

SOBIBOR

Introduction



ODILLO GLOBOCNIK
SS Hauptsturmführer
Head - "Operation Reinhard"

World War II began in Europe on September 1, 1939, with Germany's invasion of Poland. Nazi policy against the Jews, limited to the isolation and forced immigration of German Jews, now took a new and furious turn.

On July 31, 1941, Marshal Hermann Goering authorized SS Gruppenfuehrer and Chief of the German Security Forces, Reinhard Heydrich, to finalize preparations for the exterminations:

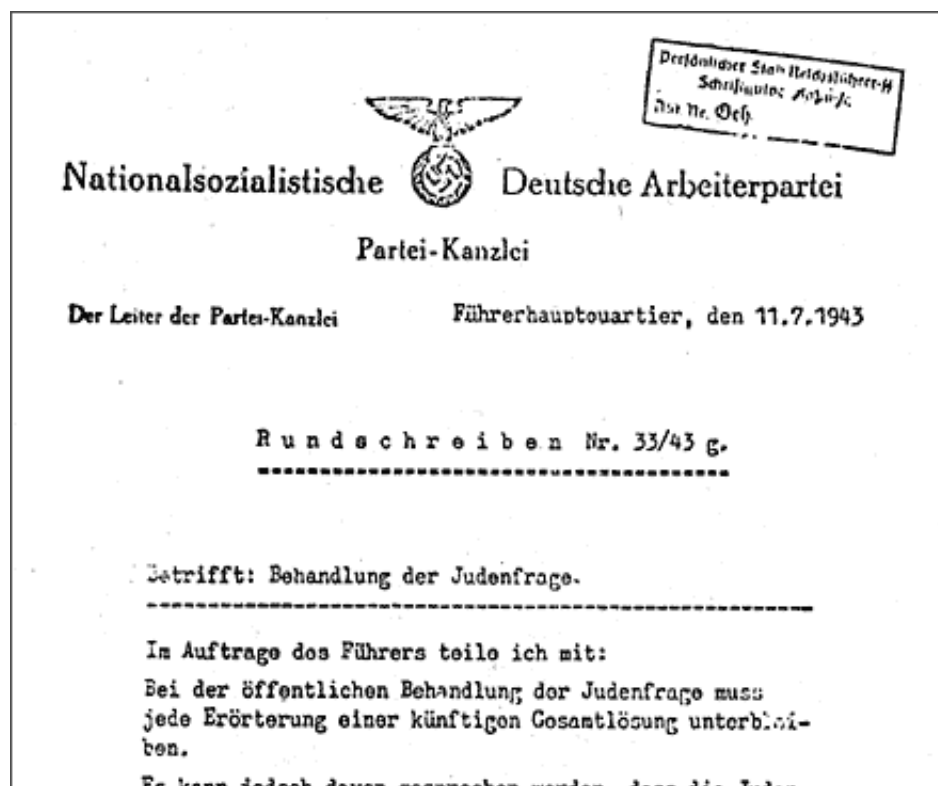
"...I hereby commission you to carry out all necessary preparation with regard to organizational, substantive and financial viewpoints for a total solution of the Jewish question in the German sphere of influence in Europe. Insofar as the competencies of other central organizations are hereby affected, these are to be involved."

January 20, 1942, SS Gruppenfuehrer Reinhard Heydrich called a meeting to confirm his plan to key officials. This meeting is now known as the "Wannsee Conference", named for the Berlin suburb where it was held. The only purpose of this meeting was to organize and coordinate various governmental agencies to carry out the "Final Solution to the Jewish Problem". The Conference made genocide a fact for the rest of occupied Europe.

Soon that same year, under a secret code name "Operation Reinhard" three death camps were build in rapid succession: Belzec completed in March, Sobibor built in April, Treblinka in July.

Under the supervision of SS General Odillo Globocnik and staffed by personnel from the euthanasia program in Germany (killing of deformed, mentally retarded Germans in gassing installations) discontinued in Germany due to the outcry of the church, these camps began a vast extermination program which did not end until Polish Jewry had virtually ceased to exist.

In each one of these camps hundreds of thousands of Jews were killed. Despite this, these names except Treblinka where most of Warsaw Jews were killed, are not as well known as those of other camps like Auschwitz or Dachau, despite the fact that in the "Operation Reinhard" camps more Jews were killed than in Auschwitz. The reason is simple. They were top-secret installations and in the few recovered documents were referred to as "Durchgangslagers" (transit camps). They were dismantled and all signs of their existence were removed long before the Allies arrived.



es nicht jenen Worten gesprochen werden, dass wir durch
 geschlossen zu zweckentsprechendem Arbeitseinsatz her-
 angezogen werden.


gez. M. Bormann

F.d.R.:

[Handwritten signature]
 Verteiler: Reichsleiter, -
 Gauleiter,
 Verbandeführer.

Schlagwortkartei: Behandlung / Juden.

Martin Borman's Letter
 Relaying the order from Adolf Hitler barring public reference to the Final Solution.



National-Socialist German Worker's Party
Party-Secretary

Head of the Party Secretary Führer Headquarters, July 11, 1943

Circulation No. 33/43 g.

Re: Treatment of the Jewish Question

On instructions from the Führer I make known the following:

Where the Jewish Question is brought up in public,
 there may be no discussion of a future overall solution.

It may, however, be mentioned that the Jews
 are taken in groups for appropriate
 labor purposes.

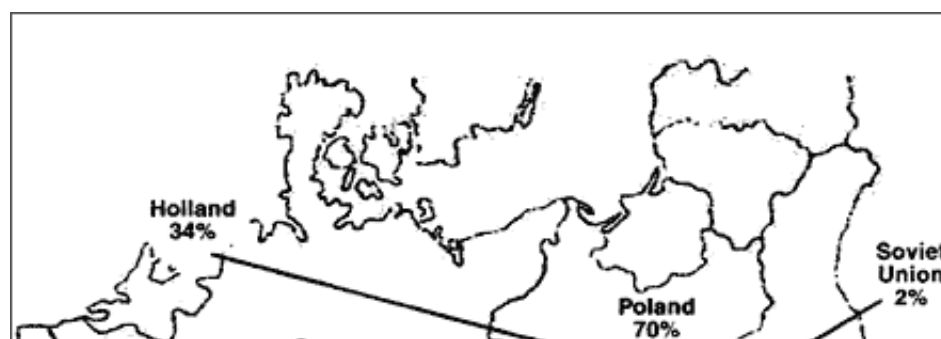
Signed, M. Bormann

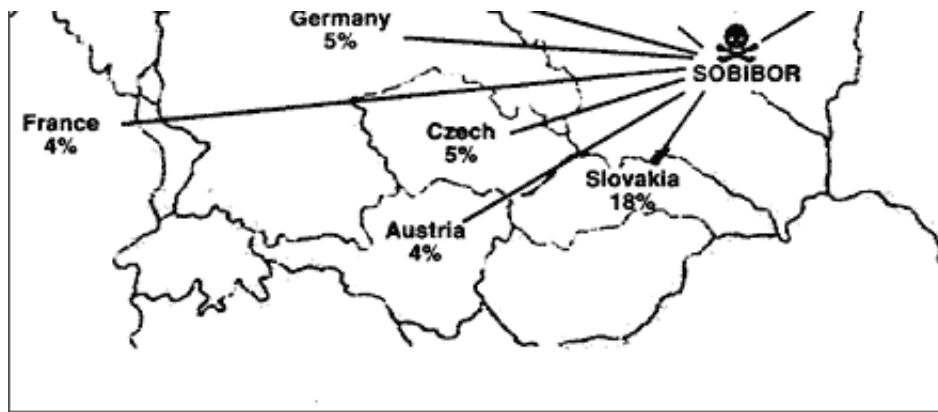
F.d.R.:

[Handwritten signature]
 Distribution: Reichsleiter (Reich leader)
 Gauleiter
 Group Leaders

File reference: Treatment / Jews

English translation of Martin Borman's Letter
 Relaying the order from Adolf Hitler barring public reference to the Final Solution.





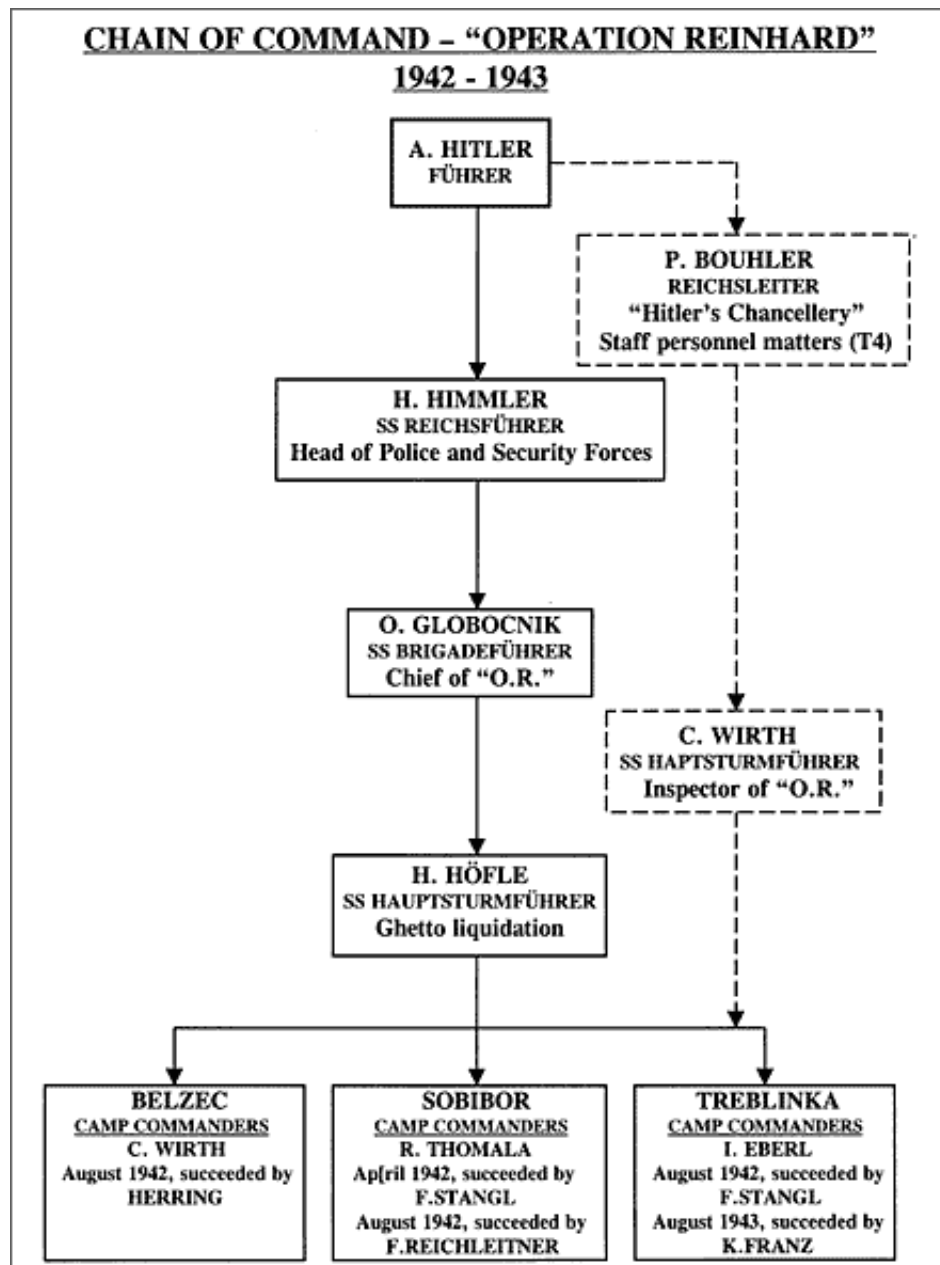
Deporation of Jews to Sobibor.



Detail map of occupied Poland.



Location of the "Operation Reinhard" installations in occupied Poland.



Chain of command - Operation Reinhard, 1942-1943.

Construction



MODEL OF THE SOBIBOR EXTERMINATION CAMP
On display in the Los Angeles Holocaust Museum

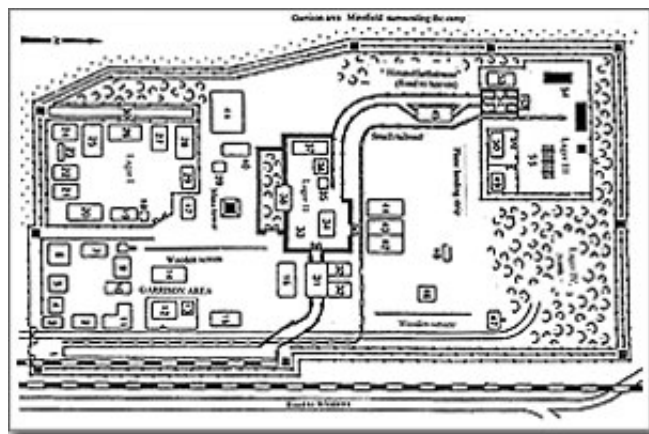
observation tower in the middle of the camp, a series of smaller guard towers surrounded Sobibor. Added to the security was a 15 meter-wide minefield around the perimeter.

