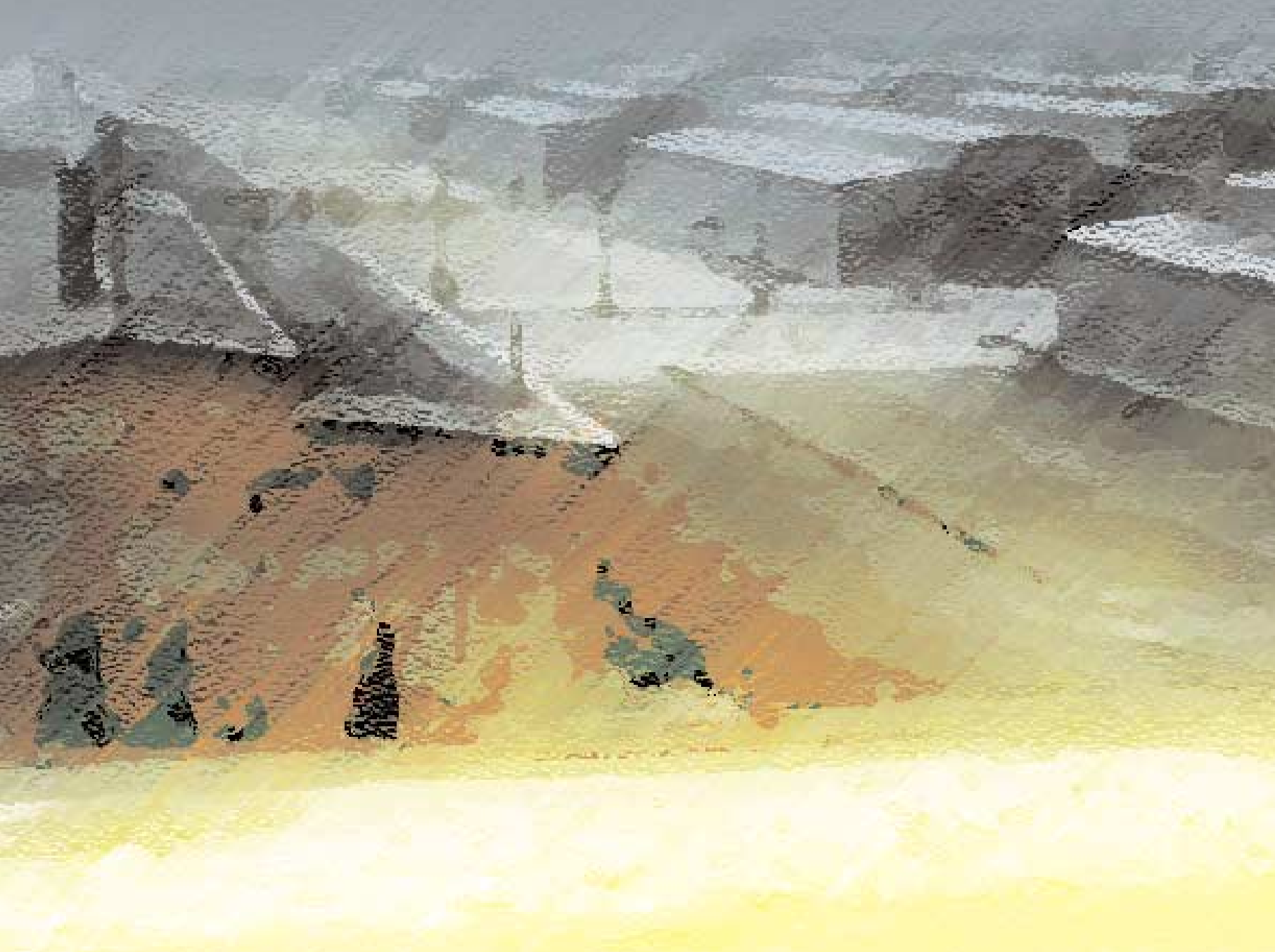


A sample chapter taken from
Auschwitz Diary
A history of Auschwitz-Birkenau 1940-1945

by Jeremy Crick

JANUARY
1943



10th January

Having already liquidated the remaining prisoners from the Sonderkommando tasked to exhume and burn the rotting corpses in the Birkenwald mass graves (December 1942) - today another Sonderkommando liquidation takes place. It is likely that this group of men had been working at the two Bunkers in the Birkenwald. Filip Müller (camp number 29136) of the Auschwitz I Sonderkommando met a group of these men last October who had been working out here in the Birkenwald since last spring thus predating the formation of the exhumation Sonderkommando.



