

# **THE GAS CHAMBER OF SHERLOCK HOLMES**

**AN ATTEMPT AT A LITERARY ANALYSIS OF THE  
HOLOCAUST GASSING CLAIM**

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1999

**CODOH**

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## **"In Memoriam!"**

Dec 22, 1997: Revised Jan 10, 1999

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### ***NOTES***

## 1. Introduction

A COMMON BELIEF is that in World War Two the National Socialist government of Germany carried out a secret policy of mass exterminations, chiefly using extermination gas chambers. The policy is said to have been ordered by Adolf Hitler, and involved the gassing of millions of human beings, who subsequently were burned either in crematoria or in huge pits so that scarcely a trace of their bodies remained.

The claim of mass gas extermination has been questioned ever since the late 1940's, but only by a few people, and very much on the fringe of public discourse.<sup>2</sup> In the early 1970's several new critics of the gas extermination claim emerged, and over the past two decades they have been joined by many others, so that now there are at least several dozen who have written on the subject.<sup>3</sup> These researchers consider themselves heir to the tradition of those historians who sought in the 1920's to revise, and de-politicize, our understanding of the First World War, and so consider themselves historical revisionists. But the skepticism of these researchers towards mass gassing is usually accompanied by a desire to reevaluate the Holocaust in its entirety, and as a result they are more normally called "Holocaust revisionists" or "Holocaust deniers".<sup>4</sup>

The response of traditional historiography to the challenge of the revisionists has not been what one would expect. Normally, when someone challenges a historical orthodoxy, a minute analysis of the material and documentary record ensues, and the record is correspondingly revised. But nothing of the sort has happened here: instead, the arguments of the revisionists have been ignored and they have been reviled.<sup>5</sup>

In recent years, the expression of revisionist skepticism has been criminalized in several European countries, leading to heavy fines and prison terms, particularly in Germany and France.<sup>6</sup> In Canada, two major trials have been held with the intention of silencing a gas chamber critic.<sup>7</sup> Most recently the Prime Minister of Great Britain, during his candidacy, repeatedly promised to ban revisionist writings about the Holocaust.<sup>8</sup>

The further erosion of free speech on this matter must be considered intolerable to anyone who takes the intellectual life seriously. Therefore the purpose of this essay will be to deliberately review the gassing claim, with the object, not to prove that gassings did or did not take place, but rather to investigate whether there is a plausible basis for revisionist doubt. If we find that the traditional gassing narrative contains sufficient errors or lacunae to justify doubt, then we must allow doubt. On the other hand, if we find that the traditional gassing narrative has an irrefutable documentary or material base, then we must note this also. The result should be, in the first case, due recognition of revisionist contributions to the ongoing process of modern historiography, or, in the second case, a further marginalization of revisionist thinking, which should render their influence harmless and thus unobjectionable. But in any case we cannot continue the current situation where revisionists are dismissed as not serious even while many of them are punished with quite serious fines and prison terms.

The method we shall use is largely determined by the inherent problems of the subject, specifically the problems concerning text and source criticism. Even if charitably inclined, anyone with minimal historical training cannot fail to notice how traditional Holocaust scholars take a generally uncritical, selective, and anachronistic position with regards to their evidence. From a mass of materials that support, or seem to support, their position, they simply select heavily edited excerpts here and there.<sup>9</sup> Rarely is an attempt made to explain the theoretical underpinnings of the selection or verification process for testimonies or affidavits. Rarer still are attempts to place the frequently ambiguous evidence in a wider documentary context. When the original sources contain errors or data inconsistent with the traditional interpretation, no attempt is made to explain the source or significance of these errors and inconsistencies.

Finally, traditional Holocaust scholars pay no attention to the chronological evolution or even the circumstances of gassing claims, even though it should be obvious that earlier statements, widely publicized, have a strong potential for influencing later permutations of a claim. This last is a particularly glaring omission, since the vast majority of Holocaust evidence is gleaned from testimonial or affidavit narratives. In short, the overall impression created by the traditional school's method is one of simply selecting data that supports what everyone already knows.

The revisionist approach has its own strengths and weaknesses. Its greatest strength has been its willingness to subject the standard evidentiary texts to rigorous criticism. But even here, there has been a tendency to confuse debunking with historical explanation. It is not enough to say that this or that affidavit contains several errors and is therefore suspect, nor, for that matter, is it enough to carry out forensic studies and show the extreme unlikelihood of specific gassing claims. There have been enormous contributions in this latter area in the past decade, and the researches of Faurisson, Berg, Rudolf and Mattogno have gone a long way to define the physical limits against which testimonies and affidavits must be tested.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, to show with a fair degree of probability that the mass gasings were impossible is not the same thing as explaining why everyone believes they took place.

Therefore we begin at the beginning with the simple proposition that the gassing claims are either true or not true. If they are true, then the historian should be able to establish how the claims came to be known, and at what point the fugitive claims of wartime crossed the threshold of fact. On the other hand, if the claims are false it should be possible to explain how they emerged, how they were constituted, and why they were believed. In short, the problem requires a chronological method.

In general the tendency in most writings on the Holocaust has been to ignore the difference between rumor and fact: the traditional school considers all rumors fact, the revisionists consider all facts rumor.<sup>11</sup> It is precisely at this juncture, then, that we seem to have a promising point of departure, since all parties, traditional or revisionist, agree that the gassing claims began as vague, anonymous, and unverifiable reports, that is, as rumors.

Fact is a reflection of empirical reality; but rumor expresses a reality all its own, however difficult it is to define, since the real world of rumor is simply that world of unspoken assumptions, associations, and projections that characterize a human culture at a specific moment of historic time. Attempts to describe the parameters and nature of that unspoken world, which in some ways is more real than the real world, at least in terms of determining our perception and our judgment, has been a main project among intellectual historians and literary critics at least since the early 1960's.

By way of a simple example: in 1976 a literary detective named Samuel Rosenberg wrote a book entitled *Naked is the Best Disguise: The Death and Resurrection of Sherlock Holmes*. Rosenberg closely analyzed the Holmes stories in order to argue that Conan Doyle was expressing in his work a great number of late Victorian concerns: Evolution, Nietzsche's theories, German secret societies and bellicose nationalism, the White Man's Burden, and so forth. While we can debate his success in mapping out Conan Doyle's specific intellectual concerns, his book did succeed in placing the stories firmly within a specific cultural context, thus helping to explain their content.

