15 September 1942. Most of these were large family transports, many of their members being sent directly to the birchwood. The <i>Sonderkommando</i> <sup>[9]</sup> which did the gassing and cremating worked day and night shifts. At this time Jews were gassed and burned by hundreds of thousands.
c. 64,800 – 65,000	About 200 Slovak Jews. Some 100 women were sent to the women's camp, the others going to the birchwoods. Among those coming to the camp were:
-	Lajos Katz from Zilina; Avri Burger (his wife died) from Bratislava-Poprad; Miklos Steiner, from Bystrica n/V.; Gyorgy Fried, from Trencin; Buchwald [sic]; Jozsef Rosenwasser, from Eastern Slovakia; Gyula Neumann, from Bardejov; Sandor and Mihaly Wertheimer, from Verbo; and Bela Blau, from Zilina.
c. 65,000 – 68,000	Naturalized French, Belgian, and Dutch Jews. About 1000 women were sent to the women's camp and a minimum of 3000 persons were gassed.
c. 68,000 – 70,500	2500 German Jews from the Sachsenhaus reception-center.
c. 71,000 – 80,000	Naturalized French, Belgian, and Dutch Jews. Not more than ten percent of those arriving were sent to the camp. The number exterminated is conservatively estimated at 65,000-70,000.

## 9. Description of the Extermination Crew.

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On 17 December 1942, 200 young Slovak Jews were executed in Birkenau. They had been engaged as *Sonderkommandos* in the gassing and cremating crews. Their plan to revolt and escape was betrayed and the executions followed. Among those executed were:

Sandor Weisz  
Oszkar Steiner  
Aladar Spitzer  
Ferenc Wagner  
Dezso Wetzler  
Bela Weisz

All these men came from Nagyzombat. Two hundred Polish Jews, who had just arrived from Makow, replaced the executed *Sonderkommandos*.

We lost our direct contact with this “working place” after the elimination of the Slovak Jewish *Sonderkommandos*, and this brought a deterioration in our supply situation. Transports arriving at the birchwood brought with them, although they had to leave their luggage in Auschwitz, large amounts of foreign currency, mostly dollars in banknotes or gold, tremendous quantities of gold and precious stones, and even foodstuffs. Although these valuables had to be handed in, it was unavoidable that a great deal, especially gold dollars, went into the pockets of the boys who were working in the extermination crews and had to go through the clothes of those who had been gassed.

In this way a considerable amount of wealth and foodstuffs got into the camp. One could buy nothing for money in the camp officially, of course. But one could make a deal with the SS men and with civilian workers who were employed in the camp at various skilled jobs and so could smuggle in some food and cigarettes. Prices were naturally abnormal; a few hundred cigarettes cost twenty dollars in gold. Barter also flourished. But the high prices did not disturb us since we had more than enough money. We obtained clothing from the *Sonderkommandos* and so were able to change our rags for good clothes which had belonged to those gassed. For instance, the coat I am now wearing belonged to a Dutch Jew.

The *Sonderkommandos* were segregated. We did not associate with them because of the horrid smell they spread. They were always filthy, in rags, totally brutalized, and became violent savages. It was no rarity for one to club another to death. Such an occurrence was nothing sensational among other prisoners as well, since the murder of a prisoner is not considered a crime. It is simply recorded that prisoner number so and so died; the cause of death is immaterial. I was present when a young Polish Jew named Jossel explained the fine art of “expert murder” to an SS man and, to demonstrate his point, killed another Jew with his bare hands, without using any weapon.

#### 10. Transport Arrivals at Auschwitz-Birkenau, January – February 1943.

At about the number 80,000, the systematic extermination of those from the Polish ghettos began.

##### **Numbers**

c. 80,000 – 85,000

##### **Transports**

About 5000 Jews from various Polish ghettos, including Mljava, Makow, Zichenow, Lomza, Grodno, Bialystok. Transports arrived continuously for thirty days. Only 5000 persons were assigned to camp; the remainder was gassed immediately. The *Sonderkommandos* worked feverishly in two shifts twenty-four hours a day, but they could hardly cope with the task of gassing and burning. It can be estimated without exaggeration that between 80,000 and 90,000 persons were exterminated. These transports brought with them particularly large sums of [Polish?] money, foreign currency, and precious stones.



c. 85,000 – 92,000	6000 Jews from Grodno, Byalistok, and Cracow, and an additional 1000 Gentile Poles. The large majority of the Jews went to the birchwood directly. An average of 4000 Jews were driven into the gas chamber daily.  In the middle of January 1943, three transports of 2000 persons each arrived from Teresin [Theresienstadt Czechoslovakia]. The markings of these transports were, “CU”, “CR”, and “R”, which were incomprehensible to us. All parcels belonging to these transports were similarly marked. Of these 6000 persons, only 600 men and 300 women were sent to the camp, the remainder being gassed.
c. 99,000 (sic) – 100,000	Large Dutch and French Jewish transports arrived at the end of January 1943. Only a fraction went to the camp, the remainder being gassed.
c. 100,000 – 102,000	2000 Gentile Poles, mostly intellectuals, arrived in February 1943.
c. 102,000 – 103,000	700 Gentile Czechs, the survivors of whom were later sent to Buchenwald.
c. 103,000-108,000	3000 French and Dutch Jews and 2000 Gentile Poles.

