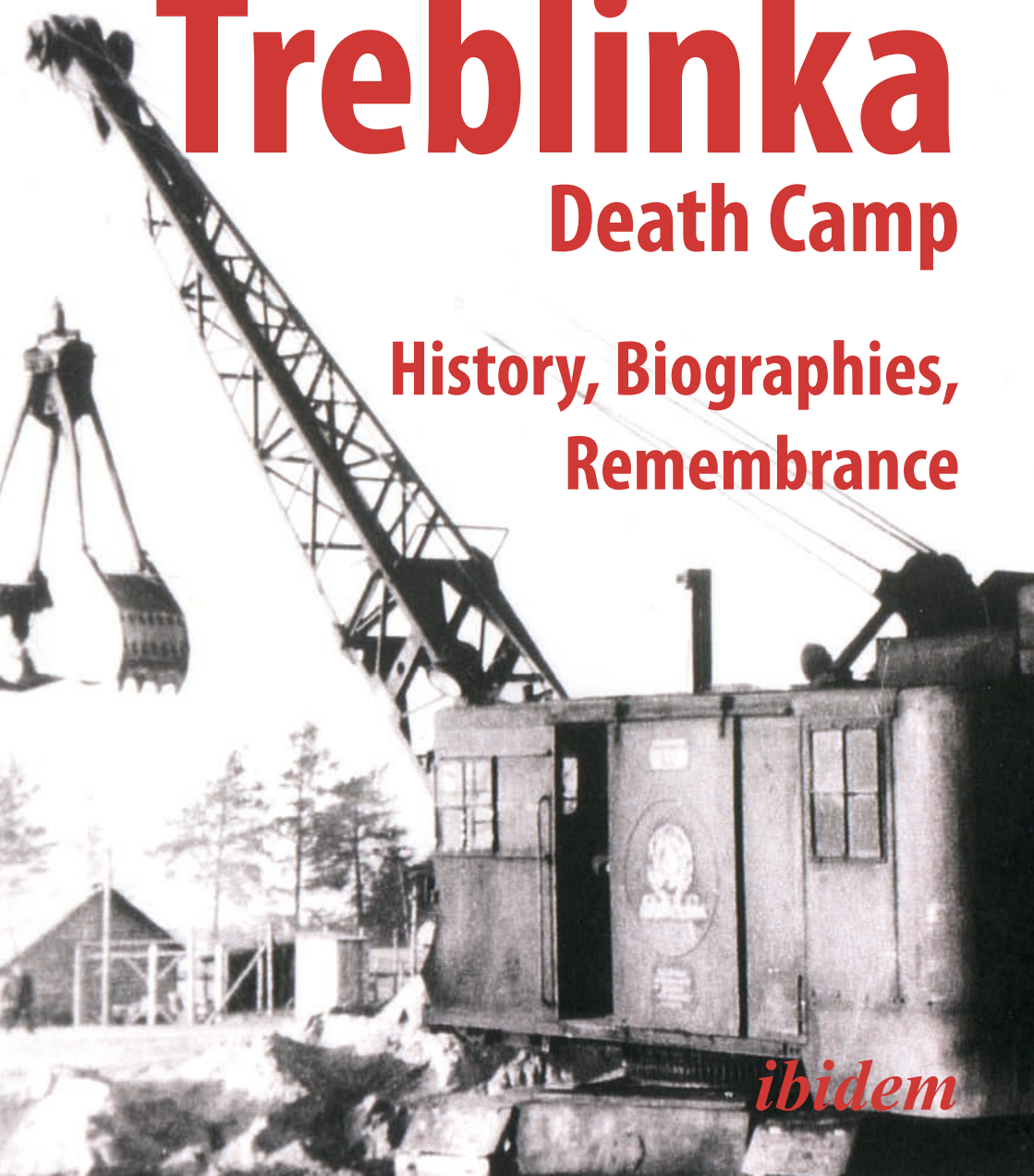


Chris Webb & Michal Chocholatý

# The Treblinka Death Camp

History, Biographies,  
Remembrance



*ibidem*

# The Treblinka Death Camp

History, Biographies, Remembrance

by

Chris Webb and Michal Chocholatý



Chris Webb & Michal Chocholatý

# **THE TREBLINKA DEATH CAMP**

History, Biographies, Remembrance

## **Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek**

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

## **Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek**

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

Cover design: Clare Spyrakis.

ISBN-13: 978-3-8382-6546-9

© *ibidem*-Verlag / *ibidem* Press  
Stuttgart, Germany 2014

Alle Rechte vorbehalten

Das Werk einschließlich aller seiner Teile ist urheberrechtlich geschützt. Jede Verwertung außerhalb der engen Grenzen des Urheberrechtsgesetzes ist ohne Zustimmung des Verlages unzulässig und strafbar.

Dies gilt insbesondere für Vervielfältigungen, Übersetzungen, Mikroverfilmungen und elektronische Speicherformen sowie die Einspeicherung und Verarbeitung in elektronischen Systemen.

All rights reserved

No part of this publication may be reproduced,  
stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form,  
or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise)  
without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Any person who does any unauthorized act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

For Artur Hojan

Dedicated to the memory of  
Kalman Teigman and Richard Glazar



## FOREWORD

The Holocaust was a set of events that engulfed an entire continent. The Nazi occupation of Europe pursued Jews from Greece to the Soviet Union. The survivors have been scattered around the globe. In recent years the memory of these events has become a global discourse—there is a UN mandated remembrance day and the Holocaust has become a kind of moral touchstone which is held up as the central event of the twentieth century. As a consequence whenever one thinks of the Holocaust one inevitably thinks in terms of scale—of six million dead, of journeys of thousands of miles. The rhetoric of Holocaust studies—as attempts to understand the Holocaust have become defined—also emphasize the enormity of the events with which we are grappling, we are constantly reminded of the idea that the Holocaust is both unrepresentable and unimaginable. Part of this rhetoric is the idea that the Final Solution operated on an industrial scale, and that the concentration camps need to be understood as factories of death. Within this epic memory it is the camp at Auschwitz that provides much of the iconography both through contemporary images (the unmistakable tower at the entrance of Auschwitz-Birkenau for example) and the images bequeathed by the memorial museum, the apparently endless stacks of human hair, or the piles of shoes and suitcases.

Reading Chris Webb's book on Treblinka one is somewhat paradoxically struck by the essential truth of that epic memory, but at the same time of some of its inherent distortions—by the degree to which Treblinka in some ways conforms and in some ways denies this epic memory. In Treblinka a meticulously constructed factory of death did emerge, where killing ultimately was the only function of the facility. This factory consumed, according to the numbers collected here, some 885 thousand lives. Such an observation is scarcely credible and one is tempted to simply throw up one's arms in despair and declare such events unimaginable.



Yet the detail brought together here, some of it for the first time in the English language, also provides a timely warning about surrendering to such rhetoric. This is not an unrepresentable or more precisely unimaginable horror. As Alan Confino argues in his recent *Foundational Pasts*, the Final Solution was and is imaginable—precisely because it was imagined by its perpetrators. Chris Webb's reconstruction of Treblinka reminds us of this over and over again. This was a camp in which the technology of death was continuously refined and made more efficient. While the end result might have been a cleaner process, it was not one in which the perpetrators were distanced from their crimes because the means of carrying out those crimes had been considered, reconsidered; imagined and re-imagined, over and over again.

One is also reminded in Webb's book of another, at times neglected reality of the Holocaust. Despite the implications of the epic memory I described, the Final Solution did not take place on another planet. Despite the desires of the perpetrators to keep their crimes secret—the building of an imaginary train station at Treblinka being the most obvious indicator of that—they were not. Although the reality of what was occurring in the death camps might have been obscured, these places were public spaces with which local populations engaged in a variety of ways—some of which are testified to here.

And despite the scale of the death toll, one is also reminded by Webb's book just how small places like Treblinka were and as such that the seismic events of the Holocaust were in many ways rather intimate too. Covering just a few hundred square meters, and with a largely identifiable staff, Treblinka was a place in which victims and perpetrators confronted one another repeatedly. This intimacy is reconstructed here and as such Treblinka emerges as very much representable. These are epic events, but they took place in spaces that are only too conceivable in the human imagination.

And it was of course because Treblinka was constructed on a small scale that in the aftermath of *Aktion Reinhardt* the camp could be dismantled and disguised. One of the consequences of this is that

to visit Treblinka today is to visit a space in which there are no visible remains from the camp itself. Treblinka therefore stands, perhaps more than any other place, as representative of the void which the Final Solution represents.