We want to pursue a similar path here, and hence propose a literary analysis in a chronological format. That is, while skeptical of the gassing claims, we are not setting as our primary objective to prove or disprove any specific gassing claim. Instead we will have a simple narration of the gassing claims, from the spring of 1942 through the end of the Nuremberg and Auschwitz Trials in 1947. The analysis shall be "literary" because it

will focus on the themes, motifs, tropes, and story elements that comprise the gassing claims. To put it another way, the gassing claims will be laid out, viewed as narratives or as "texts", arranged in order, and analyzed separately and in combination.

Literary analyses usually involve several different steps. One is simply the breakdown of a text into its parts along with a discussion of these. In the present case this will involve the isolation and tracking of some of the gassing claim story elements. A second step involves a textual analysis, in which the text is arrayed with similar texts that may have influenced it or which may have been influenced by it. Precisely for this reason, judgment on the veracity of claims will be suspended, in favor of investigating whether a given narrative shows textual links with prior or later texts. A third approach places the text in a broader social and cultural context, in order to see how it relates to, or expresses, its culture. In the present case the emerging story elements will be placed in the context of known historical and cultural crosscurrents, most of which have been undervalued or ignored by traditional historians of this subject. By putting these materials in context, it will be possible to see the extent to which the gassing claim was, or was not, peculiar to its time.

After discussing the various story elements of the emerging gassing claim three facts should become clear. First, the mass gassing narratives have a strong family resemblance among them and even to texts that predated the supposed gas exterminations by 20 years or more. Second, the unique characteristics of the gassing process can be traced, in the broader context of European social and cultural history, to completely ordinary procedures, albeit procedures which were the source of significant social and cultural anxiety. Finally, it should become plain that there is no documentary or material evidence that unambiguously supports the mass gassing claim: those documents that are said to bear even remotely on the gassing claim are, in context, completely benign, and for the most part refer back to the anxiety-producing procedures just discussed. These conclusions will not prove that there were no mass gassings. They will, however, vindicate revisionist doubt.

It will of course be impossible to indefinitely withhold a final judgment on the source or character of the gassing claims. But we can take guidance from two cautionary remarks of Conan Doyle's Baker Street sage. "How often have I said to you that when you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth?" said Sherlock Holmes to Dr. Watson in *The Sign of Four*. To be sure, the historian must always be willing to face uncomfortable truths. "I should have more faith," Holmes remarked in *A Study in Scarlet*, "I ought to know by this time that when a fact appears opposed to a long train of deductions it invariably proves to be capable of bearing some other interpretation." Indeed, it is precisely the reasonable possibility of "some other interpretation" that all historical investigation must be dedicated.

Yet no one can authoritatively deny the existence of something that most everyone else accepts as true. Therefore categorical denials of mass gassing are not possible. One can, however, try to explain how the gassing claim could have arisen quite naturally given the characteristics and concerns of early 20th Century social and cultural life. It will be shown that the gassing claim, as a form of the more general extermination claim, comprises elements of specific concern to East European Jews since the early 19th Century. It will also be shown that the traditional extermination scenario, featuring a shower-gas-burning sequence, is rooted in profound European and American concerns over disease and disease prevention, the use of poison gas and other mysterious weapons of mass destruction, and finally anxiety and fear over the recent reappearance of cremation as a means of disposal of the dead.

In short, it will be possible to see that the generation of a delusion of mass gas extermination did not require a conspiracy, or a hoax, nor much conscious effort at all, but only a social and cultural climate that would facilitate the generation of such claims,

at a time of war, hatred, and social anomie. We will see that such claims, facilitated here and there by a little helpful fraud, but above all by a simple willingness to believe the worst about one's enemies, would allow these rumors to be stated as fact and become themselves part of that social and cultural landscape of which we are only half-consciously aware.

A few caveats are probably in order. Many people still feel that to question the mass gassing claim, or for that matter, any other aspect of the Holocaust, is tantamount to dismissing the enormous suffering and loss of life experienced by the Jewish people in World War Two, and that it is even "wicked" to pose questions that may cause survivors any further suffering.<sup>12</sup>

As to the first point, it is only because of the emphases of recent historiography that the mass gassing claim has come to be so exclusively associated with the Jewish people and the Holocaust. In 1945, it was commonly claimed that ten million or more had been exterminated at the same half dozen camps where today three million Jews alone are said to have been gassed,<sup>13</sup> the implication is clear that at the time it was believed that more non-Jews than Jews had in fact been exterminated with poison gas.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, mass gassing has been reconstructed as having been applied first to insane and disabled non-Jewish Germans in the course of the Euthanasia campaign. Therefore, skepticism of the mass gassing claim intersects, but does not embrace, the totality of the Holocaust.

As to the second point: the argument that we must spare the feelings of survivors is essentially an appeal to compassion. For many years, we were swayed, and even troubled, by this argument, but we have seen in recent times that this compassion has been invoked to justify persecution and censorship. So now the value of compassion has been placed at odds to the free reason of the individual. But in fact all compassion, and all human action, can only flow from the reasoned choice of free human beings. We conclude, therefore, that the most positive end is served by insisting on the right of free people to speak their minds.

## NOTES

1. Already the present essay in its research phase has given rise to two specialist articles, "*Technique and Operation of German Anti-Gas Shelters: A Refutation of J. C. Pressac's 'Criminal Traces'*" and "Defending Against the Allied Bombing Campaign: Air Raid Shelters and Gas Protection in Germany, 1939-1945, Parts 1 and 2". These articles correspond to sections 12 through 14. The present essay may stand on its own, but it is also in effect an outline for further extended treatments.

2. The first revisionists include the Frenchman, Paul Rassinier (d. 1967), active from 1948, a former inmate of Buchenwald (see his collected writings, *Debunking the Genocide Myth*, Institute of Historical Review (IHR), Newport Beach, CA: o. p.), and the Rumanian Jew, Josef Ginzburg (d. 1990), whose family was persecuted and deported during World War Two, writing under the pseudonym, J. G. Burg, from 1962. There is no easily available precis of revisionist historiography, Arthur R. Butz, *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century*, IHR, Newport News, CA:1983 contains some information, pp. 10-12; pp. 317-334.

