



THE
AUSCHWITZ
CONCENTRATION CAMP

History, Biographies, Rememberance

Chris Webb

ibidem

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Dedicated To :

Mr Marian Koszewski from Kościan—Survivor of Auschwitz and Gusen camps.

I met him in Kościan in September 2005, thanks to Artur Hojan and Cameron Munro.

Frank Bright who survived Auschwitz, although his Father and Mother did not.

He kindly shared the story of the Brichta family with me, part of which is included in this book.

For **Freya Isabel**

I therefore became Commandant of the Quarantine Camp which
was to be built at Auschwitz.
It was far away, in the back of beyond, in Poland.

Rudolf Höss
Commandant of Auschwitz

We had read the name of Auschwitz on the labels on the trucks—
trucks or wagons—trucks. But nobody of us knew
what Auschwitz meant.

Primo Levi
Italian Jew who was deported to Auschwitz in 1944,
but survived.

Foreword

I have known Chris Webb since 2003. I myself had been involved in Holocaust research for many years prior to this, though on a purely private basis. It was in 2003 that I came across the Aktion Reinhardt Camps (ARC) website. I sent an inquisitive email to the website enquiring about becoming a member. A very enthusiastic response came back from Chris, welcoming me to the fold.

The website was run on a very devolved basis—if you wanted to contribute something you went ahead and did it. There was some proof checking and review of facts, but those who wanted to contribute could. And so the website and interest grew. It generated the most extensive research undertaken to date on the three Aktion Reinhardt Camps. As I was to discover, it was Chris who was the real driving force behind the website.

We met for the first time on the ARC field trip to Poland in 2004 and we have met several times each year since then, as well as undertaking research trips to Poland and the United States of America, and swapping research material and ideas by email. Chris has always provided excellent feedback on my research efforts. He has been researching the Aktion Reinhardt Camps and the Holocaust in general for over 40 years.

I have met many researchers and talked to many institutes of Holocaust research around the world. Almost all agree that the ARC website is still the most comprehensive and user-friendly website on the Holocaust. Since the ARC website was frozen some years ago, existing on the web but not being added to, Chris has moved on to other projects, including setting up H.E.A.R.T. and the Holocaust Historical Society. He has also written a trilogy of books on Bełżec, Sobibór and Treblinka, that have been published by Ibidem-Verlag and he has self-published other Holocaust related works.

Chris joined the Tiergarten 4 Association in 2015, of which I am the Chairman and founder. The Tiergarten 4 Association is a Berlin registered association which researches and publishes works on

Nazi war crimes, with a focus on the Warthegau, Chełmno, Aktion Reinhardt Camps, gas vans, Sonderkommando 1005, other Concentration Camps, euthanasia institutes and War crimes trials. The Tiergarten 4 Association has an extensive library of some 20,000 books and more than a million pages of original documents relating to the Nazi period and War crimes trials. Some of these documents have been consulted in producing this book on Auschwitz.

Chris has also very generously given his time and expertise to Holocaust education in the UK. He has given many lectures at Universities and has more recently acted as a consultant and guide to Auschwitz and Kraków, where he has imparted his knowledge about the Camp in particular and the Holocaust in general. It is thus an opportune moment for Chris to publish his book on 'The Auschwitz Concentration Camp, History, Biographies, Remembrance.'

As with all of his works, in his book on the Auschwitz Concentration Camp, Chris produces a fine balance between detailing the sufferings of the victims and the actions and characters of the perpetrators. He manages in a concise form to give an excellent overview of all aspects of Auschwitz and its many complex of camps.

The book will be useful both for those coming to the Holocaust for the first time, and those seasoned researchers like myself, who have read many books on Auschwitz. Although the number of existing published works on Auschwitz is vast, this book on the Auschwitz Concentration Camp is a very worthy addition to the bibliography of one of the most important Camps established by the Nazis.

Cameron Munro

Tiergarten 4 Association

Berlin

March 2017

Author's Introduction



The Author—Auschwitz-Birkenau January 2017
Photograph: Taken By Mark Handscomb

This book was inspired by my recent visits to Auschwitz-Birkenau whilst acting as a guide for the University of Teesside in 2016 and 2017. I have now visited the site four times and every visit brings new things to learn and understand. It remains a sobering and humbling experience, from my first visit in 2004, up to the current day, and these experiences will stay with me for life.

This book has been constructed using the excellent book by Dagnuta Czech, *'Auschwitz Chronicle'* to tell the chronological history of the Concentration Camp, from its conception in 1940 to its demise in 1945. This is the best way to chart the development of the police Camp which became the greatest cemetery without a grave in the history of mankind. Whilst the *'Chronicle'* has been used as the foundation, accounts from both survivors and members of the Camp

garrison, some of which have never been published in book form to date, tell the heartbreaking story of life and death, in the most infamous of places, created by man.

This work covers the establishment of the Camp, its development from a Security Police prison holding Polish political prisoners to the industrial mass killing of a large portion of the Jewish race in Europe. The story is told from all sides; the Polish prisoners, the Jews, the Germans, the Resistance workers, the survivors and the victims, the heroes and the villains. Biographies of the perpetrators and remembrance for both the survivors and the victims. Chronological tables of the deportations and details of some of the survivors, and the post-war statements and Trials, all tell the story of the hell called Auschwitz.

My first visit to Auschwitz was made in 2004, as part of a group visiting many of the major Holocaust related sites, including former Camps such as Płaszów, Treblinka, Sobibór, Bełżec, Trawniki, Poniatowa, and Majdanek. I was lucky enough to be guided around Auschwitz by the Swedish expert Börje Hallström, who joined us on the trip. He had visited the Camp and the surrounding area many times before, and he passed on his knowledge freely, for which I am most grateful.

In terms of thanking people, I would first like to thank Tom Nixon from Teesside University who designed the book cover, with such consummate skill. I was delighted to renew my working relationship with Tania Mühlberger, who once again proof read and copy edited this book in her exemplary style, I am blessed to know her. For introducing me to Tania and for being instrumental in the great privilege of inviting me to work with Teesside University, I must thank Professor Matthew Feldman. Our long standing friendship is a source of much joy. I must also thank Mark Handscomb and Lucy Jolly, for our three trips to Auschwitz, along with the students from Teesside University who made the journey to Poland. Mark very kindly took some photographs of me on the ramp in Birkenau, in freezing weather in January 2017, specifically for this book.

I am also indebted to Cameron Munro, the founder of the Tiergarten 4 Association in Berlin, who very kindly wrote the foreword to this book, and provided information used in this work. He was part of the ARC group which toured the Auschwitz-Birkenau murder factory in 2004, and along with the late Artur Hojan, produced a study of the Auschwitz sub-camps, which was completed in 2009, but to date is unpublished. Artur also obtained some original items of correspondence from Auschwitz for me, which have been included in this work.

Cameron Munro is a dedicated researcher on the Holocaust and we have worked together on many projects and research trips, in the United Kingdom, Europe and the United States of America. From the same organization I must also pay thanks to Robert Parzer, who supported my many requests for information and documents. I thank Robert wholeheartedly for all of his efforts.

I am grateful for the support of a number of people helping me with my research. I must place on record my thanks to Frank Bright, who survived Theresienstadt and Auschwitz, before settling in the UK after the War. He very kindly sent me his fantastic account of his families' experiences growing up in Nazi Germany. Both of Frank's parents were murdered in Auschwitz. I am sincerely grateful to him for sharing this tragic story with me. His full account was first published online on the Holocaust Education and Research Team (H.E.A.R.T.) website during 2008. In a similar vein, I must also thank Dr. Thomas Nowotny, for providing me with the account of Max Block, who perished in Auschwitz during 1944, also for the H.E.A.R.T. website in 2012.

I must also place on record my thanks to the late Sir Martin Gilbert, who inspired me greatly with his research on the Holocaust, and who kindly donated maps to aid me in my research. His sad passing in 2014 was a great loss.