The Sobibor camp was located three miles from the Bug River in a sparsely populated area in the eastern part of occupied Poland, near the village of Sobibor, between the cities of Chelm and Wlodawa. The initial 30 acres of camp territory was later expanded to 145 acres.

Camp security was crucial to the death camp. At Sobibor it included an excellent lighting system in and around the camp which had an independent electric aggregate, multiple barbed wire fences intertwined with young pine branches to conceal the interior. Besides the main

The interior of the camp was divided into five main sections: "Vorlager" or garrison area and four inner sections called Lagers: II, III, IV and I. Separately partitioned with barbed wire fence these were, in essence, cages within cages. A brief

description reveals both their relationship to one another and their separate functions.



PLAN OF THE SOBIBOR CAMP RECONSTRUCTED BY THOMAS BLATT

From court documents, drawings of SS Bolender, SS Bauer and Sobibor survivors

The GARRISON AREA included the main entrance gates, the extension rail from the main outside depot and the railway platform where the victims were taken off the trains. The Commander's villa "Swallows' Nest" stood opposite the platform and was flanked on the right by the guardhouse and on the left by the armory. The SS villa known as "The Happy Flea", as well as additional SS quarters, garage, mess hall and other buildings were built nearby. The barracks of the Ukrainian guards' were located just to the north, opposite the fence.

LAGER I was built directly west and behind the garrison area. It was made escape proof by extra barbed wire fences and a deep trench filled with water. The only opening was a gate leading into the garrison area. This Lager was the living barracks for Jewish prisoners and included a prisoner's kitchen. Each prisoner was given approximately twelve square feet of sleeping space. The women prisoners slept in a separate barrack.

Jews employed in Lager I provided services for the Nazi staff: tailors and shoemakers, shops for carpentry, mechanical and other maintenance needs. After work, the Jewish prisoners from throughout the camp (except Lager III) were assembled in Lager I for roll call and night lock-ups.

LAGER II was a larger section and included a variety of essential "services" for both the killing process and the everyday operation of the camp. Worked by 400 prisoners, including women, Lager II contained the warehouses used for storing the articles taken from the dead victims, including hair, clothes, food, gold and all other valuables. This Lager also housed the main administration office.

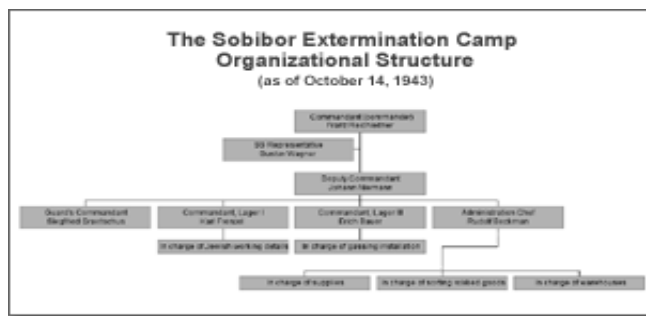
It was at Lager II that the Jews were "greeted" and prepared for their death. Here they undressed, women's hair was shorn, clothing searched and sorted and documents destroyed in the nearby incinerator. The victim's final steps were taken on a sandy pathway 164 yards long and about 10 feet wide framed by barbwire. Cynically called "Himmelfahrtstrasse" (Heavenly Way), it led directly to the gas chambers.

LAGER III was where the victims met their end. Located in the northwestern part of the camp, there were only two ways to enter the camp from Lager II. The camp staff and personnel entered through a small nondescript gate. The entrance for the victims was also the place of their earthly exit; it descended immediately into the gas chambers decorated with flowers and a Star of David. The structures there included (besides the gas chamber and the open-air crematorium) a special cage like enclosure for the 150 Jewish prisoners working there.

The camp was constantly rebuilt and expanded. The chambers, no longer large enough to handle the large waves of victims, were demolished in August, 1942 and a new massive building with about twice the number of gassing units was built. A long corridor two yards wide led to the gas chambers with the inscription "Bathhouse". These new gas chambers were 4.40 yards by 4.40 yards and 2.42 yards high. The victims entered the gas chambers through small doors; they exited through large swinging doors that led to 32 inch-high ramps, making it easier to unload their bodies. Tightly packed, one chamber held 450-500 people. The engine that generated the deadly carbon monoxide was in a small shed adjacent to the gas chambers.

The Nazi staff was sent from the discontinued (due to the outcry of the church) Euthanasia program in Germany. It included the first commander of Sobibor, SS-Hauptsturmfuehrer Franz Stangl, who later in August, 1942 was replaced with SS-Hauptsturmfuehrer Franz Reichleitner and a group of 30 non-commissioned officers of which about half was always rotating on special leave. A force of about 120 Ukrainians were always on guard duty.

The Jewish prisoners accounted for a total of close to 650 men, including about 100 women and 150 prisoners separated in Lager III.



SOBIBOR EXTERMINATION CAMP ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

As of October 14, 1943

Transports

The SS contracted the "fare" for transporting the Jews to their death with the German railroad authorities: children up to 10 years of age traveled half the regular fare and those under 4 years old traveled free with their parents. The SS paid for their transportation from the funds robbed from their victims.

From the end of July to the beginning of October, 1942 the railroad was on repair and alternative forms of transports were found: trucks, horse drawn wagons, even forcing the Jews from local villages and towns to come by foot. Later the railroad transport resumed bringing Jews from Holland, France, the Soviet Union and other countries.

In the Hagen court proceedings against former Sobibor Nazis, Professor Wolfgang Scheffler, who served as an expert, estimated the total figure of murdered Jews at a minimum of 250,000.



Train of Dutch Jews
They don't know anything



Train of Polish Jews
They know their destiny

Sketches by Josef Rychter (on scraps of newspapers)

Only his name is known. He risked his life to record the Nazi crimes around Sobibor.

Some Verified Transports of Jews to Sobibor

Data abstracted from court documentation and other sources.

Jews from occupied Polish territories:

Year	Date	City	Number
1942	Mid-April	Krychow (labor camp)	250
	May 3	Komarow	2000
	May 5	Opole Lubelskie	2000

May 6	Demblin-Irena	2500
May 7	Ryki	2500
May 7	Jozefow	1270
May 8	Baranow	1500
May 8	Konskowola	1580
May 9	Markuszow	1500
May 9	Leczna	200
May 10	Michow	2500
May 12	Opole	2000
May 12	Turobin	2000
May ?	Pulawy	2500
May 12,15	Zolkiewka	1000
May 13-14	Gorzkow	2000
May 14-15	Krasnystaw	3400
May 15	Izbica	400
May 15-16	Zamosc	5000
May 18	Siedliszcze	630
May 21-23	Chelm	2300
May 23	Wlodawa	1200
May 25-30	Chelm	1500
May ?	Lysobyki	500
May ?	Wawolnica	500
May ?	Krasniczyn	?
May ?	Rudnik	?
May ?	Wysokie	1000
May ?	Cycow	?
May ?	Krasnystaw	?
June 1-2	Hrubieszow	3049
June 2	Belzec	1000
June 2	Dubienka	2670
June 6	Krasniczyn	800
June 7-9	Hrubieszow	500
June 8	Grabowiec	1200
June 10	Uchanie	1650
June 10-13	Biala Podlaska	3000
June ?	Cycow	500
June ?	Slawatycze	1000

June ?	Dubeczno	?
June ?	Olchowiec	?
June ?	Pawlow	?
June ?	Sawin	?
June ?	Krzywowiedzba	?
June ?	Krasniczyn	?
June 29	Majdanek	5000
July 24	Wlodawa	hundreds of children
July (end)	Chelm	300
Aug. 10	Rejowiec	2000
Aug. 10	Zolkiewka	1000
Sept. 6	Ustrzyki	?
Sept. 8	Ryczywol	69
Oct. 1-5	Duchaczow	150
Oct. 8	Izbica	1500
Oct. 10	Rejowiec	2400
Oct. 11	Lubartow	3000
Oct. ?	Wojslowice	1200
Oct. 22	Siedliscze	500
Oct. 22-30	Piaski and Izbica	5000
Oct. 23	Leczna	3000
Oct. 24	Wlodawa	5000
Oct. 27-28	Chelm	3000
Oct. 28	Hrubieszow	2000
Oct. 30	Wlodawa	500
Oct. ?	Belzyce and Bychawa	7000
Nov. 2	Izbica	1750
Nov. 6	Chelm	10000
Dec. 22	Staw	800
Dec. ?	Dubeczno	650

Year	Date	City	Number
1943	Jan. ?	Izbica	750
	Jan. ?	Chelm	?
	Feb. ?	Chelm	300
	April 28	Izbica	200
	April 29	Leczna	200
	April 30	Wlodawa	2000

May 1-7	Wlodawa	150
May 22	Lwow	?
June 26	Belzec (death camp liquidation)	306
July 4	Lwow	?
Aug. 8	Debica	2000
Aug. 15-29	Bialystok	200
Sept. 10	Dorohuczca	?
Sept. 29	Bialystok	?
Oct. 20	Treblinka (to dismantle Sobibor)	aprox100

Jews from other European countries:

Year	Date	City	Number
1942	April-June 13	Czechoslovakia	6000
	April-June 30	Germany - Austria	10000
	April-Oct. 20	Slovakia	24378
	March 5-6	Holland	1105
	March 6	France	71
	March 11	France	?
	March 13	Holland	964
	March 26	Holland	1250
	March 26	France	994
	March 31	Germany	?
	April 2	Holland	1255
	April 9	Holland	2020
	April 16	Holland	1204
	April 21	Germany (Berlin)	938
	April 23	Holland	1166
	April 25	France	2000
	April 30	Holland	1204
	May 7	Holland	1187
	May 14	Holland	1466
	May 21	Holland	2511
	May 28	Holland	2862
	June 4	Holland	3006
	June 8	Holland (children)	1266
	June 11	Holland	3017
	July 2	Holland	3397
	July 9	Holland	2417

July 16	Holland	1988
July 23	Holland	2209
Sept. 18-19	Sov Union (Lida)	2700
Sept. 18-23	Sov Union (Minsk)	6000
Sept. 23-24	Sov Union (Vilno)	5000

Murder



GUARD TOWER

The proceedings of the extermination followed two scripts: for Polish Jews already aware of Sobibor's true function, their treatment from arrival to their death in the gas chambers was cruel, accompanied by shots, killing on the spot for the slightest resistance, beating and terror.

The foreign Jews not aware of their fate were threatened with deceptive care, even politeness, until the doors of the gas chamber.

The following description of the fate of a typical Dutch transport of 2,500 Jews will help you understand how millions could be killed so easily.

Excerpts from Thomas Blatt's diary describe the arrival of a Dutch transport:

"...The arriving passenger train stopped outside the camp at the small, obscure station amidst a wild forest. Inside, every available seat was taken.

Soon eight to ten cars were detached from the rest and pushed onto a sidetrack leading into the camp. The Germans and the Ukrainian guards were posted around the platform and waiting (1). At the Nazis' signal, people were ordered to alight.

After leaving the heavy luggage behind on the train platform, a column of about 500 people started towards a long barrack (31) with large gates on opposite ends. Attached to the right side of the barrack were smaller barracks (32). When they entered they were ordered to leave any handbags they still carried. The moment the barrack was empty, prisoners called "pakettentrager" (package carriers) opened doors to the adjoining barracks (32), and quickly transferred all the handbags to be sorted. The purses were emptied onto tables and the contents were thrown in the proper containers: money with money, brushes with brushes, lipsticks with lipsticks, etc. Finally, documents, pictures and other papers were taken in blankets to the incinerator.

While this was happening, the victims were led to a yard with an overhanging roof (33). There SS Scharfuehrer Herman Mitchell in a quiet, convincing voice, welcomed the Jews. He sympathetically apologized for the inconvenience of the trip and the difficulty in extending them a roof and a bed to relax in right away. First he explained, because of strict sanitary conditions, they must shower and be disinfected. Later, he assured them the able-bodied would work, get paid and live with their families until the war was won. The soothing speech of the well-mannered SS man had its effect.



THE SOBIBOR EXTERMINATION CAMP

The women and children brought in first, undressed and proceeded through the narrow alley between barbed wire fencing towards three connected barracks 100 meters away (45). There a group of prisoners, ironically called "friseurs" (barbers) by the Nazis, were waiting to cut their hair. It was done quickly with a few nervous clips of the scissors. The young girls, visibly ashamed, sometimes begged the "barbers" not to cut too short. They were certain a shower would follow. A German stood in the middle of the room with a whip in his hand, supervising and making sure the "barbers" would not speak to the victims. It was not necessary. The poor victims would not have believed them anyway. Now robbed of all their possessions, even their hair, the Nazis prepared to take their lives. The gas chambers were only four yards away. And soon they walked innocently to its open gates to be brutally packed into the gassing units (51).

SS Bauer and a Ukrainian named Emil started the engine (52) and soon a horrifying mass scream could be heard. At first it was very loud and spontaneous. About five minutes later it gradually subsided until finally a contrasting silence took over.