Yet it is thanks to works like Webb's and the scholarship that he represents here that we can know something of what happened there. We can hear the voices of surviving victims, and of course of the perpetrators themselves. We can in that sense win a small victory over the Nazis' efforts to destroy and to expunge Jews and Judaism from this world, and of course to expunge the memory of their own destructiveness. We can, thanks to collections of material like this, continue to proclaim that, in the words of Primo Levi, it has been. We can, however imperfectly, see into the void.

Professor Tom Lawson  
Northumbria University



## AUTHORS' INTRODUCTION

*Treblinka Death Camp—History, Biographies, Remembrance* is the culmination of many years' interest and research on the third and biggest of the three *Aktion Reinhardt* death camps in Nazi-occupied Poland, stimulated by the publication in 1967 of Jean-Francois Steiner's controversial book *Treblinka*, published in London by Weidenfeld & Nicholson and in New York by Simon & Schuster. An edition in Slovakian was published a year later by Obzor in Bratislava.

Within the pages of this book the history of the Treblinka camp is painstakingly reconstructed—from its construction in early summer 1942 to its final liquidation in the autumn of 1943. During that short period of time, no more than fifteen months, approximately 900,000 Jews were deported to the camp from the big Polish ghettos of Warsaw and Bialystok, as well as from the districts of Lublin and Radom, and from as far afield as Austria, Germany, Greece, Macedonia, Salonika, a part of former Czechoslovakia (*Reichsprotektorat Böhmen/Mähren*—Bohemia and Moravia) and Vilna in the *Reichskommissariat Ostland* (Lithuania). They were gassed and their bodies cremated on open air pyres.

Of these several hundred thousand victims deported to Treblinka, very few survived. The experiences of these few are recounted here partly in their own words in post-war testimony, and uniquely in the authors' correspondence and personal interviews with the last survivors of Treblinka, Kalman Teigman, Eliahu Rosenberg, Samuel Willenberg, Pinchas Epstein, and Edi Weinstein. The debt owed to them and to their families for agreeing to meet and assist with our research, and in doing so reopening unimaginably painful memories, cannot be adequately repaid. This book is our modest attempt to honor both their courage and memory. At the time of writing (2014) only Samuel Willenberg is still alive.

There are several other people to whom we also owe a debt of thanks for their encouragement and invaluable assistance in producing this book. First on the list is Michael Tregenza, the British historian based in Lublin, Poland, who has our deep gratitude for reading and copy-editing the entire manuscript, and for making invaluable suggestions and important additions to the text. His knowledge of *Aktion Reinhardt* and its personnel is second to none. We would also like to warmly thank members of the ARC (*Aktion Reinhardt* Camps) group who visited Treblinka in 2002 and subsequently established the website [www.deathcamps.org](http://www.deathcamps.org). These include Michael Peters from Germany who undertook some sterling research on T4/ Treblinka personnel and Peter Laponder from South Africa, both of whom built models of the Treblinka death camp. Also from the ARC group, we wish to express our gratitude to Robert Kuwalek and Lukasz Biedka (Poland), Dr. Robin O'Neil (UK), and the late Billy Rutherford (UK), another talented model-maker.

A vital source of knowledge for this book has been the Holocaust Education and Archive Research Team (H.E.A.R.T.), and especially its website [www.holocaustresearchproject.org](http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org), co-founded in 2006 by Chris Webb and Carmelo Lisciotto. H.E.A.R.T. has contributed to a number of television programs concerning the Holocaust and given lectures at universities on a wide range of Holocaust-related subjects.

Our thanks also go to Dr. Matthew Feldman from Teesside University in the UK for his constant support, guidance and friendship throughout the development of this book. Also in the UK, Sir Martin Gilbert, CBE, PC, kindly donated maps from his collection to aid our research. In Poland, Edward Kopówka, responsible for the Treblinka memorial site, has our thanks for acting as our guide during various research visits to Treblinka. We are also grateful to Zvika Oren, Judy Grossman and Noam Rachmilevitch at the Ghetto Fighters' Museum in Western Galilee, and Shaul Ferrero at Yad Vashem, Jerusalem for their assistance.

Michael Grabher, author of *Irmfried Eberl—‘Euthanasie’-Arzt und Kommandant von Treblinka* (Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main 2006) has our thanks for assistance with correspondence between Eberl and his wife. Alexander Abdo at the Hessisches Hauptstaatsarchiv in Wiesbaden provided copies of this correspondence.

A number of institutions and archives must be thanked for their cooperation: the Bundesarchiv in Berlin-Lichterfelde, Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw; National Archive in Prague-Chodovec; National Archive and Records Administration (NARA), Washington, DC, National Archives at Kew (London); and the Weiner Library for the Study of the Holocaust and Genocide, also in London.

Michal Chocholatý extends his personal thanks to his friend Jiří Strnad from the Czech Republic who accompanied him on some of the visits to Israel to interview Treblinka survivors and who has been his travelling partner on research trips to Austria, France, Germany, Israel, and Poland.

On a sad note, Chris Webb personally dedicates this book to his friend and colleague, Artur Hojan from Koscian, Poland, an expert on Nazi ‘euthanasia’ and the Chełmno death camp in his home district, the former Reichsgau Wartheland, who helped with some of the Polish information for this book. Artur left his home on the evening of 1 December 2013 and disappeared. His body was recovered from a nearby canal on 12 February 2014.

*He was taken from us in the prime of life and may he rest in peace.*

Chris Webb  
Heathfield,  
United Kingdom

Michal Chocholatý  
Plzeň (Pilsen),  
Czech Republic

March, 2014



# CONTENTS

FOREWORD-----	vii
AUTHORS' INTRODUCTION -----	xi
ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE FOOTNOTES -----	xviii
PREFACE	
<i>'Aktion Reinhardt: An Overview</i> -----	1
 <b>PART I: The hell called Treblinka -----</b>	<b>10</b>
CHAPTER 1	
Penal labor camp: Treblinka I -----	11
CHAPTER 2	
Construction of the death camp: Treblinka II-----	19
CHAPTER 3	
Initial phase under Dr. Eberl: July–August 1942-----	31
CHAPTER 4	
Chaos and Reorganization -----	47
CHAPTER 5	
Industrialized mass murder: September–December 1942 -----	61
CHAPTER 6	
Deceptions and diversions: Late 1942–early 1943 -----	69
CHAPTER 7	
Visit by the Reichsführer-SS: Orders to erase evidence of crimes	77



CHAPTER 8	
Jewish work brigades -----	83
CHAPTER 9	
The camp revolt: 2 August 1943 -----	99
CHAPTER 10	
The end of Treblinka and <i>Aktion Reinhardt</i> : August–November 1943-----	115
<b>PART II: Survivors, victims and perpetrators-----</b>	<b>124</b>
CHAPTER 11	
Interviews with Treblinka survivors -----	125
CHAPTER 12	
Wartime reports about the death camp-----	169
CHAPTER 13	
Transports and death toll -----	179
CHAPTER 14	
Treblinka war crimes trials -----	195
CHAPTER 15	
From Trawniki to Treblinka -----	209
CHAPTER 16	
The real ‘Ivan the Terrible’-----	219
CHAPTER 17	
Roll of Remembrance: Jewish survivors and victims-----	231
CHAPTER 18	
The Perpetrators -----	305

## POSTSCRIPTUM

Lublin concentration camp (Majdanek). A part of <i>Aktion Reinhardt?</i> -----	355
Supplementary documents -----	361
APPENDIX 1 -----	366
APPENDIX 2 -----	367
APPENDIX 3 -----	372
Illustrations and Sources -----	374
Selected Bibliography -----	439
Acknowledgements -----	447
Index of Names -----	449

## ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE FOOTNOTES

Abt.	Abteilung (Section)
Auß.	Außenstelle (Branch Office)
Bd.	Band (Volume)
BA	Bundesarchiv (Federal Archive)
Coll.	Collection
GFH	Ghetto Fighters' House
HStA	Hauptstaatsarchiv (Main State Archive)
HStA(H)	Hauptstaatsarchiv (Hessen)—Main State Archive (Hesse)
IPN Izba	Pamięci Narodowej (Institute of National Memory)
OSI/DJ	Office for Special Investigations at the Department of Justice, Washington, DC
RG	Record Group
USHMM	United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
YVA	Yad Vashem Archive
ŻIH	Żydowski Instytut Historyczny (Jewish Historical Institute)