During the writing of this book, I must express my thanks to Piotr Setkiewicz from the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, who helped me with a number of questions. I am also grateful for the assistance given to me by Miriam Haardt, Deputy Senior Librarian at the Wiener Library, in London, who helped me with my research

into transports to Auschwitz, from a number of European countries occupied by the Nazis.

A big thank-you to my publisher, ibidem-Verlag, who are a real pleasure to work with. I am extremely appreciative of their continual support, and the kindness and patience of Valerie Lange and Florian Bölter. This is my fourth published work with them, and I am proud that we have such a productive working relationship.

My wife Shirley, my daughter Heather and son-in-law Mark all deserve a mention in supporting my research and published works, over the many years. They mean the world to me.

To everyone who has supported me with my life-long interest in the Holocaust—I thank you all.

Abbreviations

- AK – Armia Krajowa – Polish Home Army
ARC – Aktion Reinhard Camps website
BBC – British Broadcasting Corporation
GFH – Ghetto Fighters House, Israel
H.E.A.R.T. Holocaust Education Archive Research Team
HHS – Holocaust Historical Society, UK
KL – KonzentrationsLager – Concentration Camp
NA – National Archives, Kew, London
PPS – Polish Socialist Party
RSHA – Reich Security Main Office
SD – Sicherheitsdienst – Security Service
SIPO – Sicherheitspolizei – Security Police
SS – Schutzstaffel – Protection Squad
TAP – Secret Polish Army
TOW – Military Organization Union (Polish)
USHMM – United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
WL – Wiener Library, London
WVHA – Administration and Economic Main Office of the SS
YVA – Yad Vashem Archives

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Part I
The Hell Called
Auschwitz

Chapter I

Auschwitz Main Camp

1940

The *Baedekers Guide to the Generalgouvernement* published in 1943, provides a description of Auschwitz, the German spelling for the Polish town of Oświęcim, (ironically containing—although slightly mis-spelled—the word “schwitzen...aus” which is literally to sweat profusely—something also associated with decay. Tragically symbolic, it is here associated with the emaciated, tired, and extremely malnourished physique of the prisoners, and for those selected—the after effect of the gassing of the many thousands of Jews in this Concentration Camp) which is located in southern Poland, some 31 miles west of Kraków:

The railway to Kraków continues north-east past Auschwitz (348 kilometers from Vienna), an industrial town of 12,000 inhabitants, the former capital of the Piast Duchies of Auschwitz and Zator, whence a secondary railway runs via Skawina to Kraków.¹

It was here near the Polish town of Oświęcim that the Nazis in 1940, created the infamous Auschwitz Concentration Camp, utilizing former Polish army barracks in the Zasole district. The *SS-Oberführer* Arpad Wigand, who was based in the *Höhere SS- und Polizeiführer Südost* offices in Breslau, today Wrocław, had identified the site of Zasole, with its military bases and excellent rail connections just outside of the town of Auschwitz in the fork of the Soła and Vistula rivers, as a suitable place to build a Concentration Camp for Poles arrested by the German Security forces.²

In early January 1940, *SS-Oberführer* Richard Glücks, the Inspector of Concentration Camps ordered *SS-Sturmbannführer* Walter

¹ Baedekers, *Das Generalgouvernement*, Leipzig 1943, p. 10.

² *Auschwitz—Nazi Extermination Camp*, Interpress, Warsaw 1985, p. 15.

Eisfeld from Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp to inspect the military barracks, and the commission concluded that the barracks were unsuitable for conversion into a Concentration Camp. This view, however, was not shared by the *HSSPF* office in Wrocław, and another inspection commission was ordered.

On February 21, 1940, *SS-Oberführer* Richard Glücks informed *Reichsführer-SS*, Heinrich Himmler, that the inspection of the barracks had recommended, that with certain modifications, the barracks could be used and that a quarantine camp could begin functioning immediately. Negotiations commenced with *Luftwaffe* General Halm, regarding the transfer of these barracks to the *SS*.

Another inspection, this time, under the command of *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Rudolf Höss, also from Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp took place in Zasole, on April 18 and April 19, 1940. Rudolf Höss advised *SS-Oberführer* Richard Glücks, that the accommodation of the eight two-storey and fourteen single-storey brick barracks framing the north and south side of the large exercise yard, could be utilized as a Concentration Camp.³

On April 27, 1940, following the inspection report prepared by Rudolf Höss, Himmler ordered Richard Glücks to establish a Concentration Camp at Auschwitz and on May 4, 1940, Höss was officially appointed the first Commandant. One of his first acts was to acquire from the Mayor of Auschwitz, 300 local Jews who worked at the site, making it ready to accept the first intake of prisoners.

Rudolf Höss described his task on taking up his appointment:

My task was not an easy one. In the shortest possible time, I had to construct a transit camp for ten thousand prisoners, using the existing complex of buildings which, though well constructed, had been completely neglected, and were swarming with vermin. From the point of view of hygiene, practically everything was lacking. I had been told in Oranienburg, before setting off, that I could not expect much help, and I would

³ Robert Jan van Pelt and Deborah Dwork, *Auschwitz 1270 To the Present*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 1996, p. 168.

have to rely largely on my own resources. In Poland I would find everything that had been unobtainable in Germany for years!⁴

However, the reality was that in constructing Auschwitz Concentration Camp, Rudolf Höss was facing considerable problems even in obtaining the basics:

Whether it was a question of bread or meat or potatoes, it was I who had to find them. Yes, I even had to visit the farms, in order to collect straw. Since I could expect no help of any kind from the Inspectorate, I had to make do as best I could on my own. I had to organize the trucks and lorries I needed and the fuel for them. I had to drive as far as Zakopane and Rabka to acquire cooking-pots for the prisoners' kitchen, and to the Sudetenland for bed-frames and mattresses.⁵

SS-Unterscharführer Pery Broad, who was a member of the Political Section in Auschwitz, wrote an account of his experiences in the Camp and he handed it over to the British authorities after the War. It became known as the 'Broad Report.'

His description of the main camp at Auschwitz states:

The Auschwitz Concentration Camp, known in Poland as the 'Camp of Death' was located near the city of the same name in the marshy tract between the Vistula and a tributary, the Soła. It was opened in 1940. Old military barracks and factory buildings formed the core of what later became a very large complex of buildings.

At first there was only the so-called Auschwitz base camp, situated on a road along the Soła connecting the village of Rajsko with Auschwitz. From the street, next to the main gate, could be seen the luxurious quarters of the Commandant *SS-Obersturmbannführer* Höss. The entrance was barred, and SS guards checked every soldier and civilian entering or leaving. To the right of the gate were the guard barracks and diagonally across from that the headquarters building. The view of the prisoner compound was obstructed by a long concrete wall, above which could be seen the guard towers and

⁴ Rudolf Höss, *Commandant of Auschwitz*, Pan Books London and Sydney 1980, p. 116.

⁵ *KL Auschwitz Seen by the SS*, Panstwowe Muzeum W Oswiecimiu 1978, p. 40.

gables of the dreary red-brick buildings. Most of the twenty-eight blocks of the compound housed prisoners. Some were used as hospitals, offices, storerooms and for other purposes. The prisoner kitchen was also in the compound. The compound was surrounded by two high, electrified barbed-wire fences, which at night were brightly lit. In addition there were large searchlights on the towers. A 10-foot-wide gravel strip, the so-called neutral zone, ran along the inner fence, and anyone found there was fired at. About 20,000–25,000 persons were confined in the base camp.⁶

The infamous *Rapportführer* (Roll-Call Leader) Gerhard Arno Palitzsch, arrived on May 20, 1940, from Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp, with 30 convicted criminals, mostly German, who were given serial numbers 1–30, and placed in Block 1. These 30 men were the *Kapo's* who were to supervise the prisoners and maintain control, in a brutal fashion, as an extension to the SS forces. Among the thirty men were Bruno Brodniewitsch, who was given Serial Number 1, and he was appointed Camp Senior.⁷

Forty prisoners from the Dachau Concentration Camp, near Munich arrived in Auschwitz on May 29, 1940, the so-called *Aussen-Kommando*, under the command of *SS-Unterscharführer* Beck. This *Kommando* consisted of one German *Kapo*, and thirty-nine Polish prisoners, most of them gymnasium students from Łódź. They were housed in the kitchen barracks and were put to work erecting the first temporary barbed wire fence around the camp.⁸

On June 14, 1940 the first transport of prisoners arrived in Auschwitz, these were 728 Polish men from the prison in Tarnów, on the orders of the *SIPO* and *SD*⁹ Commander in Kraków. One of the prisoners was Wiesław Kielar, who described the journey in his book '*Anus Mundi*' and extracts from his book are quoted here:

⁶ B. Naumann, *Auschwitz*, Pall Mall Press, London 1966, pp. 162–163.