3. Some descriptive matter is found in Butz, *op. cit., loc. cit.*, and consult also *cum grano salis* Shermer, *Why People Believe Weird Things*, W. H. Freeman, NY:1997, pp. 173-252. After Rassinier and Burg, "Holocaust revisionism" essentially begins with Arthur R. Butz, whose book was first published in 1976 (1977 in the US): Robert Faurisson in France and Wilhelm Stäglich in Germany emerged almost simultaneously along with others. The end of the '70's witnessed the debut of the *Journal of Historical Review* [hereinafter *JHR*], the primary English-language organ of revisionist writings. The 1980's found important writings by James G. Martin, Friedrich Berg, and Mark Weber, they were joined in the 1990's by, among others, Carlo Mattogno and John Ball. The 1988 Zündel trial also witnessed the

entrance of the British historian David Irving into the revisionist fold, although to this date his writings have not heavily engaged the topic of the Holocaust as such, but see his *Goebbels* (1996) and *Nuremberg: The Last Battle* (1996), both issued by Focal Point in London.

4. Shermer, Michael, *op. cit., loc. cit.*, provides a definition of revisionist positions, or as he calls it, "Holocaust Denial": (1) intentional genocide on racial grounds; (2) "highly technical, well-organized" program, using gas chambers and crematoria, (3) between five and six million dead. Shermer is to be credited for not demonizing revisionists, although his treatment leaves much out. More to the point, we do not know of any other historical event where the facts are set as preconditions to the concept, furthermore, not all revisionists give equal weight to each of the three "conditions". In the present case, while we have doubts about the extent of (1) and (3), we do not consider them historiographically interesting. On the other hand, we are certain that (2), at least as stated, is false.

5. Typical are the descriptions of revisionists that one finds in Lipstadt, Deborah, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory*, Penguin Books (Plume), NY:1994, we note in particular the introduction where revisionist "deniers" are characterized as plague-spreading rats.

6. Revisionism is thus outlawed in Germany, France, Switzerland, and Israel.

7. Two trials were carried out against Ernst Zündel, in 1985 and 1988; Barbara Kulaszka prepared a digest of the transcripts of the second trial, printed as *Did Six Million Really Die?* and his available on the Zündel-site on the Internet [hereinafter, DSMRD].

8. Tony Blair's promises in news reports, 16 Oct 96, and 30 Jan 97.

9. This is evident, for example, in Raul Hilberg's *Destruction of the European Jews*, Quadrangle, Chicago:1968, which, on the subject of gas exterminations restricts itself to heavily edited testimonies of two Nazis, taken under vastly different circumstances, two ambiguous documents, and a number of postwar memoirs of former concentration camp inmates.

10. The forensic approach is largely the brainchild of Robert Faurisson who already in the 1970's sought to compare the arrangement of gassing facilities in Poland with known gas execution technology in the United States. In the late 1980's, while preparing for the second Zündel trial, an expert in US execution technology, Fred Leuchter, was commissioned to write a report on the gassing sites in Poland. The resulting *Leuchter Report* (1988) was a milestone in Holocaust forensics, although its main conclusion, that the crematoria at Birkenau could never have been used for gassing, has been hotly disputed. Leuchter's main scientific conclusions, that the crematoria bore unexpectedly low cyanide traces, considering their supposed use, have been reproduced in several studies by both sides, but the interpretation of these low to non-existent traces has been variously argued and appears inconclusive. The most thorough and rigorous study of forensic issues related to cyanide residues remains the *Rudolf Report (Gutachten)*, but the German chemist Germar Rudolf, published in 1992 and subsequently revised. Rudolf, under the pseudonym Ernst Gauss has also edited the important collection of studies, *Grundlagen zur Zeitgeschichte*, Grabert Verlag, Tübingen:1994 [hereinafter *Grundlagen*], as well as the revisionist periodical, *Viertelsjahrhefte für freie Geschichtsforschung* [hereinafter *VffG*], 1997-present.

11. As evidence of the first, we cite Walter Laqueur's *The Terrible Secret: Suppression of the Truth About Hitler's 'Final Solution'*, Little, Brown & Co., Boston:1980, which repeats every bit of information coming from occupied Poland as proof of the extermination policy, even when he is constrained to admit that it is inaccurate.

12. Laqueur, Walter, *Fascism: Past, Present, Future*, Oxford UP, New York:1996, p. 141.

13. Soviet Special Commissions and contemporary reports had established death tolls as follows: Treblinka, 3-3.5 million, Auschwitz Birkenau, at least 4 million, Majdanek, 1.5 million, Sobibor, Chelmno, several hundreds of thousands, Belzec, 600,000. For a survey of death estimates as of 1946, including some even higher than the above, consult Aroneanu, Eugene, *Inside the Concentration Camps*, translated by Thomas Whissen, Praeger Publishers, Westport, CT: 1996, pp. 143-144.

14. *Ibid.*, The implication may not be correct: according to one of Aroneanu's witnesses the Jewish component always comprised 90% of the total, whatever that might be, *loc. cit.* This seems illogical. It also seems illogical to attribute to the Nazis a policy of exterminating non-Jews if, in the interval of 50 years, it has been accepted that in fact something on the order of seven millions were not exterminated at these six camps.



## 2. The First Reports

MOST HOLOCAUST RESEARCHERS begin their analysis of the gassing claims in the spring of 1942, so we shall follow that custom here.<sup>15</sup> We are not concerned with recording every single enumeration of a gassing claim; we are concerned above all with recording characteristic changes in how the story is reported. Throughout 1942, 1943, and well into the summer of 1944, all claims of mass gassing must be considered as uncorroborated rumors: therefore, after briefly covering the evolution of the story we must pause and attempt to provide other possible explanations for these rumors that are not keyed to the assumption that they reflect reality. To that end, we will have to duly note a few other rumors pertaining to alleged German National Socialist activities that are generally conceded to be untrue today, that is, rumors that assumed a life of their own in the Second World War.

It should be pointed out here that in the spring of 1942 the National Socialist government of Germany began to systematically deport all Jewish persons in Europe to Poland, and, according to their claims, to points farther east. There is no denying that these deportations were cruel, or that they involved the unjust seizure of wealth and belongings, or that many Jews were done to death one way or another during this process. Virtually everyone, revisionist and non-revisionist, agrees about this aspect of the National Socialist persecution of the Jewish people.

There is also agreement that in the subsequent course of the war hundreds of thousands of Jews were dragooned into the German labor system, particularly into the armaments industry, working largely out of concentration camps, and several types of labor camps, and that the death rate in these camps was very high, particularly at the end of the war when disease control measures and provisioning completely broke down. The question is whether in the course of these concentrations in Poland and subsequent deportations farther east the German National Socialists were also carrying out a policy of deliberate extermination of Jewish people, specifically using poison gas.