The next ten cars of people, by this time, were on route to the yard for the speech and surely heard the cries. But mixed with the roar of the engine and muffled by the thick walls of the gas chamber, it sounded from distance like thunder. Only

the prisoners, their hearts frozen in terror, knew the truth.

Before piling the bodies on the pyres (55), the gold teeth were pulled by the "dentist" and other body cavities were searched for more possessions, all with restless speed.

Now, the victims dead, the prisoners finished sorting out the clothing. First, they removed the Star of David and checked every fold for hidden valuables. Then they packed them in lots of ten tying with string and stored them in huge warehouses (44) to be sent later. Simultaneously, the hills of private documents, diplomas, pictures, etc. were being burned in a specially built incinerator (46), removing the last traces of their existence. Thus, the destruction of a transport of Jews was completed. The people killed, the goods stored, the documents destroyed... as if, IT NEVER WAS."

Underground

On April 28, 1943 a transport of Polish Jews from the town of Izbica arrived at Sobibor. Because of Sobibor's planned expansion the Nazis selected 40 Jews to work in the camp. Those Jews brought to the hermetically isolated prisoners of Sobibor the stunning news about the Warsaw ghetto uprising. It was the spark to fight back.

A nucleus of a conspiracy was established. Its leader was Leon Feldhendler, a thirty-three year old. A tall man, about thirty-five years old, still wearing his Red Army lieutenant's uniform attracted Feldhendler's attention. His name was Alexander (Sasha) Aronowich Pechersky, who as a former military man, emerged as the factual leader.

On October 10, a consolidated command was formed. The number of the conspirators involved was kept to an absolute necessary minimum. From a total of about 550 Jews alive at the time, less than 10% had any knowledge of the escape plan.

The escape was divided into three phases:

Phase I - prepare the assault teams [3:30-4:00 P.M.]

Phase II - eliminate the Nazis noiselessly [4:00-5:00 P.M.]

Phase III - mobilization of all prisoners for an open revolt and mass escape [5:30 P.M.]

In the first phase, members of the Underground who had access to the warehouses and sorting sheds were told to remove and to deliver knives and small axes to the conspirators command post. Next was the placement of six combat groups, of three people each, in preparation for the secret killing of the Nazis.

In the second phase, the Germans were to be trapped and executed in selected places. In Lager I mainly in the workshops. The killings in Lager II were to take place in the warehouses and in the incinerator building. The Nazis should be lured to those place under various pretexts.

Put in the broadest terms, the plan called for killing as many Germans and Ukrainians as possible within one hour, and then ignite a total revolt by the rest of the by now uninformed prisoners. In its details the plan utilized the Germans' brashness and their confidence that they had total control over the seemingly subdued prisoner population. It also depended upon the predictability of their daily routine. Most important, we utilized their greed.

A special group of prisoners was designated to attack the armory. All of them would be armed with knives and axes prepared to fit inconspicuously under belts when covered with jackets.

A few youthful prisoners were given responsibilities as message carriers, luring the Nazis to the traps and to steal weapons. Because of their functions in the camp, their movement was not strictly scrutinized by the Nazis. They had access to places that were strategically important to the Underground, including the Nazi quarters, canteen and the incinerator.

All preliminary preparations were to be completed by 4:00 P.M. Then the telephone wires should be cut at both ends and the middle section hidden to prevent the Nazis from quickly reconnecting the line. Just before 5:00, the electrician Walter Schwarz, a German Jew, was ordered to damage the electric generator supplying power to the camp. Then the elimination of the SS Staff should begin. All the Germans within reach would be quietly killed. So as not to betray the action, no one was to use (at this phase) the weapons acquired from the death enemy. Above all, everything had to have the appearance of routine. Even the behavior of the Kapos in the conspiracy was not to change and Leon urged them to make use of the whips as usual, until all workers were returned to their quarters in Lager I.

If everything went well to that point, Kapo Pozycki would blow a whistle for the regular roll-call a little earlier than usual. The Jews would form a column, but instead of waiting for the Germans, they would be led by the Kapos in regular formation toward the main gate. The idea was that the guards would think it was a German order for some work

assignment; this would allow the prisoners to come as close as possible to the main gate without arousing suspicion. Then the gate would be taken by storm and the guards overpowered.

To the organizers' dismay, there was no way of contacting the Jews in Lager III. The escape date was originally set for October 13. Later, due to unforeseen circumstances, it was moved to the next day October 14.

Revolt



ALEKSANDER A.
PECZERSKY

October 14, 1943 was a warm, sunny day and nothing disrupted the routine. Only a very small group knew that this was to be the fateful day. The Nazis in the camp went about their business as usual. At precisely 4:00 P.M., the stage was set. Everything now depended on the nerves of the attackers, their faith in themselves and luck.

Acting commander SS Untersturmfuehrer Niemann rode up on his horse and entered the tailor shop. Mundek was ready, holding the new uniform. The German without suspicion, unhooked his belt with its pistol in the holster and casually threw it on the table.

As tailors have done for ages, he patted and turned Niemann at his will. Finally he told him to stand still while he marked the alterations with a crayon. Then the blow fell. The Nazi dropped like a fallen tree, his head split. Shubayev rushed to Sasha's quarters and delivered the first pistol. They embraced. Now, there was no turning back.

At 4:15, Oberscharfuehrer Graetschus, the German in charge of the Ukrainian guards, arrived at the cobblers' shop to pick up his order. While Yitzhak held the Nazi's leg in a firm grip, pretending to pull the boots, Arcady Wajspaper and Siemion Rosenfeld slipped out from the back room and split the skull of the Nazi with the ax. Then his deputy, the Ukrainian Klatt, entered, calling his boss to the telephone. He too was attacked and killed.



LEON FELDHESSLER

In Lager II, Toivi (Thomas Blatt) standing at attention was informing a SS Untersturmfuehrer that a new leather coat, exactly his size had been set aside for him in the warehouse. The German took the bait and went without hesitation in the direction of the warehouse.

Meanwhile, in one of the many partitions of the warehouse, a few conspirators were stocking packets against the wall, each containing ten articles of clothing. At the side lay the bait: a shiny, black leather coat. Wolf entered. "Attention!", barked Bunio. The prisoners froze. "Help the Herr Unterscharfuehrer with the coat!", ordered the Kapo. An inmate fetched the coat and held it for the German. The Nazi put his arm into the sleeves and in a split second the scenario changed. Held as if in a straight jacket, he could not move his arms. A strike of the ax by Cybulski and he fell. The executions in Lager II had begun: the trap was waiting for the next Nazi.

The conspirators went out to summon other Nazis and when the miners' carts with food rations were en route to Lager III, SS Unterscharfuehrer Valaster, the driver, was flagged down and told that Wolf urgently needed him. He left to be killed.

Another team readied for a new attack on SS Oberscharfuehrer Beckman. The prisoner Pozyccki knocked at his office door asking permission to enter for some job clarification. Permission granted, they entered. Immediately, Pozyccki immobilized him by a headlock and he was knifed to death. In the adjoining room, SS Scharfuehrer Valaster's body was lying on the floor.

Unexpectedly, SS Unterscharfuehrer Walter Ryba had wandered into the car garage in the garrison area where he was killed.

From the main tower in the center of Lager II came the sound of a bugle announcing the end of the day's work. As groups returned to the main square in Lager I, the marching songs in Yiddish, German, Polish, Dutch, Ukrainian and Russian echoed far beyond the barbed wires of the Sobibor forest.

Everything appeared like any other day. In Lager I, a mass of prisoners unaware of what was about to happen stood in line for their "coffee" and bread as they did every day. Their life or death would be determined in a matter of minutes.

At that moment, SS Frederick Gaulich entered the area. The prisoner Leitman immediately asked him to come to the newly built barrack because of some problem with the bunks. The moment Gaulich entered the barrack his fate was sealed; he was killed with an ax.

The first dead German was discovered. Returning from Chelm, SS Bauer, drove to the garment warehouse with two prisoners, Jakob Biskubicz and David. While unloading cases of vodka from the truck, one guard looked into the office and noticed a dead German.

Jakob Biskubicz describes how this discovery initiated the third phase of the revolt:

"A Ukrainian came running and called to Bauer, 'A German is dead!' Bauer did not immediately understand what he meant. But David also who heard him, started to run in the direction of Lager I. Bauer ran after him and shot at him twice. I remained alone."

Sasha, heard the gunfire and understood that something bad had happened. On Sasha's orders, Pozycki blew his whistle for roll call. Although it was fifteen minutes early, the Kapo's authority was never disputed and the prisoners began to gather.

Now the news spread like a wildfire. Some Jews were returning to their barracks where they pulled out their white prayer shawls from their hiding places and came out assembling near the kitchen reciting "Kaddish"; the prayer for the dead, for themselves.

Sasha, jumping up on a table, made a short speech in Russian, his native language. His voice was clear and loud so that everybody could hear, but also composed and slow. He told the prisoners that most of the Germans in the camp had been killed. There was no turning back. A terrible war was ravaging the world and each prisoner was part of that struggle. He promised that dead or alive, they would be avenged and so would the tragedy of all humanity. He repeated twice that those prisoners who, by some miracle survive, should forever be a witness to this crime. He ended with a call: "Forward Comrades! Death for the fascist!!!"

The prisoners from various countries, speaking diverse languages, understood. From the midst of the assembled Jews a single, strange and impatient voice was heard: "FORWARD! HURRAH! HURRAH!" In a flash, the entire camp burst with the defiant call.

Thomas Blatt recounted: "The remaining Germans: Bauer, Richter, Frenzel, Wendland and some guards with machine guns, who had initially been in shock, now effectively blocked the main gate. People were killed and the front line Jews mostly unarmed fell back, then a new wave of determined fighters pushed again forward towards in a suicidal thrust.

Someone was trying to cut an opening in the fence with a shovel. Within minutes, more Jews arrived. Not waiting in line to go through the opening under the hail of fire, they climbed the fence. Though we had planned to touch the mines off with bricks and wood, we did not do it. We couldn't wait; we preferred sudden death to a moment more in that hell.

Corpses were everywhere. The noise of rifles, exploding mines, grenades and the chatter of machine guns assaulted the ears. The Nazis shot from a distance while in our hands were only primitive knives and hatchets.

We ran through the exploded mine field holes, jumped over a single wire marking the end of the mine fields and we were outside the camp. Now to make it to the woods ahead of us. It was so close. I fell several times, each time thinking I was hit. And each time I got up and ran further...100 yards...50 yards... 20 more yards...and the forest at last. Behind us, blood and ashes. In the grayness of the approaching evening, the towers' machine guns shot their last victims."

Dragnet



MILITARY FUNERAL FOR THE NAZIS KILLED IN THE SOBIBOR REVOLT
Chelm, Poland, October 17, 1943

A quietness lay over Sobibor. The few Germans still alive, Erich Bauer, Karl Frenzel, Willy Wendland, Rechwald and Siegfried Wolf assessed the situation. The guards assembled, but many of their comrades were now gone. On those parts of the fences that remained standing and on the ground now torn by the explosions, bodies were lying scattered about.

Taken by surprise, the Germans were unable to comprehend the situation. Was this revolt accomplished by the wretched Jews alone or was it a planned military action with the help of outside partisans? They were in a panic. The camp telephone was not functioning and Frenzel called the nearby base of the Border Police and the SS Mounted Unit in Chelm from the village train station. He also sent a chaotic message to the Security Police headquarters in Lublin asking for immediate reinforcement to save the lives

of the remaining Nazis: "Jews revolted ...Some escaped ...Some SS officers, noncoms, foreign guards dead. ...Some Jews still in camp. ...Send help."

The Commander of SS and Police forces in Lublin, Lieutenant General Jakob Sporrenberg, immediately informed General Frederick Krüeger in Krakow, the Commander of all SS and Police forces in occupied Poland of the Sobibor uprising and the Nazi casualties. His cable to them follows:



MILITARY FUNERAL FOR THE NAZIS KILLED IN THE SOBIBOR REVOLT
Chelm, Poland, October 17, 1943

"October 14, 1943, at about 17:00 hours, a revolt of Jews in the SS camp Sobibor, 40 km north of Chelm. They overpowered the guards, seized the armory and after a shutout with the camp garrison, escaped in an unknown direction. Nine SS killed. One SS wounded. One SS missing. Two guards of non-German nationality shot to death.

Approximately 300 Jews escaped. The remainder were shot to death or are now in the camp. Military Police and armed forces were immediately notified and took over the security of the camp at about 1:00 hours (1:00AM, October 15). The area south and southwest of Sobibor is now being searched by police and armed forces."

General Hilmar Moser, wasted no time in ordering Major Hans Wagner, commander of the 689 Wehrmacht Security Battalion in Chelm, to quell the uprising and capture those

who had escaped by every necessary measure.

Help arrived quickly in the form of a small Border Patrol unit of seven men under the command of SS Untersturmfuehrer Adalbert Benda. Late that night Major Eggert of the Security Police and Captain Erich Wullbrandt, an officer in the Security Police decorated with the highest German military honors, arrived.

SS Untersturmfuehrer Benda reported: "...During the mopping up of the camp itself, our men had to use arms because the prisoners resisted arrest. A great number of prisoners were shot: 159 prisoners were treated as ordered. All the men of the Einsatzkommando were equal to their task."