⁷ Danuta Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle*, Henry Holt and Company, New York 1990, p. 10.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁹ *SIPO* (*Sicherheitspolizei*) and *SD* (*Sicherheitsdienst*)—German Security Forces .

We tried to stay together and until now, we had been lucky. This time too. Here we were, just as we had been in our prison cell: Tadek Szwed, Djunio Beker, Romek Trojanowski and I, sitting on a bench, each clutching the small bundle they had allowed us to bring from Tarnów prison..... the policemen escorting us were decent, they allowed us to talk to each other and to smoke, if we wanted to. But we were not permitted to go near the windows.

This was an historic day for the Third Reich:

We arrived in Kraków about midday. The whole station was festooned with swastikas. There was excitement and undisguised rejoicing among the Germans. From the loudspeakers came the blare of military music and strident speeches: Victory! Paris had fallen—it was June of 1940.

The journey continued:

We traveled on.... We stop for a long time at some station. It turns out that this is the frontier between the *Generalgouvernement* and the Reich. We continue our journey. Next we stop at what, judging from the number of trucks on either side of the train, must be a major station. The name of the place, written in large letters on the station building, is, Auschwitz.... Some dump or other. We don't think about it anymore because now our train has started to move again. Presumably we're being shunted into a siding since the train curves sharply, so that the wheels squeal remorselessly.

The transport had arrived at Auschwitz Concentration Camp:

From the other side of the window comes the sound of voices shouting in German, of feet running and stamping. Suddenly the doors of our carriage are flung open. Someone on the platform shouts at the top of his voice: "Everybody out!" Our escorts assist us to climb out of the train in their own way. They bring the butts of their carbines down on our backs with resounding blows. We all dash like mad towards the one and only exit. One by one we jump down from the high carriage and land directly at the feet of scores of SS men; they are lined up in rows leading towards a high fence which encircles a large building. Beaten, pushed and terrified by the SS men yelling at us, we rush like a flock of panicking sheep through the open gate.

Wiesław Kielar continued his account of arrival:

Suddenly the striped man commanding us stepped smartly up to a group of SS men standing a little to one side. At a short distance from

them he came to attention, clicking his heels and taking off his cap in one swift movement; then he proceeded to talk rapidly in German, none of which we understood. One of the SS men, pointing at a nearby building, muttered something in reply without removing his pipe from his mouth. As soon as he had finished, Stripey once more clicked heels, put on his blue sailors cap, did a regulation about turn and returned to his previous position. Another command rang out. All the stripeys fell out and lined us up near the building.

After we had been divided up into small groups we were led into the basement where all our personal belongings were taken away; this included the removal of hair from every part of our body, followed by a bath in ice-cold water. We were handed a cardboard tab with a number which was to replace our names from now on. My number was 290. Romek Trojanowski 44, and Edek Galinski's 537. Thus in a perfectly simple manner, we became numbers.¹⁰

These first prisoners were quarantined in the building of the former Polish Tobacco Monopoly, near the railroad siding, which was separated from the rest of the buildings by barbed wire fences. This was only a temporary measure, and this building was designated for the SS guards at a later date. On the day that this first transport arrived at Auschwitz, the outside commando from Dachau were leaving and those departing saw the arrival of the first transport from Tarnów.

On July 6, 1940, the first escape from Auschwitz concentration camp took place. Polish prisoner Tadeusz Wiewowski, who was born on May 4, 1914, in Kołaczyce, near Kraków, escaped from the camp. The escape was discovered during the evening roll call. Wiesław Kielar recalled the brutal roll-call that took place that day:

We stand in rows in a large square behind the hospital block. The *Kapo's* are having a hard time counting us. The SS men too. The roll call won't tally. Maybe someone has escaped. They keep counting, but don't get the correct figure. They are furious. They vent their fury on us. We stand to attention, side by side, at arm's length, hands folded behind our heads, elbows turned back as far as possible. Thus we stand for an hour, maybe more, maybe less, because time has lost all meaning.... A group of SS men approach, among them is *Rapportführer* Palitzsch, young and

¹⁰ Wiesław Kielar, *Anus Mundi*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, England 1980, pp. 3-5.

slim in a beautifully cut uniform, his unpleasant face covered with pimples.... Pale with fear, Baworowski interprets, "A prisoner has escaped Wiejowski—the person who helped him get away is to come forward.

No-one came forward, the SS ordered the prisoners to stand there, until someone does. Kielar's account continues:

The SS men have left, Leo Wietschorek¹¹ is practicing sport with us. It is getting dark, consequently we manage to cheat. The *Kapo*'s who seem to have grown tired, slope off, one after the other, back to the block. After a while Leo returns ... he's shouting "Knees bend!" Night has fallen, from the river dampness, sticky and cold, comes creeping towards us... we shiver as if we have an attack of malaria, and this burning in our stomach, if one could only get some coffee. Someone asks for permission to go to the toilet. Permission refused, we piss in our trousers.

Dawn, now the cold is so cruel that our teeth chatter loudly... suddenly the sun appears behind the block. It turns warm. For a change they make us fold our hands behind our heads. The longed-for sun, now grows into a hated tormentor. Somebody collapses, Leo rushes over to him, he beats him with his stick, but it no longer has much effect. After a while another man passes out, and still another. From the sky a veritable fire pours down.... Many pretend to faint.... I decide to try the same trick I fall down on my face. What a relief!

I can hear the gravel crunching under the approaching feet, a hand pushes something under my nose... it's the sick-bay *Kapo*, his small penetrating eyes blink at me with understanding. Before Leo arrives they carry me to the sick bay. In the room some dozen bodies are lying on the floor. There is coffee too. Bock, the sick-bay *Kapo* gives me some tablets. I swallow them and fall asleep immediately.

Stehappell (standing-up roll call) continued until 2 p.m.—thus I managed to get out of four hours of it. Next day we are transferred from Quarantine to Block 2.¹²

During this first 'punishment roll-call', the first public flogging occurred. The flogging was carried out on a stand made in the camp carpentry workshop. Those flogged were prisoners interrogated by SS members of the Political Department—the Camp *Gestapo*, on

¹¹ Leo Wietschorek, is one of the German criminals brought from Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp. Serial Number 30.

¹² Wiesław Kielar, *Anus Mundi*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, England 1980, pp. 15–17.

suspicion of assisting Tadeusz Wiejowski¹³ in his successful escape attempt. The beatings were carried out by *Rapportführer* (Roll-Call Leader) Gerhard Palitzsch, with a stick four centimeters in diameter.¹⁴

The following day on July 7, 1940, the Jew, David Wingoczewski became the first prisoner to die in Auschwitz, as a result of standing in the punishment roll-call. He arrived in Auschwitz on June 20, 1940 from the prison in Nowy Wiśnicz, suffering various serious ailments and signs of ill-treatment.¹⁵

Wilhelm Brasse, who was born on December 3, 1917, in Żywiec, was of Austrian and Polish descent. He learnt to be a photographer in Katowice. After the German occupation, he refused to sign the *Volkliste* (ethnic German register) and he tried to cross into Hungary. He was arrested on the Polish-Hungarian border and was sent to Auschwitz Concentration Camp on August 31, 1940. He was tattooed with the Prisoner Number 3444. Later on, because of his photographic skills he was selected to work in the Photographic Identification Unit, where he took photographs of the new arrivals, for individual camp records. He recalled the early days of construction work in the Auschwitz Camp:

The prisoners had to carry stones. It was very difficult, hard labor. And we were beaten. But not enough construction materials had been provided to complete the task, so a typical Nazi solution was found—theft. I worked at demolishing houses that used to belong to Polish families. There was an order to take building materials such as bricks, planks and all kinds of other wood. We were surprised the Germans wanted to build so rapidly and they did not have the materials.

