Leading education and social research
Institute of Education
University of London

Centre for
Holocaust Education

Being Human?

Perpetrators, Collaborators, Bystanders and Rescuers

Teachers' notes

Preparation:

- Print the headers on white A4 paper and laminate. Print the case studies on white A3 paper and laminate
- The case study cards give more detailed contextual information for each of the personal stories in this lesson activity
- Please refer to the accompanying lesson plan and pedagogical guidance

Perpetrators

Collaborators

Bystanders

Rescuers & Resisters

Hans Biebow

Photo: Hans Biebow, the head of the German administration of the Lodz ghetto, inspects ties made by Jewish people forced to work in the ghetto factories.

Credit: USHMM, courtesy of Peter Feigl

Hans Biebow was a wealthy businessman from Bremen in Germany. He made his money buying and selling coffee.

In May 1940 Biebow was put in charge of the Jewish people of the Lodz ghetto. He saw a chance to make money and argued against those who wanted to starve the Jewish people to death. Biebow said it would be better to put them to work. He used Jewish men, women and children in the textile factories of Lodz, making uniforms for the German army and other goods that were sold to Berlin.

Still, only those who could work were fed. Thousands starved or died of disease. Biebow made huge amounts of money for himself and local Nazi leaders.

By the spring of 1942, the Nazi leadership had decided to kill all Jewish people wherever they could reach them. Biebow helped in this mass murder. He organised for elderly people, those too ill to work, and children under ten years old to be sent from Lodz to the Chelmno death camp.

Biebow stayed in close contact with the commander at Chelmno, making sure that the clothes and valuables of the Jewish people sent there from Lodz were returned to him.

Biebow still wanted to make money from Jewish people, so personally chose the healthiest from the surrounding villages to work in his factories. Meanwhile their loved ones were murdered in the gas vans at Chelmno.

In 1944, as the war neared its end and Germany's defeat was certain, the Lodz ghetto was closed down. The remaining Jews were sent to the gas chambers. Biebow worried that he would be put into the army, so he set up two new factories inside Germany that would be important for the war effort, using more than 1,000 of his Jewish workers from Lodz.

Biebow hoped that protecting these Jewish people would save him from punishment for his crimes after the war. Most of those Jewish people that Biebow kept from the gas chambers survived the war.

Rene Bousquet

Photo: Rene Bousquet, in January 1943, pictured on the right of the photo, wearing a fur coat, smiling and holding a cigarette.

Credit: Bundesarchiv, Bild

Rene Bousquet was a man of great personal courage – he and a friend became heroes when, in 1930, they saved dozens of people from drowning in floods in south western France. Bousquet was no Nazi, coming from a left wing, socialist family, but after the invasion of France by Hitler's Germany, he agreed to work with the Nazi authorities.

Bousquet was made Chief of the French police in the spring of 1942. He made deals with the SS so the French police would not be interfered with, agreeing to rounding up Communists and members of the French resistance and handing them over to the Nazis.

Although Bousquet did not hate Jewish people, he ordered his police force to round up thousands of foreign-born Jewish men, women and children and hand them over to the Nazis.

In July 1942, in just two days, at least 12,000 Jews were arrested and put into the Velodrome sports stadium in Paris. From there they were sent to Drancy camp, just outside Paris, and then on trains to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

At first, the French agreed only to the deportation of Jewish adults. This led to families being torn apart by the French police as they forcibly separated parents from their children. Later, Bousquet ordered Jewish children were to be deported also. In all, some 77,000 Jewish people living in French territories were killed during the Holocaust.

Otto Weidt

Photo: Otto Weidt (left) with Alice Licht and salesman Gustav Kremmert in Weidt's office at his Berlin workshop, 1941.

Otto Weidt was born into a German working class family. He grew up disliking how governments controlled people's lives, and as a pacifist was against war and violence.

Otto's father taught him how to hang wallpaper and he became a decorator, but when he started to lose his sight Otto had to give up this work. He then opened a workshop in Berlin that made brushes and brooms.

Most of the people who worked in Otto's workshop came from the Jewish Home for the Blind in Berlin. During the Second World War Otto realised his workers were in great danger. As he sold brushes to the German army, Otto managed to convince the Nazis he needed his skilled Jewish workers for important war work. At one point, when the Nazis did arrest several of his workers, Otto went personally to where they were being held and managed to get them released.

As deportations of Jewish people from Germany to the ghettos and camps in the East continued, Otto took a great risk by hiding a family of four in a small room at his workshop. The entrance to the room was hidden by a cupboard. Chaim and Machla Horn, with their children Max and Ruth, worked in Otto's workshop during the day and slept in this hidden room at night.

In October 1943 the Gestapo were told Otto was hiding Jews. They raided the workshop, discovered the Horn family, and deported most of Otto's 30 Jewish workers: first to Theresienstadt and then on to Auschwitz where nearly all were killed.

Alice Licht and her parents were among those deported. Alice threw a postcard out of the train window, telling Otto where they were headed. Otto went to Auschwitz and got a message to Alice saying he had rented a room for her with food and money. In January 1945, as prisoners were moved from the camp, Alice escaped and managed to reach the room that Otto had provided for her.

Le Chambon-sur-Lignon

Photo: The village of Le Chambon, in France. Most of the villagers helped to hide Jewish people from the Nazis and the French police. The date of the photo is uncertain.

Credit: USHMM

From the end of 1940, shortly after the Nazis invaded France, until their village was liberated by the Allies in September 1944, the people of Le Chambon and its neighbouring villages hid up to 3,500 Jewish people and perhaps 1,500 others who were on the run from the Nazis and their French collaborators.

Led by their Protestant church leader, André Trocmé and his wife Magda, the people of this village gave shelter in their homes, schools and farms. They made fake identity papers and ration cards for those in hiding and sometimes helped guide people across the border into Switzerland, which was outside of Nazi control.

The rescue is unusual in the history of the Holocaust as it involved most of the people across a whole region. The people in that region, a hilly area of southern France, had suffered persecution in the past, as they were a minority Protestant group in a largely Catholic land. This experience of being 'outsiders' might partly explain why these villagers acted the way they did. Andre Trocmé was a pacifist (he opposed all violence) and he spoke out against the French Vichy government that collaborated with the Nazis.

Trocmé also spoke out against antisemitism. Following a roundup of at least 12,000 Jewish people by French police over two days in Paris in July 1942, Trocmé said publicly 'the Christian Church must kneel down and ask God to forgive its present failings and cowardice'.

German police raids led to the discovery of five Jewish students in a secondary school. They were killed in Auschwitz. Trocmé and others were arrested by the authorities and eventually he himself had to go into hiding. His wife Magda took over the leadership of the rescue. Others in the village, including Trocmé's cousin and the village doctor, were killed for their involvement in the rescue. But no one turned away those who sought help, or betrayed those in hiding.

Albert Konrad Gemmeker

Photo: The Commandant of Westerbork, Albert Gemmeker, relaxing in his home at the camp with his secretary and lover, Elisabeth Helena Hassel-Mullender, and dog.

Credit: Yad Vashem

Gemmeker became commandant of Westerbork in October 1942. That same month, Leon Greenman arrived at the camp with his wife and child, Else and Barney.

Gemmeker was not a violent man. He rarely shouted at the prisoners or gave out harsh punishments. Conditions in Westerbork were better than many other camps, although the water supply was bad and the washing and toilet facilities were poor.

There was a camp hospital and an orphanage for the Jewish children who arrived at the camp without their parents. Gemmeker encouraged sports activities, music and dance. Some survivors of the camp remember Gemmeker as a gentleman, who smiled and even joked with the performers in the camp's musical performances. At the end of 1942, Gemmeker arranged a social evening.

Although unknown to the inmates, this was to celebrate the 40,000th Jewish person to be deported to the East.

Gemmeker was no sadist, but he made sure the trains regularly left Westerbork for Auschwitz crowded with Jewish men, women and children. As the lists of those to be deported were read out in the camp barracks, the air would be filled with the cries of children, the screams of mothers, and the grief of those who would be separated from their loved ones.

In January 1943, one of these trains carried Leon, Else and two year old Barney Greenman. In all, about 100,000 Jewish people were deported from Westerbork to the death camps of Auschwitz-Birkenau and Sobibor or to the ghetto of Theresienstadt. More than 95% of them were killed.

Adolf Hitler

Photo: Adolf Hitler with Helga Goebbels, the daughter of Hitler's Minister of Propaganda, Josef Goebbels, about 1935.

Credit: USHMM, courtesy of Richard Freimark

From his earliest writings to his very last, Adolf Hitler's obsession with Jewish people shaped how he saw the world.

He ignored how Jewish men, women and children lived ordinary, peaceful lives across the world; that German Jews fought for Germany in the First World War; and the fact Jewish people made great contributions to science, music, and the arts. For Hitler, the Jewish people were the cause of all the world's problems and the enemy of the German people.

In a letter of 16 September 1919, Hitler wrote that Jewish people were a 'non-German, alien race'. This Jewish 'race', Hitler said, cared only about 'money and power', a 'lust for gold and domination'. Hitler compared Jews to a disease that caused problems for the rest of the world; 'a racial tuberculosis of the nations'.