The next order of business was the pursuit.

Der Kommandeur der Ordnungspolizei
in Distrikt K. u. B. l. i. n
- Ia -

Lublin, den 19.10.43

Feldpostschreiben

An den B.d.O. - Offizier vom Dienst - K r a k a u -

In der Zeit vom 17.-19.10.43 wurden von den aus dem Lager Sobibor am 14.10.43 geflüchteten Juden im Raum um Sobibor und Rozanka, 35 km bzw. 52 km nördl. Chelm, durch Truppenpolizei weitere 44 Juden vernichtet und 15 Juden festgenommen.
Erbeute: 1 Gewehr, 1 Pistole, 1 Handgranate.

21.10. in Sawin, 15 km nördl. Chelm, von Streife des Wehrmachtstützpunktes Sawin, 6 Juden aus Lager Sobibor festgenommen und 1 Jude auf der Flucht erschossen.

Sicherungsabschnitt Bug:
26.10.43 im Raum um Sawin, o 540, von Wehrmachtstreife des Stützpunktes 27 1 Jude aus Sobibor auf der Flucht erschossen.

29.10. im Raume der Gemeinde Wryzki, o 488, durch Truppenpolizei 2 flüchtige Juden aus Sobibor vor der Festnahme erschossen.

DRAGNET DAILY REPORT

be captured individually or in groups and cables were sent regularly to Krakow as each of the escapees were caught.

The Security Zone Bug (Dragnet Daily Report) report pictured here reads:

"In the period from October 17 - 19, 1943 Jews who escaped from Sobibor on October 14, were apprehended in the area of Sobibor and Rozanka, fifty two kilometers north of Chelm. The military police killed forty-four more Jews and fifteen Jews were taken into custody. Seized: one rifle, one pistol, one hand-grenade."

"October 21, 1943 Sawin, fifteen kilometers north of Chelm, Wehrmacht posts in Sawin apprehended six Jews from Sobibor. One Jew was shot death attempting to escape."

"Security zone Bug:

For the Jews who had escaped, the next few weeks were terrifying. They were hunted by over 100 regular soldiers, 100 mounted police and 150 Ukrainians and SS soldiers. On October 16 and 17 the second and Third Squadron of Mounted SS and Police added five hundred more men to the manhunt. This force was formidable enough; but one must add to it the auxiliary units, regional police units and local collaboration, aided by two Luftwaffe observation aircraft, to comprehend the odds against these Jews.

The bridges across the Bug river were guarded and traps were set on the crossroads. Circling in the forest, some Jews inadvertently returned to the camp area where they were spotted and caught.

The search was finally officially halted on October 2, but the escapees continued to

"October 28, 1943, o 540, in the area of Sawin, one Jew from Sobibor was shot in an escape attempt by Wehrmacht post 27."

"October 29. 43, in the municipality of Wryki, o 489, the military police apprehended two escapees from Sobibor. They were executed.

The Jewish Side:

Original number of prisoners at the time of the revolt	550
• Not able or willing to escape, including 30 in Lager I	(150)
• Killed in combat and mine fields	(80)
Number of prisoners to initially escape Sobibor	320
• Captured in dragnet and executed	(170)
Number of prisoners to successfully escape Sobibor	150
• Killed fighting Germans as partisans or in the army	(5)
• Killed in hiding, mostly by hostile native elements	(92)
Number of revolt survivors to be liberated by the Allies	53
* Additionally, 9 Jews survived from earlier individual escapes, which makes a total of Sobibor survivors:	62

The Nazi Side:

Germans and Ukrainian guards on duty at the time of the revolt	137
Germans killed including 2 Volksdeutsche guard leaders	12
Germans wounded	1
Ukrainians guard killed	8
Ukrainian guards wounded	12
Ukrainian guards not accounted for...(Fled for fear of German reprisals)	28

Word of the escape first got to the outside world through an October 25 cable send by the Polish underground (AK) to their government-in-exile in London: "In an heroic fight with the Germans the Jews destroyed their place of torment".

This was the first and only case in which so many Nazis were killed by prisoners in a single action, in one day, during the Second World War. Bauer recalled in his post-war testimony:

"...I transported seven coffins to the city of Chelm...The rest of the coffins came with the train to Chelm. Those I transported from the railroad station to the City Hall. In all, twenty-one or twenty-three persons were killed."

Auschwitz Commandant Rudolf Hoes notes in his memoirs that "The Jews (of Sobibor) were able, by force, to achieve a major breakout, during which almost all the German personnel were wiped out...".

The uprising in Sobibor represented one of the most heroic pages in the anti-fascist resistance in World War II, as well as in Holocaust history as a whole. It was unique in its plan and execution and in successfully eliminating most of the SS staff in the camp.

As a result, the camp was closed. The area was plowed under and a Ukrainian Guard settled at the site.

On another level, the Sobibor Uprising had more far reaching and tragic repercussions. On October 19, 1943 the Sobibor Revolt was discussed extensively at a meeting held in Governor General Hans Frank's mansion in Krakow. In attendance were the Chiefs of the Security Service and Police in the Generalgouvernement. Citing Sobibor as an example of danger they decided to accelerate the liquidation of the remaining Jews in camps in Lublin area. Himmler immediately ordered SS General Friedrich Krueger to carry out this policy.

Twenty days after the revolt, on November 3, 1943, under the code-name Erntefest (Harvest Festival), the liquidation began. The results were staggering: 10,000 Jews were killed at Trawniki, 18,000 at Majdanek and an additional 15,000 in other camps; a total of 43,000 killed in six days.

Murderers

Documented proof exists that at various times, all the men listed below were at Sobibor for some length of time. Approximately 100 Germans and about 200 Ukrainian guards worked in Sobibor during its eighteen months of existence. Other than the commander and his deputy, all Germans were non-commissioned officers, but were always superior in rank to any of the Ukrainian guards. Their function in the camp varied. Some had specific assignments such

as setting up the gas chambers and crematoria; other rotated from other Operation Reinhard camps. And there were some, like Frenzel, who were at Sobibor from the beginning to its end. At any given time the German personnel amounted to about 30 men, of whom approximately one half was always on rotating vacations.

Having the spoils of their victims at their disposal, the Sobibor Nazis lived in the utmost comfort, supplementing military rations with foodstuffs stolen from the murdered Jews. The best tailors, cobblers, culinary experts, dentists and mechanics were kept as laborers who used their talents to make life easier for the Germans assigned to the "wilds" of Poland. Some even put in orders to the mechanics shop for bicycles made from converted baby carriages, for their children in Germany. Some enriched themselves by stealing valuables, even gold teeth pulled from the victims bodies.

Safe from the front line duty, the non-commissioned officers received an average monthly pay of 58 Reichsmark and close to ten times this amount in bonuses of 18 Reichsmark a day; a total of about 600 Reichsmark. Future incentives took the form of three weeks vacation every three months.

Most of these Germans, all fairly young, were family men. Some, like Frenzel, claimed even to be religious. Their job did not require them to be great managers; the barrel of a gun was persuasive enough.

LEADERS OF "OPERATION REINHARD"



ODILLO GLOBOCNIK
SS Hauptsturmführer
Head - "Operation Reinhard"



HERMAN HOEFLE
SS Hauptsturmführer
Coordinator - "Operation Reinhard"



CHRISTIAN WIRTH
SS Hauptsturmführer
Inspector - "Operation Reinhard"

TECHNICIANS OF "OPERATION REINHARD"



KARL STEIBEL
SS Sturmbahnführer
Commander - Transportation Units



WOLFGANG THOMALLA
SS Obersturmführer
Head - Death Camp Construction



ERWIN LAMBERT
Gas Chamber
Construction Specialist

LEADING NAZIS IN SOBIBOR



FRANZ STANGL
Commandant



JOHANN NIEMANN
Deputy Commandant



GUSTAW WAGNER
SS Oberscharführer



KARL AUGUST FRENZEL
In charge of Lager I



ERICH BAUER
In charge of gas chambers



SIEGFRIED GRAETSCHUS
In charge of Ukrainian Guard



PAUL JOHANNES GROTH



FRANZ WOLF



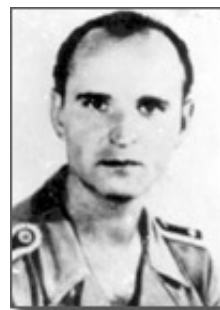
ARTHUR DACHSEL



HERMANN MICHEL



WALTER NOWAK



WILLI WENDLAND



FRANZ HODL



ALEKS KAIZER



KURT BOLENDER



WERNER KARL DUBOIS



HANS-HEINZ SCHUTT



HUBERT GOMERSKI



ERICH GUSTAV LACHMANN



JOHAN KLIER



WILLI MENTZ



ERNST ZIERKE



KURT FRANZ



KARL LUDWIG



FRITZ RECHWALD

At the Nuremberg Trials, the stories of the death camps were little known. The prosecution accused criminals mostly on the basis of the atrocities at Auschwitz and other well-known Nazi camps where the evidence and witnesses were relatively easy to obtain. As for Sobibor, witnesses had dispersed and the criminals were unknown to the authorities.

In May, 1945 former Sobibor staff member SS Nowak was recognized in East Germany by a former Sobibor inmate, Meir Ziss. Nowak was arrested by Soviet authorities. SS Hubert Gomerski, another Nazi from Sobibor, was also arrested. Then Johann Klier was arrested, but as a person who felt compassion for the Jews and secretly tried to help them, he was soon released.

One of the worst murderers, Erich Bauer, the chief of the



SOBIBOR NAZIS ON TRIAL IN HAGEN, GERMANY, 1964

Front row, L-R: K. Bolender, W. Dubois, K. Frenzel, E. Fuchs, A. Ittner, R. Jurhs
Back row, L-R: E. Lachman, E. Lambert, H. Schutt, H. Unverhau, F. Wolf

gas chambers, was found fortuitously. He was recognized on the streets of Berlin by survivors. On September 1, 1951 he was sentenced to death and then, after abolition of the death penalty in Germany, to life in prison.

On September 6, 1965, the German court in Hagen initiated the proceedings against thirteen former Sobibor Nazis, accusing them of crimes against humanity. On December 20, 1966, the following sentences were handed out:

1. Frenzel, Karl, carpenter; arrested in 1962. Accused of personally killing 42 Jews and helping to murder approximately 250,000 Jews. Found guilty of personally killing 6 Jews and of helping to murder approximately 150,000 Jews. Sentenced to life in prison.
2. Bolender, Kurt, hotel porter; arrested in 1961. Accused of personally killing approximately 360 Jews and of helping to murder approximately 86,000 Jews. Committed suicide in prison before sentencing.
3. Wolf, Franz, warehouse clerk; arrested in 1964. Accused of personally killing one Jew and helping to murder 115,000 Jews. Found guilty of having assisted in the murder of at least 39,000 Jews. Sentenced to eight years in prison.
4. Ittner, Alfred, laborer; accused of helping to kill approximately 57,000 Jews. Found guilty of having assisted in the murder of approximately 68,000 Jews. Sentenced to four years in prison.
5. Dubois, Werner, mechanic; accused of helping to kill approximately 43,000 Jews. Found guilty of having assisted in the murder of at least 15,000 Jews. Sentenced to three years in prison.
6. Fuchs, Erich, truck driver; accused of helping to kill approximately 3,600 Jews. Guilty of assisting in the murder of at least 79,000 Jews. Sentenced to four years in prison.
7. Lachman, Erich, mason; accused of helping to kill approximately 150,000 Jews; freed.
8. Shutt, Hans, salesman; accused of helping to kill approximately 86,000 Jews; freed.
9. Unverhau, Heinrich, male nurse; accused of helping to kill approximately 72,000 Jews; freed.
10. Juhrs, Robert, porter and janitor; accused of helping to kill approximately 30 Jews; freed.
11. Zierke, Ernest, saw mill worker; accused of helping to kill approximately 30 Jews; freed.
12. Lambert, Erwin, tile layer; accused of helping to kill an unknown number of Jews; freed.

Thus, most of the Nazis were freed in a relatively short time; their citizenship rights were revoked only for the duration of the prison sentence.

The most notorious of the executioners, SS Stangl, was arrested in Brazil and extradited to Germany. On July 22, 1970 the Dusseldorf Court sentenced him to life in prison for complicity in the murder of 900,000 people. He died in prison of a heart attack.