The Camp quickly developed a culture of theft, not just from the local population, but from within the institution itself. The German *Kapos* would send us inmates off and say, ‘Go and steal cement from another work *Kommando*. We don’t care about the other guys.’ And that is what we did. Planks or cement would be stolen from another *Kommando*. In

¹³ Tadeusz Wiejowski hid for a year in Kołaczyce, re-arrested, sent to prison in Jasło. He was shot in an abandoned oil well near Gorlice.

¹⁴ Danuta Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle*, Henry Holt and Company, New York 1990, p. 17.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

the Camp lingo that would be called 'organizing', but we had to be careful not to get caught.¹⁶

Jerzy Bielski, Prisoner Number 243, who was also a member of the first transport of Polish political prisoners that arrived in Auschwitz from Tarnów, recalled the *Kapo* Ernst Krankemann, who arrived at the Camp in the second batch of German criminals transferred from Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp on August 29, 1940:

First time I saw him, they were rolling the square between the two blocks, and because it was a very heavy roller, the twenty or twenty-five people in the unit were unable to pull it. Krankemann had a whip and would hit them. 'Faster you dogs!' he said.

Jerzy Bielski continued:

As evening fell, one of them collapsed on his knees and could not get up. Then Krankemann ordered the rest of the penal *Kommando* to pull the giant roller over their prostrate comrade. I had got used to seeing death and beatings, but what I saw then just made me cold. I just froze.¹⁷

On September 22, 1940, the *SIPO* and *SD* Commander of Warsaw sent 1,705 men, 1139 who were caught in round-ups on the streets of Warsaw and 566 men from Pawiak Prison, to Auschwitz. Stanislaw Debski, whose real name was Stanislaw Dubois, a young active member of the Polish Socialist Party, was given serial number 3904. Konstanty Jagiello, also a member of PPS, and active in the Red Scouts was given number 4007. Tomasz Serafinski, whose real name was Witold Pilecki, was given number 4859. Pilecki was chief of staff of the underground organization of the Secret Polish Army (*TAP*). Pilecki, with the approval of his immediate superior, joined a group of people who were to be arrested during a street round-up in Warsaw, to get into Auschwitz Concentration Camp with the aim of establishing a resistance group within the Camp, which will provide

¹⁶ Laurence Rees, *Auschwitz—The Nazis and the Final Solution*, BBC Books, London 2005, p. 38.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.40.

mutual aid to prisoners and establish contacts with the outside world.¹⁸

Witold Pilecki, a month after his arrival in the Camp, organized a group which took the name of Military Organization Union (*TOW*) and was based on the system of five member cells. Its members included Edward Ciesielski, Lieutenant Kacperski, Captain Henryk Bartosiewicz and Cavalry Captain Włodzimierz Makalinski. The main focus of this group was organizing food, warm clothing, keeping up prisoners morale and spreading news from the outside world, as well as sending to Warsaw reports about the conditions in the Camp itself.¹⁹

Witold Pilecki escaped from the bakery squad on April 27, 1943. The purpose of his escape was to take out documents regarding the crimes committed there and to provide an eyewitness account of what was happening in Auschwitz, and to help the underground organization plan for liberating the Camp. One of his last acts in captivity was to entrust the leadership of his group to Major Zygmunt Boncza-Bohdanowski²⁰ and Captain Henryk Bartosiewicz.²¹

At the end of November 1940, Rudolf Höss, and the Head of Office D-III of the *Wirtschafts- und Verwaltungshauptamt (WHVA)*—the Administration and Economic Main Office of the SS, Major Heinrich Vogel, submitted a report to *SS-Reichsführer* Heinrich Himmler, investigating the possibilities of establishing agricultural enterprises in the area around the Auschwitz Camp.

On the basis of this report, Himmler decided to create an SS farm district, in the third zone, which included the villages of Babice, Broszkowice, Brzezinka, Budy, Harmeze, Plawy and Rajsko. In this farm district, an experimental agricultural station for the East was

¹⁸ Danuta Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle*, Henry Holt and Company, New York 1990, p. 29.

¹⁹ Barbara Jarosz, *Auschwitz*, Interpress, Warsaw 1985, pp. 137–138.

²⁰ Executed at the Black Wall on October 11, 1943.

²¹ Barbara Jarosz, *Auschwitz*, Interpress, Warsaw 1985, p. 138.

to be built with laboratories, a plant breeding station in Rajsko, as well as cattle, poultry and fish-breeding facilities.²²

On December 19, 1940, the Archbishop of Kraków, Prince Adam Sapheia, sent a letter to the parish office in Auschwitz, addressed to the Commandant of Auschwitz Concentration Camp, seeking permission to read a Holy Mass at Christmas for the Catholic prisoners. On receipt of the letter from the Archbishop, the local priests, Wladyslaw Gross and Rudolf Schmidt presented the letter to Rudolf Höss, in person. The Commandant however, refused permission as the rules for Concentration Camps did not allow for religious observance.

Rudolf Höss did however approve that approximately 6,000 food packages weighing about two pounds each could be sent to all prisoners on Christmas Eve. Packages were indeed put together from local donations and from the funds set aside by Archbishop Sapheia, but many of the packages did not reach the prisoners until after the new year.²³

²² Danuta Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle*, Henry Holt and Company, New York 1990, pp. 37-38.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

Chapter II

Auschwitz Main Camp

1941

During early January 1941, Dr. Otto Ambros, a member of the board of the I.G. Farben company and responsible for the Buna Division (Synthetic Rubber) and Head Engineer, Wilhelm Biedenkopf, visited the State Planning Office in Kattowitz to look at maps and charts of various sites in Upper Silesia, in order to select an appropriate site for the construction of four Buna factories to produce 30,000 tons of synthetic rubber per year.

The area around Auschwitz seemed desirable since the confluence of three rivers meant the water and raw materials, such as lime, coal and salt were available in the region. In addition, the high population density and the existence of a Concentration Camp were also crucial, since this provided the necessary labor force for the construction of the plants. After a tour of the area, Dr. Ambros selected the town of Dwory, some 4 miles from Auschwitz as the chosen site for the Buna complex.²⁴

In an edict dated January 2, 1941, Reinhard Heydrich, the chief of the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (*RSHA*)—The Reich Security Main Office, announced that Heinrich Himmler had agreed to the classification of the Concentration Camps into three categories; Auschwitz I was designated a Class I Camp for less serious prisoners, whilst Auschwitz II, which had not yet been constructed was deemed a Class II Camp, for prisoners charged with serious crimes.

Hermann Göring, the *Reichsmarschall* and Commissioner for the Nazis 'Four Year Plan' issued guidelines for the construction of the Buna factory complex in Auschwitz. Hermann Göring requested that Himmler arranged for the speedy evacuation of the Jews from the area, in order to free up living space for the workers, who were to be employed in building the Buna works. Göring estimated that

²⁴ Ibid., p. 43.

between 8,000 to 12,000 workers would be needed to undertake this work.

Witold Pilecki, who is mentioned in the previous chapter, became very ill during February 1941, he had a very high temperature of almost 40 degrees Celsius. He was taken to Block 15 and laid on the floor in Room 7. Attacked by lice, which he fought off, after three days and three sleepless nights he sought help. Through a male nurse, Tadeusz Burski, he sent a note to the Polish Doctor Wladyslaw Dering. Dr. Dering came with another doctor and examined Pilecki and diagnosed an inflammation of the left lung, and had Pilecki transferred to Block 20. After a bath and injection Pilecki found himself in a clean bed, and could sleep at last. Due to strict cleanliness and isolation, there were no lice and no danger of typhus. After ten days, the illness passed its critical stage and he was able to get out of bed, though still of course very weak. He was kept on as a male nurse in the Hospital block.²⁵

It was during the month he worked in the Hospital, that Pilecki was able to see for himself the effectiveness of the Hospital as one of the two main branches of the resistance organization he had created. The Hospital was run by a German criminal prisoner Hans Bock, although he had never studied medicine, he was kind-hearted and courageous in the face of SS brutality.