An average of two transports of Polish, French, and Dutch Jews arrived daily during February 1943. In most cases entire transports were gassed. The number of those gassed in this month alone can be estimated at about 90,000.

#### 11. The New Birkenau Crematoria and Gas Chambers.

At the end of February 1943 the newly-built crematoria and gas chambers were opened in Birkenau. The practice of gassing and burning corpses in the birchwood was stopped and bodies were taken to the four new crematoria built for the purpose. Ashes had been utilized as fertilizer previously on the Harmanse Estate, so that it is difficult to find traces of the mass murders.

There are four crematoria at work in Birkenau at the present time, two larger ones (models I and II) and two smaller (models III and IV). Models I and II consist of a waiting hall, gas chambers, and incinerators. The large waiting hall, which is equipped to resemble the hall of a bath, can accommodate 2000 persons. There is reported to be another waiting hall, equally large, below this one. A few steps lead from the big hall (on the ground level) into a very long and narrow gas chamber. False showers are built into the walls of the gas chamber so as to give the impression of a very large washroom. Three skylights in the ceiling of the chamber can be hermetically sealed by valves. A narrow-gauge track runs from the gas chambers through the waiting hall to the incinerators.

There is a high smoke-stack in the center of the hall where the incinerators are located. Nine incinerators are built around it, each having four doors. Each door will admit three average corpses at one time. Each incinerator will burn twelve bodies in one and a half hours, giving a total capacity of approximately 2000 corpses each twenty-four hours.

The victims are first led to the waiting hall, where they are told they will go to the bathhouse. They undress and, in order to support their delusion that they are going to bathe, two attendants clad in white distribute a towel and a piece of soap to each. Then they are squeezed into the gas chamber. Two thousand persons will pack the chamber to such an extent that all must stand up. The attendants often fire into the chamber to force those inside to make room for others. When everybody is in the chamber, the doors are sealed from the outside. There is a short wait, presumably to allow the temperature inside to rise to a certain degree. Then SS men with gasmasks go up on the roof, open the valves on the windows, and pour a powder-like substance into the chamber. The cans containing this substance carry the inscription: “Cyklon zur Schaedlingsbekaempfung”<sup>[10]</sup> and the trademark of a Hamburg factory. These cans evidently contain a cyanide preparation that gassifies when the temperature rises to a certain degree. Everyone in the chamber dies within three minutes. Up to the present, there has been no case of

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anyone showing signs of life when the chamber was opened – a phenomena not so rare in the birchwood, where the procedure was more primitive. The chamber is ventilated after being opened and the *Sonderkommandos* move the corpses to the incinerators on flat cars. The crematoria designated models III and IV operate in about the same manner, but their turnover is only about half as large. The total capacity of the four crematoria, therefore, is 6000 corpses per day.

In principle only Jews are gassed. Gentiles are usually shot, being gassed only in exceptional cases. Before the establishment of the crematoria, Gentiles were executed in the birchwood and their bodies burned there. Later, however, such executions were carried out in the hall of the crematoria, which was especially equipped for the purpose, by shooting in the nape of the neck.

Inauguration of the first crematorium occurred in March 1943 and was celebrated by the gassing and cremation of 8000 Jews from Cracow. Prominent guests from Berlin, including high-ranking officers and civilian personalities, attended and expressed their highest satisfaction with the performance of the gas chamber. They diligently used the spy hole in the door of the gas chamber.

#### 12. Transport Arrivals March – September 1943.

<b><u>Number</u></b>	<b><u>Transport</u></b>
c. 109,000 – (sic) 119,000	Early in March 1943, 45,000 Jews arrived from Salonika. Ten thousand men and a much smaller number of women were sent to the camp. The remainder, at least 30,000 people, were sent to the crematoria. Of the 10,000 men in the camp, nearly everyone, perhaps all, died shortly afterwards. Most of them fell victims to an epidemic disease similar to malaria, many died of typhus, and others could not stand the hard conditions in the camp.

In view of the great mortality among the Greek Jews, resulting from malaria and typhus, selections were temporarily halted. Sick Greek Jews were told to report. We warned them not to do so, but many reported nevertheless. All were killed by intercordial injections of phenol. Such injections were administered by a medical noncommissioned officer who was assisted by two Czech doctors, Cespira Honza and Zdenek Stich, both of Prague. These doctors are at present in the Buchenwald reception center. Both doctors did everything they could to help the unfortunates, and when they could do nothing else, eased their pain.

Approximately 1000 survivors of the 10,000 Greek Jews were sent with another 500 Jews to build fortifications in Warsaw. A few hundred of these returned several weeks later in a hopeless condition and were immediately gassed. Four hundred Greeks suffering from malaria were sent to Lublin for “further treatment,” following the suppression of the phenol injections. We received news of their arrival in Lublin, but we know nothing about their fate. It is certain that not one of the 10,000 remains in the camp.