FRANZ STANGL

Confronted by a survivor in a Brazilian courtroom, 1967



FRANZ STANGL
 Extradited from Brazil to stand trial in Germany, 1970

THE BEAST OF SOBIBOR



GUSTAW WAGNER
 SS Oberscharführer

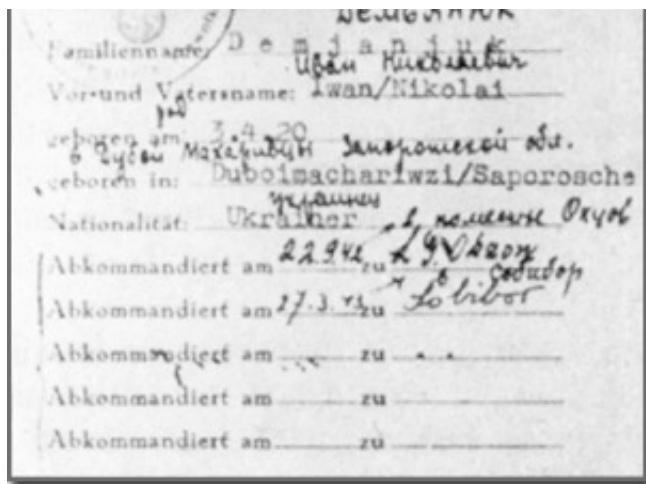


GUSTAW WAGNER
 Brazil, 1978

PASSAPORTE BRASILEIRO 44924 Nome: FRANZ WAGNER Sexo: MASCULINO Nacionalidade: ALEMANHA Estado Civil: Solteiro Data de Nascimento: 1914 Local de Nascimento: FRANKFURTE Data de Expedição: 04/12/50 Validade: 04/12/51 Observações: FRANZ WAGNER Assinatura do Expediente: <i>Francis Franz Wagner</i> Assinatura do Passado: <i>FR</i>		REPUBLICA DA GUAYANA FRANCESA SERVIÇO DE IDENTIFICAÇÃO R.E. nº. 313 706 R.G. nº. 3 304 003 FICHA DE ESTRANGEIRO P. E. Nome: FRANZ WAGNER Nacionalidade: FRANCO-ALÉMANTA Estado Civil: SOLTEIRO Profissão: PROFESSOR Local de Nascimento: FRANKFURTE Data de Nascimento: 1914 Assinatura: FRANZ WAGNER Datas de Origem: 30/4/50 Prazo de Validade: 30/4/51 Observações: 14/302/88	
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GUSTAV FRANZ WAGNER
 Wagner's Brazilian passport, issued December 4, 1950





IVAN DEMIANIUUK

Nazi ID Document issued to Demianiuik, #1393.
Note his transfer to Sobibor March 27, 1943



IVAN DEMIANIUUK

Demianiuik application for U.S. visa, dated February 9, 1952

Survivors

The odds were stacked against the escapees. It is estimated that about one-third of the escapees survived the liberation. The general conditions it occupied, provided formidable obstacles. The situation of a Jewish escapee stood in sharp contrast to that of a Christian escapee. The latter could simply mingle with the rest of the population and be safe. Not so the Jew.

At the end of 1943, there were no Jewish communities to which the hunted could return. The Jewish hamlets and small towns, once vibrant with Jewish life, were now empty. In addition, harboring a Jew meant certain death to the person or family brave enough to do so. For the Jews, Sobibor had meant certain death; the Polish countryside or city raised the odds for survival only slightly.

Stories of treachery by the indigenous population were common. Berl Freiberg tells what occurred to a large group of survivors after the escape:



BERL FREIBERG

"On the third day we were sitting, binding our wounds, when we saw an armed Gentile suddenly come out into the clearing... He came near us and began speaking. He questioned us and decided to take us to his group. Then he asked us if we were hungry and said he would bring back some food.

He left and came back with a whole gang of armed villagers and gave us some bread. We were sitting around and eating and they asked us if we had guns, or gold. They told us to hand over our guns. That's is how it's done, they told us; later they'd return the weapons. Though we knew we shouldn't, we gave up the few light weapons we had... They started shooting at us point-blank. We were trapped! We had nothing to return fire with and it ended in tragedy. We came out of Sobibor to be gunned down by the likes of these..."

Fifteen year old Berl managed to get away.

Only days after the revolt, Shlomo Szmajzner and a group of twenty one escapees were unexpectedly surrounded in the forest by supposedly friendly partisans. Shlomo's rifle was taken, they were robbed and most were murdered. During the shooting, Shlomo fell and pretended to be dead. An excerpt from his writing portrays his story:

"One of the Poles who seemed to be their leader, ordered us to raise our hands for him to inspect us. What happened next was actual looting. Those who still had some gold or valuables lost everything. ...Then I realized we had fallen in the hands of hostile guerrillas. At the same time, I said to myself, "we are done for!" The first shot came. Quick as lightning I threw myself to the ground, while the salvo was intensified. While I lay there pretending I was dead, the bandits left, since they thought their atrocious task was ended. When I realized that only silence was around me, I slowly raised my head and saw that there was no one else in sight. To my immense surprise, I noticed that both Majer and Jankel, the old tailor, had done the same. The others were all dead. ...It had to be a miracle, my being still alive, since the shots had been fired point blank.

Terrribly frightened, we left this sinister place immediately, now that there were only three of us. Leon and the other boys

were already in Eternity. They had survived the German tyranny and not even Sobibor had finished them off. However, they had met death at the hands of their Polish countrymen..."

Even those escapees lucky enough to find shelter with the Poles often found themselves in grave danger as this entry from Thomas Blatt's diary reveals:

"...One day Bojarski appeared in our hiding place, saying: "The Germans are looking for partisans in our area; they are searching in all the farms close to the woods. I'm afraid they will search mine as well and so I'm going to put you for in a more secure shelter a few days." Later, in the night we were led behind the barn to a patio-like roofed storage area. Close by, I noticed a two-wheel cart. In it lay a large object, round and gray. He held us each by the armpits and lowered us into the ground through a narrow hole dug in the earth. We asked for the kerosene lamp so that we could arrange ourselves in our new quarters. He gave it to us without a word and closed the opening by tightly pushing in straw. I looked around. We were in a small dugout, about four-and-a-half feet long, three feet wide and three feet high. Along the "ceiling" there was a strong pine pole and across it some smaller pine poles covered with straw and branches. On top of it must have been soil. The small, round entrance in the corner of the roof was now jam-packed with straw.

While wondering where the air vent must be, we heard footsteps above, then the sound of something heavy being rolled. In a moment, an object fell with a great thud over our heads and the main pole began to crack slowly in the center to form a "V".

Szmul immediately supported the pine pole with his shoulders so that the ceiling would not collapse upon us, while I tried to push the straw away from the opening in order to call the farmer. It was impossible. I began to pull out big clumps of straw, and found that something else was blocking the entry! "What's wrong?", Szmul cried out. "It's blocked! It's blocked!", I gasped. The kerosene lamp began to flicker and waver and finally went out. We could not panic, I told myself...we mustn't panic. I tried to light it again. The match lit for a few seconds and went off. "Why the hell doesn't it burn?", my mind screamed. The answer came instantly: there was not enough air. We couldn't see each other in the dark. Panicky and struggling to breathe, perspiration poured down my forehead into my eyes.

It was very dark and cramped. Without oxygen we were exhausted, close to fainting and trembling with fear. Finally, with superhuman effort, Fredek managed slightly to move the heavy object blocking the entry hole, shifting it a little towards the crack of the bent ceiling. A stream of fresh air quickly revived us all, and we squeezed out. As we stood there, it flashed through my mind that there was a change in the surrounding scenery. The two-wheel cart wasn't on the side as before, but partially over our new hiding place. The handles stood high up and the body of the wagon was slanted down to the ground. Next to it on the now broken roof was a huge millstone. We didn't try to figure out what it was all about. Fredek went immediately to inform Bojarski of the accident. In a minute he was back. "Bojarski's getting dressed and will be right out." And, grinning, he added, "You know, when he saw me coming towards him, for a second he stared at me like I was a ghost. Then he clasped his head and yelled, "How did you get out?" We laughed. It still hadn't occurred to us that he had actually tried to bury us alive and that the two-wheel carriage with the millstone was expertly prepared to seal off the entrance and make any escape impossible. It had been the sudden force from the edge of the fallen millstone that had broken the main support of the roof, forming a slide, which made shifting the weight possible. This saved us from death. There was no way we could have been able to move it off had the roof been straight. We watched Bojarski's huge figure advance towards us in the murky night. "Well, boys" he said, "you'll have to return to the old hiding place. We'll think of something else later."

The fatal day on the night of April 23, 1944 we were lying quietly, hungry and resigned, when we heard faint footsteps about the barn. We recognized Bojarski's tread perhaps he was bringing us food. We heard him stop before the board barring the entrance. Fredek stretched out on his belly and edged towards the opening in the straw. We heard the hatch open and the board move. A moment of silence, then a flash and the thunder of a shot.

I heard Kostman scream, the rest was a gurgle and then a mutter. The board was hurled back and now we heard only Fred's hoarse deathly gasp. Szmul and I were sitting against the wall. In his final convulsions Kostman threw himself about, spraying us with his blood. After the initial shock and confusion, we realized that he was dead and it was our turn. Still we felt it was a nightmare, a kind of bad dream, but Fred's body was only too real.

To reach us through the regular opening one had to crawl flat on his stomach, but now we could be too dangerous for the murderers. So they decided to disassemble the hiding place. We heard the straw covering the shelter being pushed away. We knew this was our last moment. Cramped and without weapons, we felt like rats in a trap. Szmul crawled to the other corner where he burrowed into some thick straw. I followed him. We waited. The last straw was removed uncovering the big table--our hiding place. Then the thin layer of straw covering me was removed. "I got him", shouted a young fellow happily. I begged him not to shoot and to spare my life. Holding a lantern, he looked straight into my eyes. I saw his face and the muzzle of his rusty pistol. "Where is the first one?", he asked me. I replied, "He's dead." "And where is the second?" "Next to me." I heard the report of the pistol and felt a sharp, burning bite of the bullet under my jaw. My ears rang. Instinctively and fully conscious, I took a deep breath, closed my eyes and slid down. Seconds passed. I felt no pain. I wasn't sure whether I was alive or if this was life after death. I opened one eye slightly. In the dim light, I saw

the man who had shot me. He was talking in a low voice with someone. Now I knew I was alive. At the same time I wondered if I should ask him to shoot me again? If he left me, I would only suffer and die later. Or he would bury me alive. But I did not move...

I felt a noose around my feet. They pulled me outside. Evidently, I was in the way of their reaching Szmul. I was put down in the mud. The night was cold. I was nude and it was raining. I opened my eyes and watched in the dark, silhouettes of the men in front of our hiding place. I heard steps and lay down again. A man approached, stopped and said, "Might be better to give him another bullet." I froze, recognizing Bojarski's voice. Someone put his hand over my mouth, I held my breath. At the second, when I thought my lungs would burst, he removed his palm. He then felt my fingers in the dark probably looking for rings and said to Bojarski, "Let's not waste a bullet; he is already stiff."

Suddenly I heard a scream from Szmul, "Don't shoot! Don't shoot! I want to live!" There was a shot, then another. Again a scream from Szmul, a last muffled shot, then complete silence...

They returned to and pulled me inside the barn. After more poking and shaking of the hay they left, while one said to the other, "We'll bury them tomorrow; they won't rot until then and we can search more thoroughly in the daylight." When they left I crawled out, and ran to the woods.

Ironically, after surviving the hell of Sobibor, Leon Feldhendler was killed in his home in Lublin, soon after the liberation by anti-Semitic Polish countrymen. Sasha Pechersky spent years in a Soviet prison. They did not believe his story and he was accused of cooperation with the Nazis. He was released when people from abroad were asking about him and his story was verified.

SOME OF THE SURVIVORS



ILANA SAFRAN



HELA WEISS (Felenbaum)



ZELDA METZ (Kelberman)



EDA FISHER (Lichtman)



RYWKA FELDMAN
(Zielinska)



SELMA WIJNBERG (Engel)



ESTER TURNER (Raab)



SIMCHA BIALOWICZ



JAKOB BISKUBICZ



HERSZ CUKIERMAN



JOSEF CUKIERMAN



CHAIM PLOTNIKOW



JOSEF DUNIEC



SZLOMO ALSTER



MOSZE GOLDFARB



ZYNDEL HONIGMAN



CHAIM LEIST



SAMUEL LERER



KURT (TICHO) THOMAS



CHAIM TREGER



ALEKSY WJACEN



PHILIP BAILOWICZ



ALEKSANDER SZUBAJEW



SZYMON CYMIEL



YEFIM LITWINOWSKY



ARKADY WAJSPAPIER



ENGEL CHAIM



CHAIM POWROZNIK



SIEMION ROSENFELD



AZIK ROTENBERG



CHASKIEL MENSHE



MOSZE SZKLAREK



SZLOMO SZMAJZNER



JOSEF HERSZMAN



BERL FREIBERG



SZLOMO PODCHLEBNIK



YEHUDA LERNER



ABRAM MARGULES



ICHAK LICHTMAN



ABRAM WANG



CHAIM KORNFELD



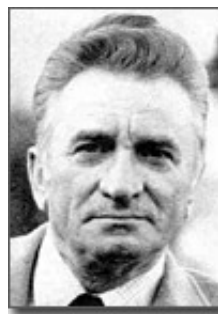
BERL ZISS



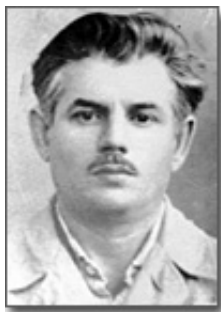
ALEKSANDER PECZERSKI



LEON FELDENDLER



THOMAS BLATT



SIEMION MAZURKIEWICZ



ABRAHAM KOHN

Confrontation



CONFRONTATION WITH A MURDERER

Thomas Toivi Blatt (right) interview with former SS Karl Frenzel (left) Germany, 1983

Karl Frenzel, one of the leading Nazis in Sobibor, was sentenced to life in prison. After serving sixteen and a half years, he was released on appeal due to a technicality. In July, 1984 the court in Hagen rejected a defense motion to stop the trial on the grounds that Frenzel was suffering from heart problems. After a stringent medical examination it was ruled that he was fit to be retried.