The Prisoners' Hospital at first occupied Block 16, in the Auschwitz Main Camp, a little later it took over Block 15 and by the end of 1940, Block 20 as well. Bock was supported by the Polish doctors and in agreement with SS doctors Max Popiersch fought for and obtained important privileges for the Hospital. Conflicts arose between the SS doctors and the Political Department, who considered that the whole Camp came under their jurisdiction. There were a number of striking examples of these conflicts. For example, the Political Department sent a Russian prisoner named Zolotov, who was an informer to the Hospital as a nurse and to spy on the doctors. SS-Doctor Friedrich Entress was informed by a Polish doctor that although there was not a vacancy, he was demanding to be taken in,

²⁵ Jozef Garlinski, *Fighting Auschwitz*, Fontana Collins 1975, p. 51.

because the Political Department wanted it. Dr. Entress reacted by kicking the spy out and going immediately to see Camp Commandant Rudolf Höss. Entress returned from this meeting and confirmed that only the Senior Medical Officer and himself had any authority over the affairs of the Hospital.²⁶

The role of the Hospital in the history of Auschwitz was very important, and it deserves recording. Dr. Wladyslaw Dering, was a Polish doctor, who was noisy, brusque, and difficult but a good doctor and he became an important figure in the Hospital. But he was not the first, the earliest doctor was Dr. Stefan Pizlo, who entered the Camp on the very first transport from Tarnów Prison on June 14, 1940.

The first Hospital clerk was Kazimierz Szczerbowski; the first pharmacist was Wlodzimierz Lachowicz, who was assisted by Marian Tolinski. When Lachowicz died of typhus in 1942, Tolinski took over his role. A laboratory was established beside the Hospital and was directed until the final days of the Camp by Witold Kosztowny. Dr. Glogowski worked there for a few weeks before he was accepted into the Hospital. For a short time too, Professor Antoni Jakubski was employed there. Professor Jakubski was 62 years old when he entered Auschwitz, and he was probably the oldest prisoner to survive and see the liberation in January 1945.²⁷

On February 28, 1941, in Berlin, the program for the visit to Auschwitz was planned. Present at the meeting were Himmler, Karl Wolff, who was Himmler's chief of staff, *SS-Sturmbannführer* Heinrich Vogel, and *SS-Untersturmführer* von Thermann. The inspection members will fly from Berlin's Tempelhof Airport to Gleiwitz. They will tour the Camp and then leave for Breslau, to attend the 42nd birthday celebrations of *SS-Gruppenführer* Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski. Himmler and his entourage will stay overnight in the Hotel Monopol, in Kattowitz.

Heinrich Himmler, the *SS-Reichsführer*, carried out his first inspection tour of Auschwitz, on March 1, 1941. Himmler and his group

²⁶ Jozef Garlinski, *Fighting Auschwitz*, Fontana Collins 1975, pp. 53-54.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

were accompanied by the *Gauleiter* and Governor of Upper Silesia, Fritz Bracht, the Higher SS and Police Leader in Breslau, *SS-Obergruppenführer* Ernst Schmauser, as well as *SS-Oberführer* Richard Glücks, who according to Rudolf Höss had arrived in Auschwitz, prior to Himmler's visit. Also present were leading representatives of the firm of I.G. Farben.

Following the comprehensive tour of the Camp Heinrich Himmler ordered Rudolf Höss to expand Auschwitz Concentration Camp in order to hold 30,000 prisoners. He also ordered the construction on the site of the village of Birkenau, a Camp to hold 100,000 Soviet Prisoners of War. He further instructed Höss to make available 10,000 prisoners for I.G. Farben for the construction of the industrial plant in Dwory near Auschwitz. Himmler was also keen to cultivate the development of agricultural projects and to expand the Camp workshops.²⁸

One rather unusual occurrence took place around Easter 1941 for one prisoner. Wladyslaw Bartoszewski, a Polish political prisoner was in the hospital Block 20, when two SS men approached him and told him to get out. Then having passed a cursory medical he was about to be released from captivity, he was taken to the Camp chancellery where the clothes he was wearing when he entered the Camp, were returned to him. Wladyslaw takes up the story:

They didn't give me back my golden cross, they kept that as a souvenir. I had to sign a form that he had no complaints about his stay in the Camp. Together with three other Poles who were released that day, Wladyslaw Bartoszewski was escorted by a German guard to Auschwitz railway station and put on a train. As the train pulled away he felt keenly 'those first minutes of freedom.' Ahead of him lay a lengthy journey home, back to his mother in Warsaw.²⁹

On Holy Saturday, April 12, 1941, the evacuation of the villages of Babitz, Birkenau, Broschowitz, Budy, Harmense, and Rajsko was

²⁸ Danuta Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle*, Henry Holt and Company, New York 1990, pp. 50–51.

²⁹ Laurence Rees, *Auschwitz—The Nazis and the Final Solution*, BBC Books, London 2005, pp.46–47.

completed. This operation took five days to complete, and no warning was given to the residents, and they were robbed of their possessions and property. Thus the Auschwitz Concentration Camp had taken over the area between the Sola and Vistula rivers.³⁰

Rudolf Höss and Karl Fritzsich selected 10 prisoners from Block 2 as hostages and condemned them to death by starvation, in retaliation for the escape of a prisoner from the Camp. Among those selected were the Polish political prisoners:

Marian Batko (11795)
Wincenty Rejowski (3301)
Antoni Suliga (7883)
Stefan Otulak (7904)
Tadeusz Kustra (12906)
Jan Scheffler (11860)
Franciszek Bobla (1075)
Stanislaw Opasiak (9638)
Adam Giermakowski (12889)
Jozef Nocko (12929)

All of the above were locked up together in a cell in the cellar of Block 11, where they were given nothing to eat or drink. The cell was opened a few days later and Marian Batko, originally from Kraków, was the first to die on April 27, 1941; the rest of those incarcerated died by May 26, 1941.³¹

Father Maksymilian Rajmund Kolbe arrived in Auschwitz on May 29, 1941. He was arrested in the Franciscan monastery in Niepokalanów and was incarcerated in the Pawiak prison in Warsaw on February 17, 1941, along with other monks from that order. Transported to Auschwitz, he was given prisoner number 16670.³²

On June 17, 1941, Rudolf Höss selected another ten prisoners from Block 2 and condemns them to starve to death in retaliation for the escape of Antoni Jedlinski. Those condemned are as follows:

Boleslaw Pinski (16761)

³⁰ Danuta Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle*, Henry Holt and Company, New York 1990, p.58.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 65.

Aleksander Paszkowski (13953)
Roman Orzel (12922)
Wasył Fediuszko (7354)
Witales Loposki (9608)
Wojciech Szczepanek (13939)
Franciszek Juszczyk (12322)
Antoni Grzesiak (11858)
Stanisław Wysocki (13220)
Jan Pajor (11852)

The above mentioned prisoners starved to death between June 19, 1941 and June 27, 1941, in the bunker of Block 11.³³

Commandant Rudolf Höss, once again on June 24, 1941, selected another ten hostages from among the prisoners in Block 2, in retaliation for another prisoner's escape. He condemned them to starve to death in the bunker of Block 11. The names of the Polish prisoners were :

Albert Bies (14033)
Piotr Prozorowski (12195)
Marcin Domino (14440)
Włodzimierz Krat (8749)
Władysław Głab (14243)
Stanisław Markiewicz (12116)
Marian Sosniczka (16626)
Stanisław Ungier (12959)
Roman Hejduk (17207)
Feliks Krolik (16741)

Six days later on June 30, 1941, the bunker cell was opened and their deaths were confirmed.³⁴

On July 3, 1941, 80 Polish political prisoners were sent to Auschwitz by the *SİPO* and *SD* in Kraków and they were executed in the gravel pits near the theatre building. Among those executed were