Following the suppression of the “selection” system, the murder of prisoners was also forbidden. The following Reichsgermans were flogged for multiple murder:

Alexander Neumann, professional criminal  
Alexander Zimmer, professional criminal  
Albert Haemmerle, “ “  
Rudolf Osteringer, “ “  
Alfred Klein, political prisoner  
Alois Stahler, “ “

These notorious murderers also had to sign a statement admitting the killing of a certain number of their fellow-prisoners.

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Early in 1943, 50,000 discharge forms were received by the Auschwitz political department. This news caused great joy among us, as we hoped that some of us at least might be released. But these forms were filled in with the personal data of those gassed and were placed in the archives.

### **Numbers**

### **Transports**

c. 119,000 – 120,000	1000 Gentile Poles from the Pawiak prison in Warsaw.
c. 120,000 – 123,000	3000 Greek Jews, part of whom were sent to Warsaw to replace their dead compatriots. Those who stayed behind died off quickly.
c. 123,000 – 124,000	1000 Gentile Poles from Radom and Tarnow.
c. 124,000 – 126,000	2000 men from various Gentile transports.

In the meantime, Polish, Belgian, and French Jewish transports arrived continually, and their members were gassed without even a fraction going to the camp. One of these consisted of 1000 Polish Jews coming from Lublin-Maidanek. Among them were three Slovaks, including one named Spira from Stropko or Varanno.

At the end of July 1943, transports abruptly stopped coming. There was a short respite while the crematoria were thoroughly cleaned and prepared for further activities. The work started again on 3 August. Transports of Jews from Benzburg and Sosnowitz came first, and were followed by others without interruption during the whole month of August.

c. 132;000 (sic) – 136,000	Jews from Benzburg and Sosnowitz. Only 4000 men and few women went to the camp. Over 35,000 were taken to the crematoria directly. Most of these died in the so-called quarantine camp from exceptionally inhuman treatment, starvation, various diseases, and last but not least, murders in their own ranks. Those chiefly responsible for the crimes committed against them are Tlyn, a professional criminal of German nationality who came here from the Sachsenhausen reception center, and Mieczislaw Katerzinski, a Polish political prisoner from Warsaw.
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At this time “selections” were started again on a particularly large scale in the women’s camp. The camp doctor, an SS Sturmfuhrer and son or nephew of the Berlin police director, acted with a brutality which stood out even in this camp. The practice of “selection” was carried out without respite from this time until our escape.

c. 137,000 (sic) – 138,000	1000 Gentile Poles from the Pawiak prison in Warsaw and about 80 Greek Jews arrived at the end of August.
c. 138,000 – 142,000	3000 Gentiles from various transports.
c. 142,000 – 145,000	3000 Jews from various Polish labor camps and a group of Russian POWs arrived at the beginning of September 1943.
c. 148,000 (sic) – 152,000	Family transports from Teresin (Theresienstadt), which arrived during the week following 7 September 1943.

### **13. Treatment of the Theresienstadt Czechs, September 1943 – March 1944.**

For some reason unknown to us, the Theresienstadt transport enjoyed exceptional treatment. Nobody was gassed or even shaved, members kept their belongings and were billeted by families in a separate section of the camp. The men did not have to work, members were allowed to send mail to relatives, and a special school for the children was permitted under the leadership of Fredy Hirsch, at one time youth leader of the Makabi of Prague.[\[11\]](#)

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However, members of these transports had to endure the sadistic tortures of a “camp inspector” named Arno Boehm, a professional criminal of German nationality who was, by the way, one of the most abject individuals in the entire camp. Our astonishment increased when we had an occasion to see the official roster of the transport. This roster bore the peculiar title, “Specially treated Czech Jews for six months’ quarantine.”<sup>[12]</sup> We knew very well what the “SB” marking meant, but we could not find an explanation for the exceptional treatment and the extraordinarily long quarantine. According to our experience up to that time, the quarantine never lasted longer than three weeks. We became suspicious as the end of the six months’ quarantine period approached, and were convinced that these Jews would also end up in the gas chamber. Looking for an opportunity to make contact with the leaders of the group, we explained their situation and did not leave them in any doubt as to their fate. A few of them, especially Fredy Hirsch, who obviously enjoyed the full confidence of his companions, told us that they would resist if our suspicions should materialize. Men of the *Sonderkommandos* promised that they would join immediately if the Czech Jews put up active resistance. Many hoped that a general uprising could be instigated in the camp.

We learned on 6 March 1944 that the crematoria had been put into condition for the Czech Jews. I went to see Fredy Hirsch without delay to inform him, and appealed to him to act immediately. He replied, “I know what my duty is.” I sneaked to the Czech camp again before dawn and heard that Fredy Hirsch was dying. He had poisoned himself with luminol. The following day, 7 March 1944, he was transferred in a state of coma, with 3791 of his companions with whom he arrived in Birkenau after 7 September 1943, to the crematorium, on trucks where all were gassed.<sup>[13]</sup> The youths went to their death singing. The resistance did not come off. Determined men of the *Sonderkommando* had waited in vain.