In January 1939 Hitler warned if there were to be another world war, he would blame the Jewish people. He promised the result would be 'the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe.'

At 4 o'clock on 29 April 1945, as the Third Reich crumbled around him and shortly before he killed himself in a Berlin bunker, Hitler wrote My Political Testament. In this final document, Hitler still blamed the Jewish people for the war he himself had started: '...those who carry the real guilt for this murderous struggle, this people will also be held responsible: the Jews!'

Hitler's hatred for the Jewish people never left him. No other group obsessed him in this way. Even at the end he wrote:

'...before everything else I call upon the leadership of the nation and those who follow it to observe the racial laws most carefully, to fight mercilessly against the poisoners of all the peoples of the world, international Jewry.'

Irene Sendler

Photo: Irene Sendler , a 29 year old social worker living in Warsaw when Nazi Germany invaded Poland in September 1939.

Credit: Yad Vashem

The Nazis crowded hundreds of thousands of Jewish people into the few streets of the Warsaw ghetto, walled off from the outside world. Conditions inside the ghetto were appalling. With seven people living in each room and hardly any food, disease and hunger led to the deaths of thousands. Irene Sendler managed to get permission to enter the ghetto to inspect the conditions. Once inside, at great personal risk, she arranged to smuggle Jewish people out of the ghetto and into hiding.

Sendler joined Zegota, the secret Polish organisation set up to rescue Jewish people, and was put in charge of saving Jewish children. Sendler smuggled the children out of the ghetto in toolboxes, potato sacks and suitcases and arranged for them to be hidden with Polish families, in Catholic orphanages, and at homes for abandoned children.

Sendler promised the parents of these children that after the war she would return them to surviving Jewish relatives. Many of the children were so young that they would not be able to remember their real families. So, in order to keep track of the hundreds of children that she placed in hiding, Sendler listed their real names and identities and buried these precious documents in jars.

In October 1943, Sendler was arrested by the Nazis, tortured and sentenced to death. Despite having her legs and feet broken, she refused to tell the Nazis the names of other members of Zegota or where the children were hidden. The Polish resistance bribed her guards and helped her to escape from prison. Sendler went into hiding but still continued to help the Jewish children.

After the war, Irene Sendler dug up the jars containing the names of 2,500 children that she had saved, found them, and tried to return them to their families. Almost all of their parents and other relatives had been murdered in the gas chambers of Treblinka or had died in the ghetto.

Anton Slupetzky

Photo: The gas chamber at Mauthausen,16 July 1945, after the liberation of the camp.

Credit: USHMM, courtesy of Benjamin Lefkowitz.

The gas chamber at Mauthausen (built by the spring of 1942) was a square room in a cellar, about four metres long by four metres wide.

In order to keep the victims calm, the gas chamber was disguised as a shower room. Parts of the walls were covered with ceramic tiles. Water pipes and shower heads were fixed to the ceiling.

Up to 80 people at a time could be crowded inside the gas chamber. Then, once its two doors had been sealed airtight, SS men in a small adjoining room put Zyklon B gas into the chamber through a slit in the wall.

Anton Slupetzky was the owner of a pest control business in Linz, selling disinfectants and poisons. He was asked to sell canisters of Zyklon B gas to Mauthausen camp to disinfect clothes and bedding, killing the lice that spread in the dirty, overcrowded conditions in the camp. Slupetzky personally advised the SS on its safe use in the disinfection of the barracks.

Later, Slupetzky was present at the gassing of camp inmates in Mauthausen and its subcamp, Gusen. In full knowledge that it was now being used to murder human beings, Slupetzky continued to sell gas canisters of Zyklon B to the camps.

Arthur Greiser

Photo: Arthur Greiser, the official in charge of the western area of occupied Poland (the Warthegau) that the Nazis had made a part of Greater Germany.

Credit: National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Md.

In the autumn of 1941 Arthur Greiser, told Himmler the Jewish ghetto in Lodz was becoming too overcrowded, especially as more Jews and Roma were sent there from Germany and from nearby Polish towns.

Greiser asked for permission to murder the Jewish people in this region. Himmler agreed and the first Nazi death camp was built soon after at Chelmno, not far from Lodz. The first murders at Chelmno began on 8 December 1941.

At least 150,000 people, mostly Jews but also 5000 Roma and a number of Czechs and Poles, were murdered in gas vans at Chelmno death camp.

Buying the possessions of deported Jewish families

Photo: An auction selling the property of Jewish people deported from the German town of Hanau.

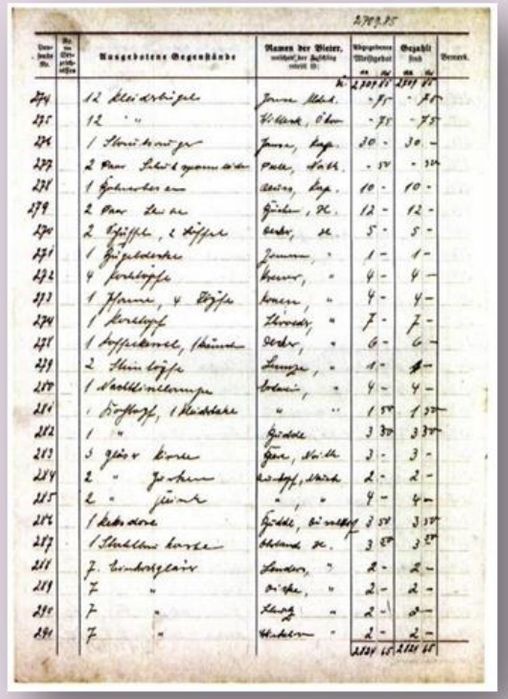
Credit: Author unknown

Jewish people were only allowed to take a few belongings from them when they were forced from their homes and deported to 'the East'. Their neighbours were then given the chance to buy at a cheap price the property and possessions that had been left behind.

In February 1942 Karl Winter, his daughter Elise, and son-in-law Friedrich Thiesebach were deported from the German town of Hemmerden.

Their neighbours then held an auction in their home to buy up the things left behind.

The document on the right shows the names of the highest bidders and the prices that were paid for the family's possessions.

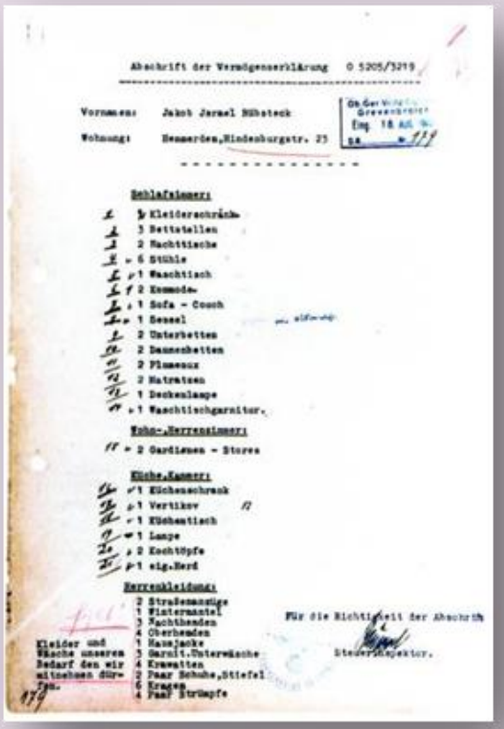


Jakob Rübsteck was deported from the town of Hemmerden, in August 1942. The form on the right lists all of his possessions, including his furniture, kitchen equipment, and shoes.

The local tax inspector, Joseph Krüppel has numbered the items that will be offered for sale at a public auction.

The historian David Bankier argues that by selling off Jewish people's property at cheap prices, the Nazis bought the support of many ordinary German people who gained from the anti-Jewish measures.

By benefiting from the persecution of their neighbours, huge numbers of people became part of the Nazis' crimes.


Abschrift der Vermögenserklärung O 5205/5219

Vorname: Jakob Jarael Rübsteck

Wohnung: Hemmerden, Hindenburgstr. 23

Schlafzimmer:
1 Kleiderschränke
3 Bettstellen
2 Nachttische
6 Stühle
1 Waschtisch
2 Kommoden
1 Sofa - Couch
1 Sessel
2 Unterbetten
2 Daunenbetten
2 Plumeaux
2 Matratzen
1 Deckenlampe
1 Waschtischgarnitur.

Herrenzimmer:
2 Gardinen - Stores

Küche-Kammer:
1 Küchenschrank
1 Vertikow
1 Küchentisch
1 Lampe
2 Kochtöpfe
1 elg. Herd

Herrenkleidung:
2 Straßenanzüge
1 Pistermantel
3 Nachthemden
4 Oberhemden
1 Kameljacke
3 Garnit. Unterwäsche
4 Krawatten
2 Paar Schuhe, Stiefel
6 Kragen
4 Paar Strümpfe

Kleider und Wäsche unseren Bedarf den wir mitnehmen dürfen.

Für die Richtigkeit der Abschrift

Steuerobersekretär.