The Birkenau Sonderkommando at work at the burial pits out in the Birkenwald - this photograph was taken by David Szmulewski (camp number 27849) who was a leading member of the International Group at the camp.

Today's liquidation begins when the members of the Sonderkommando are informed that they will be leaving Birkenau on a convoy but when they arrive at the main camp they are taken to the crematorium where they are all shot and then cremated - so taking their terrible secrets with them. Those members of the Sonderkommando too sick to travel plus various personnel from their Block are shot outside Block 2 in camp BIb.

Sources: Kraus/Kulka 154; Müller 125

13th January

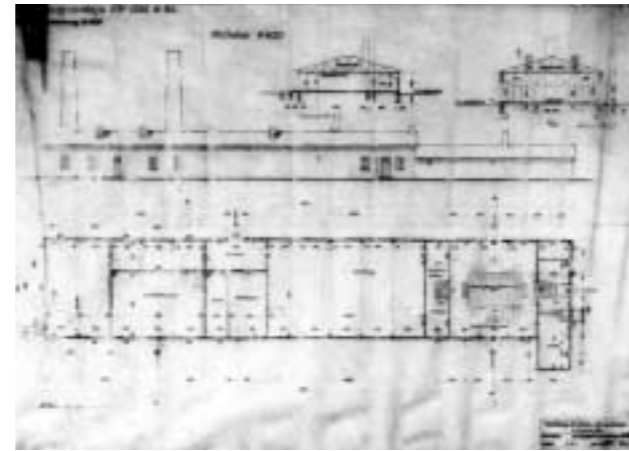
The Auschwitz Zentralbauleitung (Construction Office), under the command of SS Sturmbahnführer Karl Bischoff, writes to the Auschwitz base of the SS owned DAW (Deutsche Ausrüstungswerke) complaining that the door for Crematorium II 'which is urgently needed for the implementation of the special measures' had yet to be delivered. This letter, like a great deal of the correspondence regarding the construction of the Birkenau crematoria, would be presented as evidence at the Nuremberg Tribunal.

The construction of the crematoria buildings is underway at this point. Based on the completion dates for



Crematorium II in its very early stages of construction.

Walther Dejaco's revised and final draft for Crematoria IV and V



these, work began last year on the foundations and building fabric for Crematoria II and IV first. Sometime this month, Walther Dejaco of the Auschwitz Zentralbauleitung, completes the final design of the smaller crematorium type (IV and V) in which all the interior details are meticulously worked out.

The contract for the construction of the larger crematoria II and III goes to the Huta building firm while the contract for the construction of the smaller crematoria IV and V goes to the Riedel building firm. The contract for making the specialist doors and windows for all four crematoria is undertaken by the SS owned DAW company while all the crematoria furnaces, ovens and ventilation systems for the gas chambers is undertaken by the Erfurt based company Topf & Sons.

Sources: Hilberg 566; Nuremberg Document, NO-4466; Dwork 320-321

20th January

SS Obergruppenführer Ernst Kaltenbrunner, Heydrich's successor as head of the RSHA, has little understanding of the subtleties of Heydrich's decision to set up the Terezin (Theresianstadt) ghetto as a model ghetto for privileged Jews from the 'Old Reich' (see 28 October 1942) - to Kaltenbrunner it has enjoyed 'privileged' status for too long and he gets Hitler's permission to begin deportating the 50,000 or so Jews to Auschwitz. He sets an initial quota of 5,000 to be completed this month of Jews under the age of 60. Thus, the second RSHA transport from the Czech ghetto of Terezin sets out today carrying 2000 men, women and children. After leaving, the ghetto authorities compile a simple census of the remaining population, counting 46,735 men, women and children.

Original documents preserved in the Auschwitz Museum archives illuminate the fate of this Terezin convoy on arrival at Auschwitz the following day: 254 men and 164 women are entered into camp while 602 men and 980 women and children are gassed in the Bunkers immediately on arrival.