About 500 elderly Czechs died during the six months’ quarantine period. Of the whole group, the only ones left alive were eleven sets of twins taken to Auschwitz for biological experiments. When we left Birkenau these children were still alive. Rozsi Fuerst, a girl from Sereď n/V., was among those executed. All were forced to inform their relatives that they were all right one week before their execution, that is, during the first days of March. The letters had to be dated 23 or 25 March. They were also told to ask for parcels from relatives abroad.

#### 14. Transport Arrivals, September 1943 – April 1944.

c. 153,000 (sic) – 154,000	1000 Gentile Poles from the Warsaw Pawiak prison.
c. 155,000 (sic) – 159,000	4000 men from various prisons, Jews who had been in hiding and were captured around Benzburg, and a group of Russians ( <i>Schutzrussen</i> ) arrived in October 1943. At the same time, Russian POWs also came in and received numbers 1-12,000.
c. 160,000 (sic) – 165,000	About 5000 men, mostly Dutch and Belgian Jews, and the first transport of Italian Jews came from Fiume, Trieste, and Rome. Not less than 30,000 persons from these transports were taken directly to the gas chamber.

Mortality among the Jews assigned to camp was particularly high. The method of selection took its toll at an increased rate. Selection reached its peak between 10–24 January 1944, when the strongest and healthiest Jews were taken regardless of their labor assignment or profession. Only doctors were spared. Everyone had to line up for the “selection,” and a close check was made to ascertain that all were present. The “selection” was then made by the camp doctor (the son or nephew of the police chief of Berlin) and by the Birkenau camp commandant, SS *Untersturmfuehrer* Schwarzhuber. All Jews transferred from Block No. 7 to the “hospital” (*Krankenbau*), which was located in another part of the camp, were gassed without exception. In addition to these, another 2500 men and 6000 women were sent to the gas chamber through “selection.”

c. 165,000 – 168,000	3000 Jews arrived from Teresin on 20 December 1943. This roster had the same title as the one which had come in September. They were billeted with the September arrivals and enjoyed the same privileges. Twenty-four hours before the extermination of the first group the later arrivals were segregated in an adjoining part of the camp which happened to be empty. They are still living in this quarter. In view of their knowledge of the fate of the first group, they are already preparing to resist. Resistance has been organized by Ruzenka Laufer and Hugo Langsfeld, both of Prague. They are collecting easily inflammable material and want to set their blocks on fire. Their quarantine will be over on 20 June 1944.
c. 169,000 (sic) – 170,000	1000 persons, including Poles, Russians, and Jews in smaller groups.
c. 170,000 – 171,000	1000 Gentile Poles and Russians, and a smaller number of Yugoslavs.
c. 171,000 – 174,000	3000 Dutch, Belgian, and native French Jews arrived in late February and early March 1944. This was the first shipment of native as distinguished from naturalized French Jews. They came from the unoccupied zone. An overwhelming majority of these were immediately gassed.

In the middle of March 1944 a smaller group of Benzburg Jews, who had been found in hiding, arrived. We learned from them that many Polish Jews had escaped to Slovakia and from there to Hungary, and that these had been helped by Jews still living in Slovakia.

After the extermination of the Teresin Jews, no reinforcements arrived until 15 March. As a consequence, the number at the camp was substantially reduced, for which reason all men arriving in later transports, mostly Dutch Jews, were assigned to the camp. We had just learned of the arrival of large Greek Jewish transports when we left the camp on 7 April 1944.

#### 15. Organization and Population of the Birkenau Camp, April 1944.

The Birkenau camp consists of three sections (see plan no. 3) At the present time, only sections I and II are surrounded by the inner guard belt, as section III is still in the process of building and is not inhabited.

When we left Birkenau at the beginning of April 1944, the number of inmates of the camp was as follows:

<u>Place</u>	<u>Slovak Jews</u>	<u>Other Jews</u>	<u>Gentiles</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
<u>I Section</u>	c. 300	c. 7000	c. 6000	In addition to 300 Slovak girls, 100 girls are employed in the staff building.
Women's reception centers Ia and Ib	-	-	-	-
<u>II Section</u>	-	-	-	-
a. Quarantine camp	2	c. 200	c. 800	Dr. Endre Mueller from Podolinec, one of the two Slovak Jews, is block-inspector.
b. Camp of the [sic]	-	c. 3500	-	With six months quarantine.
c. Not occupied at present	-	-	-	-
d. Staff camp	c. 58	c. 4000	c. 6000	-

e. Gypsy camp	-	-	c. 4500	Remnant of 16,000 Gypsies. They are not performing labor and are dying out quickly.
f. Hospital	6	c. 1000	c. 500	The six Slovak Jews are engaged in hospital administration.*
g. [Shown on plan, but not accounted for.]	-	-	-	-