In 1984, I was granted a three hour face-to-face taped interview with the former SS Frenzel, the man who forty years earlier had selected him to live and work at Sobibor and sent his whole family to the gas chambers. The following are selections from the author's article.

THE CONFRONTATION WITH A MURDERER

"Do you remember me?"

"Not exactly", he answered. "You were a little boy..."

An innocent enough reply... For one crazy moment I could almost imagine this was not what it really was. We could have been uncle and nephew meeting after so many years, or perhaps father and son. Yes, there were even similarities in us. Except for his receding hairline, double chin and fuller middle, (he was seventy-three and I was fifty-six) there was the same coloring, ruddy complexion, very fair skin, blue eyes, hair once reddish, now graying, and the ample nose, quite remarkably similar in shape. It was quite possible that he did not remember me. What was I to him? But I remember him. I will never forget. I can't forget. Every night my nightmares remind me.

"You are sitting here and drinking your beer. You have a smile on your face. You might be anyone in the neighborhood. But you are not like anyone. You are Karl Frenzel, the SS Oberscharfuehrer. You were the third in command in the death

camp Sobibor. You were the Commandant of Lager I. Maybe you don't remember me, but I remember you."

I was trembling as I faced him. "It was a dilemma", I said to him, " but I decided to come. This was the first case, as far as I know, from the World War II literature where the accused talks face-to-face with the victim and I feel it is important."

I told him I put aside the moral implications and my feelings and approached him objectively simply as a researcher.

I knew why I wanted to talk to him. As a man who has dedicated his life to the remembrance of Sobibor and as a serious researcher of Sobibor, I felt there were still some unanswered questions and gaps. As a former senior staff member of a death camp, one of the few still living, he could give me some technical and other important information and facts about the camp and the revolt known only by the SS. I could get the German view of events and solve some puzzling aspects of the camp. But why did he want to talk to me? I asked him outright why he agreed to speak to me. He said he wanted to apologize to me in person. He couldn't do it in the courtroom. "I don't blame you or other witnesses," he said. "And I must honestly say I was sorry for you and all those witnesses... After all those years to have to think back on all those memories and be pressured... they were pressuring and squeezing you in the court...".



KARL AUGUST FRENZEL
In charge of Lager I

This was putting it mildly. The method of the defense was primarily to discredit the testimony of the witnesses by asking them idiotic questions. In my case for example, "How tall was the tree near the barrack?" or " Was the club with which Frenzel beat your father round or not? How many centimeters?" A stranger in the courtroom would immediately have thought I was the defendant and not the victim.

Now, speaking to him at the same table, privately in a hotel lobby, I was again in moral conflict. In a way, my being there with him could be interpreted as desecrating and insulting the memories of the deceased, making this murderer again a "person", in some manner, even forgiving him. I knew that many of my fellow survivors will point an accusing finger at me. Yet I wanted to talk to him. I knew if I went, I would be sorry and if I didn't, I would be even more sorry. Time will move on. I will be gone, Frenzel will be gone, but what will be written down will go to history. So, I blocked out the feelings.

"I was fifteen years old. I survived because you picked me as a shoe-shine boy. But my father, my mother and my brother and the other 200 Jews from Izbica that you led to the gas chamber, did not."

"This was terrible, very terrible. I can only tell you with tears, he went on quietly, calmly in an even tone, "it isn't only now that it upsets me so terribly. It upset me then... You don't know what went on in us, and you don't understand the circumstances we found ourselves in."

I heard him, but nothing registered emotionally. Functioning on an intellectual level only, my mind simply sought out data and compared what he said with facts. And the facts were: SS Frenzel acted above and beyond "duty". A conscientious and efficient official, he led the incoming transports of Jews to the gas chambers. To the slave-workers, he doled out vicious beatings for slowness and other infractions. Those who became sick, or were caught committing "crimes" such as theft of food, he personally led to the execution site. Was he asking me to understand and feel sorry for his sufferings? I felt no pity, no anger, nothing. In order to interview him I turned off all feelings, just as over forty years ago in Sobibor I did not feel for my gassed parents and brother; if I had, I would have broken down and been killed.

I was the objective reporter now and I wanted to know what he felt in those years. I said, "Frenzel, I would like to know what you felt then...Were you an anti-Semite or did you do what you did because you were ordered to? What I want to know is, did you believe, when you were there, that what you were doing was right?"

There was a pause. I didn't realize the spot I put him in. If he said no, he would be portraying himself as a morally deficient Nazi. If he said yes, he would be portraying himself as a morally deficient human being.

"No", he said quietly and evenly, "but we had our duty to do. For us it was also a very bad time." I made no comment on this comparison, but asked why he joined the Nazi Party. He looked at me dumbfounded, as if it were a silly question, and he replied, "Because there was unemployment!". As if this were self-explanatory. He told me that by chance his first girlfriend was Jewish. They were together for two years, but parted when her father, who was an editor of the Social-Democratic newspaper Vorwärts, found out that he was a member of the Nazi party. In 1934, she emigrated to America with her family.

"You were a member of the Nazi Party since 1930", I said. "Why are you now having a change of heart?" "No, I'm not just now," he answered, " I've cursed the Nazis and all their leaders since 1945 for what they have done. Since 1945 I have not been interested any more in politics." I noted that his change occurred when the Germans lost the war, but I said nothing. After the war he lived peacefully like any respectable citizen. After his wife's death he took care of his five children. In 1962, he was arrested at his job in Frankfurt where he worked as a stage lighting technician. On his break police officers interrupted his beer drinking and asked him if his name was Frenzel and was he ever in Sobibor? He admitted he was.

We went on. "Frenzel, how many Jews were gassed at Sobibor? They say over half a million. Is that accurate?" He replied, "No. I think no more than 160,000, but the railroad documents show 250,000 and many were brought by trucks, carriages and by foot." I said, "Are you a religious person?" I asked, "Do you attend church?" He responded, "Yes, very often." I then asked, "Did you have any conflict regarding your religious beliefs and political activity?"

"No. We were German Christians, [A Nazi-supported section of the Evangelical Church]. All my children were christened, like myself. My brother studied theology. My wife and myself, not every Sunday because of the children, but every second or third, we always attended church."

"And you have not, as a Christian, any problems with your past?" He answered immediately "I have nothing to hide. I'm sorry that I was in this mess then."

"But in Sobibor you did not think about being sorry," I pressed. He answered, "We didn't know where we were till we arrived. They told us we were going to guard a concentration camp. So I had my duty to do."

"Was the extermination of 250,000 Jews your duty?" He looked straight at me, "I was in jail for over sixteen years and had ample time to think about right and wrong and I came to the conclusion that what happened to the Jews in those times was wrong. All those years, I was dreaming about it...".

I was listening as if from far away. I asked about his family, I knew that he had two brothers. One was studying for the pastorate. How much did they know? "Both of them were killed in the war, but my sister survived," he answered. I asked, "How about your children now. Do they know? And what are they saying?" He replied, "Naturally they wondered about Sobibor. They know it was a crime. They say, 'Father, you were also a part of it' and I explained. But they are with me and don't reject me. They wanted to know everything that happened at Sobibor. I was ordered there. I was not an SS. There were only five SS. The rest were civilians in SS uniforms."

I asked why he didn't ask for a transfer if he wasn't an ardent Nazi. He wanted to, he said. He had begged his brother to try to get him out.

"But the fact is," I said, "there was a case where an SS man simply asked for a transfer and was given it. He wasn't killed." Frenzel didn't answer.

A hotel employee entered the room. He refilled his empty beer glass and left. We had our quiet corner again. I had many questions to ask Frenzel. As a survivor I had often wondered what a Nazi thought of the film "Holocaust". Had he seen it? He shook his head. Did he think any film or documentary could show it the way it was? "No," he said, "the reality was much worse ...it was so terrible that it can not be described."

Suddenly, though I tried to block it out, a scene flashed across my mind: my friend, Leon, being beaten to death, slowly and the horror of being forced to watch his agony. Another scene flashed... Standing, listening to the muffled screams from the gas chambers...and knowing that men, women and children were dying in horrible pain, naked, as I worked sorting their clothing. I tried to keep an interviewer's tone, but my voice trembled.

"Frenzel," I said, "tens of thousands of children were killed at Sobibor and you had children at the time. I've seen pictures of them. When you saw little children, five years, one year, one week old put to death. Did it occur to you, you had children also?" I didn't mean it the way he took it. Defensively, and with just a trace of anger, he said he never killed children, but was accused of it by other witnesses. His voice, until now in a low, even tone with patience and self-control, suddenly took on emotion. "I want you to know," he said and I could feel the resentment in his voice, "there was this little ten year old girl and her mother, and Wagner wanted to take them to the gas chambers and I arranged so they didn't go." There was a pause and his voice trembled slightly. "That's why it's upsetting that I'm accused of killing children." Apparently he didn't consider ordering their deaths as "killing". Someone else did the actual shooting or gassing. As if sensing my feelings, he continued, "I condemn all that happened to the Jews...I can understand that you can never forget, but I can't either. I've dreamed about it all of the sixteen years I spent in prison. Just as you dream about it, I dream about it too." Surely he wasn't comparing his nightmares to mine...or was he saying his conscience was bothering him?

Frenzel was sent to Sobibor from Hadamar, a sanitarium where mentally ill Germans were gassed in the course of the euthanasia program. I mentioned Hadamar and asked how he felt killing Germans. His voice became angry. The tape ran out and so as not to jeopardize the interview, I did not insist on an answer.

I decided to ask less personal questions. Did he remember "Berliner"(Berliner was an Oberkapo, killed by the Jews for cruelty to his fellow prisoners). I asked if it was true that he gave permission to the Jews to kill him. He leaned back in his chair, like an executive, "Yes," he answered confidently, "when I think back hard, it was so. My Kapo from the Bahnhofkommando told me about Berliner, then I think I said 'Butcher him to death', or something similar." His tone was frighteningly casual, as if he were speaking of getting rid of rotten potatoes. In fact, he didn't do it because he was on the prisoners' side, but because he was furious that Berliner went above his head to SS Wagner.

I asked him about Cukerman (given over one hundred lashes, his body was left in a pool of blood). Yes, he remembered, he was the cook. There were five to eight kilos of meat missing, so he gave him a beating. "...Later the

meat turned up and Cukerman's son said 'My father did nothing, it was me who had taken the meat.' So I gave them both twenty-five lashes. I want you to know I was always fair. I never punished unless they had done something wrong." I did not comment, but I was thinking he wasn't always so lenient. Another survivor testified in court that Frenzel caught his fifteen year old friend helping himself to a can of sardines and took him to the crematorium where he was shot.

I had another leading question. What had happened to the Dutch Jews? He immediately knew what I meant. Like a superior officer, he answered swiftly and to the point, "A Polish Kapo told me some Dutch Jews were organizing an escape, so I relayed it to Deputy Commandant Niemann and he ordered the seventy-two Jews to be executed." He failed to mention that he alone led them to be killed. And I could not help noting that his voice and bearing were more forceful now and there was a feeling of competence and pride about his work.

"The revolt was well executed, don't you think?" I asked proudly, but if I expected confirmation or praise, there was none. Instead, he asked a question, did I know how long the revolt took? "Fifteen minutes." I said. He agreed. "But, we worked from 3:30 to 5:30," I continued, "the time during which we annihilated your comrades. You reported it, and later Captain Wurbrand arrived and executed all the Jews in the camp. Did you leave anyone alive?" Quickly and defensively he retorted that it was SS General Sporenberg who ordered the executions, not he.

I had more technical questions. Many escapees unwittingly found themselves back near the camp, having run around in circles in the forest. I wanted to know how many were caught. His face lit up. A chance to show his expertise. "Yes, about forty-five and with the 150 Jews remaining in camp, about 195. Then I had the operation (searchin camp) stopped. About seventy were killed in the revolt and in the mine fields surrounding the camp." Then, as an afterthought, looking away he added in a matter-of-fact tone, "I'm happy for every Jew who survived." I didn't comment on this irony. I dropped the subject of the revolt. "You know," I said, "Every year I travel to Sobibor. You can still find today, if you just scrape the earth, burnt bones and hair that had been cut from the women before going to the gas chambers." I wasn't really expecting a response to this and I received none. I think I said it simply because each year as I bend down and pick up a piece of bone, I feel a sense of awe. I pay my respect to those who died. Their bones do not let me forget. They seem to be crying out for justice. And there has been little justice in the finding and prosecuting of Nazi criminals. At least their deaths as Jews should not be denied! (I had in mind the sign at the entrance to Sobibor).