Making money from Mauthausen

Photo: The roll call square inside Mauthausen concentration camp, looking toward the main gate. The buildings were built by local workmen. The photo was taken in 1945, after the liberation of the camp.

Credit: USHMM

The SS needed local people to help build and run the concentration camps. At Mauthausen, local carpenters were paid to build and fit out the barracks where prisoners slept.

Basic supplies were bought from local firms and shops, food from the nearby farms and from a store near the railway station. A local firm was paid to provide trucks and drivers for bringing in the necessary supplies. The camp staff enjoyed eating and drinking in nearby pubs and restaurants. SS families lived in the town, and local women took housekeeping jobs, tidying the SS homes.

Money was even to be made from the killing itself. At first the camp did not have its own crematorium, so prisoners who died at Mauthausen were taken to a public crematorium.

Photo: Prisoners at forced labour cutting stone in the Wiener Graben quarry at the Mauthausen concentration camp, 1941. Prisoners were not expected to survive more than a few months.

Credit: USHMM, courtesy of Archiv der KZ-Gedenkstaette Mauthausen

The Zyklon B gas pellets used in Mauthausen's gas chamber were bought from a small business in Linz that sold disinfectants.

The SS used camp inmates as slave labour, cutting granite from the rock quarries. Local stonemasons earned their living in these quarries, and watched over the inmates who were worked to death alongside them. Local businesses paid the SS to use their slave labourers.

Others also found ways to make money from the inmates suffering in the camp. Valuables taken from the new arrivals, such as silver and gold watches, and even the gold teeth pulled from the mouths of the dead, were swapped by the starving camp inmates with local people for food.

A happy family man in Mauthausen

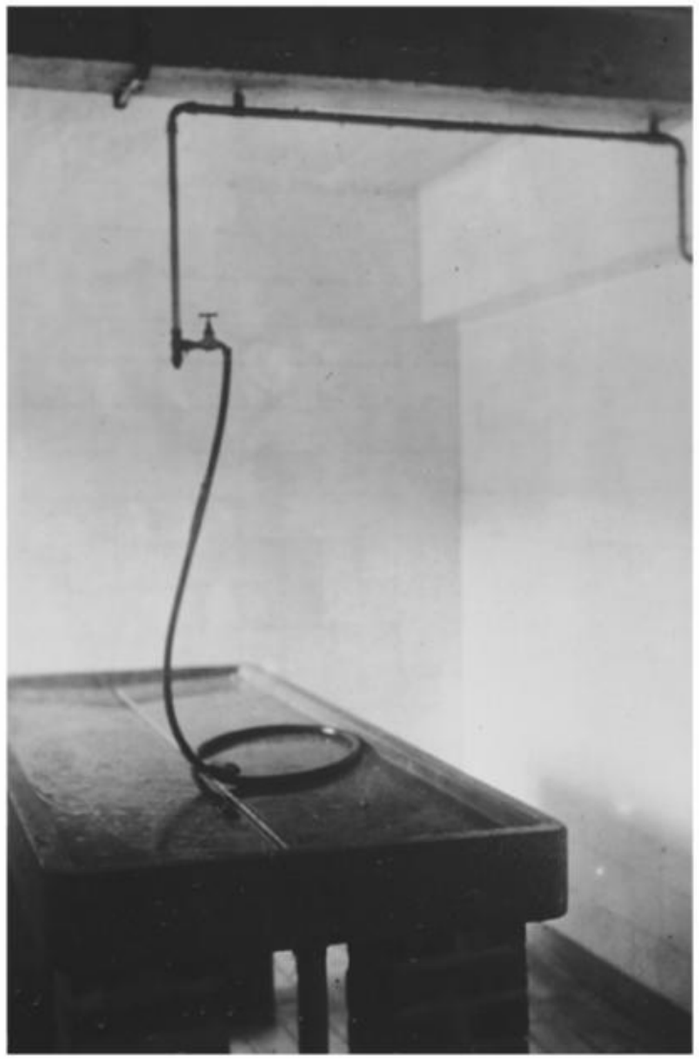


Photo: A medical table used for removing gold teeth from the mouths of the dead, at Mauthausen

Credit: National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Md.

Walther H. was a dentist who worked in the Mauthausen concentration camp. He was in charge of prising gold teeth from the mouths of those murdered in the gas chamber.

Piles of gold teeth were sent to Berlin to be melted down and sold. Women prisoner's hair was also cut off and sent to Berlin, to be turned into material and sold, or used to insulate German submarines.

Before the victims entered the gas chamber, they were 'examined' by SS men dressed as doctors, but the real purpose was to see which of them had gold teeth. Those with gold teeth were then marked, so that their bodies would be easy to find among the corpses after the gassing.

These bodies were then laid out on the medical table shown in the photograph above, and their gold teeth was forced from their mouths.

This photograph was taken after the liberation of Mauthausen by American soldiers. The original caption reads: 'This is the chamber where they knocked out gold teeth, after they were gassed by SS men. Camp Mauthausen. July 16, 1945.'

After the war, the dentist Walther H. was put on trial for his part in the murders at Mauthausen. He was found guilty and sentenced to death. In June 1946, Walther's wife wrote the following, pleading for his life:

> "'He was always a devoted husband who valued his family above anything else and I love him with all my heart.' And she continued, 'The children are too small to beg for their father. I enclose a picture of the children in the hope that their innocent eyes will plead with you and save their father from death by hanging. Furthermore, I enclose a picture of my husband showing him as a happy family man. Please look at his eyes. You will see in them how good and unselfish he is and that he does not belong among the criminals of Mauthausen."
>
> **Letter cited in 'Places Very Far, Places Very Near' by Gordon J .Horwitz, in *The Holocaust: Origins, Implementation, Aftermath,* ed. Omer Bartov, pp.213-14**

Hartheim

Photo: Hartheim castle in Austria, date uncertain.

Credit: USHMM

> ‘When gassing was completed,’ says Horwitz, ‘local men assigned to the crematory carried out the heavy task of stacking and then disposing of the bodies in the oven they serviced.’
>
> **‘Places Very Far, Places Very Near’ by Gordon J. Horwitz, in *The Holocaust: Origins, Implementation, Aftermath*, ed. Omer Bartov, p.213**

From August 1941, inmates from Mauthausen and Dachau concentration camps who were too exhausted to work were driven to Castle Hartheim, near the Austrian city of Linz. There they were murdered in a gas chamber.

Hartheim was one of the killing centres used for killing German disabled people in the Nazis’ first mass murder programme, which began on Hitler’s order soon after the start of the Second World War.

When the German public found out about the killing of disabled people there were huge protests. Hitler ordered an end to the killing of the disabled, but the same gas chambers were then used to kill concentration camp inmates.

From the summer of 1941 until the spring of 1942, almost 3000 prisoners were taken from Mauthausen concentration camp and killed at Castle Hartheim. After that, Mauthausen had its own gas chamber.

What could the ordinary, local people possibly have known about these mass murders, which were supposed to be kept highly secret?

Historian Gordon J. Horwitz has pointed out it was local workmen who built the gas chambers, tiling the walls, fitting the pipes that would carry the gas, and fitting the airtight doors of the gas chamber. Local bus drivers drove people to their deaths at Hartheim and local nurses met the victims from the buses and led them to the gas chambers. Local women were the secretaries who wrote letters to the victims’ relatives, lying about the cause of their deaths. And local doctors were in charge of the whole mass killing.

Heinrich Himmler

Photo: Heinrich Himmler, Reichsführer of the SS, pictured here with his wife and daughter.

Credit: AKG, London

Apart from Adolf Hitler, Heinrich Himmler was the most powerful man in Nazi Germany by the time of the Second World War.

Himmler was Head of the SS and was in charge of the police, the concentration camps and the whole system of terror in Nazi Germany.

In October 1943, in a speech at the town hall in Poznan, Heinrich Himmler congratulated his SS officers on their role in 'the extermination of the Jewish people':

> "I am referring here to the evacuation of the Jews, the extermination of the Jewish people. This is one of the things that is easily said: 'The Jewish people are going to be exterminated,' that's what every Party member says, 'sure, it's in our programme, elimination of the Jews, extermination – it'll be done.'
>
> And then they all come along, the 80 million worthy Germans, and each one has his one decent Jew. Of course the others are swine, but this one, he is a first-rate Jew.
>
> Of all those who talk like that, not one has seen it happen, not one has had to go through with it. Most of you men know what it is like to see 100 corpses side by side, or 500, or 1000.
>
> To have stood fast through this and – except for cases of human weakness – to have stayed decent, that has made us hard. This is an unwritten and never-to-be-written page of glory in our history."

Himmler, H. (1943), quoted in Yitzhak Arad, Israel Gutman, Abraham Margaliot, (eds.) *Documents on the Holocaust*, p.344

Dr. Johann Paul Kremer

Photo: Dr. Johann Paul Kremer after the war.