The first claim of mass gassing pertaining to Jewish people that received wide circulation was contained in the so-called Bund Report that was smuggled to the Polish Government in exile, located in London, in the third week of May, 1942.<sup>16</sup> The report contained two gassing rumors: first that a special automobile (a gas chamber) was being used to gas 90 persons at one time.<sup>17</sup> Since the victims were supposed to have dug their graves before being gassed, it follows that this was more a gas chamber that could be moved from place to place than a gas van (normally conceived as a vehicle that would drive victims to a grave while they died from gas inhalation on the way).<sup>18</sup> The second rumor pertains to actions in Warsaw: it is said that Jews were being experimented upon with poison gases.<sup>19</sup>

The Bund Report, in turn, appears to be a composite of at least two documents that had come from Warsaw during the spring of 1942. The first of these was an underground communication from the Jewish Labor Bund, in Warsaw, dated March 16, 1942, which described German activities in Western Poland as follows:

"In a number of villages the Jews were put to death by gas poisoning. They were herded in a horrible way into hermetically sealed trucks transformed into gas chambers, in groups of fifty, entire families, completely nude ...."<sup>20</sup> and further alleged that "gas poisoning" was being carried out in Lodz.<sup>21</sup> The second document that contributed to the Bund Report was a lead article in *Der Veker*, April 30, 1942, at a time of internecine struggle between Jewish resisters and collaborators in the Warsaw ghetto.<sup>22</sup> That article is the source of most of the numerical totals in the Bund Report, but it is interesting that neither of these documents indicate 700,000 total dead.<sup>23</sup> The April 30, 1942 *Der Veker* article also specifies Chelmno as the site of poison gassings, without giving details, but it



is worth noting that from the March 16 communication there is an implied connection of bathing (the enforced nudity) and gassing, although, as we shall see, it will be some months before either element become dominant in the recitation of atrocities.

Two of the members of the Polish National Council in exile were Jewish: Zygielbojm and Szwarcbart, and they could be expected to be particularly interested in what was being alleged about their co-religionists several hundred miles away under German military occupation, and, in spreading these allegations as a means of getting support for their people.<sup>24</sup> The Bund Report was thus extensively publicized in the media.

Already on June 24, 1942, the Bund Report was summarized on the BBC.<sup>25</sup> The following day, the Daily Telegraph ran a major story on the Report, with two headlines of note: "Germans murder 700,000 in Poland," and "Traveling Gas Chambers".<sup>26</sup> The following day, Zygielbojm delivered a broadcast over the BBC, summarizing the Bund Report, in Yiddish, and hence obviously directed to the Jewish population in Poland.<sup>27</sup> Within a week, the BBC had made an arrangement with the Polish National Council giving the BBC priority in the reporting of all future atrocity stories.<sup>28</sup>

On July 1, 1942, the Polish Fortnightly Review published a report, based on the allegations made in the Bund Report, and now also mentioning specific camps: Sobibor, and Majdanek, near Lublin.<sup>29</sup> It also made a reference to atrocities at Auschwitz, described as a labor camp, where about a thousand Soviet and Polish POW's were supposed to have been gassed the previous September, as well as to another camp nearby, called '*Paradisa*' -- the name, so the report alleged, because "from it there is only one road, leading to Paradise."<sup>30</sup> It further alleges that the crematoria in the *Paradisa* camp were five times larger than at Auschwitz, and that experiments with poison gas were conducted there.<sup>31</sup> It should be emphasized that the remarks in the Polish Fortnightly Review concerning Auschwitz were not in the Bund Report; they appear to have come from earlier reports that were sent to London.<sup>32</sup>

Looking over these initial claims it is clear that the claim of gassing is but one of a number of extermination claims being made. It is furthermore true that the claims of gassing focus more on the allegation of experiments rather than a systematic extermination procedure. On the Auschwitz claims, there are some startling inaccuracies: *Paradisa* is clearly a reference to Birkenau, but Birkenau had no crematoria until the following spring, and the term *Paradisa* itself, as a road to paradise, is obviously the origin of the "*Himmelfahrt*" that will later figure so prominently in the folklore of Sobibor and Treblinka but which has no place in the history of Birkenau.<sup>33</sup>

The other thing that is important to note in this first rush of stories about gassings is that the BBC has already begun to play a major role in recycling these rumors back to their point of origin in Poland.<sup>34</sup> These broadcasts in effect create a feedback loop that repeats and gives authority to Polish rumors, which are then re-injected back into Poland, where they may be expected to multiply and burgeon. There will be more to say of these broadcasts shortly, but the role of radio in disseminating and universalizing the rumors of mass gassing is something that deserves a very thorough accounting.

By July 16, 1942, the allegations of gassing were repeated in the News Review, here with the claim that the Germans were preparing "large gas stations" where the Polish Jewish population would be murdered.<sup>35</sup> The report claims that Jews were to be given "no sleeping drugs"... "they were just trussed up and finished off."<sup>36</sup> This report is getting us closer to the claim as we understand it today, but the reference to drugs and trussing up the victims suggests more a reference to gassing as a form of execution than for mass extermination: in other words, it appears that the author was attempting to compare the gassing procedure alleged in Poland with that used for executions in the United States.<sup>37</sup>

Later on that same summer, two rumors were passed on to Gerhart Riegner, the Geneva representative of the World Jewish Congress in Geneva.<sup>38</sup> Both of these came from Germans, private citizens hostile to Nazism, and both claimed that the National Socialist government was preparing to use poison gas: the one claim would mutate into the formulation of "lighting the gas ovens"<sup>39</sup> the other made a specific reference to the use of prussic acid, or cyanide gas (*Blausäure*).<sup>40</sup> Both of these rumors are considered important because they stem from German sources and secondly because cyanide gas would later be considered to be a basic "murder weapon" in the extermination process.<sup>41</sup> But it should be clear that rumors heard by even prominent Germans in the context of the established BBC gassing claim feedback loop are no more valid than any others. In this respect it is interesting to note that when two "eyewitnesses" from Poland were interviewed in Geneva at about the same time neither one said a word about gas exterminations, although they described many other hardships endured by Polish Jews.  
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A BBC broadcast on September 27<sup>th</sup> featured the exiled German author Thomas Mann, who repeated the gassing claim, saying that 16,000 French Jews had been gassed on a train after it had been "hermetically sealed" and that 11,000 Polish Jews had been put to death in the same way.<sup>43</sup> It is known that such rumors were heard in Europe at the time.<sup>44</sup> It follows that among the French and Dutch Jews being deported in the fall of 1942 there would be some who would be quite anxious about what awaited them in the concentration camps.