**PREFACE**

**‘Aktion Reinhardt’**

**An Overview**

*Aktion Reinhardt*—also known as *Einsatz Reinhardt*—was the code name for the extermination of primarily Polish Jewry from the former *Generalgouvernement* and the Białystok area. The term was used in remembrance of *SS-Obergruppenführer* Reinhard Heydrich, the coordinator of the ‘Final Solution of the Jewish Question’ (*Endlösung der Judenfrage*)—the extermination of the Jews living in the European countries occupied by German troops during the Second World War

On May 27, 1942, in a suburb of Prague, Jozef Gabčík and Jan Kubiš, members of the Czech resistance, ambushed Heydrich in his car while he was en—route from his home in Panenské Březany to his office in Prague. Heydrich died from his wounds at Bulovka Hospital on 4 June 1942.<sup>1</sup>

Four days after his death, about 1,000 Jews left Prague in a single train which was designated ‘AaH’ (*Attentat auf Heydrich*—Assassination of Heydrich). This transport was officially destined for Ujazdów in the Lublin district, Poland, but was gassed at the Bełżec death camp in the far south-eastern corner of the Lublin District. The members of Odilo Globocnik’s resettlement staff henceforward dedicated the murder program to Heydrich’s memory under the code name *Einsatz Reinhardt*.<sup>2</sup>

The head of *Aktion Reinhardt* was *SS-Brigadeführer* Odilo Globocnik, the SS and Police Chief of the Lublin District, appointed to

---

<sup>1</sup> R. Cowdery, P. Vodenka, *Reinhard Heydrich Assassination*. University of Southern Maine Press, Lakeville 1994, pp. 49, 63.

<sup>2</sup> G. Reitlinger, *The Final Solution*. Valentine, Mitchell, London 1953, pp. 105–106.

this task by *Reichsführer-SS* Heinrich Himmler. At the Führer's Headquarters in Rastenburg, East Prussia (Kętrzyn in present day Poland) on October 13, 1941, Heinrich Himmler, Friedrich-Wilhelm Krüger and Odilo Globocnik met at a conference during which Globocnik was authorized to build a death camp at Bełżec in the far south-eastern corner of the Lublin District of the *Generalgouvernement*. This was to be the first death camp constructed with static gas chambers, although the first mass extermination camp in the east, at Kulmhof in the *Reichsgau Wartheland* (to-day, Chełmno nad Nerem in Poland) used gas vans from early December 1941.<sup>3</sup>

On January 20, 1942, at a villa in the Wannsee suburb of Berlin, Heydrich organized a conference on the '*Final Solution of the Jewish Question in Europe*'. The conference had been postponed from December 8, 1941, as Heydrich wrote to one of the participants, Otto Hoffman, 'on account of events in which some of the invited gentlemen were concerned'.<sup>4</sup> This meant the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor the previous day and the entry of the United States into the war.

Those who attended the Wannsee Conference included the leading officials of the relevant ministries, senior representatives of the German authorities in the occupied countries, and senior members of the SS, including Heinrich Müller, head of the Gestapo, and Adolf Eichmann, head of Department IV B4, the sub-section of the Gestapo dealing with Jewish affairs.

\*

Odilo Lothario Globocnik was born on 21 April 1904 in Trieste, the son of an Austro-Slovene family, and a construction engineer by trade. In 1930, he joined the Nazi party in Carinthia, Austria, and after the banning of the Nazi Party in Austria in 1934, earned a reputation as one of the most radical leaders of its underground cells.

---

<sup>3</sup> P. Longerich, *The Unwritten Order—Hitler's Role in the Final Solution*. Tempus, Stroud 2001, p. 85.

<sup>4</sup> Reitlinger, *The Final Solution ...*, op. cit., p. 101.

In 1933, Globocnik joined the SS, which was also a prohibited organization in Austria since 1934, and was appointed deputy Party District Leader (*Stellvertretender Gauleiter*).<sup>5</sup>

After serving several short terms of imprisonment for illegal activities on behalf of the Nazis, he emerged as a key figure in the pre-*Anschluss* plans for Austria, serving as a key liaison figure between Adolf Hitler and the leading pro-Nazi Austrians.<sup>6</sup>

After the *Anschluss* of March 1938, Globocnik's star continued to rise and on May 24 he was appointed to the coveted key position of Party District Leader (*Gauleiter*) of Vienna. His tenure was short-lived, however, and on January 30, 1939 he was dismissed from this lofty position for corruption, illegal speculation in foreign exchange and tax evasion—all on a grand scale.<sup>7</sup>

After demotion to a lowly SS rank and undergoing basic military training with an *SS-Standarte*, he took part with his unit in the invasion of Poland. Eventually pardoned by Himmler, who needed such unscrupulous characters for future 'unsavory plans', Globocnik was appointed to the post of SS and Police Leader (*SS- und Polizeiführer*) of the Lublin District in the *Generalgouvernement* on November 9, 1939.

In Lublin, Globocnik surrounded himself with a number of his fellow Austrians, SS-officers like Herman Julius Höfle, born in Salzburg on June 19, 1911. Höfle became Globocnik's deputy in *Aktion Reinhardt*, responsible for personnel and the organization of Jewish deportations, the extermination camps and the re-utilization of the victim's possessions and valuables. Höfle was later to play a significant role in mass deportation *Aktionen* in Warsaw and Białystok. Ernst Lerch from Klagenfurt became Globocnik's closest confidante and adjutant. Georg Michalsen, a Silesian from Oppeln, was another adjutant and he, too, participated with Höfle in the deportation of Jews from the ghettos in Warsaw and Białystok. Another, early

---

<sup>5</sup> J. Poprzeczny, *Hitler's Man in the East—Odilo Globocnik*. McFarland, Jefferson 2004, p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Reitlinger, *The Final Solution ...*, op. cit., p. 262.

<sup>7</sup> Poprzeczny, *Hitler's Man ...*, op. cit., p. 76.

member of this group was Amon Göth who cleared the Kraków, Tarnów, and Zamość ghettos, and later became notorious as Commandant of the Płaszów labor camp near Kraków.<sup>8</sup>

The headquarters of *Aktion Reinhardt* was located in the 'Julius Schreck Barracks' (*Julius-Schreck-Kaserne*) at *Litauer-Straße 11*, a former Polish school close to the city center in Lublin, where Höfle not only worked but also lived in a small apartment. Also located in Lublin were the buildings in which the belongings and valuables seized from the Jews were stored: the former Catholic Action (*Katholische Aktion*) building on Chopin-Straße, and in prewar aircraft hangers on the Old Airfield (*Alter Flugplatz*) on the south-eastern outskirts of Lublin.<sup>9</sup>

The most notorious member of *Aktion Reinhardt* was *SS-Obersturmführer/Kriminalinspektor* Christian Wirth, the first commandant of the Bełżec death camp and later Inspector of the *SS-Sonderkommandos* of *Aktion Reinhardt*. Before his transfer to Poland, Wirth had been a leading figure in 'Aktion T4,' the extermination of the mentally and physically disabled in six so-called 'euthanasia' killing centers in the Reich.

The role of the 'T4' euthanasia program was fundamental to the execution of *Aktion Reinhardt* because the great majority of the staff in the death camps served their 'apprenticeships' in mass murder at the euthanasia institutes of Bernburg, Brandenburg, Grafeneck, Hadamar, Hartheim and Pirna-Sonnenstein where the victims had been murdered in gas chambers using CO gas from steel cylinders. The senior officers in both *Aktion T4* and *Aktion Reinhardt* were all police officers with equivalent SS ranks, and with Himmler's approval SS-NCO's had emptied the gas chambers and cremated the bodies of the victims in portable furnaces. The SS-men performed this work wearing civilian clothes because Himmler did not want the possibility to arise of the public becoming aware of the participation of the SS in the killing.

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>9</sup> Reitlinger, *The Final Solution ...*, op. cit., p. 314.

During *Aktion Reinhardt* the SS authorities also supplemented the forces guarding the death camps by employing former Red Army troops who had been captured or had surrendered to the Germans, mostly ethnic Germans (*Volksdeutsche*) from the Ukraine, the Baltic States and the Volga region of Russia who were trained in an SS camp in the village of Trawniki, 25 km south-east of Lublin. The majority were already anti-Semitic (equating Bolsheviks with Jews) and were ideally suited to the persecution and extermination of Jews.