Credit: Author unknown

Johann Paul Kremer was an SS doctor at Auschwitz-Birkenau for two and a half months, in the autumn of 1942. He decided which new arrivals would be gassed immediately, who would be worked to death in the concentration camp, and helped with the gassing of prisoners too exhausted to work any longer. We discover from Kremer's diary (see accompanying card) the horror he felt when he first arrived at Auschwitz. At his trial in Poland in 1947 he said more about the murder of inmates from the women's camp, which he'd written about in his diary on 5 September.

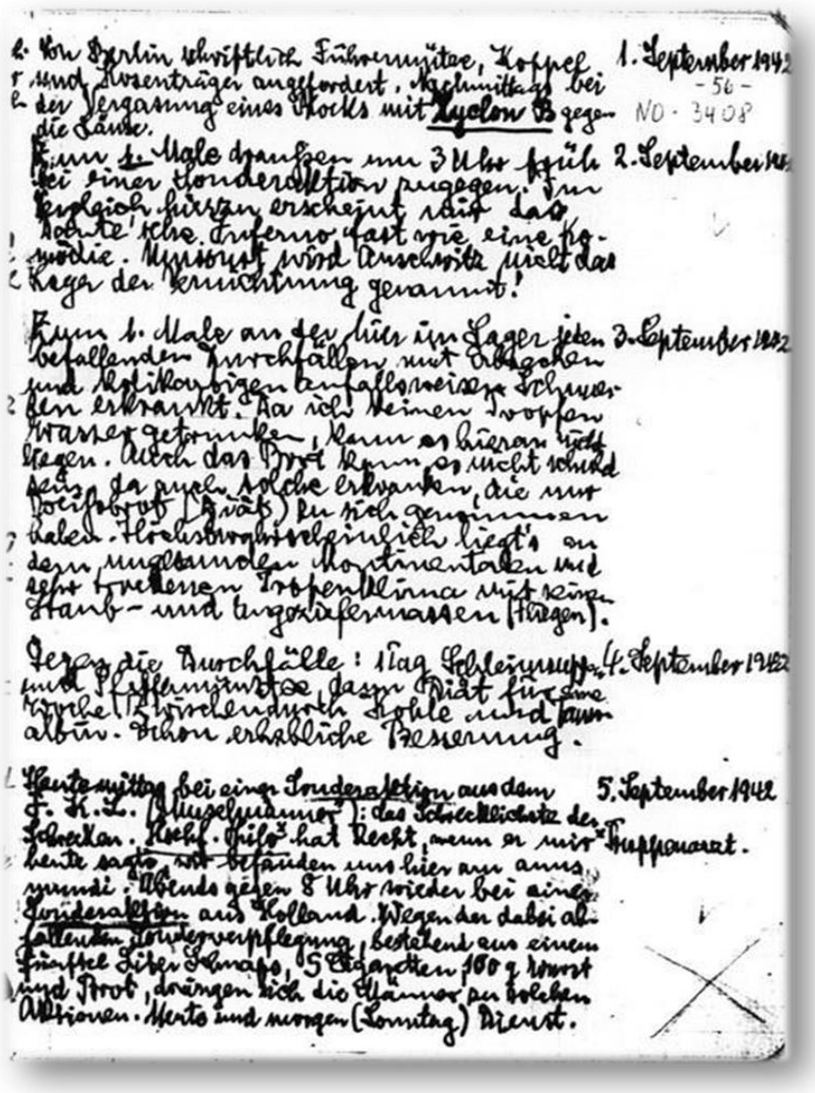
That same day, 981 Jews from Drancy camp, Paris, arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Sixteen men and 38 women were chosen to work inside the camp. The rest were all killed immediately in the gas chambers.

The next day Kremer described his Sunday dinner in detail. Just one week after coming to Auschwitz, his only mention of murdering nearly 1,000 human beings was that he had 'attended another special action outdoors'.

Was murder now just a part of his daily routine?

This is one of two cards on Johann Paul Kremer. See the accompanying card for excerpts of his diary.

Dr. Johann Paul Kremer's diary



1 Sept 42 'Have ordered SS officers' cap, sword-belt and braces from Berlin by letter. In the afternoon was present at the gassing of a block with Zyklon B against lice.

2 Sept 42 'Was present for the first time, at a special action at 3am. By comparison Dante's Inferno seems almost a comedy. Auschwitz is justly called an extermination camp!'

3 Sept 42 'Was for the first time taken ill with the diarrhoea which attacks everybody in the camp here. Vomiting and colic-like paroxysmal pains. Water did not cause it as I had not drunk any. Neither was it the bread. People who take white bread only (diet) also fall ill. Most probably it is the unhealthy continental climate, very dry and tropically hot, with clouds of dust and insects (flies).'

4 Sept 42 'Against diarrhoea – for one day gruel and mint tea, then on diet for a week. Took charcoal tablets and tannalbin. On the way to recovery.'

5 Sept 42 'At noon was present at a special action in the women's camp (Muselmänner) – the most horrible of all horrors. Thilo, military surgeon, was right when he said to me today that we are located in the anus mundi [anus of the world]. In the evening at about 8pm another special action with a draft from Holland. Men compete to take part in such actions as they get additional rations – a fifth of a litre vodka, five cigarettes, 100 grams of sausage and bread. Today and tomorrow (Sunday) on duty.'

6 September 1942

Today an excellent Sunday dinner: tomato soup, one half chicken with potatoes, and red cabbage (20 grams of fat), dessert and magnificent vanilla ice-cream. After dinner we welcomed the new garrison doctor, *Obersturmführer* Wirths from Waldbröl... It has been a week since I came to camp and still I have not been able to get rid of fleas in my room in spite of using all kinds of insecticides... In the evening at 8 o'clock attended another special action outdoors.

Translations of Kremer's diary entries and the official record of his post-war trial statements from *KL Auschwitz Seen by the SS*, (The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum), pp.161-4.

These extracts from Kremer's diary suggest he quickly got used to being involved in mass murder.

Max Taubner

Max Taubner was a junior officer in the SS, in charge of a small number of men in the Nazi-occupied lands of eastern Europe.

Taubner was not part of the Einsatzgruppen killing groups. He had not been ordered to kill Jewish people. But in their spare time, Taubner and his men hunted down and shot hundreds of Jewish men, women and children and buried them in mass graves.

Taubner and his men enjoyed the killing, and beat their victims to death with spades, clubs and whips.

Now and again, Taubner took a break from the killing to play the song, 'You are Crazy, My Child' on his accordion as his men continued the murders. He also took photographs of the killing and showed them to his wife and friends while home on leave.

On 24 May 1943 a Nazi SS and Police Supreme Court found Max Taubner guilty of a number of crimes. They recorded:

The accused shall not be punished because of the actions against the Jews as such. The Jews have to be exterminated and none of the Jews that were killed is any great loss…

Real hatred of the Jews was the driving motivation for the accused. In the process he let himself be drawn into committing cruel actions… which are unworthy of a German man and an SS officer… In so doing the accused gives rise to considerable concern.

The accused allowed his men to act with such vicious brutality that they conducted themselves under his command like a savage horde. The accused jeopardised the discipline of the men. It is hard to conceive of anything worse than this. Although the accused may have otherwise taken care of his men, by his conduct he however neglected his supervisory duty which, in the view of the SS, also means not allowing his men to become psychologically depraved. The accused is therefore to be punished under section 147 of the MStGB [Military Penal Code]…

By taking photographs of the incidents or having photographs taken, by having these developed in photographic shops and showing them to his wife and friends, the accused is guilty of disobedience. Such photographs could pose the gravest risks to the security of the Reich if they fell into the wrong hands… For this crime the accused is to be punished under section 92 of the MStGB…

Cited in *Those Were the Days*, edited by Ernst Klee, Willi Dressen, and Volker Riess, translated by Deborah Burnstone.

Police Battalion 101

Photo: Members of Police Battalion 101. The 500 German policemen from Hamburg who arrived in Józefów, a small Polish town, were not hard core Nazis. The majority were not even members of the Nazi Party, and only a few were members of the SS.

Credit: USHMM, courtesy of Michael O'Hara & Bernhardt Colberg

They were ordinary family men, most aged between 30 and 40 years old, who had been sent to German occupied-Poland. Far from home, they missed the wives and children they had left behind.

They had not been specially chosen or trained for the task they were about to be given, but when they arrived on the outskirts of Józefów in the early hours of a summer's morning in 1942 they were given an extraordinary order:

- To empty the Jewish ghetto
- To round up the old and the sick, the women, babies and children, force them from their homes and murder them all in the nearby woods
- To spare only the men thought fit enough for work in the slave labour camps.

Their commander, Major Trapp, knew this was a terrible order, and worried about the effect on his men. So he promised that any family man who could not face carrying out these murders could do other jobs instead. Trapp promised no one would be punished for not taking part in the killings.

There is no doubt Trapp's men believed his promise. They admitted as much after the war. But still only about a dozen asked to be excused from the killings, and a few more avoided the killing by busying themselves with other tasks. None were punished. All the others joined in with the murders of women and children, the old and the sick. A few killed eagerly. Most just did what they were told. They went on to kill elsewhere, too. In all, these policemen shot over 38,000 Jewish men, women and children and deported more than 45,000 others to the gas chambers of Treblinka.