<b>*Number</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Place of Origin</b>	<b>Duties</b>
36,832	Walter Spitzer	Nemsova	Block inspector
29,867	Josef Neumann	Snina	“Capo” of corpses
44,989	Josef Zelmanovics	Snina	Personnel
32,407	Lajos Eisenstaedter	Korompa	Tattooer
30,049	Lajos Solmann	Kezmarok	Clerk
-	Chaim Katz	Snina	Personnel

The internal administration of the Birkenau camp is carried out by prisoners assigned to that work. Prisoners are not billeted by nationality, but by their labor assignment, that is, by *Kommandos*. Each block has five functionaries:

- 1 Block Inspector (*Blockaeltester*)
- 1 Block Clerk (*Blockschreiber*)
- 1 Block Nurse
- 2 Block Handymen

The block inspector wears on his left arm a white band showing the number of his block. He is responsible for order in his block, where he is, so to speak, master of life and death. Up to February 1944 almost half of all block inspectors were Jews. At that time an order from Berlin prohibited filling this office with Jews, following which the Jews were relieved from duty. Three Slovak Jews, however, are carrying on to this day. They are:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Place of Origin</b>	<b>Duties</b>
Ernest Rosim	Zilina	Inspector, Block No: 25, (cleaning crews, plus artisans from Benzburg)
Dr. Endre Mueller	Podolinec	Inspector, Block No. 15, quarantine camp
Walter Spitzer	Nemsova	Inspector, Block No. 14, hospital area

The block clerk is the executive assistant of the block inspector. He does all clerical work, keeps the roster up to date, and is in charge of a large file. His work is loaded with great responsibility since the roster has to be kept in order in a painstaking manner. Prisoners are recorded by their numbers only, not by their names, and consequently an error is easily made. Mistakes of this kind may be fatal. If by mistake the clerk reports an individual number dead by mistake, which can easily occur in view of the high mortality rate – and has in fact happened – such a mistake is simply corrected by executing the wearer of the number later. Once a report is forwarded, it cannot be corrected, and the reported roll must agree with the actual roster. The post of clerk confers great power within the block. Unfortunately there are often abuses.

The nurse and handymen perform manual work around the block. Naturally there can be no question of any nursing.

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The camp inspector (*Lageraeltester*) is over the whole camp. He is also a prisoner. The present camp inspector is Franz Danisch, No. 11,182, a political prisoner from Koenigshuette, Upper Silesia. The camp inspector is absolute master of the entire camp. He is entitled to appoint and remove block inspectors and clerks, and can also assign men to labor crews, etc. Danisch is fair even to Jews; he is objective and incorruptible.

The camp clerk, who actually has the greatest power in the camp, is assigned to the camp inspector. He is the only man in direct contact with the camp command, receiving orders and handing in reports. As a result, he has a certain amount of influence with the camp command. Block clerks are his direct subordinates and make their reports to him. The present camp clerk is Casimir Gork, No. 30,029, a Polish political prisoner who was formerly a bank clerk. Although Gork has anti-semitic views, he does not molest the Jews.

Principal supervision of the blocks is exercised by six to eight SS block leaders. They call the roll nightly and report to the commander, Untersturmfuehrer Schwarzhuber, a Tyrolean whose title is camp leader (*Lagerfuehrer*). Schwarzhuber is a drunkard and a sadist.

The camp commandant is the superior of camp leaders of the Birkenau and Auschwitz camps, as well as the leader of the Auschwitz reception center. The name of the present camp commandant is Hoess.

The capo heads each labor detachment (*Arbeitskommando*); larger detachments have several capos. A capo can dispose of the prisoners at will during working hours, and he often beats them to death. In the past, Jews were often capos, but this was forbidden by the order from Berlin already mentioned (February 1944). One Jew, a mechanic named Roth from Nagymihaly, still holds such an office.

Supreme control of the work is entrusted to German experts.

### III. TESTIMONY OF THE SECOND ESCAPEE[14]

#### 16. Internment at Maidanek camp at Lublin, June 1942.

We left Novaky on 14 June 1942, passed through Zilina, and arrived at Zwardon at 5 p.m. Here we detrained and were counted. The transport was taken over by SS men, who expressed loudly their indignation at the fact that we were traveling without any water. "Those Slovak barbarians would not even furnish water," they said. We continued and arrived at Lublin in two days. As soon as the train stopped, the following order was given. "Those between 15-50 years old who are fit for work will leave the train; children and old people will stay in the cars." We got out. The station was surrounded by Lithuanian SS men armed with machine pistols. The railroad cars containing the children and old people were sealed and the train started off. We do not know where the train went or what happened to the passengers.