"Frenzel, you know there is a plaque as you enter the camp today and it reads: HERE THE NAZIS KILLED 250,000 RUSSIAN PRISONERS OF WAR, JEWS, POLES AND GYPSIES." Immediately his eyes lit up. Here again, he was an authority on Sobibor. Excitedly and with emphasis he retorted, "Poles were not killed there. Gypsies were not killed there. Russians were not killed there...only Jews, Russian Jews, Polish Jews, Dutch Jews, French Jews."

I was surprised at his strong reaction. I wanted it verified. It was so important. "Only Jews were destroyed in Sobibor, Frenzel?" "Only Jews, only Jews", he answered. I made sure I got it on tape. I could use this verification from a leading Sobibor Nazi to show the responsible officials in Communist Poland their manipulation of the truth.

We were quiet for a moment. Then in a confidential tone, as if between friends, quietly and hesitantly and I believe sincerely, he began, "Herr Blatt, you know, when I see on television and read about Israel, I ask myself how could so many (go to their deaths)...When I see in Israel, proof of their courage, I can't understand how this could happen here...I just can't grasp it."

Suddenly I realized he probably didn't feel hatred for Jews, but contempt that they were weak. I didn't let him go further. My voice trembled, "I think the question you want to ask is, why did the revolt happen so late?" Not waiting for a reply, I continued, "For one thing, the Polish Jews had already been imprisoned in the ghettos for three years and were demoralized. They were weak, members of families who were separated or killed, they were broken in spirit. They were starved, they were ill, and there were the elderly, and women with children. And the Jews from other countries, like Holland, who had not come from ghettos, who knew nothing, and had been tricked. You know how it was...". He did not comment. "Besides, I said, breaking the silence, who could believe it? They simply couldn't believe that Germans could do such a thing. They believed in Humanity. You know...the fake train station, flowers, promising speeches." I paused. Still he said nothing.

After a few moments of silence I asked him once more if he believed in the Nazi racist theory. "I ask that you see me also in another way than in Sobibor," he answered. "I have much on my conscience (and here his voice had a calm strength to it)...many people, not one, but 100,000 people on my conscience...and it's okay with me, you can put it in the American press."

"What do you say," I asked him, "when many Germans say it wasn't so, that it never happened?" He answered, "I say it's exactly true, it's not right to say it never happened." I asked further, "So why don't you go to a magazine or newspaper and say openly: 'I'm German, I was there in charge. I worked there, and it's true.'?" He said that if he told them the way Jews were murdered, he would be afraid, like the Jew, Kornfeld. (Supposedly Kornfeld, a Sobibor survivor living in Brazil, had refused to testify against SS Wagner, for fear of reprisals against him).

I asked what he thought of neo Nazis today. "Are they strong or weak?" "Very weak and they should be forbidden," he answered. "Well, if they are so weak, why are you afraid to speak out?" I asked. He leaned forward and as if indicating various locations on an imaginary map, he pointed with his finger on the table. "They are here, there and if I go to the

press, they have their connections."

We talked for another few hours. I was trying to get more information regarding the interaction between the Nazis in Sobibor and the inner structural organization of the camp which was unknown to the prisoners. I sifted through the past, verifying suspicions and rumors. Surprisingly, I was able to verify facts that were never brought up in court and were necessary for writing the story of Sobibor.

I lit another cigarette and we sat back quietly for a while, facing each other. I heard voices from outside and looked out the window. I saw on the street older women and men of Frenzel's age. I wondered what they were like back then. And those young kids...what will they become?

Our interview was over.

So, repentant as he claims to be, he will not speak out. He is now a free man living at home (under the pretense of illness), even though his appeal was lost on September 12, 1985 and he was given a life sentence once more.

I had gained some pertinent information, but was emotionally shattered. I paid a price. I felt and still feel, a sense of guilt and betrayal for doing the interview. My only consolation is the hope that my published work will give some insight, especially to the younger generation, into how and why such an evil was possible and to the depths that hatred and bigotry can lead us.

The Hero



TOIVI AND SASHA
Thomas Toivi Blatt (left) and Alexander Aronowicz Pechersky (right)
Rostov, Soviet Union, 1980

Sasha's image never left my memory. I remember him standing with me and Szlomo in front of the barbed wires, as another Jew with a ax tried to cut them. Everything was in turmoil, machine guns blasting the area, many fell. He had only a revolver in his hand which was useless against guard in the distant towers. Sasha emerged again, for a short time, as a leader when with a lager group of Jews wandered in the forest.

After the war, when news reached me of his survival I promised myself to meet him someday. After emigrating to the U.S. at the first opportunity I wrote him a letter and received an invitation. This enabled me to get a visa to the Soviet Union. January 20, 1980 I boarded a plain in Los Angeles and the next day I arrived at Rostov.

Sasha and his wife Olga were waiting in the main lounge of the airport. Thirty-seven years I have seen him the last time, his posture was straight and energetic. A taxi took us straight to the hotel. (As a foreigner I was not allowed to sleep in a private home.) In the evening he came and invited us for supper in his home. After a short walk, we stoped in front of an older, wooden apartment house. The front door led us through a narrow hall to a room at the right. This was his place. On the other site of the hall, his neighbor was a woman doctor and they shared a communal kitchen and toilet. In two small rooms, he lived with his wife Olga, a very kind woman. The furniture was sparse: a table some chairs. One corner of the room was curtained of by a bed sheet hanging on a string, forming a triangle behind which was a mirror and a shelf with a razor and other toilette necessities.

Alexander Aronowicz Pechersky was born in Kremenchung in 1909, later in 1915 he moved to Rostov on the Don (river) where he studied music and theater. After receiving his diploma, he worked as a cultural director in a string of so-called culture centers where he organized amateur theaters.

At the start of the Word War II , he was conscripted to the army as a junior commander. In



ALEKSANDER A.
PECZERSKY

Shortly after the escape

September the same year he was promoted on the front to lieutenant and worked in the battalion and division staffs. A month later, in the area of Wiazma, in October, 1941 he was taken prisoner by the Germans.

In May, 1942 as a result of an unsuccessful escape from the POW camp in Smolensk, he was sent to a punitive camp Borysow. His Jewish heritage discovered, he was transferred on August, 1942 to a SS labor camp in Minsk.

September 18, very early in the still dark morning the SS commandant Waks had a short speech assuring that the people are only being transferred to Germany to work. Three hundred grams of bread was distributed to each person and they were led to the train station. On September, 23, the train arrived at Sobibor.

Excerpts from an interview with Alexander Aronowicz Pechersky

Leader of the Sobibor revolt
Soviet Union, 1980

Toivi: Were you aware of what happened in Sobibor?

Sasha: In the evening, the same day, I asked a another prisoner about the smog coming out from behind the fence in the opposite site of the camp. He looked at me and told me a matter of fact, the people you came with?, they are leaving Sobibor in the smoke. From him I learned the truth about the death factory, but working in the forest I was removed from direct witnessing of the murder, until... (and here his voice breaks down and tears rolled down his cheeks, the same thing happened a few years later when we meet in Moscow) working in the forest I heard amidst noises a loud cry of a child "Mama" coming from behind a hilltop. I realized that I was working near the gas chambers. I was thinking about my Elotchka, my daughter I left in a village in the Ukraine.

Toivi: Why, do you think you were selected by the conspirators for an organizer of the revolt?

Sasha: I don't know. Maybe because I was still wearing my officers' cap or they noticed my close association with other former soldiers. Most probably, because one of my closest friends from Minsk was a Polish Jew, Leitman Szlomo, a cabinet maker from Warsaw and he someway established contact with the conspiracy, recommending me to Boruch (Leon Feldhendler-T.B.) as a military officer to lead the revolt. At this time a few former POW led by Grisha made plans to escape.

Toivi: Did you believe in success of the revolt?

Sasha: We had no choice. Fighting back give us a chance, a very distant chance but still some hope. Here we were sentenced do die. As a military man, I was aware that a surprise attack is worth a division of solders. If we can maintain secrecy until the last minute of the outbreak, the revolt is 80% accomplished. The biggest danger was deconspiration. Because of it so few prisoners were involved. Nevertheless, I was astonished that so many people initially were able to escape. The smudginess of the operation surprised myself. Now thinking about this I came to a conclusion that the Nazis simple despised us Jews, believed their own indoctrination about the subhumans and treat us like robots not being able for this kind of operation. They were to confident in these believes and this, too, proved their downfall.

Toivi: I had seen you a few times in Sobibor casually talking with Luka, the Dutch girl. In your diaries you mention her quite often. She left a lasting impression on you.

Sasha: Yes, Luka was only 18 years old, very intelligent and smart. Although our meeting was initially arranged by Shloma and I knew her only about two weeks, I will newer forget her. We were not involved like other young people in camp. She was an inspiration for me. In the beginning the communication was difficult, because the language problem. Soon we were able to understand each other without help. I informed her minutes before the escape of the plan. She has given me a shirt. She said, "it's a good luck shirt, put it on right now", and I did. It's now in the museum. I lost her in the turmoil of the revolt and never saw her again.

Toivi: You have written that the attack on the armory was unsuccessful. I have seen documents, testimonies from SS Dubois contrary to your statement.

Sasha: Yes I know, could be that another group I was not aware of succeeded in their attack on the armory.

(Note) Without question Sasha is considered by me and the rest of the survivors a Hero and all of us agree that if it had not been for him, no Jew would have survived Sobibor. Even so, I had troubling questions to ask.

Toivi: In your memoirs, you summarized your departure from the rest of the escapees with a few sentences. "We realized that it make no sense to continue together in such a large group therefore we divided into small units, each going its own way." You know, Sasha, the faith kept me close to you. After your speech just before the escape I lost you for a while, to meet you by the barbed wires, then lost you again, only to find you in the forest. I was with you until your departure, as was Szlomo, and we remember it differently.

Sasha, don't take this in the wrong way, please, because of you I'm here, alive; because of you, of us have families children and grandchildren instead of finding their end in Sobibor. If you lived in the West, you would be admired by untold thousands.

I just want to know: why didn't you organize a partisan group of us? We were people from hell, determined to fight to the death to revenge then deaths of our people. As we know now, in that same region there were Jewish partisans. Tell me, please, was it necessary to depart "that" way, by subterfuge? To promise that you would come back after a short surveillance and maybe to buy food. We trusted you, you were our hero, nobody else. Why didn't you tell us the truth?

(Note) His eyebrow came together as he gazed at me piercingly.

Sasha: My job was done. You were Polish Jews in your own terrain. I belonged in the Soviet Union and still considered myself a soldier. In my opinion, the chances for survival were better in smaller units. To tell the people straight forward: "we must part" would not have worked. You have seen, they followed every step of mine, we all would perish.

Toivi: I can understand that not telling us the truth was perhaps necessary, otherwise we would not let you go, but why did you take with you all the armed men? Leaving us only one rifle, which one of your men still tried to take it from Szloma by force, backing down only after a great outcry from us. So your men had all the weapons and the rest of us, over 50 people, were left with one rifle. And on top of that, money was collected for your people to buy food for the rest. To us, this was plain dishonesty.

Sasha: Tom, what can I say? You were there. We were only people. The basic instincts came into play. It was still a fight for survival. This is the first time I hear about money collection. It was a turmoil, it was difficult to control everything. I admit, I have seen the imbalance in the distribution of the weaponry, but you must understand, they would rather die then to give up their arms.

(Note) There was nothing more to say on this subject and I directed the conversation to his live in the partisans and the Soviet Union.

Toivi: Tell me what happened after you left.

Sasha: With the help of a peasant near the Bug River, we crossed the river on the night of 19-20 and reentered my Motherland, the Soviet Union. Two days later we meet Voroshilov partisans and joined with them in fighting the Germans behind the German lines by sabotaging their transport and annihilating small garrisons. My best friends Cibulsky and Shubayev (Kali-Mali) were killed.

As soon as I could, I rejoined the Red Army. In August, 1944 I was severely wounded in the leg. I received a medal for bravery and returned as a civilian to my old job as a music teacher, but not for long...

Toivi: You were a leader of the most successful Nazi prisoner revolt during World War II. Many people own their lives to you. Did you receive any recognition for your deeds?

(Note) At this point he stood up and went to the door leading to the hallway, opened, checked outside and returned without a word. Living myself for a long time under the Communist rule in Poland, I understand his precaution even as he told me that his neighbor across the hallway is a longtime friend, a woman doctor, living in the same household for over twenty years.

Sasha: Yes, after the war, I received an award, he whispered sarcastically, I was thrown into prison for many years. I was considered a traitor because I surrounded to the Germans, even as a wounded soldier. After people from abroad kept inquiring about me, I was finally released but, my brother who had been arrested with me, succumbed to a diabetic coma while in prison. I was allowed again to work with the youth on a lower level in the cultural activities. I even was asked and did talk about my experiences in schools, but as far as an official acknowledgment and medal, no such thing for a Jew.

Toivi: Sasha, when historians are writing the history of Sobibor, you as the leader of the revolt are quoted as the fundamental source. Sobibor had a small community of prisoners and in most cases they know each other. In your writing, I found unknown names of kapos and for that matter, a commandant of Sobibor called Berg when in actuality the name of the commander was Reichleitner. Is there any reason for these discrepancies?