The next important development in the mass gassing claims comes again from Polish sources, and in particular the testimony of Jan Karski, a Polish intelligence operative who claimed to have been an eyewitness at Belzec, indeed, his report also mentions Sobibor and Treblinka.<sup>45</sup> These various reports were compiled by the Geneva Zionists, and then publicized in London and New York at the same time.<sup>46</sup> There were two apparently new elements to these materials. The first is the description of the loading of deported Jews into trucks covered with lime and chlorine -- this apparently the origin of the later claim of extermination with chlorine gas.<sup>47</sup> The second was the description of extermination at Belzec -- the victims were told to strip, as if for a shower, were led into a room, and then electrocuted via a metal plate on the floor.<sup>48</sup> The elaboration of these materials in the New York Times on November 26, 1942, would include allegations by Rabbi Stephen S. Wise that the Germans were also turning the bodies of dead Jews into "fats and soaps and lubricants" and that the Germans were now "injecting bubbles into their veins" because "prussic acid had been found to be too expensive."<sup>49</sup>

This particular cycle of extermination claims seems especially rich. Lime and chlorine were standard materials used to combat epidemics -- we will discuss this in more detail shortly. The extermination description at Belzec is noteworthy for two reasons: first, because it is apparently the first time that "showering" is explicitly described as an element in pre-extermination deception, although as we have seen the connection appears have preceded this statement,<sup>50</sup> and second because the electrocution claim is no longer made today (although it must be said that it would later undergo significant elaboration.)<sup>51</sup>

The last element that is interesting is in regard to the soap claim, which has quietly been abandoned by all responsible researchers in recent decades.<sup>52</sup> The claim of corpse utilization seems obviously related to a similar false claim made about the Germans in World War One, and indeed it was recognized as such in some quarters even in 1942.<sup>53</sup> Another point is that there are two documents that indicate that the Germans were attempting to squelch such rumors in Slovakia and Lublin in July and October of 1942.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, we know that "soap making" originally arose among ethnic Poles in 1942, who, along with the Jews, were being resettled on the right bank of the Bug River.<sup>55</sup>

The accumulation of extermination claims made in 1942 would lead the allied leaders to make a declaration on December 17, 1942, condemning German practices, without, on the other hand, specifying procedures.<sup>56</sup>

In April, 1943, an interesting memo of atrocities was drafted in London but was never issued. It claimed to describe extermination activities at Auschwitz- Birkenau. Three types of extermination were alleged in this anonymous document besides shooting. They were:

- a. Gas Chambers, the victims were undressed and put into those chambers where they suffocated.
- b. Electric Chambers, these chambers had metal walls, the victims were brought in and high tension electric current was introduced.
- c. The so-called Hammerluft system. This is a hammer of air. These were special chambers where the hammer fell from the ceiling and by means of a special installation victims found death under air pressure.<sup>57</sup>

Needless to say neither method b. nor c. form part of the current extermination narrative. However these two story elements are good examples of how Holocaust claims are later elaborated and developed. The description of the electric chambers is almost certainly derived from the Karski report, and will surface again. The *Hammerluft* system appears even more interesting. The crux of this rumor appears to be the idea of a falling hammer: it is probably here that one has for the first time a claimed method of execution that will later emerge as a prime form of death at Mauthausen (where it was supposed to be the "Kugel Decree"), Buchenwald, and also Sachsenhausen, where in the form of what Carlos Porter sarcastically called the "pedal-driven brain-bashing machine" it was supposed to have been used to exterminate 840,000 Russian POWs.<sup>58</sup> On the other hand, the element in the claim that touches on air pressure is probably the grandfather of the so-called "vacuum chambers" at Treblinka that would make a brief appearance in 1945.<sup>59</sup>

For all of the subsequent development of the *Hammerluft* claim, it seems odd how this rumor could have arisen in the first place, since there is no material or physical evidence to support it (indeed, there is no such evidence for any of the claims we have reviewed so far). We are tempted to think that someone took the term "*Hammerluft*", which might conceivably refer to a pneumatic hammer, and this led to some grisly speculation. On the other hand it is interesting to note that during the war the Germans attempted to develop a secret weapon that involved high pressure jets of gases that would penetrate the fuselage of low flying aircraft, and, as a military project, POW's and Jewish forced laborers were no doubt involved.<sup>60</sup> Perhaps rumors of this project also mutated into this particular extermination claim.

The abovementioned memo, drafted April 18, 1943, was never issued, probably because the main atrocity story at the time was the massacre of the Polish officers in Katyn forest which had just been revealed by the Germans.<sup>61</sup> The story is simply this. Over ten thousand Polish officers fell into Soviet hands in 1939 and were never heard from again. In February, 1943, shortly after the fall of the Sixth Army at Stalingrad, Germans stationed outside of Smolensk discovered mass graves of Polish officers. The Germans spent two months exhuming and analyzing the remains, accounting for 4,400 bodies in all. Several non-German forensic experts, including an independent Polish commission, were called in to investigate and carry out autopsies. The results in the subsequent German report, which was more than 300 pages in length, concluded that the officers had been systematically butchered in the spring of 1940. It was, in other words, an atrocity carried out by the Soviet Union.<sup>62</sup>

The Katyn episode is interesting for a few reasons. In the first place, confronted with well nigh irrefutable evidence of the criminality of their main ally, both Britain and the United States took the position that it was a German crime.<sup>63</sup> Second, the German conduct of the exhumations and autopsies was thorough and meticulous: the international specialists, including the Poles, were allowed to conduct their researches with the minimum of interference.<sup>64</sup> Third, the German forensic report is probably the most detailed analysis of any atrocity that ever occurred in the Second World War, nothing even remotely comparable has ever been produced for the many allegations of German atrocity.

In the midst of now typical gas chamber claims in May and June, and perhaps as a response to the Katyn accusation, the Soviets conducted a trial in Krasnodar in July of 1943, featuring German POW's who confessed to the gassing of people by use of "gas vans" or as the Russians called them, "*Dushegubki*" or "murder vans".<sup>65</sup> It is worth mentioning here that no "gassing van" has ever been located.<sup>66</sup> In August of 1943 a periodical entitled *Polish Labor Fights!* repeated extermination claims for Treblinka once more, now referring to rooms that are filled with people, sealed, and then filled with steam that kills the victims.<sup>67</sup> Aside from the novel use of steam, later abandoned, one notes here again the use of the "showering" motif in the extermination process.