On November 1, 1941, construction of the first *Aktion Reinhardt* death camp began near the village of Bełżec, 125 km south-east of Lublin, and became operational in mid-March 1942. Construction of the second camp, at Sobibór, between the cities of Włodawa and Chełm on the River Bug, north-east of Lublin, came into operation at the end of April 1942. The third and last of these camps was located near the railroad station in Treblinka,<sup>10</sup> about 100 km north-east of Warsaw. All three camps shared some common vital facts: they were all situated on or close to main railway lines for the speedy delivery of the victims to their deaths, and they were located in sparsely-populated regions. The true fate of the Jews was initially hidden from them by announcing that they were being ‘transported to the east for resettlement and work’. The *Aktion Reinhardt* death camps were very similar in layout, each camp being an improvement on its predecessor, and the ‘conveyor-belt’ extermination process developed at Bełżec by Christian Wirth was implemented, improved and refined at the other two camps.

The personnel assigned to *Aktion Reinhardt* came from a number of sources, SS and policemen who served under Globocnik's command in the Lublin district, other SS men and civilians drafted into the Aktion, and members of the ‘T4’ euthanasia program.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> The nearest village to the death camp was not Treblinka village but the village of Poniatowo; not to be confused with the village and forced labor camp at Poniatowa in Lublin District.

<sup>11</sup> Y. Arad, *Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka—The Aktion Reinhardt Death Camps*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis 1987, p. 17.



Yitzhak Arad quotes in his book Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka that a total of 450 men were assigned to *Aktion Reinhardt*, including 92 from 'T4',<sup>12</sup> more recent research by the authors, however, has identified a slightly higher total of 98 men, of whom 56 are known to have served in Treblinka at one time or another. (See chapter 18: members of the SS-garrison).

The Old Lublin Airfield was also used throughout *Aktion Reinhardt* as a mustering center for personnel transferred from the T4 'euthanasia' institutions in the Reich, to the extermination of the Jews in the *Generalgouvernement*. The SS-men, police and civilians thus transferred were usually met at the airfield by Wirth personally, on occasions accompanied by Reichleitner from Sobibór and Stangl from Treblinka. According to witnesses, at these selections of personnel, all three officers wore *Schutzpolizei* uniforms and none of them mentioned anything about their future employment or where they would be based. At the airfield depot the newcomers received Waffen-SS uniforms, provided by the SS-Garrison Administration (*SS-Standortverwaltung*) in Lublin, but without the SS runes on the right hand collar patches. The civilian employees from 'T4', especially the male psychiatric nurses among them, were sent first to the SS training camp at Trawniki for a two week basic military training course.<sup>13</sup>

The men selected in Lublin and distributed to the three *Aktion Reinhardt* death camps were augmented by a company-sized unit of about 120 black-uniformed auxiliary guards who had also been trained at the SS training camp in Trawniki—the so-called 'Trawniki-men' (*Trawnikimänner*), usually referred to as 'Ukrainians' because they were the majority.

Those who spoke fluent German were appointed platoon or senior platoon leaders—*Zugführer* or *Oberzugführer*.<sup>14</sup> The rest were

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p. 17.

<sup>13</sup> F. Suchomel, *Christian Wirth*. Altötting 1972, (private typewritten report), Michael Tregenza Collection, Lublin, Poland.

<sup>14</sup> Arad, *Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka ...*, op. cit., p. 22.

known as *Wachmänner* (lit. guardsmen). A select few of the *Trawn-ikimänner* were given other, special duties, including the maintenance and operation of the engines that pumped their poisonous exhaust fumes into the gas chambers. Among them were the infamous Ivan Marchenko ('Ivan the Terrible') and Nikolay Shalayev at the Treblinka death camp.

\*

In the course of *Aktion Reinhardt* approximately 1.6 million Jews were murdered in the death camps at Bełżec, Sobibór and Treblinka. Jewish property to the value of 178,045,960 *Reichsmark* (RM) was seized by the SS, which represents the minimum known amount. Through the theft of large amounts of cash and valuables by *SS-Brigadeführer* Globocnik, SS-men, policemen and guards, the true total will never be known.

The *Aktion Reinhardt* extermination operation ended officially in November 1943 and Himmler ordered Globocnik, who was by then the Higher SS and Police Leader) (*Höhere SS- und Polizeiführer*) for the Adriatic Coastal Region (*Adriatisches Küstenland*), based in Trieste, to produce a detailed 'Balance Sheet' for the murder program. Globocnik produced the requested financial accounts and suggested that certain SS-officers should be suitably rewarded for their 'invaluable contribution' to *Aktion Reinhardt*. Globocnik received Himmler's thanks 'for his 'services to the German people', but made no mention of medals for any of Globocnik's subordinates.<sup>15</sup>

After completion of the extermination work in the *Generalgouvernement*, most of the men who had served in *Aktion Reinhardt* were transferred to northern Italy where their headquarters was in a disused rice mill in the San Sabba suburb of the Adriatic port of Trieste (*Risiera di San Sabba*). Divided into three SS-units: R-I, R-II and R-III, they operated under the code designation 'Operation R' (*Einsatz R*), still under the command of *SS-Obersturmführer* Christian Wirth. Their primary task was the round-up and deportation to Auschwitz-Birkenau of the surviving Italian Jews, and confiscation

---

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 375.

of their property and valuables. *Einsatz R* was simply a smaller version of *Aktion Reinhardt*. Additionally, Italian-Jewish mental patients were removed from their hospitals and sent to the T4 'euthanasia' institution at Schloss Hartheim in Austria for gassing. The units not engaged in these operations were assigned to security and anti-partisan patrols on the Istrian peninsula.

Wirth turned San Sabba into an interrogation and execution center where not only Jews but also Italian and Yugoslavian partisans were tortured, beaten to death, or simply shot and their bodies cremated in a specially installed furnace in the courtyard.<sup>16</sup> The human ashes were dumped in the Adriatic Sea. There is also evidence that a gas van was used in San Sabba.

\*

The key members of *Aktion Reinhardt* mostly escaped justice. Christian Wirth and Franz Reichleitner (the second Commandant of Sobibór death camp) were killed by partisans in northern Italy in 1944. Amon Göth was tried and sentenced to death in Kraków in September 1946 for crimes committed in the forced labor camp in Płaszów (today a suburb of Kraków). Dr. Irmfried Eberl, the first Commandant of Treblinka, committed suicide in a West German prison in 1948 while awaiting trial. Only Franz Stangl (the first Commandant of Sobibór and second Commandant of Treblinka)<sup>17</sup> and Kurt Franz, the last Commandant of Treblinka, were brought to trial. Both were found guilty of crimes against humanity and sentenced to life imprisonment.

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 399.

<sup>17</sup> It is a significant fact that Eberl, Reichleitner, and Stangl, as well as many other key members of *Aktion Reinhardt* were Austrian nationals.



# **PART I**

## **The hell called Treblinka**

## CHAPTER 1

### Penal labor camp: Treblinka I

The village of Treblinka is located approximately 100 km north-east of Warsaw and approximately 4 km from the important railway junction of Małkinia Górna, which is mentioned in the Baedeker *Das Generalgouvernement–Reisehandbuch* as an important rail junction and former border station with the Soviet Union.<sup>18</sup>

In the book by Vasily Grossman, *The Treblinka Hell*, the description of the countryside is very apt:

The terrain to the east of Warsaw along the Western Bug is an expanse of alternating sands and swamps, interspersed with evergreen and deciduous forests. The landscape is dreary and villages are rare. The narrow sandy roads where wheels sink up to the axle and walking is difficult are something for the traveler to avoid.

In the midst of this desolate country stands the small out-of-the-way station of Treblinka on the Siedlce railroad branch line. It is some one hundred kilometers from Warsaw and not far from Małkinia station where tracks from Warsaw, Białystok, Siedlce and Łomża meet.

Many of those who were brought to Treblinka in 1942 may have had occasion to travel this way before the war. Staring out over the desolate landscape of pines, sand, more sand and again pines, scrubland, heather, unattractive station buildings and railroad crossings, the pre-war passenger might have allowed his bored gaze to pause for a moment on a single-track spur running from the station into the forest to disappear amid the dense pines. The spur led to a gravel pit where white sand was extracted for industrial purposes.<sup>19</sup>

In preparation for the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941 the German authorities took over the gravel pit, and used the raw

---

<sup>18</sup> K. Baedeker, *Das Generalgouvernement—Reisehandbuch*. Verlag Karl Baedeker, Leipzig 1943, p. 102.