There are other cases where people refused to obey such orders, but not a single record exists of any German soldier, SS man or policeman being shot or sent to a concentration camp for refusing to murder Jews.

Reinhard Heydrich

Photo: Reinhard Heydrich, Chief of the Nazis' Reich Security Main Office, with his wife and children.

Credit: Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin

In 1939, Reinhard Heydrich was told to come up with a plan for what to do with the Jewish people. His first answer was to move all Jewish people out of German-controlled lands by force. So, when Germany invaded Poland in September that year, Heydrich ordered Polish Jews to be put in ghettos until their deportation could be organised.

Soon, the Nazis realised they had made a major problem for themselves. They now had to feed and house huge numbers of Jewish people they had crowded into tiny parts of towns. There was a big risk disease would break out and spread to the Germans living outside of the ghettos.

When Germany invaded the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941, millions more Jewish people came under Nazi control. By now Hitler had control of most of Europe, and the millions of Jewish people who lived there.

The Nazis realised it would be impossible to move so many people. More extreme 'solutions' were suggested and Heydrich sent four SS killing squads (called Einsatzgruppen) into the Soviet Union. With German police, soldiers and local helpers these killing squads shot more than one million Jewish men, women and children.

On the morning of 20 January 1942, Heydrich held a meeting of Nazi officials at a villa next to the lake of Wannsee, near Berlin. Heydrich said they would kill every Jewish person they could. This meant not only the millions of Jewish people already in lands under German control, but those in lands yet to be taken over: 4,000 Jewish people living in Ireland, 330,000 in England, 55,500 in Turkey, 200 in Albania, and millions in the parts of the Soviet Union not yet conquered.

The details of how to murder millions of people had yet to be fully worked out. But already, at the time of this meeting, huge numbers of Jewish people had been shot by the Einsatzgruppen and gas vans at Chelmno death camp had begun killing. Over the coming year of 1942, gas chambers for the murder of the Jews of Europe were built at the death camps of Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka and Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Reinhard Wiener

Reinhard Wiener, in 1981, 40 years after he filmed a mass murder in Nazi-occupied Latvia

Photo: Yad Vashem. Still from a filmed interview.

Reinhard Wiener was born in 1914 in Germany. His father was against the Nazis, but Reinhard joined the Nazi Storm troopers (the SA) when he was 22 because he was a keen sportsman and enjoyed the outdoor activities that they promoted. Wiener was also a keen amateur film maker and had special permission to use his film camera during the early years of the war.

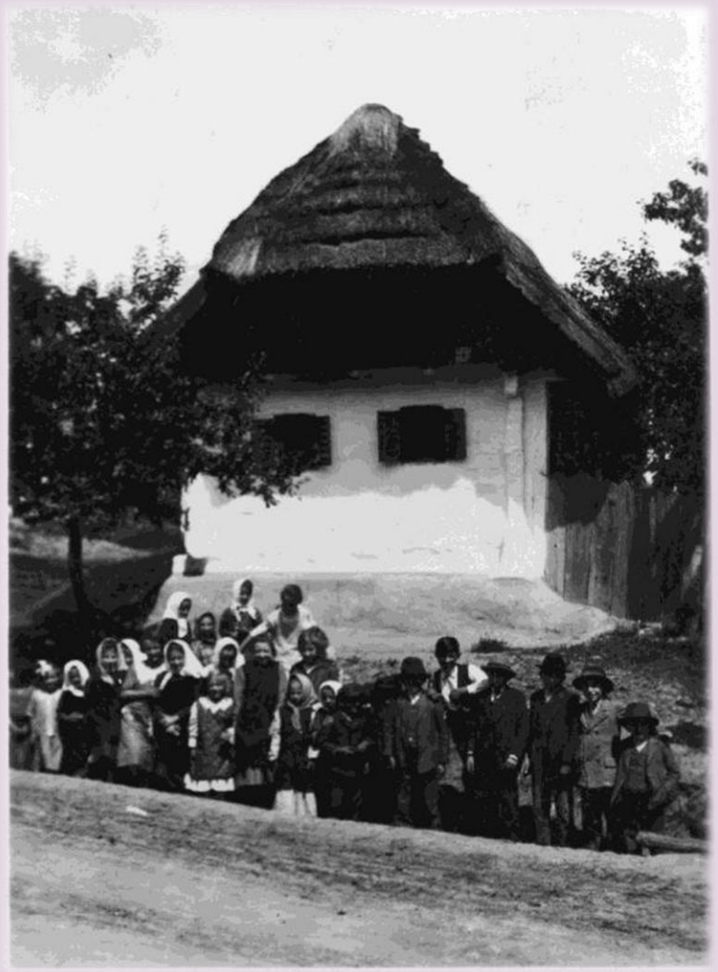
In mid-July 1941 Wiener was stationed close to the city of Liepaja, in Latvia, on the Baltic Sea. One day as he walked with others near the beach, carrying his film camera as usual, Wiener met a soldier who told them not to go any further because 'back there on the beach it is horrible'. Forty years later, Wiener remembered the mass murder that he filmed on the seashore that summer's day:

> We asked him 'Why?' and he told us, 'Yes, Jews are being shot there'.... but I decided after the soldier told us not to go there, to go there anyway, because I wanted to film it. I knew – I had heard from Jews who worked for us – that [their] relatives, family members, would not return to their homes in the evening. They were caught in Liepaja or at the market by... the Latvian home guard or SS, when they were brought back from work... Then I said, 'I don't I know, I want to go and see for myself, whether what they told me about their husbands not returning home and being killed was true.'
>
> We walked until we came to the execution site. German soldiers were standing as spectators all around the long trench, which was in the middle... At first I stood in the second row of soldiers, approximately 50m from the trench and was waiting to see what would happen.... The Jews... were forced to jump over the sides of the truck to the ground. Among them were crippled and weak people, who were caught by others. At first, they had to line up in a row, before they were chased towards the trench...They had to stand with their backs to the firing squad.

From an interview with Reinhard Wiener, 27 September 1981, at Yad Vashem, Israel.

Still images taken from Reinhard Wiener's film, showing the arrival and shooting of Jewish men on the beaches of Liepaja, in Nazi-occupied Latvia. The exact date is not known, but is thought to be early August 1941.

The villagers of Kleinpetersdof



Credit: Author unknown

This photo shows Roma children standing outside a farmhouse in the Austrian village of Kleinpetersdof, in 1928. They were part of a family that included two brothers: one the local blacksmith, the other a farm worker.

During the 1940s, the local authorities of Kleinpetersdof decided to send the Roma members of their village to the Nazis' 'Gypsy Camp' at Lackenbach.

The local people said they needed a blacksmith in the village, so he and his wife and children were allowed to stay, and they survived the war.

Credit: Author unknown

The blacksmith's brother, the farm labourer, was not so lucky. The village had plenty of people who could work on the farms.

He and all his family were deported to the 'Gypsy Camp' at Lackenbach (pictured above). All were murdered in the Porrajmos, the Nazi genocide of the Roma people.

The 'Gypsy Camp' at Lackenbach, Austria, 23 October 1940. Lackenbach was the largest of all the camps set up to hold the Roma and Sinti people in Greater Germany.

Mauthausen: The escape of Soviet prisoners of war

Photo: Mauthausen Block 20 following an escape attempt by Russian prisoners.

Credit: National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, courtesy of Francisco Boix

In early February 1945, some 400 Soviet prisoners of war tried to escape Mauthausen concentration camp by climbing the walls. Those who were not immediately killed by gunfire from the camp guards managed to run into the surrounding countryside.

The war was nearly over. The Soviet army was getting closer, and these desperate men, badly weakened and half-starved, tried to find shelter and scraps of food from the people in the nearby town of Mauthausen, and at farms and houses in the neighbouring villages. At each door, they begged for help and not to be handed over to the SS.

The SS and local Nazi Party officials recruited and armed the local people to help them in the hunt for the escaped prisoners of war. Boys too young for army service, elderly men, farm women and women shopkeepers joined in the manhunt.

> “They ‘thoughtlessly seized the opportunity to participate in the sport of chasing and killing. In hunting down the inmates – with guns and knives and pitchforks – the local citizenry revealed unmistakeably that the surrounding communities were in fact extensions of the camp.’ ”

‘Places Very Far, Places Very Near’ by Gordon J. Horwitz, in *The Holocaust: Origins, Implementation, Aftermath*, ed. Omer Bartov, pp. 210-11.