In late November, 1943, the Soviets, upon the liberation of Kiev, would allege that several tens of thousands had been shot at Babi Yar, a ravine outside of the city.<sup>68</sup> The absence of forensic evidence was explained by claiming the Germans had somehow managed to dig up all of the remains a few weeks before retreating from the Red Army and burned all of the bodies without leaving a trace. What is at issue here is not the reality of shooting claims, *per se*, for there certainly is much evidence to corroborate the notion that the Germans and their East European auxiliaries massacred many people, including Jews, in the course of carrying out the Commissar Order to kill communists and communist sympathizers, as well as in the context of anti-partisan warfare.<sup>69</sup> Rather, what is interesting about the Soviet claim is the assertion that all of the remains were completely destroyed. This is a very prominent feature of all atrocity claims made against the Germans in World War Two.

In December, 1943, the Soviets held another atrocity trial, this time in Kharkov, a city in the Eastern Ukraine that had changed hands several times during the war. Again, there were repetitions of the same gas van testimony given at the Krasnodar trial, and, on December 16, 1943, an interesting description of Auschwitz given by an SS officer, Heinisch:

*Prosecutor:* Tell the court about your talk with Somann.

*Heinisch:* Somann told me that death caused by gas poisoning was painless and more humane. He said that in the gas van death was very quick, but actually death came not in twelve seconds but much more slowly and was accompanied by great pain.

Somann told me about the camp in Auschwitz in Germany where the gassing of prisoners was carried out. The people were told that they were to be transferred elsewhere, and foreign workers were told that they would be repatriated and were sent under this pretext to bath-houses. Those who were to be executed first entered a place with a signboard with "Disinfection" on it and there they were undressed -- the men separately from the women and children. Then they were ordered to proceed to another place with a signboard "Bath." While the people were washing themselves special valves were opened to let in the gas which caused their death. Then the dead people were burned in special furnaces in which about 200 bodies could be burned simultaneously.<sup>70</sup>

Heinisch went on to say that Somann was the Chief of the Security Service in the

Breslau area, which is the general area where Auschwitz is located, that gas executions took place only in camps on German soil, and further revealed that the decision to carry out executions "by means of gas poisoning" was made at a conference in the Summer of 1942 which Hitler, Himmler, and Kaltenbrunner attended.<sup>71</sup>

Heinisch's testimony is remarkable in several respects. First of all, we have by December, 1943, at a trial under Soviet auspices, a clear albeit erroneous narrative of the gassing claim at Auschwitz, in a form more or less similar to the standard narrative and in a publication that received wide distribution. It is also notable that Heinisch does not specify the ethnicity of the victims, but rather prefers to speak of foreign workers and their families: this at a time when large numbers of Ukrainians were being evacuated to the Reich for labor and were being subjected to the indignities of communal showers.<sup>72</sup>

The description of the gassing process provided by Heinisch is erroneous and therefore in attempting to account for it we could conceive of a link back to the unpublished narrative concerning Auschwitz in May or to other rumors that may have been circulating at the time. But it is important to note that the narrative contains details about bathing and disinfection that we have not encountered prior to this point. It is also important to reflect on how it would be possible for Heinisch, a district commissar at Melitopol in occupied Russia, and Somann, an SS chief in Breslau, to be informed of a process that the postwar trials have assured us were carried out in the greatest secrecy.<sup>73</sup>

In early 1944, in February, the Belzec electrocution story once more emerged.<sup>74</sup> Finally, at the beginning of May, the New York Times repeated a story in which the Germans were planning to construct "special baths" which were in fact gas chambers, and in which the Hungarian Jews were to be exterminated.<sup>75</sup> By this time, then, the gassing claim had become cemented its most typical form.

It should be emphasized at the end of this brief review of gassing and other extermination claims that to this point not a hint of what we would normally call evidence had been brought forward. Nevertheless we can see emerging over time a kind of model for extermination procedures, what we will call the shower-gas-burning sequence. The idea that victims would be led into a bathing facility of some kind, and then be executed (the method of execution focusing on gas more and more as time went by), and then burned so that no trace would remain was already a very common idea by the summer of 1944.

In fairness it should also be kept in mind that the shower-gas-burning concept still coexisted with other methods of extermination, including steam, vacuums, hammers of air, and electrocution, which have not been alleged in many years. We should expect therefore a heightened level of material and documentary proof in support of the gassing allegations as opposed to the others. We will find out the extent to which this is true in subsequent sections.

In reviewing these gassing claims we find that virtually all of them came from anonymous sources in Poland, and that all of them were publicized and propagated by Jewish agencies in Switzerland, London, and America.<sup>76</sup> The conclusion that many revisionists have drawn is that these gassing claims were therefore developed by Jewish groups as part of a hoax.<sup>77</sup> We would dissent from this interpretation: it is too great a leap to suggest that these Jewish agencies, in publicizing these claims, knew them to be false, or were publicizing them to some nefarious purpose. On the contrary, all of the internal evidence -- letters, diaries, stray conversations -- indicate that the Western Jews most responsible for the spread of these claims actually believed them.<sup>78</sup> Whether these stories were then used to pursue political ends, and specifically Zionist ends, does not by itself discount the apparent sincerity of what these Jewish leaders were writing and saying at the time. To put the matter simply, they were in no position to know what was

really going on: all they knew, or thought they knew, was that their co-religionists were undergoing a terrific ordeal of persecution, and needed help.

Having surveyed the claims, we must now attempt to interpret the nature of these various story elements. In other words, if these rumors are not a reflection of reality, then where did the rumors come from? It is clear that the use of gas was expressed in three ways before settling on the shower-gas scenario. One of these involved the idea of gas as a means of execution, in which the victims were not sedated, another involved the use of gas in experiments, which tied to the allegation of prussic acid use, and finally there was the variant that featured the "lighting of the gas ovens."<sup>79</sup>

The "gas oven" motif is clearly a garbled association between crematoria, almost all of which are gas operated, and the basic gassing claim. This perhaps innocent association, which corresponds to the known gas ovens that existed in many homes, tended to create an absolute linkage between gas chambers and crematoria: that is, wherever a crematorium was, there also was a gas chamber.

The "lack of sedation" motif, as already discussed, was probably an extension of the use of poison gas for execution purposes in the United States. The electrocution motif, prominent at about the same time, was a probable extension of the same idea, since electrocution was even more widely used for executions in America.<sup>80</sup>

Since the poison gas used for American executions was also cyanide, that could account for the rumors of cyanide gas usage. But there are other contexts in which cyanide gas could have emerged in official German documents or discussions during this period, and these usages could have led to garbled understanding which would account for the rumors as well, particularly those concerning experiments.