³³ Ibid., p. 67.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 69.

some unwell prisoners from Block 15. Also included in those murdered were the former Mayor of Kraków, Dr. Boleslaw Czuchajowski (17365) and Karol Karwat (17349).³⁵

A few hundred Russian Prisoners of War were incarcerated in Block 11, on July 18, 1941. They were put to work excavating sand in the gravel pit, behind the Camp kitchen, next to the SS Block Leaders room. Within the space of a few days this entire group was murdered, either from gun shots from small-calibre weapons or the *Kapo's* killed them with blows from shovels or picks.³⁶

One of those who witnessed the murder of these Russian Prisoners of War was Jerzy Bielski. In Auschwitz he was given the Prisoner Number 243. He was a member of the first transport of Polish political prisoners that arrived in Auschwitz from Tarnów. He recalled what happened:

Prisoner *Kapo's* beat them mercilessly, kicked them, clubbed them, they would fall to the ground. It was a macabre scene. I have never in my life seen anything like it. Neither did I later on, even though I remained in the camp for a long time after. I saw an SS man, a junior officer walking around the gravel pit with a pistol in his hand, it was sadism. "You dogs, you damn Communists, you pieces of shit," horrible words like these. And from time to time he would direct the pistol downwards and shoot.³⁷

Karl Fritzsich selected 15 hostages on July 29, 1941, from among the prisoners in Block 14, in retaliation for an escape by a prisoner from the Camp. They were condemned to death by starvation in the bunker of Block 11. During this selection Father Maksymilian Rajmund Kolbe stepped out of the line of prisoners and asked Karl Fritzsich to take him instead of the prisoner Franciszek Gajowniczek (5659). The prisoners were incarcerated in Block 11.³⁸ Father Maksymilian

³⁵ Ibid., p. 70.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 74.

³⁷ *Auschwitz—The Nazis and the Final Solution* – BBC 2005.

³⁸ Danuta Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle*, Henry Holt and Company, New York 1990, p. 76.

Rajmund Kolbe, on August 14, 1941, was killed with a phenol injection by Hans Bock, the Block Senior in the prisoners infirmary.³⁹

On October 8/9, 1941, the construction of the Prisoner of War Camp in Birkenau was commenced. In retaliation for an escape on October 27, 1941, from Block 18a, ten hostages were selected from that block and they were condemned to death by starvation in the bunker of Block 11. The following were selected:

Henryk Kozlecki (11278)
Jan Skierniewski (21157)
Wladyslaw Maciag (20908)
Jozef Tomczak (21373)
Stanislaw Kocek (21173)
Stefan Kisniewicz (16189)
Zdislaw Witamborski (13882)
Franciszek Roller (21086)
Pawel Olszowka (21062)
Waclaw Kieszkowski (14634)

Six of the above men died from starvation between October 31, 1941 and November 10, 1941. Jan Skierniewski, Jozef Tomczak, and Franciszek Roller were shot on November 11, 1941. However, Henryk Kozlecki was released from the bunker into the Camp on October 29, 1941. This was the only instance of a prisoner condemned to death by starvation, being released from the bunker back into the Camp.⁴⁰

During October 1941, Polish prisoner Kazimierz Smolen witnessed the arrival of Soviet Prisoners of War in Auschwitz, and he later recalled:

It was already snowing—extraordinary to have snow in October—and the Soviet Prisoners of War were unloaded from trains about three kilometers from the Camp. They had to give all their clothes away and jump into barrels with disinfectant, and naked they went to Auschwitz Main Camp. Usually they were completely emaciated. Once at the main

³⁹ Ibid., p. 80.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 100.

Camp, the Soviet prisoners became the first inmates to have their prison numbers tattooed on their bodies.⁴¹

One of those Soviet Prisoners of War who arrived in Auschwitz during October 1941, was Pavel Stenkin, who had been captured by the Germans a mere two hours after the invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. He remembered his initial impressions of life in the Camp:

The average living time for a Soviet prisoner at Birkenau was two weeks. If you got something eatable, you must swallow it. Raw potato or not—it doesn't matter..... when it was time to get up in the morning, those who were alive moved, and around them would be two or three dead people it was death, death, death. Death at night, death in the morning, death in the afternoon. There was death all the time.⁴²

The Polish national holiday of November 11, 1941, saw mass executions in the courtyard of Block 11, against the 'Black Wall' or 'Wall of Death' take place. 151 inmates were shot by Roll Call Leader, Gerhard Palitzsch. The prisoners were killed by a shot to the base of the neck.⁴³

On November 20, 1941, Commandant Rudolf Höss ordered the cessation of cremating corpses in the crematorium in Auschwitz *Stammlager*. He ordered that the corpses of inmates and Russian Prisoners of War should henceforth be buried in the mass graves in Birkenau.⁴⁴

The poultry and fish farm begun in the spring on the site of the evacuated village of Harmense, where an outside *Kommando* had been working. It was one of the first sub-camps to be established on December 8, 1941. Fifty inmates were housed there. The Director of the farm was *SS-Unterscharführer*, Bernard Glaue. An angora rabbit

⁴¹ Laurence Rees, *Auschwitz—The Nazis and the Final Solution*, BBC Books, London 2005, p. 80.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 80–81.

⁴³ Danuta Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle*, Henry Holt and Company, New York 1990, p. 105.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

facility was also moved there. This was previously located in the vicinity of the Camp, in a storage area, between farm buildings.⁴⁵

On December 18, 1941, in Block 11, where the Penal Company was located, 11 Jewish prisoners died. They were:

Chaim Ackermann (22355)

Rubin Opel (22935)

Herbert Guttman (23618)

Isaak Oppel (24271)

Juda Gutwein (23618)

Anschel Rausen (24326)

Gerson Ring (24333)

Richard Spira (24441)

Stanislaw Borski (24508)

Moses Eichenstein (24531)

Olmer Rubin (24574)⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 114.

⁴⁶ Danuta Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle*, Henry Holt and Company, New York 1990, p. 118.

Chapter III

Selected SS Personnel

At the head of Auschwitz Concentration Camp stood the Camp Commandant, who was responsible for everything connected to the Camp, including the maintenance of security. The Camp Commandant was at the same time the Commander of the SS garrison and the head of the numerous SS economic enterprises.

The first Commandant of Auschwitz Concentration Camp was *SS-Obersturmbannführer* Rudolf Höss from May 4, 1940 until November 11, 1943, when he was transferred to the post of Head of the Office D-I in the *WVHA* in Oranienburg. He was succeeded by Arthur Liebehenschel on November 11, 1943. Liebehenschel only served as the Commandant for 6 months and he was replaced by *SS-Sturmbannführer* Richard Baer on May 11, 1944, who served as the Commandant until the Camp was liquidated in January 1945.

After the division of the Auschwitz Camp into three different camps, the Commandants of Birkenau (also known as Auschwitz II) were *SS-Sturmbannführer* Fritz Hartjenstein from November 22, 1943 until May 8, 1944, when *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Josef Kramer succeeded him. The Commandant of the sub-camp at Monowitz, also known as Auschwitz III was *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Heinrich Schwarz, who held this post until the Camp's liquidation in January 1945.

Rudolf Höss was supported by his Adjutant Josef Kramer, who transferred to Auschwitz from Mauthausen Concentration Camp in Austria. Kramer was captured by the British Army when they liberated Bergen-Belsen in April 1945. Kramer was known in the British press as 'The Beast of Belsen'.

The role of the First Camp Commander was held by Karl Fritzsche, who was transferred from Dachau Concentration Camp near Munich and the Second Camp Commander was Franz Xaver Maier, who was transferred to Auschwitz from the SS Death's Head Division.

The Director of Administration was Max Meyer who had previously served in the Concentration Camp Inspectorate, and the role

of Bursar was performed by Herbert Minkos, who had previously served in Buchenwald Concentration Camp in Weimar. Other posts such as Senior Food Clerk was undertaken by Willi Rieck who arrived in Auschwitz from Dachau Concentration Camp and Otto Reinicke was in charge of Housing Administration who previously had served in Flossenburg Concentration Camp.