The people living in the town of Mauthausen

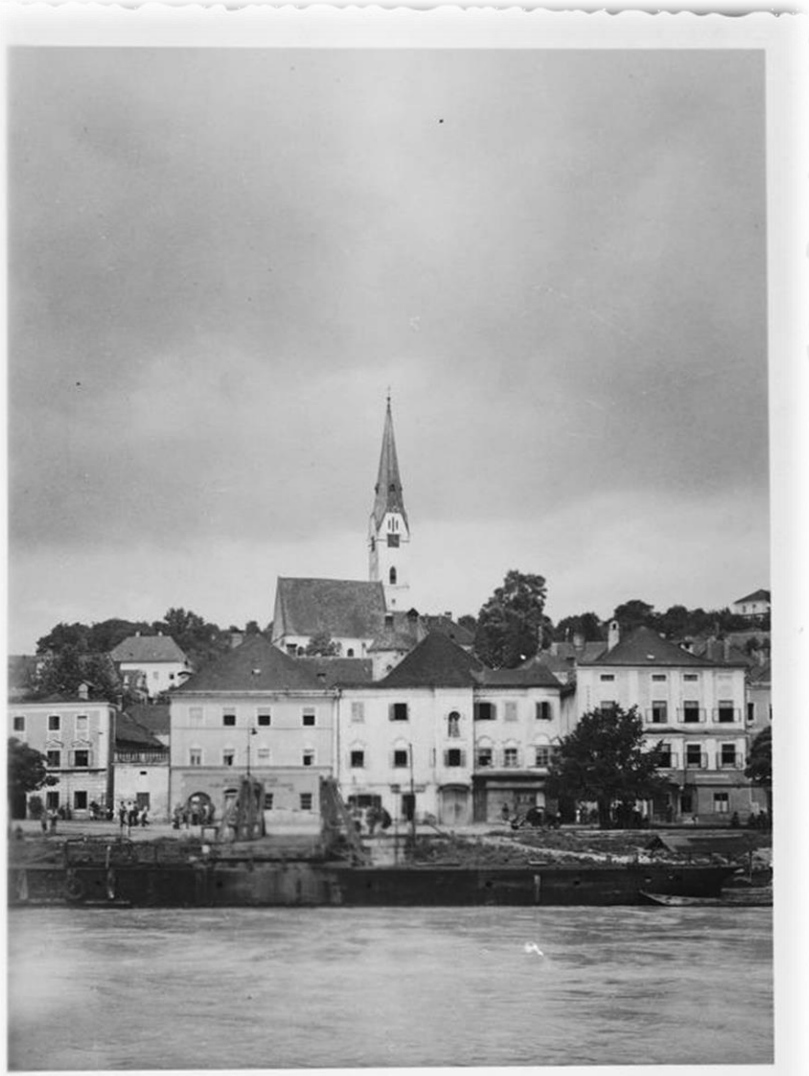


Photo: The town of Mauthausen, Austria, on the bank of the river Danube, in July 1945.

Credit: USHMM, courtesy of Benjamin Lefkowitz.

In Mauthausen the local Nazis and camp staffers mingled at recitals, lectures, youth assemblies, sporting competitions, and hunts. Here the executioners found relaxation in local taverns and with some of the local women at private gatherings held in farmhouses. Here resided the wives and children of SS family men; here were the shopkeepers – hairdressers, druggists, grocery owners – whom they patronized. Above all, here resided the decent folk, as opposed to the outcasts and criminals sealed within the walls of the camp.

'Places Very Far, Places Very Near' by Gordon J .Horwitz, in *The Holocaust: Origins, Implementation, Aftermath*, ed. Omer Bartov, p.213.

Did the people of Mauthausen know what was happening inside the concentration camp that lay just three miles outside their picturesque town? Could they have known what the SS men who they mixed with were doing in the camp?

Many preferred not to know and chose not to see. Farmers avoided the fields close to the camp. Mountaineers chose routes that did not overlook the quarries where the inmates were worked to death. But still, the truth was unavoidable. The smell from the crematoria was carried on the wind: 'The unmistakeable, sickly sweet odour of burning human flesh was, as townsfolk readily admit, a part of the atmosphere,' according to Horwitz.

In hundreds of other towns that were also close to other camps, the situation was much the same.

A woman who lived near Hersbruck camp, some 20 miles from Nuremberg in Germany, later remembered the two huge fires that burned human bodies in the open:

One evening one of my sons came running into the house and shouted, 'Mama the woods are on fire.' Sometimes the flames were so high that it looked as if the trees were burning. Whenever they were burning bodies the smell was awful, and when the wind brought the smoke toward Molsberg it was terrible.

'Places Very Far, Places Very Near' by Gordon J. Horwitz, in *The Holocaust: Origins, Implementation, Aftermath*, ed. Omer Bartov, p.213.

Letter of complaint from Eleonore Gusenbauer, the village above Mauthausen, September 1941.

Inmates of the Mauthausen concentration camp are constantly being shot at the Vienna Ditch work site. Those who are badly struck still live for some time and lie next to the dead for hours and in some cases for half a day.

My property is situated on an elevation close to the Vienna Ditch and therefore one often becomes the unwilling witness of such misdeeds. I am sickly in any case and such sights make such demands on my nerves, that I will not be able to bear it much longer.

I request that it be arranged that such inhuman deeds will cease or else be conducted out of sight.

Quoted in Gordon J. Horwitz, *In the Shadow of Death – Living Outside the Gates of Mauthausen*, p.35

Theresa Stangl

Photo: The Stangls' home, near Sobibor, taken after the war.

Credit: Author unknown

Theresa Stangl was the wife of Franz Paul Stangl, Commandant of the Sobibor and Treblinka death camps in German-occupied Poland. Her husband was in charge of the murder of more than one million Jewish people, and an unknown number of Roma, Soviet POWs and Poles.

Theresa and their children lived with Stangl in a house just a little way from the Sobibor death camp.

One day, while her husband was at his 'work', Theresa and the children played in their garden. They were joined by several of the guards from the camp. One of them, called Ludwig, approached Theresa and began to tell her about his family at home, his wife and children.

Ludwig had been drinking and became more and more sorry for himself. Years later, Theresa said that he suddenly burst out:

> "Dreadful, it's just dreadful, you have no idea how dreadful it is.'
> I asked him, 'What is dreadful?'
> 'Don't you know?' he asked. 'Don't you know what is being done out there?'
> 'No. What?'
> 'The Jews are being done away with.'
> 'Done away with?' I asked, 'How? What do you mean?'
> 'With gas,' he said. 'Fantastic numbers.'"

Theresa was deeply shocked and later she asked her husband about what he was involved in. For some time, she refused to sleep with him. But Stangl lied to her that he was not really so involved in the killing process. Theresa chose to believe him, and after a while their family life returned to 'normal'.

All the while, Stangl's role as Commandant of the death camp continued.

Years later, both Theresa and Franz Paul Stangl were interviewed by Gitta Sereny.

This is Sereny's account of her final interview with Theresa Stangl:

At the very end of our conversations I told Frau Stangl that I needed to ask her an extremely difficult question which I wanted her to think about deeply before attempting to answer. 'It is the most important question as far as my talks with you are concerned,' I said, 'and to me, the reply that you give me will determine your own position; the degree, if you like, of your own guilt.' I suggested that, before replying, she should leave me for a while, lie down, think about it.

'Would you tell me,' I asked, 'what you think would have happened if at any time you had faced your husband with an absolute choice; if you had said to him: 'Here it is; I know it's terribly dangerous, but either you get out of this terrible thing, or else the children and I will leave you.' What I would like to know,' I said, 'is: if you had confronted him with these alternatives, which do you think he would have chosen?'

She went to her room and lay down; I could hear the bedsprings creak as she lowered herself on to the bed.

The little house was silent. It was very hot outside and the sun shone into the living room where I sat waiting, for more than an hour. When she came back she was very pale; she had been crying, had then washed her face and combed her hair and, I think, put on some powder. She was composed; she had made a decision – the same decision her husband had made six months earlier in the prison in Düsseldorf; to speak the truth. I have thought very hard,' she said. 'I know what you want to know. I know what I am doing when I answer your question. I am answering it because I think I owe it to you, to others, to myself; I believe that if I had ever confronted Paul with the alternatives: Treblinka – or me; he would... yes, he would in the final analysis have chosen me.'

I felt strongly that this was the truth.

The following night, Theresa Stangl took back what she had said in a letter to Gitta Sereny.

Gitta Sereny, *Into that Darkness: An Examination of Conscience*, pp 360-1.

Dr. Victor Capesius

Photo: Victor Capesius after the war, following his arrest.

Credit: Fritz Bauer Institute

Victor Capesius had a job selling medicine to doctors, hospitals and pharmacies, until he was drafted into the German army in 1943.

By February 1944, Capesius was part of the SS. He was sent to work in Auschwitz-Birkenau, helping to choose which people would be killed immediately in the gas chambers, and who would be worked to death inside the concentration camp.

All through the summer months, hundreds of thousands of Hungarian men, women and children were sent by trains to Auschwitz- Birkenau to be murdered. All of the other major Jewish communities in Nazi Europe had already been destroyed.