<sup>19</sup> V. Grossman, *The Treblinka Hell*. Gershon Aharoni, Tel Aviv 1984, p. 13.

material for fortifications and other military purposes. After the gravel pit had been abandoned by the *Wehrmacht*, the *Kreishauptmann* in Sokołów Podlaski established a company for concrete products and the need arose for a cheap labor force to work in the gravel pit. Thus, the idea for creating a penal labor camp was born, with the approval of Dr. Ludwig Fischer, the civilian governor of Warsaw District. Later, this camp received the name of 'Labor Camp Treblinka' (*Arbeitslager Treblinka*).

In the early phase the camp was designed exclusively as a place of deportation for 'stubborn elements' from the whole Sokołowski-Węgrowski district, then for the farmers unwilling to deliver their quotas of agricultural supplies demanded by the German authorities, persons evading forced labor, or involved in anti-German activity. At first, the camp held only several scores of prisoners who were accommodated in the buildings formerly belonging to the gravel works, and came under the jurisdiction of the local *Kreishauptmann* in Sokołów.

The German authorities published various notices, such as in the Official Gazette for the Warsaw District (*Amtsblatt für den Distrikt Warschau*) on December 16, 1941, announcing that *Arbeitslager Treblinka* had been set up under the jurisdiction of the SS and Police Leader Warsaw.

The Commandant of the camp was *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Theodor van Eupen who had previously been in charge of the Main Accommodation Administration Office) (*Heersunterkunftsverwaltung* in Sokołów. The camp staff consisted of about twenty SS men and one detachment of Ukrainian *Trawniki* men who served as guards. One of those guards was Alexey Kolgushkin from the Trawniki training camp who provided this statement on September 24, 1980, in the city of Rybinsk, Yaroslavl Oblast (Province) in USSR, regarding his service Treblinka labor camp:

Near the entrance to the work camp where I served there was a barrier and guard tower. The portion of the camp that contained the prisoners was isolated from the camp in general. This area that contained the prisoners was surrounded by a double barbed wire fence, which in turn contained a patrolled region between the two fences.

This controlled region consisted of a strip of ploughed earth where the footprints of anyone who crossed it would be left. The entire camp was surrounded by a single barbed-wire fence, there were buildings situated in the camp that held clothing, there were also warehouses and stables.

There were barracks where the guards lived and there were barracks where the Germans from the camp administration lived. None of the guards were permitted to enter the area where the prisoners were kept, and the guards were forbidden from entering the controlled area.

The area containing the prisoners was divided into three sections. One section contained a kitchen, stoves and sewing shops. The Jewish prisoners who were artisans lived there along with Jewish tailors, barbers, stove workers and drivers. They were dressed in civilian clothes, each wore their own clothes. In the next section lived the Jews who were used for forced labor. They were dressed in striped uniform and they wore wooden clogs on their feet. I do not know if there were skilled laborers among these Jews, who had a specialty. They were sent to work in the sand pit where they hauled sand; they were also taken to work in the forest removing tree stumps. The sand from the sand pit was sent off in the direction of Małkinia station.

In the third section of the camp were kept the Polish prisoners. As a rule, the Poles were used for auxiliary work in the camp—they were dressed in civilian clothes, like the Jewish skilled workers. I do not know if their food was on the same level as that of other prisoners.

The guards were divided into sections, platoons and companies. The camp administration was made up of Germans only—they occupied the supervisory positions. The guards were divided into four sections, each containing 12–15 men. Besides providing security for the camp the guards took the prisoners to work by convoy and they guarded them during work.

I do not know who shot prisoners on the way to work. I personally had occasion to take prisoners by convoy to the sand pit and accompany them into the forest to remove tree stumps and to aux-



iliary jobs—in general wherever they went to work. I also led prisoners by convoy to Malkinia railroad station where they worked at unloading and stacking.<sup>20</sup>

The history of the penal labor camp is closely connected with the history of the death camp—Polish and Jewish prisoners from the labor camp participated in the construction of the death camp. The penal labor camp at Treblinka therefore served not only as a concentration camp ‘for criminal elements’, it also served the function of a reservoir of manpower for the construction of the extermination camp.

Jan Sułkowski, a Polish bricklayer by profession, had been sent to the labor camp on May 19, 1942 for evading forced labor for the German authorities. He was released in the summer of 1942, after helping with the construction of the death camp. This was a typical term of imprisonment which usually lasted from two to six months, after which time the prisoners were either released or sent to a concentration camp.

During the weeks of Sułkowski's incarceration and construction of the death camp, Jews began arriving in the camp. He personally witnessed the brutality and murderous behavior of the camp guards towards these Jews:

Germans killed Jews at work by shooting them or beating them to death with sticks. I saw two such cases in which SS-men, during the grubbing-out jobs, forced Jews to walk under the falling tree by which they were crushed. In both cases several (two, three or four) Jews were killed. It also happened that SS-men would often rush into the barracks where, drunk or sober, they went on shooting at the Jews who were inside.<sup>21</sup>

Richard Glazar, a prisoner from the Treblinka death camp, visited the penal labor camp on one occasion. He recounted this experience in a post-war interview:

---

<sup>20</sup> OSI/DJ, Washington, DC: Aleksey Nikolaevich Kolgushkin, September 24, 1980.

<sup>21</sup> W. Chrostowski, *Extermination Camp Treblinka*. Vallentine, Mitchell, London 2004, p. 27.

There's one thing to say that's not so well known, there was another Treblinka camp (...) not very far away from Treblinka extermination camp. It was a forced labor camp. A small camp, it was just a quarry.

Once I was taken there with my *Kommando* just to bring sand and stones to Treblinka. So I saw how it looked. It was a normal concentration camp. And one can imagine the Germans, the Nazis, they camouflaged it, with the existence of this labor camp, the existence of the extermination camp.<sup>22</sup>

Israel Cymlich has described in his memoirs his arrival at the labor camp:

Our car pulled up at the Treblinka labor camp. A tall SS-man accompanied by guards, came over, and we were escorted to the camp. Above the entrance we saw an innocent-sounding sign: '*Arbeitslager Treblinka*'. Noticing double barbed wire and elevated platforms in the four corners of the camp, I realized we were in for hard times. We were told to form a column of three persons abreast, and under threat of being sent to the 'forest', to hand over money and valuables. We realized that executions took place in the forest. Most people handed over everything they had on their person and I, too, parted with 600 zlotys. We were terribly thirsty and could barely stand on our feet. Finally, some black coffee and water was brought in. (...)

Each of us got 200 grams of bread, half a spoonful of marmalade and sugar. In the evening, together with others, we lined up for a roll call. The SS-men counted us, and we went inside the barracks. It was a fairly long barrack, lined on both sides with two-tiered rows of bunk beds, so that people slept beneath and above. The floor was made of asphalt (sic).

Most of the residents of this barracks (C) were German and Czech Jews.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Richard Glazar interview with Bonnie Gurewitsch-Brooklyn, USHMM Council Conference of Liberators, USHMM Washington, DC, 26 October 1981.

<sup>23</sup> I. Cymlich, O. Strawczyński, *Escaping Hell in Treblinka*. Yad Vashem/The Holocaust Survivors' Memoirs Project, New York and Jerusalem 2007, pp. 31–32.

Saul Kuperhand, another prisoner of the penal labor camp, recalled in his book *Shadows of Treblinka* how he was incarcerated in the same barracks: 'we were herded to the barracks marked with the letter C. We slept on double-decker bunks made of raw wood: we did not have even a single sheet or piece of straw. The bottom level of each bunk held 13 men, the top level 12.'<sup>24</sup>

The average number of prisoners in the penal labor camp amounted to about 1,000–1,200 people, Poles and Jews, who were all forced to work under brutal conditions, with very low rations. Between 800900 prisoners toiled from dawn to dusk, either in the gravel pit, where the work was exhausting, digging out gravel and sand or loading railroad trucks.<sup>25</sup>

Another group of prisoners were employed at Małkinia railroad station where they too, loaded railroad trucks. Female prisoners were employed at the farm attached to the camp, while another group consisting of 250 Jewish skilled artisans worked in the camp's workshops. Throughout the long day's labor, the prisoners were brutally treated, beaten, tortured or simply shot for the slightest misdemeanor, with only a brief respite from the back-breaking work at noon each day.<sup>26</sup>

The camp diet consisted of half a liter of watery soup or ersatz coffee in the morning, one liter of the same soup at noon, and a cup of ersatz coffee without sugar, with 20 dkg of black bread in the evening. On such a diet bereft of any nourishment, the prisoners succumbed to diseases; epidemics spread throughout the camp resulting in a high mortality rate.<sup>27</sup>

The garrison of the penal labor camp, as well as the characteristics of its key members, are described by the former prisoner Israel Cymlich in his memoirs:

---

<sup>24</sup> M. Kuperhand, S. Kuperhand, *Shadows of Treblinka*. University of Illinois Press, Champaign 1998, p. 110.