Maximilian Grabner was the Director of the Auschwitz camp's Political Department, who had previously served in the *Kattowitz Gestapo*. One of the most notorious individuals in the Political Department was *SS-Scharführer* Friedrich Wilhelm Boger. Known and referred to as the 'Tiger of Auschwitz', he was in charge of escapes, and was feared for his brutal interrogations. He even invented a contraption for beating prisoners, called the 'Boger Swing'. Maximilian Grabner, the feared head of the Political Department was relieved of his post on December 1, 1943 and replaced by Hans Schurz. Another member of the Political Department was the young Hans Stark, who was in charge of registrations, and who was given leave from Auschwitz to sit school exams.

The direct management of the Auschwitz Concentration Camp, responsible for such matters as accommodation, food and clothing for the prisoners, the prisoners work and security and camp discipline, came under the responsibility of the *SS-Schutzhaftlagerführer*.

The first *SS-Schutzhaftlagerführer*, Karl Fritzsch, held the rank of *SS-Hauptsturmführer* and had several roll-call leaders to assist him, as well as Block Leaders. The most infamous roll-call leader was Gerhard Palitzsch, who arrived from Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp. Karl Fritzsch served in this post until the end of 1941, and it was Fritzsch who was responsible for carrying out the experimental gassings of Soviet Prisoners of War in a bunker in Block 11 during late August 1941. Fritzsch was succeeded in this post by *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Hans Aumeier, who held this post until August 18, 1943. Hans Aumeier was replaced by *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Heinrich Schwarz, up to November 1943 when he was replaced by *SS-Obersturmführer* Franz Johann Hofmann. Hofmann held this post

until June 1944, when *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Franz Hössler carried out the same role up to the liquidation of the Camp.

The chief *Lagerführer* of the men's Camp in Birkenau was *SS-Obersturmführer* Johann Schwarzhuber and the Women's Camp was under the supervision of Franz Hössler. In the women's Camp in Birkenau, the function of chief Supervisor was held by Johanna Langefeld during the period March 26, 1942 until October 8, 1942. She was then succeeded by Marie Mandel, who retained this post until November 1944, when she was replaced by Elisabeth Volkenrath, who performed this role until the Camp was liquidated in January 1945. One of the most infamous female guards was Irma Grese, who was well-known for her cruelty to the women inmates. Grese was captured by the British Forces at Belsen Concentration Camp and was tried and executed in Hamelin prison on December 13, 1945.

One of the most notorious members of the guard personnel, mentioned above, was Gerhard Palitzsch who held the rank of *SS-Hauptscharführer* and he performed the role of *Rapportführer* (Roll Call Leader). He was generally regarded as the most brutal and cruel member of the *SS* Garrison. He carried out thousands of executions at the 'Black Wall' in the courtyard of Block II. Palitzsch boasted that he was responsible for the deaths of 25,000 people, which has never been substantiated. His name is forever part of the bloody history of Auschwitz. He was eventually transferred to a sub-camp at Brno, but then arrested by the *SS*, and subjected to disciplinary proceedings. He was sent to the front and was apparently killed in action near Budapest during December 1944.

Another member of the *SS* Garrison who deserves special mention is *SS-Hauptscharführer* Otto Moll, who was in charge of the penal company and later in charge of the Jewish *Sonderkommando* that cremated corpses near the Bunkers I and II in Birkenau. After managing the Gleiwitz sub-camp, he was recalled by Rudolf Höss to manage the crematoria in May 1944, when the mass deportation of Hungarian Jews took place. A number of prisoners accounts all present a picture of him as one of the Third Reich's most brutal and cruel murderers. He submitted a plan, as the Red Army drew near

to liquidate the Camp by bombing, in what became known as the 'Moll Plan'. He was tried by the Allies after the War, at the trial of the SS Garrison at Dachau, where he was found guilty of War Crimes and executed on May 28, 1946.

Among the most well known members of the SS personnel in Auschwitz within the medical profession, was Dr. Josef Mengele, who arrived at the Camp on May 30, 1943. Dr. Mengele was not only responsible for sending thousands of individuals to their deaths after being selected at the unloading ramps, he also carried out pseudo-scientific research on twins and dwarfs, killing many of them in the name of medical research.

The *SS-Standortarzt* was responsible for the health and well-being of the SS garrison and providing health care for the prisoners, throughout the Auschwitz Camp complex. The SS garrison doctor was in charge of the medical officers of the SS detachments, the Camp doctors, the SS dentists and the Camp pharmacist. The garrison doctors were *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Dr. Max Popiersch from the start of the Camp, until September 1941. He was replaced by *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Siegfried Schwela, who died on May 10, 1942 from typhus. He was in turn replaced by Dr. Franz Bodmann, who was the Women's Camp doctor in Auschwitz.

On August 17, 1942, Dr. Kurt Uhlenbrock took over the position of SS Garrison Doctor, but like Schwela he contracted typhus and was replaced on September 6, 1942 by *SS Obersturmbannführer* Dr. Eduard Wirths, who retained this post until January 18, 1945.

A number of other medical professionals featured heavily in the history of Auschwitz Concentration Camp, such as Professor Carl Clauberg, who was a Professor in gynecology at the University of Königsberg. He arrived in Auschwitz in April 1943 and carried out mass sterilization experiments in Block 10. Another, was Dr. Johann Kremer, who went to Auschwitz during August 1942, to carry out research on hunger. Kremer kept a journal of his time in Auschwitz, where he conducted selections for the gas chambers.

Dr. Horst Schumann, who was involved in the T4 euthanasia programme, went to Auschwitz on July 28, 1941 and selected 575 prisoners to be taken to the T4 Institute at Sonnenstein-Pirna to be

gassed. In November 1942, he returned to Auschwitz to carry out mass sterilization experiments on men and women using x-rays.

One of the most feared *SS* members of the medical staff was Josef Klehr, who was the Head Medical Officer in the prisoner's infirmary in the main Camp. He participated in the killing of prisoners with phenol injections into the heart, in Block 20.

Whilst there will be a detailed section on the biographies of the most important figures in the Camp's personnel, it must be recognised that circa 8,000 *SS* male and *SS* female personnel served at Auschwitz throughout its five year existence. The vast majority of these held German citizenship, the so-called *Reichsdeutsche*, whilst others were ethnic Germans, the so-called *Volksdeutsche*.

Chapter IV

Auschwitz I

Mass Murder By Gassing 1941–1942

On July 28, 1941, a special medical commission arrived at Auschwitz in order to carry out a selection of prisoners within the framework of the 'Euthanasia Programme,' run by Viktor Brack. This secret organization was based at the address of *Tiergartenstraße 4*, in Berlin, and was responsible for the programme that carried out euthanasia of the mentally ill, chronically sick, and the so-called asocials within the Third Reich. This was until Adolf Hitler brought the programme to a close in 1941. This programme was extended to include Concentration Camps, and this committee inspected all invalids, and the chronically ill, who were selected by the Camp administration under the pretext of transferring them to another Camp, supposedly with better working conditions.

One of the doctors of this special medical commission was Dr. Horst Schumann, who was the Director of the Grafeneck Euthanasia Institute in Württemberg and then he performed a similar role in the T4 Institute at Pirna / Sonnenstein, near Dresden. Dr. Schumann was later to return to Auschwitz to carry out sterilization experiments on both male and female prisoners.

Most of the prisoners selected by this commission came from Block 15, the convalescent block, where sick and exhausted prisoners and those incapable of working were sent when an SS doctor no longer wanted them to remain in the prisoners' infirmary. Some of the prisoners registered voluntarily, because there was a rumor circulating in the Camp that the inmates selected for this transport were to be relocated to a sanatorium.