Among the crowds of Jewish people who spilled off the trains was 18 year old Ladislaus Ervin-Deutsch, his brother (who was a pharmacist) and their mother. Ladislaus remembers:

> I arrived in front of the SS-officer at the same time as my brother. 'Pharmacist, have you landed here too?' the officer said in faultless Hungarian. 'Are you a Jew?'
>
> 'Yes, a Jew,' my brother answered him, also in Hungarian.
>
> 'Pity... I am sorry. Are you healthy? Why are you walking with a stick?'
>
> 'My toes froze off. Last winter. In Russia.'
>
> 'You had better not tell anyone else that. If you are asked whether you are healthy, your answer should be a clear yes. The sick have to die. And now move on with those fit for work. With your brother... don't I know him too?'
>
> Then the officer gestured to a guard to come over and said: 'The prisoner with the stick is allowed to keep his stick.'
>
> ...The SS-officer was Dr Viktor Capesius... in the period before the war he often came to my brother's pharmacy to collect orders and to chat a little.
>
> My brother and he had slowly become friends and later Dr Capesius came even when he had no business. Just for a coffee, a glass of schnapps or to play chess. On an evening like that, while they were playing chess, I had got to know him.
>
> Strange, unexpected meeting on the arrival platform in Auschwitz. Remarkable ambiguity of human nature. One can hardly talk or think about it in any other way than ambiguously: The same Dr Viktor Capesius, who, with a wave of his hand and apathetically, or perhaps with the pleasant feeling of success given by the eager fulfilment of his duty, had sent many thousands of people to their deaths by gassing, tried to save the life of my brother.
>
> **Ladislaus Ervin-Deutsch, *About Those Who Survived and Those Who Died***

Willi Just

On 5 June 1942, Willi Just wrote to SS-Obersturmbannführer Walter Rauff in Berlin about improvements that were being made to the gas vans used at Chelmno death camp:

(Geheime Reichssache - Secret Reich Business). Berlin, June 5 1942

Re: Changes for special vehicles now in service at Kulmhof [Chelmno] and for those now being built.

Since December 1941, ninety-seven thousand have been processed ['verarbeit' in German] by the three vehicles in service, with no major incidents. In the light of observations made so far, however, the following technical changes are needed:

1. The vans' normal load is usually nine per square yard. In Saurer vehicles, which are very spacious, maximum use of space is impossible, not because of any possible overload, but because loading to full capacity would affect the vehicle's stability. So reduction of the load space seems necessary. It must absolutely be reduced by a yard, instead of trying to solve the problem, as hitherto, by reducing the number of pieces loaded. Besides, this extends the operating time, as the empty void must be filled with carbon monoxide. On the other hand, if the load space is reduced, and the vehicle is packed solid, the operating time can be considerably shortened. The manufacturers told us during a discussion that reducing the size of the van's rear would throw it badly off balance. The front axle, they claim, would be overloaded. In fact, the balance is automatically restored, because the merchandise aboard displays during the operation a natural tendency to rush to the rear doors, and is mainly found lying there at the end of the operation. So the front axle is not overloaded.
2. The lighting must be better protected than now. The lamps must be enclosed in a steel grid to prevent their being damaged. Lights could be eliminated, since they apparently are never used. However, it has been observed that when the doors are shut, the load always presses hard against them [the doors] as soon as darkness sets in. This is because the load naturally rushes toward the light when darkness sets in, which makes closing the doors difficult. Also, because of the alarming nature of darkness, screaming always occurs when the doors are closed. It would therefore be useful to light the lamp before and during the first moments of the operation.
3. For easy cleaning of the vehicle, there must be a sealed drain in the middle of the floor. The drainage hole's cover, eight to twelve inches in diameter, would be equipped with a slanting trap, so that fluid liquids can drain off during the operation. During cleaning, the drain can be used to evacuate large pieces of dirt.

The aforementioned technical changes are to be made to vehicles in service only when they come in for repairs. As for the ten vehicles ordered from Saurer, they must be equipped with all innovations and changes shown by use and experience to be necessary.

Submitted for decision to Gruppenleiter II D, SS-Obersturmbannfuhrer Walter Rauff. Signed: *Just*

Quoted from:

Claude Lanzmann, *Shoah: The Complete Text of the Film*, pp 103-105. Original Source: *Nazism: A History in Documents and Eye Witness Accounts, 1941-1945*, Volume 2, Document 913. Letter on www.jewishgen.org

Zofia Kossack

Credit: Yad Vashem

Zofia Kossack was a Polish Catholic who was strongly antisemitic. From the 1930s she argued Jewish people should leave Poland. But despite this strong dislike of Jews, Kossack was shocked when she heard about the murder of Jewish people in the gas chambers of Treblinka in the summer of 1942.

That autumn she set up Zegota (the Council to Aid the Jews), a secret Polish group that rescued Jewish people from the Nazis.

By that time most of Poland's Jews had already been murdered. But Zofia Kossack and the other Polish members of Zegota risked their own lives to save as many as they could.

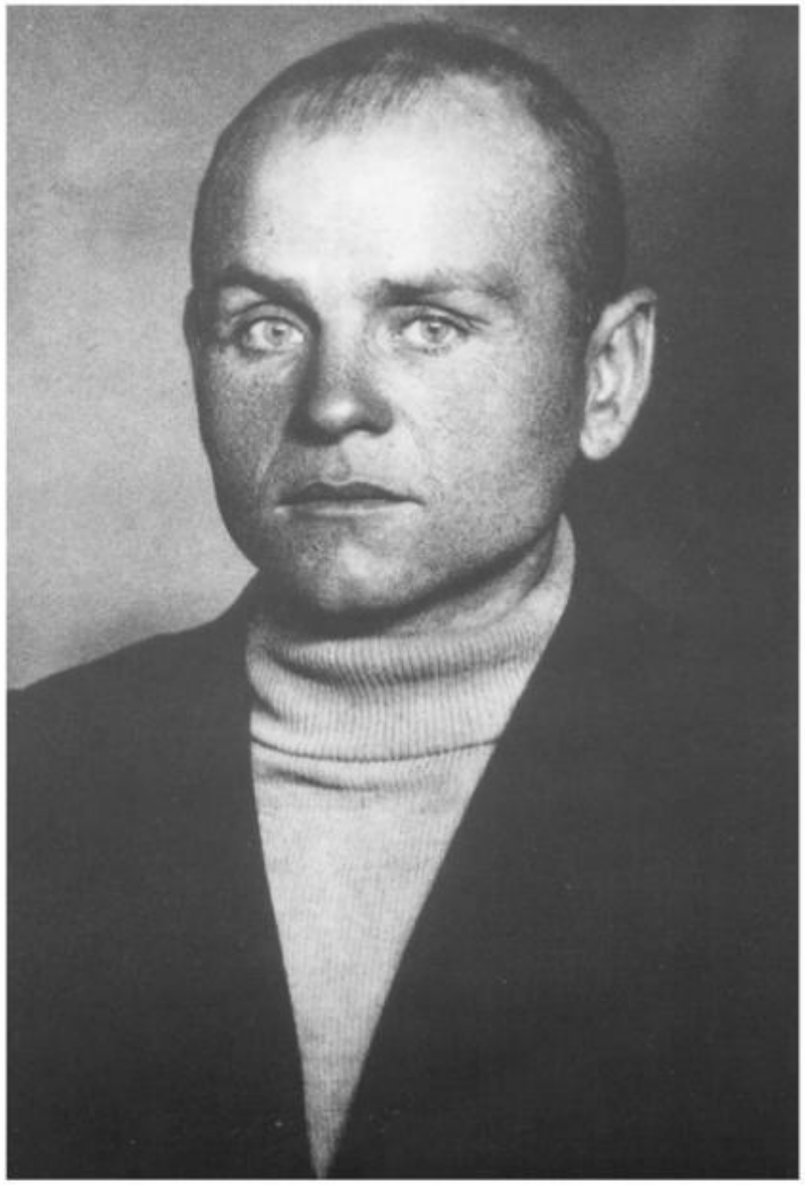
Thousands of Jewish children were placed in homes, convents and orphanages. Zegota made fake identity papers and found safe hiding places for Jewish people, and provided food and medicine for those in hiding.

Throughout this time, Kossack still disliked Jewish people. She remained antisemitic and wrote: ‘Our feelings toward Jews have not changed. We still consider them political, economic and ideological enemies of Poland’. Yet Kossack told people to remember ‘Christian virtues’ and to keep ‘deep faith in God, who forbids killing’.

In the autumn of 1943, one year after setting up Zegota, Zofia Kossak was arrested by the Nazis but still her secret organisation carried on saving Jews.

Kossack was sent to Auschwitz for several months and then moved to a prison in Warsaw. In July 1944, the Polish resistance managed to buy her freedom, and Zofia Kossack survived the war.

Leopold Socha



Credit: Dr.Kristine Keren

Leopold Socha was a small-time criminal who was a sewer worker in Lvov, a city in German-occupied Poland.

In the summer of 1943, Socha and some fellow workers found a group of 21 Jewish people – men, women and children – who were hiding in the sewer tunnels under the city to escape the deportations to the death camps.

Socha and his co-workers faced a difficult choice:

- Help these strangers, risking their own lives to do so; people caught helping Jews in occupied Poland were usually killed.
- Do nothing, even though these people could not survive for long in the filthy conditions of the sewers with no one to help them.
- Tell the Nazis, who paid well for information about where Jewish people were hiding.