<sup>25</sup> *Treblinka*, Council for the Protection of Combat and Martyrdom Monuments, Warsaw 1963 (no pagination).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

The chief of the entire camp was a *Hauptsturmführer*, some kind of Baron [Theodor van Eupen, authors' note] who had his headquarters in Ostrów Mazowiecki. He hardly ever came into direct contact with the Jews, and was responsible only for the Treblinka camp. (...)

The camp Commandant was *Untersturmführer* Prefi, a madman and a thug, a great fan of shooting people to death at every opportunity. He often carried out massacres single-handedly, by shooting from a hand-held machine-gun at a group of Jews assembled for roll call. (...)

The labor-force Commandant in the camp was *Untersturmführer* Einbuch, known as the 'thug in white gloves'. He was gifted with a phenomenal memory, recognized people well, did not cause a mess like others, granted favors to some, and surrounded himself with Jewish informers. (...)

The Commandant of the guards was *Unterscharführer* Stumpe. He always carried his knout, and very much enjoyed hitting everyone over the head with it, including the guards. He was especially fond of urging people to work harder by calling out, '*Tempo, tempo, cali, cali!*', which earned him the nickname of 'Cali' among the guards.

*Unterscharführer* Lindeke was the manager (...) his deputy was Hagen (...) who left for Warsaw after some time. He often visited the camp to attend drinking bouts. After getting drunk, he liked to play cat-and-mouse with the Jews, and would kill at least a dozen of them. (...)

The supervisor of the workshops was *Unterscharführer* Lanz, a boxing fan. I have no words to describe his humiliating treatment of people. He didn't treat his own people badly, but woe to anyone who became his target.

*Rottenführer* Werhan was in charge of the stable and the farm, he treated his own people fairly. (...)

Finally, there was the notorious henchman of the camp, head of the group (of prisoners) working in Małkinia, *Unterscharführer* Schwarz (allegedly a butcher by trade). (...) He derived sadistic satisfaction from tormenting, torturing and killing. He usually killed with a club, a hammer, or some other blunt instrument. Małkinia was the worst place to work in the entire camp. Every day, more than a dozen corpses of people whom he had tortured to death were brought in from Małkinia.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Cymlich, Strawczyński, *Escaping Hell ...*, op. cit., pp. 33–35.

The penal labor camp existed from December 1941–August 1944 when it was liquidated. The camp guard Alexey Nikolaevich Kolgushkin, whose platoon was on patrol duty on the day the camp was liquidated, has stated:

Supplementary patrols were deployed next to ours in order to guard the area where prisoners were being held. (...) in the morning camp security (...) strengthened. At approximately 8 or 9 a.m. the prisoners began to be led out of the barracks. They were led out by the Germans and assembled in the yard, the guards who were not on patrol also participated in this.

After they were all assembled, they began to beat them in groups of five and forced them to the ground. After counting out a certain number of prisoners they made them stand up and made them pull their pants down to their knees, so they could not run, to dig holes, they were all shot. (...) Approximately 500–600 prisoners were executed in these holes in all. The figure is an approximate one since I did not count the number of people condemned to death. I only remember that when I walked up to these holes on the second day, I saw they were filled up with bodies and dirt. After the liquidation of the camp the Germans and the guards fled together, since Soviet troops were already advancing on Treblinka.<sup>29</sup>

Post-war investigations by the Main Commission for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Poland revealed that at least forty mass graves containing the remains of 6,500 prisoners lie within half-a-kilometer of the penal labor camp. Throughout the existence of the camp at least 10,000 people passed through its gate.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> OSI/DJ, Washington, DC, Alexey Nikolaevich Kolgushkin, 24 September 1980.

<sup>30</sup> *Treblinka*, Council for the Protection of Combat ..., op. cit. (no pagination).

## CHAPTER 2

### Construction of the death camp: Treblinka II

The death camp in Treblinka was situated in the north-eastern region of the *Generalgouvernement*. The camp was erected in a sparsely populated area near Małkinia-Górna, an important railway junction on the Warsaw-Białystok railway line, four kilometers north-west of Treblinka village and its railroad halt.<sup>31</sup>

The site chosen was in an open, sandy area dotted with copses of trees and small woods. A patch of forest separated the site from the village of Wólka Okrąglik, which was just over a kilometer from the extermination area with its gas chambers.<sup>32</sup>

Franciszek Ząbecki was the Polish stationmaster at Treblinka village station, and a member of the Polish Underground. He had been placed at Treblinka by the AK (*Armia Krajowa*—Home Army), the biggest Polish Underground movement, originally to report on the movement of German troops and equipment. He was therefore the only trained observer on the spot throughout the entire existence of the Treblinka extermination camp. He recalled:

The first inkling we had that something more was being planned in Treblinka was in May 1942 when some SS-men arrived with a man called Ernst Grauss who—we found out from the German railroad workers—was the chief surveyor at the German HQ.

They spent the day looking around and the very next day all fit male Jews in the neighborhood—about a hundred of them—were brought in and started work on clearing the land. At the same time they shipped in a first lot of Ukrainian guards.

It was said that it was to be another labor camp, a camp for Jews who would work on damming the River Bug, a military installation,

---

<sup>31</sup> Arad, *Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka* ..., op. cit., p. 37.

<sup>32</sup> M. Chocholatý interview with Samuel Willenberg, Warsaw, March 2011.

a staging or control area for a new secret military weapon. And finally, German railway workers said it was going to be an extermination camp. But nobody believed them—except me.<sup>33</sup>

The extermination camp was the third and final camp built as part of *Aktion Reinhardt*, and was constructed along similar lines to Bełżec and Sobibór, although on a bigger scale.

Work commenced at the beginning of April 1942. The contractors were the German construction firms Schönbronn, with their Warsaw office in *Dreikreuzplatz 13* (*Plac Trzech Krzyży*—Three Crosses Square) and Schmidt und Münstermann, who also had offices in Warsaw at *Mars StraÙe 8/3*.<sup>34</sup>

Jews from the Warsaw ghetto, and neighboring towns, as well as inmates from Treblinka I, the penal labor camp, were used to complete the building work. One of them, Israel Cymlich states ‘they had worked for a long time at constructing the other camp, without a clue as to what they were building. The contingent that used to go to work there was called the ‘T-Group’.<sup>35</sup>

Another prisoner from the penal labor camp, Lucjan Puchała, recalled the initial phase of the construction of the death camp:

Initially we did not know the purpose of building the branch track, and it was only at the end of the job that I found out from the conversations among Germans that the track was to lead to a camp for Jews. The work took two weeks, and it was completed on 15 June 1942. Parallel to the construction of the track, earthworks continued.

The works were supervised by a German, an *SS-Hauptsturmführer*. At the beginning, Polish workers from the labor camp, which had already been operating in Treblinka, were used as the workforce. Subsequently, Jews from Węgrów and Stoczek Węgrowski started to be brought in by trucks. There were 2–3 trucks full of Jews that were daily brought into the camp. The SS-men and Ukrainians supervising the work killed a few dozen people from those brought in to work every day. So that when I looked from the place where I

---

<sup>33</sup> G. Sereny, *Into That Darkness—From Mercy Killing to Mass Murder*. Pimlico, London 1995, pp. 150–151.

<sup>34</sup> Arad, *Bełzec, Sobibor, Treblinka ...*, op. cit., p. 37.

<sup>35</sup> Cymlich, Strawczyński, *Escaping Hell ...*, op. cit., p. 32.

worked to the place where the Jews worked the field was covered with corpses. The imported workers were used to dig deep ditches and to build various barracks. In particular, I know that a building was built of bricks and concrete, which as I learned later, contained people-extinction chambers.<sup>36</sup>

Jan Sułkowski also worked on the construction of the death camp and noted a strange building with a hermetically sealed door:

SS-men said it was to be a bath. Only later on when the building was almost completed, I realized it was to be a gas chamber. What was indicative of it was a special door of thick steel insulated with rubber, twisted with a bolt and placed in an iron frame and also the fact that an engine was placed in one of the building's compartments, from which three iron pipes led through the roof to the remaining three parts of the building. (...) A specialist from Berlin came to lay tiles inside and he told me that he had already built such chambers elsewhere.<sup>37</sup>

Wolf Sznajdman was one of the Jews brought to Treblinka to build the death camp. He represents a unique exception refuting the theory that none of the Jews who built Treblinka survived throughout the entire history of the death camp. Sznajdman managed to survive the thirteen months from June 1942 until the camp revolt on August 2, 1943. He recalled very well the early summer of 1942 when he was brought from Stoczek to the penal labor camp in Treblinka to participate in the construction of the death camp:

Construction of a new camp had started. A spur railroad line had already been started, we have to finish the job. We were erecting the barracks, we dug the first pit. It measured 10 m. deep. It was dug in levels, step-like. It was a pit for bodies in the 'Totenlager' (death camp), in the second camp.