The selection of Jews under the age of 60 for this and another two transports this month from Terezin is also due

to a labour shortage identified by the SS authorities in charge of the allocation of camp labour - the WVHA D-II under SS Standartenführer Maurer and his assistant Sommer - as letters of Jan 27 and Feb 17 show.

Sources: Kraus/Kulka 166, 281; Reitlinger 180; Hilberg 283, 587

20th January

Eichmann's IVb4 representative in Holland, SS Hauptsturmführer aus der Fünten, tonight organises a raid on the Jewish mental asylum of Appeldoornse Bos. Using a few SS men and a large contingent of Jewish Ordnungsdienst (civil police) from the Dutch transit camp of Westerbork, over 900 mental patients including many children are taken by lorries and loaded onto goods trains for a four day journey to Auschwitz. The stretcher cases are packed forty to each wagon and all the nursing staff are transported separately in a locked passenger wagon. Rudolf Vrba (camp number 44070) is working with the Kanadakommando when this transport arrives at the old ramp and he describes the event as one of the most unsettling experiences he witnessed at the camp and one which came close to completely unnerving the SS.

The state of these people after their hideous journey presented those present with a nightmare vision - many were completely naked in the bitter frost, many were violently mad and the soiled wagons were littered with deformed corpses. The SS themselves refused to come close to these people and whipped the Kanadakommando prisoners into action to load them on the lorries.

And amid the chaos of screaming and maniacal laughter, Vrba relates that: "...there was one spark of splendid, unselfish sanity. Moving among the insane, were nurses, young girls, their uniforms torn and grimey, but their faces calm and their hands never idle...all the time they were working, soothing, bandaging, giving an injection here, an aspirin there. Not one showed the slightest trace of panic." Having won the silent respect of the SS in their calm demeanour, the nurses stand around the now loaded lorries and everyone present wonders



Members of the Jewish Ordnungsdienst (Ghetto Civil Police) at the Westerbork Transit Camp rail siding helping to organise another transport of Dutch Jews to Auschwitz.

what will become of them - and then the signal is given that they must climb aboard the lorries and suffer the same fate as their patients.

Also this month, under the auspices of the Special Form 14F13 (see 28 July 1941), 700 male and female mental patients from German mental asylums arrive at Auschwitz for immediate 'Sonderbehandlung' in the gas chambers.

Sources: Reitlinger 360; Vrba 151; Kraus/Kulka 205

23th January

The third RSHA transport from the Czech ghetto of Terezin sets out today carrying 2029 men, women and children. The people of this Terezin transport fare even worse on arrival at Auschwitz: 148 men and 80 women are entered into camp while 623 men and 1178 women and children are gassed in the Bunkers immediately on arrival.

Sources: Kraus/Kulka 166, 281; Reitlinger 180

26th January

SS Standartenführer Knochen of the Paris Gestapo, having learned yesterday through Eichmann's IVb4 that the Reichsbahn had agreed to the allocation of goods trains from Paris to Auschwitz, today orders each of the regional French Gestapo headquarters to begin further mass arrests of Jews throughout France.

Source: Gilbert (2) 151

26th January

The fourth RSHA transport from the Czech ghetto of Terezin sets out today carrying 993 men, women and children. On arrival at Auschwitz, 212 men and 72 women are entered into camp while 197 men and 512 women and children are gassed in the Bunkers immediately on arrival.

Source: Kraus/Kulka 166, 281; Reitlinger 180

27th January

Referring to the recent Terezin transports, the WVHA D-II deputy Sommer writes to Lagerführer Höss requesting that the Auschwitz camp authorities carefully select employable workers from these transports due to labour shortages at both IG Farben and also within the camp's WVHA-run Zentralbauleitung (construction department).

Sommer receives a statistical reply next month which indicates what the Auschwitz authorities think of the employability of these Jews - barely twenty percent had joined the slave labour force.

As Eichmann's RSHA IVb4 functionaries step up their campaign to eliminate Europe's Jews in the death camps, and as the WVHA scours Europe for more and more slave labourers for the SS enterprises, it is inevitable that the conflict between these twin policies would become utterly schizophrenic over the next couple of years.