Leopold Socha and the other sewer workers agreed to help, but only if the Jewish people paid them. And they made it clear that the help would only last for as long as the Jews kept paying. When the money ran out, the help would end.

What does this tell us about the man, Leopold Socha? He did help to save Jewish people from the Nazis, but in return for money. He used his power over these desperate people to benefit himself. Was this rescuer a good, kind man? Was he a hero?

But the story doesn't end there. Later the money did run out, and Socha's co-workers said they would no longer help the Jews hiding in the sewers. But Leopold Socha had come to know and care for these people, and he continued to risk his life and to help them without any reward.

Each day, Socha brought them food and drinking water. He washed their dirty clothes. He told them the news from the outside world, about how the war was going, and he gave them hope. Socha even convinced his fellow workers to carry on helping as well.

And as the war neared its end the German army was forced to retreat from Lvov. Leopold Socha then brought these Jewish men, women, and children out of the filthy sewers and into safety.

Jekabs Kulis

Photo: The little boy in this photograph, wearing the uniform of a Latvian SS murder squad, is Jewish. He is sitting on the knee of Sergeant Jekabs Kulis, the only man who knew about the boy's Jewish identity.

Credit: Author unknown

Kulis saved this child from a mass shooting of Jewish people and 'adopted' him as a 'mascot' for his group of soldiers. He told the other soldiers the boy was a Russian peasant who had lost his parents and had been found wandering on his own in the forest.

The terrified little boy was with the SS murder squad for some years. He saw the murders that the soldiers carried out. He was used by the Nazis in their propaganda: photographed in his SS uniform, featured in newspaper reports, and appearing in a propaganda film. He was even promoted to the rank of corporal.

Jekabs Kulis saved this child but murdered many other Jewish people. Kulis and the boy both survived the war. After the war, the child moved to Australia where he called himself Alex Kurzem.

Kurt Gerstein

Credit: Landeskirchliches Archiv der Evangelischen Kirche von Westfalen, Bielefeld

Kurt Gerstein was a German who opposed the Nazis. He heard rumours about the mass murder of disabled people and joined the Nazi SS to try to discover the truth.

Later Kurt Gerstein was part of an SS group that inspected Nazi death camps in German-occupied Poland. There he saw the murder of 1,000s of Jewish men, women and children in the gas chambers.

Horrified by what he had seen, Gerstein tried to tell the rest of the world about the mass murder of Jewish people.

Kurt Gerstein got news about the death camps to the Swedish government, who were not fighting in the war, and asked that they tell the world about what was happening. Once the secret was known, he thought, the Nazis would have to stop the killing. Gerstein also spoke to Protestant and Catholic bishops in Berlin about the mass murder of the Jewish people, and risked his life by giving information about the mass murders to the Dutch resistance to pass on to the British government.

But Gerstein's eyewitness reports did not bring the world outcry or the attempts to save the Jewish people that he hoped for.

At the end of the war, Gerstein was a prisoner in a French jail, where he wrote a detailed account of what he had witnessed. Gerstein was later found hanged in his cell. He had either killed himself or was murdered by other SS prisoners.

Otto Moll

Photos: Leading SS men from Auschwitz enjoy some time off at the rest centre of Solahütte. In the front row is Otto Moll, leaning to one side and stood next to camp commandant Rudolf Höss.

Credit: Author unknown

An accordion player entertains Auschwitz guards as they sing along together on a rest day at nearby Solahütte. In the front row, Otto Moll – supervisor of the gas chambers – leans against the railings and smiles. To his left is Rudolf Höss, commandant of Auschwitz. On the far right of the same row stands the tall figure of Dr Joseph Mengele, who selected thousands of people for the gas chambers and carried out horrific medical experiments on prisoners.

Otto Moll was in charge of the gas chambers and crematoria at Auschwitz-Birkenau. He was in charge of the new arrivals from their arrival until they entered the gas chambers, and afterwards in the burning of their bodies Moll welcomed new arrivals and reassured them they were about to have a shower, before ushering them to their deaths in the gas chambers.

Otto Moll was one of the most cruel and sadistic of the guards. He beat the Jewish Sonderkommando who were forced to clear the gas chambers and to burn the bodies of the dead. At times, he threw living people into the flames, or used human beings as target practice, shooting people from a distance.

Moll was an enthusiastic and innovative killer. In 1944, realising that the crematoria would not be able to burn the huge number of Jewish people due to arrive at the death camp from Hungary, Moll had prisoners dig huge open air pits to burn the bodies that could not be cremated in the ovens.

In order to kill people even more quickly, Moll reopened one of the farmhouses that had first been used as a gas chamber in the spring of 1942, but which had been abandoned after newly designed gas chambers and crematoria were built.

‘Race scientists’

Photo: Laboratory workers at the Institute for Hygiene in Hamburg, Germany, in 1937

Credit: Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz

The Nazis wrongly believed that human beings came from different ‘races’, that some of these ‘races’ were inferior to others, and that they had to fight each other to survive.

These ideas were based on the writings of so-called ‘race scientists’ who believed they could make a stronger, fitter human race by getting rid of ‘weaker’, ‘less intelligent’, or ‘disabled’ people and by preventing different ‘races’ from mixing together and having children.

The Nazis gave money for scientists to research these ideas of ‘eugenics’ and used the scientists’ work to make their own racist ideas seem more respectable.

The ‘race scientists’ helped the Nazis to define different human ‘races’, to draw up new laws that discriminated against those who were not part of the so-called ‘Aryan master race’, and also carried out operations on disabled people, black people and Gypsies to stop them from having children.

From the autumn of 1939, some doctors and nurses working in ‘race’ institutes also murdered disabled patients in the so-called ‘Euthanasia’ programme, the Nazis’ first organised mass murder.

More than 50 disabled children were murdered in the hospital of the Hamburg Institute for Hygiene, shown in the photo opposite.

The railways

Photo: Jewish people at Westerbork camp, in the Netherlands, boarding a train for the death camp Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Credit: Yad Vashem

Albert Ganzenmüller, Hitler's Minister for Transport.

Photo: GHWK

The railways played a major part in carrying out the genocide of the Jewish people. Nazi planners intended to murder 11 million European Jews from across the continent – every last man, woman and child they could get their hands on. The job of moving millions of people across Europe to the Nazi death camps and killing centres was huge and needed careful and detailed planning.

The SS discussed with Albert Ganzenmüller, who was in charge of the transport and railway system, how the Jewish people would be deported to their deaths. The railways agreed to organise the trains, to draw up timetables, to make sure that passenger carriages and cattle wagons were available to carry men, women and children across Europe.

The railways charged the SS the standard third class fare to carry Jewish people. Children under ten travelled at half price and those under four went free. Everyone knew this was a one way journey, so the SS only had to pay a return fare for the guards who travelled with these families. The railways even offered a discount – half price for trains carrying more than 400 people. So the SS crammed as many human beings as possible onto the cattle wagons, in order to get a good deal.

The same trains carried the clothes and valuables of the those who had been murdered – trainloads of spectacles, watches, shoes, umbrellas, combs, pots and pans, all travelled to Berlin without their owners. Gold teeth forced from the mouths of the dead and bales of women's hair to be used to make textiles travelled with them.

Thousands were involved: train drivers, engineers, guards, signalmen, and station staff; office workers who drew up the timetables for the trains, kept track of the number of passengers and sent the bill to the SS. The murder of the Jewish people needed the cooperation and support of people at all levels of the railway system.

German Census Bureau

Photo: Female office workers of the German Census Bureau. The notice reminds them to use the number 3 to record Jewish people.

Credit: Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz

In 1939, the Nazi government counted all of the people living in Germany, recording every person's age, sex, address, job, religion, and marital status. For the first time they also listed the person's 'race'.

All of this information about millions of people was punched into cards by thousands of clerical workers, like the women shown in the photo above.

The cards were sorted and counted by the electrical brushes of a Hollerith machine, an early type of computer.

At this time no plan had been made to murder the Jewish people, and the workers who punched the cards could not imagine such horrors. But they did know the hatred the Nazis had for Jews, Gypsies and other groups already suffering persecution. And

thousands still turned up for work each day and punched this information hour after hour, being particularly careful, as they were told to be, in marking the column that recorded 'race'.

As the Nazis invaded other countries, information about these populations was also punched onto the cards. The punch cards, other records, registration and identity cards made it possible for the Nazis to find their victims, round them up, deport them to the camps and to select them for mass murder.

People first had to be identified before they could be killed. The historians Götz Aly and Karl Heinz Roth have argued that before every act of extermination there was first an act of registration.

Leading education and social research
Institute of Education
University of London

Being Human?

Perpetrators, Collaborators, Bystanders and Rescuers

Centre for
Holocaust Education

Institute of Education, University of London, 20 Bedford Way, London, WC1H 0AL,

tel: +44(0)20 7612 6437 **fax:** +44(0)20 7612 6126 **email:** holocaust@ioe.ac.uk **web:** www.ioe.ac.uk/holocaust

The IOE's Centre for Holocaust Education is jointly funded by Pears Foundation and the Department for Education.