There was no fence there then. We walked all around. They treated us very badly. They beat us on the way, while working, they put bicycles on our heads, and they burn with cigarettes on the head. We lived in the barracks which were built for us by the people from Polish Penal Camp Treblinka. Working hard! It was hard work: to

---

<sup>36</sup> Chrostowski, *Extermination Camp...*, op. cit., pp. 25-26.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 31.



dig the pits, to build the spur line, to eradicate the forest, to prepare the timber for building purposes. We were working here for six weeks.<sup>38</sup>

The construction of the Treblinka death camp was supervised by SS-*Obersturmführer* Richard Thomalla from the Construction Office of the Waffen-SS and Police (*Bauleitung der Waffen-SS und Polizei*) in Zamość in Lublin District, who was attached to the staff of SS-*Brigadeführer* Globocnik in Lublin. Thomalla had previously also supervised construction of the other two *Aktion Reinhardt* camps at Bełżec, in its later stages and Sobibór.<sup>39</sup>

The camp at Treblinka was laid out as an irregular rectangle approximately 400 meters wide by approximately 600 meters long, surrounded by a barbed wire fence about three or four meters high, camouflaged with brushwood.<sup>40</sup> In 1943, an additional outer barrier of 'Spanish horses' anti-tank obstacles was installed, given to the SS by the army after the defeat at Stalingrad.<sup>41</sup>

At each of the four corners of the camp were watchtowers approximately eight meters high. Some had searchlights and all of them were manned by *Trawnikimänner*, primarily Ukrainians, day and night. An additional watchtower was set up at the southern edge of the camp, midway between the two corner towers, but this structure was subsequently moved to the center of the extermination area (Camp II).<sup>42</sup>

The camp was divided into three zones of nearly equal size: the SS and Ukrainian *Trawnikimänner* living area, the reception area (*Auffanglager*) and the extermination area (*Totenlager*). The living and reception areas were called the 'Lower Camp' or Camp I, while the extermination area was known as the 'Upper Camp' or Camp II. The accommodation area for the Germans and the Ukrainians

---

<sup>38</sup> YVA, Jerusalem, A 03/1560: Wolf Sznajdman, (Wolf Shneidman).

<sup>39</sup> Arad, *Bełżec, Sobibor, Treblinka...*, op. cit., p. 37.

<sup>40</sup> A. Donat, *The Death Camp Treblinka*. Holocaust Library, New York 1979, p. 298.

<sup>41</sup> M. Chocholatý interview with Samuel Willenberg, Warsaw, March 2011.

<sup>42</sup> Donat, *The Death Camp ...*, op. cit., p. 298.

*Trawnikimänner* was in the north-west section of the camp and consisted of wooden barracks for the SS and Ukrainian personnel, as well as administration buildings, an infirmary, stores and workshops.

A 100 meter x 100 meter square was separated from the rest of the camp by a barbed wire fence, and contained three barracks forming a 'U' shape. Here the Jewish prisoners who worked in the 'Lower Camp' spent their nights. At the far side of the roll call area in this section there was a primitive latrine, covered by a straw roof.

The main road entrance gate to the camp was in the north-west corner, built in the spring of 1943 by the Jewish prisoner Jankiel Wiernik. It consisted of two wooden pillars, each decorated with a metal flower and crowned by a small roof, which rested on the pillars. At night, the entrance was lit by floodlights. *Trawnikimänner* and SS-men were posted at the gate and at the guardhouse.<sup>43</sup> At the entrance, positioned to the left of the main gate, a sign read:

*Sonderkommando Treblinka.*<sup>44</sup>

The transports of Jews arrived at the reception area in the south-west section of the camp. This area included the railroad track—a 300 meter long spur, a 200 meter long platform, known in the camp jargon as the 'Ramp', and a barrack that was later to be disguised as a railroad station. At the rail entrance to the camp there was a wooden gate covered with barbed wire intertwined with tree branches. The far end of the railroad spur was blocked by a sand bank.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> Arad, *Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka ...*, op. cit., p. 41.

<sup>44</sup> Samuel Willenberg in correspondence with Peter Laponder in Cape Town, South Africa, January 23, 2001.

<sup>45</sup> Kalman Teigman claimed that there was a second gate at the far end of the railroad spur inside the camp and provided a sketch. (Teigman correspondence with Chris Webb, dated December 15, 2001), Samuel Willenberg, however vehemently denied the existence of such a second gate. (M. Chocholatý interview with Samuel Willenberg, Warsaw, March 2011). Arad also mentions a second gate (Arad, *Belzec, Sobibor,*

Behind the Ramp and the barrack that later became the fake station there was a big, open square. After disembarking, the Jews would be hurried across this square, through a gate to another enclosed space, the so-called 'Undressing Square' (*Entkleidungsplatz*), to the left of which there was the women's undressing barrack. To the right, there was a barrack of similar size, a part of which served as the male undressing barrack and the rest as a warehouse. Situated between this area and the southern boundary of the camp was the so-called 'Sorting Square' (*Sortierungsplatz*), where the clothes removed by the Jews upon their arrival, and their baggage was sorted according to type and quality. Initially, in the south-west corner of the camp, behind the sorting barrack, there was a set of few big ditches<sup>46</sup> in which the bodies of the Jews who had died during the journey to the camp would be cremated, together with the garbage from the transport.

The central ditch became a basis for later so-called 'Infirmary', known in the camp jargon as the '*Lazarett*' (lit. military hospital or sick bay).<sup>47</sup> The '*Lazarett*' was surrounded by a tall barbed wire fence, camouflaged with brushwood to screen it from view. Within this area, which could be reached by way of an entrance on the side facing the Ramp, was a big ditch which served as a mass grave. The soil excavated from this ditch was piled up to form a mound approximately one meter high. A fire burned permanently at the bottom of the ditch.

The '*Lazarett*' area also contained a small booth that served as a shelter for the SS and *Trawniki*männer in bad weather, and a bench. It was here that the Jews who were too ill, disabled, or the very young or unaccompanied children were killed by a bullet in the back of the neck (*Genickschuss*). The three Jewish prisoners who worked at the '*Lazarett*' wore Red Cross armbands and the Jewish *Kapo*, Zvi Kurland, wore a white surgical gown to make him look like a doctor. A

---

*Treblinka* ..., op. cit., p. 41). No plans of the camp exist that show a second gate.

<sup>46</sup> M. Chocholatý interview with Edi Weinstein. Prague, August 2008.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

Red Cross flag was prominently displayed on the above-mentioned booth.

Leading from the women's undressing barracks in the Undressing Square to the Upper Camp (Camp II) there was a path called the '*Himmelfahrtstraße*' (lit. Ascension Road or Road to Heaven), generally referred to in the camp as the 'Tube' ('*der Schlauch*'). This path was approximately 350 meters long<sup>48</sup> and approximately five meters wide. At the entrance to the 'Tube', near the women's undressing barracks, there was a sign: 'To the Showers' (*Zum Baden*). Beyond, the 'Tube' was enclosed on either side with barbed wire fencing over two meters high and intertwined with tree branches so that it was impossible to see in or out. The 'Tube' ran for about 30 meters towards the east side of the camp, passed through a thin copse of trees, and then made an almost 90-degree turn and terminated in front of the steps leading up to central corridor of the new gas chamber building in the Upper Camp.<sup>49</sup>

In the early stages, the women's hair was cut off in the gas chambers,<sup>50</sup> but this was later carried out in the undressing barracks while the men undressed in the open air between the two barracks.<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> The original 'Tube' was 350 m in length whereas the new one was only 125 m long. This modification is confirmed by the statement of *SS-Unterscharführer* Franz Suchomel on September 14, 1967, in Düsseldorf.