Source: Kraus/Kulka 166; Hilberg 587



A group of new arrivals considered fit to work



One of 230 French political prisoners arriving at Auschwitz on the 27 January 1943.

After registration, she becomes simply the thirty-one thousand, eight hundred and forty-ninth female prisoner to be admitted to camp.

27th January

Even though the majority of the new arrivals at Auschwitz-Birkenau over the last nine months had been condemned for no other reason than being Jewish, this did not mean that the camp was not also a primary destination for political prisoners from all over Europe.

Aside from Poland, Russia and Czechoslovakia already mentioned, political prisoners continued to arrive in small numbers from as far afield as France, Belgium, Holland, Yugoslavia and Hungary. Many, indeed, of these prisoners had done considerable time in German concentration camps before being forwarded to Auschwitz.

Arriving today is a group of 230 female French political prisoners from Romainville who are tattooed with the numbers 31625 - 31854. Among these are a highly motivated group of communist resistance fighters and Józef Garlinski (camp number 121421) relates that it is from this time onwards that, under the leadership of Danielle Casanova from this transport, an effective underground organisation develops within the women's camp. Joining this French core of female resistance in the coming weeks and months are political prisoners from Germany, Czechoslovakia and Poland and, once the women's camp is moved to Birkenau later in the year, the women's underground movement becomes even more international with the addition of more members from Austria, Russia and Belgium as well as the influx of additional French, Polish and Czech women. Like the male resistance members before them, the primary objective is to get key members into the Hospitals, Kitchens, Kanada and the various camp administration offices where both the opportunity to 'organise' vital supplies and to establish contact with the male underground groups becomes possible.

Source: Garlinski 120-125

29th January

The fifth RSHA transport from the Czech ghetto of Terezin sets out today carrying 1000 men, women and children.

Sources: Kraus/Kulka 166, 281; Reitlinger 180; Hilberg 587

29th January

Following Himmler's order (December 16 1942) the RSHA today issues instructions to begin the arrest and deportation of all Gypsies living in both Reich and occupied territories for their liquidation in concentration camps. Within a month of this order, a Gypsy Family Camp would be opened at Birkenau.

Source: Höss 63 [ed note]

29th January

SS Sturmbahnführer Karl Bischoff, head of the Auschwitz Zentralbauleitung (construction department) writes a progress report to his boss SS Gruppenführer Hans Kammler (WVHA-C) regarding the construction of the crematoria. The report is very significant in that Bischoff, perhaps in an unguarded moment, forgets to use an SS euphemism for gas chamber and uses the word 'Vergasungskeller'. This document would be presented at the Nuremberg Tribunal.

"Except for some minor construction work, Crematorium II was finished by working with all our available forces day and night, despite inexpressible difficulties and freezing weather. The ovens have been started in the presence of the senior engineer Prüfer of the executing firm, Topf and Sons, Erfurt, and they are working faultlessly. The planks cannot yet be removed from the ceiling of the mortuary cellar due to frost. However, this is not significant, as the gassing cellar [Vergasungskeller] can be used for this purpose.

Slave labourers completing the roof of the underground changing room at Crematorium II



"Due to restrictions on rail transport, the company Topf and Sons could not deliver the ventilation and air extraction equipment at the time demanded by the Zentralbauleitung. After the aeration and deaeration equipment arrive, however, installation will begin immediately, so that presumably by February 20, 1943, it will be completely ready for operation."

Sources: Hilberg 566; Reitlinger 168; Gilbert (1) 115n; Nuremberg Document, NO-4473

During January

Right at the start of the year, the men of the Kanadakommando are transferred to Birkenau. Rudolf Vrba (camp number 44070) relates that all members of their group are deeply suspicious of the move and they begin to prepare themselves inwardly for the possibility that they will be marched straight into the gas chambers: "Suddenly the head of the column pivoted left. We were going into the camp after all. We had been granted at least a brief reprieve and for us that was enough because no man in Auschwitz ever thought in terms of living. He thought merely of living a little longer."

Their first sight of Birkenau, however, is not encouraging. As they make their way under the gatehouse and down the long camp road between sectors BI and BII, they "could see the glow of the flaming ditches growing brighter and the clean lines of the brand new concrete

crematorium standing out starkly before us, yellow flame stabbing the sky from the top of its tall chimney."