Sasha: When I was aware in full, of the of the terrible Sobibor purpose, my mind was occupied first of all to find a way to get out, to stop the working of this machinery. The names of the prisoners and the Sobibor functionaries were of second importance and to be truthful, besides my closest friends from Minsk, I did not remember a single other name. In order to finish my memos I write down some fictional names. But this doesn't change the truth about Sobibor.

Toivi: Last question. Do you feel any resentment, feel any betrayal by the injustice done to you from both sides? Did you seek revenge on the Germans when fighting them with the partisans and the Soviet Army after Sobibor?

Sasha: No, I did not take revenge. I fought for my Motherland as a soldier, not as a murderer.

(Note) It was getting late, and as I had been told I had to be back in the hotel by midnight, I said goodbye and left with another bear hug from Sasha.

My journey initially was only to see a long lost friend, brother, father or whatever you would call a person who did give you a new life. I wanted to see him, to thank him, to know who he really was. In my memory I always have seen him as a strong, tall, military officer. In Rostow, his posture despite over 70 years was still erect, tall and commanded respect, the same time he was soft spoken, polite and sensitive, it did come out in our conversations.

I promised to try to get him a visa to the United States as my guest. The exit permit was refused by the Soviets. In 1987, again I invited him to the premiere of the film "Escape From Sobibor". This time he could receive the visa, but was already too sick to travel. He died in 1990.

Epilogue



SOBIBOR MONUMENT - HILL OF ASHES
The ashes of over 250,000 Sobibor victims are collected here

In 1986, the Capuchin Order, which advertised for contributions to build a chapel and mausoleum to honor the victims, completed construction of a small church on the site of the camp. At the entrance to the church stands a life size wooden carving portraying Father Maximilian Kolbe, a Franciscan priest who had died in Auschwitz and was later canonized, behind barbed wires and crematorium chimneys of a Nazi extermination camp. This carving conveyed the unfortunate and erroneous impression that non- Jews, particularly Catholics, were victims of Sobibor. In fact, the only Christians killed in Sobibor were the 10 SS men and about a dozen Ukrainian guards killed by the inmates on the day of the revolt and escape.

In addition, a kindergarten was built on the site and a portion of the camp was converted into a playground, complete with slides, carousels and swings, on the exact spot where thousand of Jews had been tortured and killed.

Not only had life been taken from the Jews at Sobibor, but the memory of their very existence was being erased.

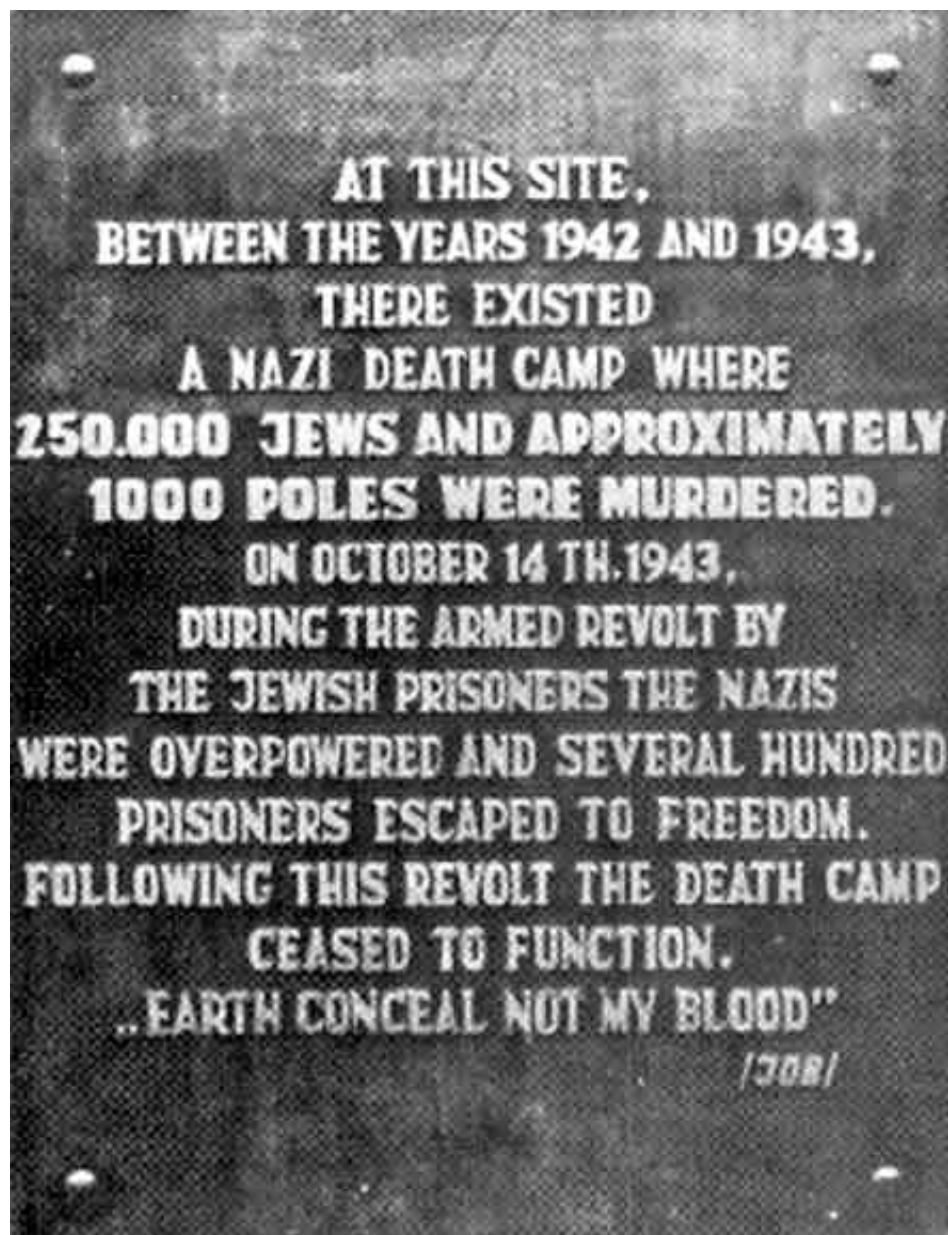
In 1987, I became chairman of the Holocaust Sites Preservations Committee, with the goal of preserving not only the site but also the historical integrity of Sobibor. A broad spectrum of Christians and Jews, business leaders, politicians and academia the world over supported these efforts. Seven years later, as a result of intensive negotiations with the Polish government, a new topographical map was officially accepted for Sobibor, designating it as a historical landmark. The kindergarten was closed and the building is now a Sobibor museum.

The most difficult task proved to be correcting the false text of the commemoration plaque. The negotiation continued over three governments administrations. After producing court documents, testimonies of both victims and perpetrators, including SS Frenzel's testimony from my interview with him, an agreement was reached that the plaque should state the truth: that 250,000 Jews were the victims of Sobibor and that the phrase "and about 1,000 Poles" (i.e. Christians) should be added to the plaque.

Now, In the place of the original false plaque, five new, historically accurate plaques were installed by the Holocaust Sites Preservations Committee, founded by the Milken Foundation, the Dutch and German governments. The plaques state clearly and unequivocally in five languages that the victims of Sobibor were Jews.

On the 50th anniversary of the revolt, the Holocaust Sites Preservations Committee and local authorities sponsored a commemoration ceremony at Sobibor. Members of the government attended, and letters from President Walesa and Prime Minister Suchocka were presented. Speakers included Marek Edelman, second in command in the Warsaw ghetto revolt, representatives of the government, military commanders, a rabbi and a Catholic bishop.

More Documents



New Plaque at Sobibor

PRESIDENT
REPUBLIC OF POLAND

Warsaw, October 14, 1993

To the participants of the fiftieth anniversary of the revolt at Sobibor:

There are places on Polish soil that are symbols of human tragedy and human bestiality, heroism and cruelty. These are the death camps. Built by Hitler's engineers, administered by the Nazi "professionals" - they served only one purpose: total genocide and the annihilation of the Jewish race. Sobibor was such a place. A manmade hell in which fifty years ago the Jews revolted, without the chance of a victory, but not without hope.

A heroic fight ensued, not in the defense of life, but in the hope of a dignified death. In defending the dignity of the 250,000 victims, the majority of whom were Polish citizens, the Jews achieved a moral victory. They saved their dignity, their honor, and in a way, saved humanity. Their deeds cannot be forgotten, especially today when in many

places on earth, bigotry, racism and intolerance are springing up again. And, where again, the crime of genocide is being committed.

Sobibor remains as a reminder and a warning. But it also represents the testimony of a people and their dignity, and a triumph for all of humanity.

I pay reverence to the memory of all, Jews from Poland and from all of Europe, who were tortured to death here, on this soil.

Lech Walesa

Translation Of The Letter From President of Poland
Original in possession of Thomas Blatt

PRIME MINISTER
REPUBLIC OF POLAND

Warsaw, October 12, 1993

Mr. Thomas Blatt
Chairman of the Holocaust Sites Preservation Committee

Honorable Mr. Chairman, Honorable Mr. Wojewodo, Honorable Assembly:

Please accept my sincere words of thanks for the honor of inviting me to the ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of the revolt in the Sobibor death camp.

Unfortunately, because of urgent matters, I cannot take part in today's events in person. However, I wish to send my homage to the heroes - the victims of Hitler's terror and cruel genocide. The prisoners of Sobibor, the horrible death camp for Jews, took the heroic decision to fight, and in effect, they chose above all a way to die, because they were fully aware that if anyone survived, they would be only a few. In this inhuman world of the totalitarian system of death camps, slavery, and human degradation, in which we saw mainly death, the prisoners of Sobibor have shown how to act and fight heroically, so as to be morally victorious.

The history of Sobibor has also shown us that even in the face of extreme terror and extermination, Hitler's hangmen were not able to kill in the victimized and tormented people the will to fight for freedom, even if the road led to death.

The history of the Holocaust is the most monstrous tragedy of a people's destiny, where the most appalling chapters took place on our soil. It is the duty of all of us - and I do not need to justify deeper - to know more, understand more, and remember those terrible, murderous times and the heroes of those days.

In paying reverence to those who chose the battle call of death in Sobibor death camp, we must remember the prize for the final victory over totalitarianism. We should do everything so as not to allow the emergence of another "inhuman world" and their indescribable crimes.

Respectfully,

H. Suchocka

Translation Of The Letter From Prime Minister of Poland
Original in possession of Thomas Blatt

Comments

"Thomas Blatt has written remarkable book that tells two stories. The first details the working of the notorious Sobibor extermination camp. The second tells of the revolt at Sobibor. Blatt tells those two stories in measured tones: he neither exaggerates the heroism of the Jewish prisoners nor demonizes their cruel victimizers. This is a remarkable feat in itself because Blatt was one of the prisoners who had a role in the revolt and who escaped from Sobibor. Most compelling is Thomas Blatt's interview with Karl Frenzel, a Nazi officer at Sobibor, which encapsulates Hanna Arendt's famous phrase 'the banality of evil'."

- **Dr. Michael Nutkiewicz**, Chief Historian of Shoah
Spielberg Foundation in Los Angeles

"Thomas Blatt writes in the preface to this remarkable book. "Witnessing genocide is overwhelming; writing about it is soul shattering. Nor can the reader emerge unscathed from this wrenching account of man's inhumanity to humanity. This account of the killing of 250,000 Jews at the death Sobibor is made even more powerful by the fact that the author

is one of a handful of survivors of the revolt. To read this book is to risk having ones soul shattered and ones humanity put in question. No one who reads it ever will be able to forget Sobibor or Thomas Blatt."

- **Marilyn J. Harran, Ph.D., Professor of Religion and History**
Chapman University

"This important and deeply moving book, written by one of the heroes of the legendary 1943 Sobibor uprising, recount one of the greatest escape stories in the annals of human history. Thomas Blatt's powerful and passionate narrative honors the memory of Sobibor's victims. It is a "must" reading."

- **Neal M. Sher, Executive Director, American Israel Public**
Affair Committee; former Director, Office of Special Investigations
U.S. Department of Justice

"Thomas Blatt has produced a well documented study of the Sobibor extermination camp where approximately 250,000 Jews were annihilated. This book does much to help us understand the camp and the revolt for which it became famous. Without his sustained and courageous pressure on the Polish government to change the sign at Sobibor, few would know that Jews were the primary victims at the camp."

- **Alex Grobman, Ph.D., Director**
Martyrs Memorial and Museum of the Holocaust
Los Angeles

"Having worked with Tom over a period of several years during the development and production of the film "Escape from Sobibor", I came to deeply respect his passion, attention to detail, and strength of character. As a survivor of the revolt at the Sobibor death camp, hi brought all the qualities and more to his compelling book, Sobibor - The Forgotten Revolt. This is a powerful story of a tragic part of history and a fitting tribute to the many who lost their lives in camp as well as to the courageous men and women of Sobibor who rose in rebellion on October 14, 1943. It is a story never to be forgotten."

- **Denis Doty, Producer**
"Escape from Sobibor"

Please send comments to: comments@sobibor.info
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