An SS *Schaarfuehrer* took over command at the station and told us that we have a long trip ahead. Those who wished to take their parcels with them could do so; those who thought they could not carry them might load their parcels on a truck ready for the purpose. This truck would arrive without fail. Some of my companions took their luggage with them while others loaded theirs on the truck. We found a factory which bore the sign "Bekleidungswerke"[15] just behind the town. There were about a thousand persons, dressed in dirty striped prisoners' uniforms, lined up in the factory court. They were obviously waiting for dinner. This spectacle was not very encouraging, as we recognized the people as Jews. When we reached the hill, we suddenly saw the very large camp of Maidanek, surrounded by a barbed wire fence three meters high.

As soon as I entered the gate of the camp, I saw Maco Winkler, who is from Nagyszombat (Trnava). He warned me that all my parcels and clothes would be taken away. Slovak Jews who had arrived earlier

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surrounded us. They were dressed in rags of prisoners' uniforms, had shaven heads, were barefoot or in wooden clogs, and many had swollen legs. They begged for food or other small items. We distributed almost anything we had, since we knew that anything we kept would be taken away anyhow. We were then led to the warehouse where we had to hand in all our belongings. Then we were driven on the double to another barracks where we stripped, had our heads shaved, were put under a shower, and finally received our underwear and prisoners' uniforms, a pair of wooden shoes, and a cap.

I was attached to the so-called Labor Section II. The whole camp consisted of three such labor sections, separated from each other by wire fences. Slovak and Czech Jews billeted in Labor Section II. We were trained for two days how to lift our cap when we met a German, and were drilled for hours in the soaking rain. Barracks installations were very peculiar; our furniture consisted of three very long tables on top of one another. Prisoners had to sleep under and on the tables.

We received soup in the morning. It was so thick that we had to eat it with our hands. A similar soup was served at noon, and in the evening we had so-called "tea" with 30 dekagrams of indigestible bread and two or three dekagrams of marmalade or synthetic fat, both of the worst quality.

In the early days we were taught to sing the camp hymn in an excellent manner, and had to stand around for hours and practice. The hymn is as follows:

Aus ganz Europa kamen Wir Juden nach Lublin. Viel Arbeit gibt's zu leisten Und dies ist der Beginn.	From all of Europe came We Jews to Lublin. There is much work to do, And this is the beginning.
Um diese Pflicht zu meistern Vergiss Vergangenheit Denn in der Pflichterfuellung Liegt die Gemeinsamkeit.	In order to master this duty Forget the past, For in the fulfillment of duty Lies community feeling.
Drum ruestig an die Arbeit Ein jeder halte mit Gemeinsam wollen wir schaffen Im gleichen Arbeitsschritt.	So actively at work, Let each one hold his own, Together we want to labor At the same work-pace.
Nicht alle wollen begreifen Wozu in Reihen wir stehen. Die muessen wir dann zwingen Dies alles zu verstehen.	Not all want to understand Why we stand in ranks. We must then force them To understand all this.
Die neue Zeit muss alle Uns alle stets belehren Dass wir schon nur die Arbeit Der Arbeit angehoren.	The new era must teach us – All of us – forever That we now only to labor, Only to labor belong.
Drum ruestig an die Arbeit Ein jeder halte mit Gemeinsam wollen wir schaffen Im gleichen Arbeitsschritt.	So actively at work, Let each one hold his own, Together we want to labor At the same work-pace.

Billeting was as follows: Labor Section I, Slovak Jews; Labor Section II, Slovak and Czech Jews; Labor Section III, partisans. Sections IV and V were being constructed by those billeted in sections I and II. Partisans billeted in section III were shut up in their barracks. They did not work and were not allowed to leave their quarters; their food was thrown down in front of the door and taken inside from there. The guards shot at them whenever possible.



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The capos were Reichsgermans and Czechs. The former treated prisoners brutally, while the Czechs tried to assist them whenever possible. A gypsy named Galbavy, from Holies, was camp inspector, and his substitute was a Jew named Mittler from Sered n/V. Mittler evidently obtained his position as a result of his brutality, since he used his power to torture his fellow-Jews, who were already suffering enough indignities. He never missed an opportunity to commit some mean act.

We were mistreated by SS men every night when the Order of the Day was read. After the day's hard work, we had to stand for hours and sing the camp hymn. This singing was led by an old Jewish conductor from the roof of a near-by building, while the SS men had their fun using their sticks and whips. Rabbi Eckstein of Sered n/V. died in tragic circumstances. On one occasion he arrived a little late for the reading of the Order of the Day, as he was ill in the latrine. The *Schaarfuehrer* thereupon had him dipped into the latrine twice suspended by his feet, drenched him with cold water, and finally shot him.

The crematorium was located between the first and second labor section. Corpses were burned here. The mortality rate per section of 6000 to 8000 was about 30 daily, but this number increased five and six-fold shortly afterwards. Later ten to twelve sick men were taken daily to the crematorium, from whence they never returned. The crematorium had electric heating installations which were handled by Russian prisoners.

Bad nourishment and unbearable conditions caused various diseases among us. Grave stomach ailments were the most widespread, and an incurable disease that resulted in swollen feet also took its toll. People's legs were so swollen that they could not move them at all. More and more of these were taken to the crematorium, where they were murdered by methods unknown to me. When on 26 June 1942 the number of these unfortunates had been reduced to 70, I decided to take the first opportunity and to volunteer for transfer to Auschwitz.