<sup>49</sup> Donat, *The Death Camp...*, op. cit., p. 299.

<sup>50</sup> GFH, Israel, File 28646: L. Bewerunge, 'Mit Peitsche und Revolver an der Rampe'. Franz im Treblinka-Prozess des heimtückischen Mordes beschuldigt/Den Baumeister der Gaskammern wiederkannt? Bericht unseres Korrespondenten Lothar Bewerunge: Hairdresser Gustav Boraks from Israel belonged in Treblinka to the group of 25 hairdressers who had to cut the women hairs inside of a gas chamber.

<sup>51</sup> S. Willenberg, *Surviving Treblinka*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1989, p. 40.

The Jewish survivor Avraham Bomba recalled:

In the gas chamber we were working as a barber between two (...) little more than two weeks. And then they decided that the barbers will not go in anymore to the gas chamber to cut off the hair of the women over there, but in the undressing barrack.

The gas chamber. How it looked? Very simple. Was all concrete. Was no windows. There was nothing in it. Besides on top of you, there was wires (pipes) and you know, the water going to come out from it.

Had two doors. Steel doors. From one side and from the other side. The people went into the gas chamber from the one side. And they pushed in as many as they could. It was not allowed to have the people standing up with their hands down because there is not enough room, but when the people raised their hand like that, there was more room to each other. And on top of that they throw in kids, 2, 3, 4-year-old kids on top of them.<sup>52</sup>

The third largest area of the camp, the 'Upper Camp'—Camp II, or the 'death camp' proper (*Totenlager*)—occupied the south-eastern area of the camp. This is where the mass murders were carried out daily. The area was completely isolated from the rest of the camp by barbed wire fences camouflaged with branches, as well as high earth ramparts which prevented observation from outside. The entrance was hidden by a special screen. This part of Treblinka, the 'Upper Camp', measured approximately 200 meters x 250 meters.<sup>53</sup>

When the mass killings first began, there were initially three gas chambers located at the heart of the Upper Camp, inside a brick building constructed on concrete foundations. Each gas chamber measured approximately 4 meters x 4 meters, and approximately 2.6 meters high. Several steps at the front led up to a corridor, from which three doors approximately 1.80 meters high and approximately 90 centimeters wide led into the three gas chambers.<sup>54</sup> The

---

<sup>52</sup> USHMM, Washington, DC, RG-50.030.0033: Interview with Avraham Bomba, August 28, 1990.

<sup>53</sup> Arad, *Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka ...*, op. cit., p. 41.

<sup>54</sup> Donat, *The Death Camp ...*, op. cit., p. 300.

chambers were constructed much like air raid shelters with hermetically sealed doors.

Inside, the walls were lined with tiles up to a certain height and on the ceiling of each chamber there were pipes and shower heads to create the illusion that the chambers were normal shower rooms. According to the Jewish survivor Eli Rosenberg, there was also a small observation window made of unbreakable glass in the ceiling of each chamber.<sup>55</sup>

On the wall opposite the entry door of each chamber were the unloading doors, each one approximately 2.50 meters wide and approximately 1.80 meters high, made of thick wooden planks.<sup>56</sup> These doors could be opened only from the outside and opened like modern garage doors—outwards and upwards—and fastened open by upright wooden (or iron) supports while the interiors of gas chambers were being cleaned. Each unloading door opened onto a 70–80-centimeter-high concrete ramp made of enlargement of a platform which completely encircled the building.<sup>57</sup> The floors of the gas chambers were also tiled and slanted towards this platform.

---

<sup>55</sup> Eliahu Rosenberg telephone conversation with M. Chocholatý, 2003. In orig: 'Okienko z nietłukącego szkła'. There was also a similar observation window on the roof of a gas chamber in Sobibór: 'When Himmler asked to inspect the gas chambers, the Nazis marched the naked girls down the Road to Heaven. 'Bademeister' Bauer was waiting for them on his usual perch, the roof of the 'showers', where he had peepholes into the chambers. The Berliner (SS-*Oberscharführer* Bauer) usually wore coveralls like a mechanic when he supervised the gassings, but in honor of Himmler, he donned his best SS uniform.' (R. Rashke, *Escape from Sobibor*. University of Illinois Press, 1995, p. 105). There is another statement concerning the Sobibor chambers, where the construction of the old chambers was probably the same as in Treblinka: 'Bauer told his colleagues about an event, when a naked woman asked an SS-man who was closing the door of the gas chamber: 'What is the officer doing behind the window on the roof? How can we take a bath when he is watching us?' (T. Blatt, *Sobibór: Zapomniane powstanie*. Muzeum Pojezierza Łęczyńsko-Włodawskiego we Włodawie, Włodawa, p. 59.

<sup>56</sup> Donat, *The Death Camp ...*, op. cit., p. 300.

<sup>57</sup> See Wiernik's model of Treblinka displayed in GHF!

At the rear of the building there was a machine room (*Maschinenraum*) which housed a Russian tank engine which pumped its exhaust fumes into the gas chambers through the pipes and shower heads on the ceilings. The engine room also contained a generator which supplied the Upper and Lower Camps with electric current.<sup>58</sup>

Jankiel Wiernik, deported to Treblinka on August 23, 1942, was a skilled craftsman and selected for work by the SS on arrival in the camp. He was employed as the camp carpenter, and has provided the following description of the original gas chambers, known by the prisoners as the 'small gas chambers':<sup>59</sup>

When I arrived at the camp, three gas chambers were already in operation. (...) The outlet on the roof had a hermetic cap. Each chamber was equipped with a gas inlet pipe and a baked tile floor slanting towards the platform. The brick building which housed the gas chambers was separated from Camp I by a wooden wall. This wooden wall and the brick wall of the building together formed a corridor which was 80 centimeters higher than the building. The chambers were connected with the corridor by a hermetically-fitted iron door leading into each of the chambers. On the side of Camp II, the chambers were connected by a platform four meters wide, which ran alongside all three chambers. The platform was about 80 centimeters above ground level. There was also a hermetically-fitted wooden door on this side.

Each chamber had a door facing Camp II (1.80 meters x 2.50 meters), which could be opened only from the outside by lifting it with iron supports, and was closed by iron hooks set into the sash frames, and by wooden beams. The victims were led into the chambers through the doors leading from the corridor, while the remains of the gassed victims were dragged out through the doors facing Camp II.

The power plant operated alongside these chambers, supplying Camps I and II with electric current. An engine taken from a dismantled Soviet tank stood in the power plant. This engine was used

---

<sup>58</sup> Donat, *The Death Camp ...*, op. cit., p. 157.

<sup>59</sup> Eliahu Rosenberg also often called them the 'small gas chambers'. (M. Chocholatý telephone conversation with Rosenberg in 2003).

to pump the gas which was let into the chambers by connecting the engine with the inflow pipes.<sup>60</sup>

Abraham Krzepicki, who was deported from Warsaw to Treblinka on August 25, 1942, has described the original, small gas chamber building as:

A longish, not too large brick building standing in the middle of the death camp (...) this building was surrounded by a wooded area (...) spread over the flat roof of the building there was a green wire net whose edges extended slightly beyond the buildings walls. These may have been for protection against air attacks. Beneath the net, on top of the roof, I could see a tangle of pipes.

The walls of the building were covered with concrete. The gas chamber had not been operating for a week. I was able to look inside through one of the two strong, white-washed iron exits, which happened to be open. I saw before me a room, which was not too large. It looked like a regular shower room with all the accoutrements of a public bathhouse. The walls of the room were covered with small orange terracotta tiles. Nickel-plated metal faucets were set into the ceiling. That was all. A comfortable neat little bathhouse set in the middle of a wooded area.<sup>61</sup>

Eliahu Rosenberg, employed as a grave-digger in the Upper Camp, has given this description of the small gas chambers:

The first thing which appeared before our eyes was a barn-like building built of rough bricks. As I found out later, these were the gas chambers in which a large number of people died. There were three sections there, the size of a regular dining room. The ground (floor) and a half of the wall was covered with red tiles in order to camouflage the blood sticking to the walls. In the ceiling there was a small sealed window which was never opened, and through which the gas-sing procedure could be watched. The ceiling had been equipped with showers through which water did not run. Due to the dark inside the chambers, it could not be seen that along the walls ran pipes some five centimeters in diameter through which flowed the gas—it was the exhaust gas produced by an engine placed in the cabin. There were pushed some four hundred people into each chamber.

---

<sup>60</sup> Donat, *The Death Camp ...*, op. cit., pp. 157-159.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 105.