Apart from the camp roads, everywhere is a slimy quagmire of mud and, instead of the neat rows of brick buildings at the main camp, the flat moorland of Birkenau is broken only by the dark, brooding wooden stable blocks. And there are skeletal bodies everywhere - some with life remaining in their limbs and others who have given up the fight to live and lie around in all directions covered in mud. Soon the Kanadakommando settles down to its new home in camp BIb Block 16.

The authorities use the move to Birkenau to increase the strength of the Kanadakommando to 400 men plus 200 women on the day shift and 150 men plus 200 women on the night shift. The Kanada warehouses, however, would remain at Auschwitz I for the duration of the year and this is where the women and certain specialist men sort, grade, clean and repackage all the belongings of the Jewish victims. The majority of the men continue to work at the old ramp, clearing the goods wagons and platform from each incoming transport and loading the large fleet of lorries for the short journey to Kanada.

Vrba loses no time in making contact with members of the underground in camp BIb - eventually reporting to David Szmulewski (camp number 27849) who plays a leading role in the Birkenau underground as leader of the International Group. Szmulewski had fought all his young life for his beliefs, taking him to both Spain and Palestine and is mentioned in many survivor accounts. Through him, Vrba meets Fred Wetzler (camp number 29162) who happened to be from Vrba's home town of Trnava in Slovakia. Vrba also renews his contacts with Filip Müller

The position of the 'old ramp' near to the camp at Birkenau





Barracks at Birkenau

(camp number 29136) once the Crematorium I Sonderkommando are transferred to Birkenau.

Continuing to work at the old ramp for the next six months, Vrba - his status improving all the time with his work for the camp underground - continues to compile statistics on the RSHA Jewish transports and the fate of those on arrival at the camp. And living close by Crematorium II he is able to observe the long, pathetic lines of Jews "being herded towards the innocent grey building with its mock washrooms, all but a few still believing that they were travelling another section of the road that would bring them to a new life." And with all the new contacts he makes among camp registrars, he is increasingly able to verify and amplify his own observations about the operation of the new death factories as they come into operation in the growing belief that if somebody could escape from Birkenau with so much factual knowledge about the extermination of Europe's Jews, "I was confident that there would be no more sheep, queuing for the Auschwitz butcher, if only they could be warned of their fate before they were loaded onto the transports."

Sources: Vrba 169-176; Kraus/Kulka 142; Gilbert (1) 193-194

During January

In October of last year Himmler had reached broad agreement with the army high command (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht - OKW) that the SS control the labour supply for vital armament production through the

establishment of labour camps and, also, Himmler had made considerable progress in the establishment of SS owned enterprises to further exploit Jewish slave labour for vital war work. The OKW had, in part, acceded to Himmler's pressure in this area in order to safeguard the vast pool of skilled Jewish labour from being entirely swallowed up in the Final Solution. And as an increasing number of Poles and Ukrainians were being shipped to the Reich to work in industry, employment departments outside the SS were keen to safeguard the Jewish labour force as replacements in these territories. Himmler's twin agenda is now clear - liquidate the 'unproductive' Jews and force the remainder to become SS slaves to help pay for the Final Solution. Himmler then orders the elimination of all non-productive Jews from within the General Government of Poland by the end of 1942.



The train takes them to Chelmno to be gassed in mobile killing vans.

By the beginning of this year, the vast 'clearances' of the large Polish ghettos had resulted in the transport of 1,496,283 Jews from both the General Government and incorporated Poland to the death camps of Treblinka, Sobibor, Belzec, Chelmno, Majdanek and Auschwitz. There remained less than 700,000 Jews who now realised that to work meant staying alive a little bit longer - and little hope for those who could not work.

Accordingly, the process of clearing the remaining Polish ghettos of 'unproductive' Jews continues this month resulting in the transport of over 40,000 to Auschwitz and 13,000 to Treblinka during January alone. The remaining Jews in the ghettos of Warsaw, Lodz, Bialystok, Krakow and Radom are cut down mercilessly - the SS are only interested in preserving a core of the strongest and best trained as a labour pool for their own WVHA enterprises or to be hired as slaves to private enterprises.

Sources: Hilberg 284-299, 335-337; Gilbert (1) 113

Lodz ghetto Jews head off for 'resettlement'