#### 17. Internment at Auschwitz, 30 June 1942 – September or October 1942.

I handed in my prisoner's uniform on 27 June 1942, received civilian clothes, and traveled in a transport to Auschwitz. We traveled forty-eight hours in sealed boxcars, without water or food, and arrived at Auschwitz half dead. There we were greeted by the sign over the gate, "*Arbeit macht frei.*"<sup>[16]</sup> The court was clean and neat, and the brick buildings and the lawns made a good impression on us after the primitive and dirty barracks at Lublin-Maidenek. We thought that we had made a good change. First we were led to a cellar where we received tea and bread. Next day they took away our clothes, shaved us, tattooed our number on the left arm over the wrist and issued prisoners' uniforms similar to those we had had at Lublin. After our personal data were taken, we became regular political prisoners of the Auschwitz reception center.

We were billeted in Block No. 17, where we slept on the ground. Slovak girls were quartered in the next row of buildings, separated from us by a wall. They had been deported from Slovakia in March and April 1942. We were put to work on the construction of the enormous "Buna" plant. Work began at 3 a.m. Food consisted of potato or carrot soup at noon and 30 dekagrams of bread in the evening. We were cruelly beaten during work. Since our place of work was situated outside the outer guard belt, the area was divided into squares 10 meters by ten meters. Each square was guarded by one SS man, and anyone crossing the borders of his square during work was instantly shot as "attempting to escape." It often happened that an SS man ordered a prisoner to fetch some object from outside his square. If the prisoner obeyed and stepped over the line, he was shot. The work was very hard. We were scarcely permitted to rest and had to march back to the camp in military order. Whoever did not keep in step or broke ranks was cruelly beaten or sometimes shot. When I joined this labor crew, about 3000 men were working, of whom 2000 were Slovak Jews. Very few of us could stand the hard work because of the poor food. Many attempted to escape, although they had no hope to success. We witnessed several hangings each week.

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After a few weeks of painful labor, a typhus epidemic broke out in camp. The weak prisoners died off by the hundreds. Construction on the "Buna" plant stopped and the camp was closed. Those who remained alive at their place of work were sent to the quarry at the end of July 1942. Work here was even more difficult, if that was possible, than at the "Buna" plant. We could never accomplish as much as was wanted by our supervisors since we were too weak. Most of us had swollen legs. Our labor gang was reported for laziness and negligence, and a commission came to examine each one of us thoroughly. All those with swollen legs or whom the commission found to be unfit were segregated. Although my legs hurt badly, I mastered my pain and stepped out smartly when called before the commission. I was found fit. About 200 of the 300 persons were declared ill. They were immediately sent to Birkenau where they were gassed.

After this I was detailed to work at the DAW.<sup>[17]</sup> My job was painting ski boards. We had to finish a minimum of 110 pieces per day; anyone who could not complete that amount was flogged in the evening. We had to work very hard to avoid the evening punishment. Another group manufactured boxes for shells. On one occasion 15,000 such boxes when finished were found to be a few centimeters shorter than ordered. Thereupon several Jewish prisoners, among them one Erdelyi (who was said to have relatives in Trencin-Ban), were shot for sabotage.

The Jewish girls from Slovakia who lived beyond our wall had been transferred to Birkenau in August 1942. I had occasion to talk to them briefly. They were starved, dressed in old rags of Russian uniforms, and were barefoot or wore wooden shoes. Their hair was shorn and they were completely neglected.

We underwent a very severe physical examination on the same day (sic). All those suspected of typhus were sent to the birchwood, while we who had been declared fit were sent stark naked into the evacuated and disinfected barracks. We were again shaved, bathed, and given new clothes. I learned by accident that there was a vacancy in the cleaning squad (*Aufräumungskommando*), volunteered, and received the assignment.

A hundred prisoners, all Jews, worked in this cleaning squad. We worked in a completely isolated part of the camp where mountains of luggage, consisting of rucksacks, suitcases, and other such pieces were stacked in warehouses. Our job was to open this luggage and to sort the objects found. We filled suitcases with combs, mirrors, sugar, cans of food, chocolate, drugs, and so forth. The suitcases were stored according to their contents. Clothes and underwear were taken to a large barrack where they were sorted and packed by the Slovak Jewish girls. These goods were then loaded into railroad cars and shipped out. Unusable clothing was sent to a textile factory in Memel, while good garments were sent to a Berlin welfare association. Valuables, such as money, gold, foreign currency, and precious stones, were supposed to be handed in to the political division. SS supervisors stole a substantial part of these valuables, and much was also taken by the prisoners working there. The boss of this assortment detail, who is recognized as an expert in the field, is Albert Davidovics, from Iglo (Jihlava?). He occupies the same post to this day.