A total of 573 inmates, most of them Poles were selected, and at the last moment two German *Kapos* were added to the transport: Johann Siegruth, Prisoner Number 26, the one-armed Head *Kapo* of the lumber yard, and Ernst Krankemann, Prisoner Number 3210, the Block Senior of Block 11 and *Kapo* in the road construction labor

camp. Following Dr. Schumann's orders, the transport was sent to *Schloss Sonnenstein*, a castle near Pirna, under the watchful eye of Roll Call Leader Franz Hössler. On his return, Franz Hössler reported to Rudolf Höss, that the prisoners were gassed in a bathroom, where carbon monoxide gas was introduced through the shower-heads. Also Franz Hössler claimed that during the transport to Sonnenstein that Krankemann was murdered and that Siegruth committed suicide.⁴⁷

Whilst Rudolf Höss attended a conference in Berlin to discuss the Jewish Question at the end of August 1941, *SS Hauptsturmführer* Karl Fritzsch used the gassing agent *Zyklon B*, to murder Russian Prisoners of War in the basement of Block 11. Wiesław Kielar, in his book *Anus Mundi* described the scene:

Outside Block II Palitzsch was waiting for us. It was getting dark. The heavy wooden door of the penal company opened. We pushed the trucks into the yard and turned them around, facing the gate. Waiting in the yard was the entire *SS* retinue with *Lagerführer* Fritzsch and Camp Doctor Entress at the head. We stood expectantly while the *SS* men conferred for a time, after which they summoned Gienek.

They were handed gas masks. Palitzsch and several *Blockführers* also put on their gas masks. Together they approached the entrance to the block cellars. They stayed down there for rather a long time.....Palitzsch was the first to reappear, behind him the rest of the *SS* men. They had taken off their gas masks, which meant the gas was already diffusing. After a while Obojski and Teofil returned as well.

Wiesław Kielar described what happened next:

Now we were divided into groups, each with its own special task. Some went down into the bunkers in order to fetch the corpses out of the cells, others carried them up the stairs where yet another group of nursing orderlies undressed them. The rest were ordered to haul the naked corpses a little farther into the yard, ready for loading onto the waiting trucks.....

⁴⁷ Danuta Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle*, Henry Holt and Company, New York 1990, p. 75.

Downstairs it was stifling and reeked of dead bodies. All the cells were open, and in them we saw corpses of the gassed, crowded together and standing up. It was a little less crowded where the sick had been. A few corpses lay in a heap directly behind the door. We began with them. It was difficult to pry apart the bodies that were clinging together. One by one we dragged them into the corridor, from where the others carried them up the stairs.

The deeper we penetrated into the cells, the harder it became to fetch out the corpses. Pressed together in the small cells, they stood, although they were dead, with the same countenance they had had, presumably, two days earlier. Their faces were blue, almost purplish. Wide open eyes threatened to pop out of their sockets; their tongues protruded between their open lips; their bared teeth gave an eerie appearance to their faces.

The nightmare went on:

To begin with, two of us carried one corpse. As a result there was confusion on the narrow stairs, people getting in each other's way. We made only slow progress, we began to work singly. Instead of carrying the corpses, we dragged them behind us by a hand or foot. Now our work progressed much faster and more smoothly. The whole bunker was disinfected with chlorine, which made our labors easier still. True, the strong smell of chlorine made one's eyes smart, but at least it reduced the stench of the putrefying corpses. The greatest problem was getting the bodies up the stairs. Their heavy heads bumped against each step with a dull thud; their limp extremities caught on protruding steps and thresholds. Upstairs, in the corridor next to the washroom, we flung the bodies on the floor, here other prisoners undressed them while we turned back to fetch another load. Before very long I discovered that the air up there was considerably better, moreover the work of undressing seemed to be less arduous.

Therefore, having dragged out another corpse, I began to undress it. However, it turned out that taking garments off limp and distended bodies was not at all easier than transporting them; but at least there was a little more fresh air here, and it was somewhat cooler. Out of pockets fell money, notes, letters, photographs, several bits and pieces, keepsakes and cigarettes; in other words, the sort of things one was allowed to keep in a prison camp. All these belongings now lay on the floor, mingled with excrement and wet chlorine, forming a veritable rubbish heap. From time to time, one of the SS men would rummage with his boot in this junk, which had been the prisoners' most cherished keepsakes. Whenever an SS man discovered something valuable he

would pick it up in mock-disgust, play about with it for a bit, and when he fancied himself unobserved, quickly slip it into his pocket. All we helped ourselves to were belts, which we needed for work and which anyway, we had official permission to take.

The plunder of the dead continued:

The naked corpses, once they had been dragged across the steps out into the yard, had to undergo a special treatment. Closely supervised by SS men, dentists peered into the mouth of every corpse. When they found gold crowns, gold teeth or other gold work, they pulled them out with forceps. It didn't take long for a small wooden box to be filled, to the undisguised satisfaction of the SS.

One of the *Blockführers* was struggling with the hand of a huge prisoner in an attempt to remove a wide wedding ring from his finger. The German was so drunk that he could not manage it. He stood there, cursing obscenely and looking around helplessly. Suddenly he noticed a shovel by the wall, which someone had forgotten to take away. Here was the solution to his problem. With one blow he chopped all five fingers off the blue hand. The wedding ring rolled along the floor. With a coarse laugh he picked it up and dropped it virtuously into the box, not without first having kicked the hacked-off stumps in the direction of the corpses. These mutilated fingers made a far more harrowing impression on me than dozens of dead bodies being loaded on platforms.⁴⁸

Once the method of gassing had been determined, the Camp administration needed to find a suitable building to carry out the exterminations. The Camp authorities had installed a crematorium in an old ammunition depot, and in June 1940, August Schlachter, the head of the construction office in the Camp, an architect from Biberbach, obtained an advanced double-muffle, coke-heated furnace from J. A. Töpf and Sons, for RM 9,000.⁴⁹

On September 16, 1941, another trial gassing took place and 900 Soviet Prisoners of War were gassed in the morgue of the old crematorium, as recalled by Rudolf Höss in his memoirs:

⁴⁸ Wiesław Kielar, *Anus Mundi*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, England 1980, pp. 62–65.

⁴⁹ Robert Jan van Pelt and Deborah Dwork, *Auschwitz 1270 To the Present*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 1996, pp. 176–177.

I have a clearer recollection of the gassing of nine hundred Russians which took place shortly afterwards in the old crematorium, since the use of Block II for this purpose caused too much trouble. While the transport was detraining, holes were pierced in the earth and concrete ceiling of the mortuary. The Russians were ordered to undress in an anteroom; they then quietly entered the mortuary, for they had been told they were to be deloused. The whole transport exactly filled the mortuary to capacity. The doors were then sealed and the gas shaken down through the holes in the roof. I do not know how long this killing took. For a little while a humming sound could be heard. When the powder was thrown in there were cries of "Gas," then a great bellowing, and the trapped prisoners hurled themselves against both the doors. But the doors held. They were opened several hours later, so that the place might be aired. It was then that I saw, for the first time, gassed bodies in the mass. The killing of these Russian prisoners of war did not cause me much concern at the time. The order had been given, and I had to carry it out. I must even admit that this gassing set my mind at rest, for the mass extermination of the Jews was to start soon and at that time neither Eichmann nor I were certain how these mass killings were to be carried out.⁵⁰

SS-Unterscharführer Pery Broad provided a description of the crematorium:

The old Auschwitz crematorium stood at a distance of approximately 100 meters from the Camp. It was said to have originally been a storehouse for turnips. The stone building was surrounded on three sides by earthen embankments on which grass, young trees and beautiful flowers were planted. A level concrete block served as its roof. The area in front of the crematorium was closed in by a high wall with two large gates, the entrance and the exit. Thus when wagons loaded with corpses, brought from the mortuary of Block 28, arrived of an evening to be unloaded, the whole place was hidden from the eyes of unwanted onlookers. A stranger would not so easily have guessed that the rectangular mound planted with many coloured flowers, was in reality the crematorium—unless he noticed the thick metal pipe bent at right angles, which projected from the roof and emitted a monotonous humming. But even then he would hardly know that this was the ventilation pipe, which made the air in the mortuary at least a little more bearable.

⁵⁰ *KL Auschwitz Seen by the SS*, Panstwowe Muzeum W Oswiecimiu 1978, pp. 93–94.