SS *Sturmführer* Wikleff, commander of this detachment, was a brute who often beat the girls. These girls came daily from Birkenau to work. They told us unbelievable stories about conditions prevailing there. They were beaten and tortured. Mortality was higher among them than it was among men. "Selections" were made twice weekly, and there were new girls daily to replace those who had been "selected" or had died in some other way.

On my first nightshift I had occasion to see how transports coming to Auschwitz were treated. A transport consisting of Polish Jews arrived. They had traveled without water and about a hundred were dead on their arrival. When the doors of the cars were opened, the Jews, completely weakened by the long journey and privations, were driven out wailing. Quick beating by SS men speeded up the unloading. Then the unfortunates were lined up in rows of five. Our task was to remove the corpses, those half dead,

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and parcels from the railroad cars. We placed the bodies at a collecting point. All those unable to stand on their feet were declared dead. Parcels were thrown into one stack. The cars had to be thoroughly cleaned so that no trace of the transport remained. A commission of the political division then selected ten percent of the men and five percent of the women, who were assigned to camp. The remainder was loaded on trucks and taken to the birchwood, where they were gassed. Corpses and those half dead were also loaded on trucks. These were burned in the birchwood without being gassed first. Small children were often thrown on the truck with the corpses. Parcels were moved by truck to the warehouses, where they were sorted as described above.

Typhus raged during July and September 1942 in the Birkenau and Auschwitz camps, especially among the women. Those who were ill were not treated at all. At first typhus suspects were killed by means of phenol injections, later they were gassed in large numbers. Within two months 15–20,000 prisoners perished, most of them Jews. The women's camp suffered particularly. They had no sanitary installations at all and the girls were full of lice. Big "selections" were held weekly. Regardless of the weather, the girls were forced to line up naked for these "selections," and to wait in deadly fear to see whether they would be "selected" on that occasion or would have a week's grace.

Many men and women committed suicide. They simply touched the high-tension wire of the inner guard belt. So many women perished that not more than five percent [sic] of the original number survived. There are 400 girls at Auschwitz and Birkenau at this time, the remainder of the original 7000. The majority of these have secured camp administration jobs for themselves. One of them named Kata (I do not know her family name), from Bystrica n/V., fills the high position of camp clerk. About a hundred Slovak girls are employed in the Auschwitz staff building. They do clerical work for both camps and interpret for interrogators who interview prisoners. Some of the girls work in the kitchen and laundry of the staff building. Lately the Slovak girls are better dressed, as they have been able to complete their wardrobe from the stocks of the *Aufräumungskommando*. Many even wear silk stockings. They are now letting their hair grow and altogether are much better off than in the past. This does not apply, of course, to the several thousand other prisoners in the women's camp. The Slovak Jewish girls are the oldest inmates of the women's camp and thus have a somewhat privileged position.

I soon lost my comparatively comfortable job [October 1942?] with the *Aufräumungskommando*, and as punishment was transferred to Birkenau, where I spent one and a half years. On 7 April 1944 I succeeded in escaping with my companion.

A CONSERVATIVE ESTIMATE OF THE NUMBER OF JEWS EXTERMINATED AT BIRKENAU FROM APRIL 1942 TO APRIL 1944, ACCORDING TO COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN (by the two escapees):

Poland (shipped by trucks)	c. 300,000
Poland (shipped by trains)	600,000
Holland	100,000
Greece	45,000
France	150,000
Belgium	50,000
Germany	60,000
Yugoslavia, Italy, Norway	50,000
Lithuania	50,000
Bohemia, Moravia, Austria	30,000
Slovakia	30,000
Various camps of foreign Jews in Poland	<u>300,000</u>

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TOTAL

c. 1,765,000

## NOTES

- [1] i.e. Alfred Wetzler–ed.
- [2] DAW: *Deutsche Ausrüstungswerke*, or German Armament Works – footnote in original document.
- [3] “Work liberates.” – footnote in original document.
- [4] Respectively, small and large guard belts – footnote in original document.
- [5] “Here I am” – footnote in original document.
- [6] “Capos” were inmates in concentration camps who held positions of authority. They often treated other inmates with extreme brutality – ed.
- [7] *Sonderbehandlung*, or “special treatment” – footnote in original document.
- [8] Arrived mid-April 1942 – ed.
- [9] Labor gangs with special assignments – footnote in original document.
- [10] Cyclon for exterminating criminals – footnote in original document. Note: It actually means “for pest control,” eds.
- [11] The largest Jewish sports club in Czechoslovakia – footnote in original document.
- [12] “S[onder] B[e]handlung] – Transport tschechische Juden mit monatlicher Quarantaene” – footnote in original document.
- [13] March 7, the day chosen by the Germans for this execution, is an outstanding Czechoslovak national holiday, the birthday of President Masaryk – footnote in original document.
- [14] i.e., Rudolf Vrba – ed.
- [15] Clothing factory – footnote in original document.
- [16] Translation: “Work liberates.”
- [17] Translation: *Deutsche Ausrüstungswerke*, or German Armament Works.

Source of English translation: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD, Record Group 226, Records of the Office of Strategic Services, Entry 19, Box 119, File XL 8883.

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