Soon after the invasion of Russia, the Wehrmacht obtained materials indicating that the Red Army had contingency plans for spraying German troops with cyanide gas from low-flying aircraft. As a result, in January, 1942, the Germans conducted experiments on farm animals using this gas, with generally fatal effect. This in turn led to the development of the FE 42 gas mask filter, which provided protection against cyanide gas. But the Germans, for reasons of security, attempted to keep these developments secret.<sup>81</sup> So we have here at the beginning of 1942 secret experiments with prussic acid and the development of a device to protect against it, all of this before or roughly simultaneous with the emergence of rumors that the Germans were experimenting with this gas on human beings. A far more potent association in which prussic acid would emerge concerned the use of this material for delousing and disinfecting communities in Eastern Europe. Therefore we must make a detour to discuss these German delousing and disinfection procedures.



## NOTES

1. Cf. Butz, Arthur R., *op. cit.*; Gilbert, Martin, *Auschwitz and the Allies*, Henry Holt & Co., NY:1982. Also useful to this section are: Gilbert's article, "What Was Known and When", in Gutman, Y. & Berenbaum, M., *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp*, Indiana UP, Bloomington:1998; Martin, James J., *The Man Who Invented 'Genocide'*, Institute for Historical Review, Newport Beach, CA: 1984; Dawidowicz, Lucy, ed. *A Holocaust Reader*, Behrman House, West Orange, NJ: 1976; and Laqueur, Walter, *The Terrible Secret*, Little, Brown, Boston:1980.
2. Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 40. For reasons that will become more clear, it does not seem absolutely certain that the entirety of the Bund Report was composed in Warsaw. The entire text is reproduced in Dawidowicz, *Reader*, pp. 316-318. Priority claims for the first gassing story antedate this appearance: Robert Faurisson has referenced a report of the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, from Stockholm, December 22, 1941, as follows: "More than 1,000 victims of spotted fever [i.e., typhus] in the densely crowded Warsaw ghetto have been put to death by gas [—], it is learned today from reliable sources," quoted in *Grundlagen*, p. 10n. However this account is no longer credited by the traditional narrative. Laqueur, *Terrible, passim*, cites many other reports from early 1942 that circulated in Poland in various underground newspapers, in letters, etc.
3. Gilbert, *op. cit.*, pp.40-42
4. Cf. Ohlendorf's testimony in the Einsatzgruppen Trial, excerpted in Harris, Whitney R., *Tyranny on Trial*, Barnes & Noble, NY:1995 (orig. SMU Press, Dallas, TX: 1954), p. 352ff
5. Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 43. This rumor is clearly indebted to the claim from December, see note above.
6. Dawidowicz, *Reader*, p. 215
7. *op. cit.*, p. 216
8. *op. cit.*, p. 294f for the complete text of the front page editorial. It is worthy of note than an analysis of the original text indicates that the atrocities are enumerated by way of justifying the recalcitrance of the Bund to the German occupation, and condemning the cooperation of the Jewish Councils. On these last, consult especially Trunk, Isaiah, *Judenrat*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln: 1996 (originally published in 1972); and Ringelblum, Emanuel, *Polish-Jewish Relations During the Second World War*, Northwestern UP, Evanston, IL: 1992.
9. *Ibid.*, the 700,000 figure appears to come from a 1916 article, see Laqueur, *op. cit.*, p. , and Faurisson, cited below.
10. Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 43, *passim*. The aim of the Bund Report, by the way, was not to elicit a Zionist quid pro quo, but rather to call for reprisals against Germans held by the Allies. This tends to support the idea that the gassing claims were generally believed by Polish Jews in exile.
11. Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 44
12. Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 43
13. Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 44
14. Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 46
15. Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 44
16. Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 45
17. *Ibid.*
18. The inference derives from the fact that Oswiecim (Auschwitz) is not mentioned in the Bund Report; however, it is mentioned in the underground appeal of 16 March, cf. Dawidowicz, *Reader*, pp. 215-216, however the details concerning Auschwitz in the 1 July article of the *Fortnightly Review* are not present in that earlier communication.
19. On *Himmelfahrt*, see Harris, *op. cit.*, p. 334 for an example.
20. The inference derives from the fact of the Yiddish language broadcast, the BBC's claiming priority in announcing atrocity claims, and the fact, to be discussed later, that the BBC was widely listened to in occupied Europe. An analysis of BBC broadcasts is very much needed. More evidence of this feedback loop will be discussed further below, cf. Shermer, *op. cit.*, p. 100f for an elucidation of the concept.



21. Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 51
22. Ibid.
23. Perhaps the text was rewritten in London for the sake of an Anglo-American audience whose association with poison gas would more readily conjure up the idea of execution: poison cyanide gas had been used for executions in the United States since 1924, see Crowell, Samuel, "Technique an Operation of German Anti-Gas Shelters" at site referenced above, and is also available in German in Gernar Rudolf's translation as "Technik und Arbeitsweise deutscher Gasschutzbunker im zweiten Weltkrieg" in *VffG*, I, 4, (XII, 1997), pp. 226-241, also incorporating some elements of "Defending Against the Allied Bombing Campaign."
24. Gilbert, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-58
25. the "gas oven" formula is attributed to a Dr. Sommer, although it is not exactly clear if he composed the message that was eventually passed on to the West, Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 56, 58n.
26. Gilbert, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*, repeated arguments that a single source existed for both messages, credit for identifying the "prussic acid" component as being derived from a Mr. Schulte belongs to Richard Breitman.
27. The current version holds that cca. one million people were exterminated with cyanide gas evolving from Zyklon B, a common pesticide, see further discussion below. The other two million gassed are said to have been killed with exhaust gases, specifically carbon monoxide from diesel engines.
28. Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 64f
29. quoted by Stäglich, Wilhelm, *Auschwitz: A Judge Looks at the Evidence*, Institute for Historical Review, Newport Beach, CA: 1990, p. 112f (an English translation by Thomas Francis of *Der Auschwitz Mythos*, Grabert Verlag, Tübingen: 1979)
30. The inference is supported in Frank, Anne, *Diary of a Young Girl* (Definitive Edition), Bantam Books, NY:1997, p. 53, where for the entry of October 9, 1942 she describes hearing rumors of gassing over the "English radio", and see further discussion below.
31. Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 93f
32. cf. Martin, *op. cit.*, p. 40. In The New York Times the following day, that is, 26 November 1942. The details are clearly the same.
33. Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 94
34. Ibid.
35. Martin, *op. cit.*, p. 41
36. cf. the communication of 16 March 1942, discussed above, also Rothschild, Sylvia, ed., *Voices from the Holocaust*, New American Library, NY:1981, where a Polish Jewish survivor recalled his fear of going to the bath house at Sachsenhausen already in 1942, p. 159, and habitual BBC listening by others, p. 129, 153. This testimony also indicates the very wide dispersion of the shower-gassing claim/rumor at this time, which inferentially supports the concept of the BBC feedback loop.
37. The nadir of this claim may be found in the *Black Book of Polish Jewry*, published in 1946, quoted by Porter, Carlos Whitlock, *The Holocaust: Made in Russia*, Historical Review Press, n. p.:1988, p. 381.
38. cf. Weber, Mark, "Jewish Soap" in *JHR*, vol.11, no 2. Also compare Hilberg, Raul, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Quadrangle Books, Chicago:1968, pp. 331, 470. Rejection of the wartime soap-making rumor should be distinguished from the claim made at the International Military Tribunal (IMT) at Nuremberg by the Soviet Union that the Germans conducted soap-making experiments at Stutthof ca. 1944. This last claim is not explicitly rejected, but see Weber's article above. The reader is directed to the complete affidavit in support of the claim, reproduced in Porter, *Holocaust*, pp. 368-376, with the recommendation that they read it and decide for themselves.
39. Martin, *op. cit.*, p. 46
40. Hilberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 331, German propaganda division reports October, 1942, and NO-1660.
41. Hilberg, *op. cit.*, p. 331
42. Martin, *op. cit.*, p. 44

43. Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 130
44. on "Kugel Decree" see Harris, *op. cit.*, on the real meaning of the term, see Porter, Carlos Whitlock, *Not Guilty at Nuremberg*, Historical Review Press, Brighton, Sussex, UK:n. d., pp. 15-16, on the "pedal-driven brain-bashing machine" see Porter, *Holocaust*, p. 15, 378-380.
45. Porter, *Holocaust*, p. 408
46. cf. Hahn, Fritz, *Waffen und Geheimwaffen des deutschen Heeres, 1933-1945*, Bernard & Graefe Verlag, München:1992, "Windkanone", vol. 2, p. 136f
47. Paul, Allen, *Katyn*, Naval Institute Press, Annapolis: 1996; p. 210, the Germans broke the story April 13, 1943
48. Paul, *op. cit.*, p. 254, the length of the Soviet report is given as 38 pages.
49. On allied response, see Paul, *op. cit.*, p. 222, and especially pp. 301-315, Martin, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-69
50. On German handling of Katyn, see Paul, *op. cit.*, p. 208-210, 228-231, 270-273
51. Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 149. The trial took place from July 14 to July 17, 1943. See *The People's Verdict: A Full Report of the Proceedings at the Krasnodar and Kharkov German Atrocity Trials*, Hutchinson & Co., London:1944. *Dushegubki* is the feminine substantive plural from the neuter noun *Dushegubstvo*, meaning murder, literally, destroying or crushing of the spirit (from the verb "to breathe"). The cognate derivation of suffocation is therefore innate.
52. Weckert, Ingrid, "Die Gaswagen -- Kritische Wurdigen der Beweislage" in *Grundlagen*, provides a detailed analysis of this claim. A review of the testimonies in *The People's Verdict* finds that the confessions of the German defendants and other witnesses on the gas vans are almost word for word identical, but these descriptions have never been correlated with any drawing or physical object. Other noteworthy themes developed, beginning at the Krasnodar Trial, include the claim that the Germans became obsessed with secrecy once they found out that the Soviets had obtained "gas van" documents (the most important of the PS-501 documents was developed by the Soviets, see Weckert, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*), that Hitler personally ordered the suppression of "gas van" information in July, 1943, and that the bodies were burned to "wipe out the traces" of the crimes.
53. Butz, *op. cit.*, p. 82
54. Butz, *op. cit.*, p. 89, compare also the critique, "Babi Yar: Kritische Fragen und Anmerkungen" in *Grundlagen*, by Herbert Tiedemann
55. The question of the number of Jews shot by the Germans or their auxiliaries is hotly debated by revisionists, as is also the reasons for or rationale provided for these shootings. There seems little reason to disbelieve the extensive documentary records, which indicate a minimum of several hundreds of thousands of Jews slain. The next question pertains to the reason for these shootings: in some cases it appears tied to anti-partisan activity, in others, to retaliation or simply punitive measures, in others, to the ideological commitment of some Nazi commanders to the killing of all Jews. The traditionalist claim, supported by the judgment of the IMT and NMT, is that 2 million Jews men women and children, were shot, and that they were shot because of their Jewish identity alone. The actual totals one can derive from the existing documents -- assuming 100% reliability -- is about one million. Revisionists dispute the claim of shooting exterminations, largely, one thinks, because it is traditionally linked to the gassing claim, although it must be said that the evidence for the mass shootings is of a completely different order of magnitude and verisimilitude than the evidence for gassing. The shooting claims deserve an extended treatment on their own, one which places these actions in the context of the German tradition of reprisal shootings, from which the Jewish massacres, one way or the other, undoubtedly derived.
56. *The People's Verdict*, p. 90.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 90, 91f
58. The Soviet prosecution at Nuremberg in the course of its presentation stressed elements of sexual shame and dishonor among Ukrainian deportees during this time-frame. xxxxx
59. It is also remarkable that Gilbert, in *Auschwitz and the Allies*, completely ignores Heinisch's testimony about Auschwitz, even though he references the Kharkov trial, references *The People's Verdict*, and sought to present in that book a complete narrative of how information about Auschwitz was acquired. It is also remarkable that Heinisch's narrative precedes the 1944 constructions of the Auschwitz narrative, discussed below. A review of other sources, primary and secondary, shows no references to Heinisch or Somann concerning Auschwitz.
60. Butz, *op. cit.*, p. 146

61. Butz, *op. cit.*, p. 147. This narrative, like the other Auschwitz narratives for 1944, appears to have come from the Weissmandel circle in Bratislava (cf. Dawidowicz, *A Holocaust Reader*, pp. 318-327) but given the testimony of Heinisch six months previous its derivative nature is easily argued.
62. Gilbert, *op. cit.*, passim
63. e.g., Butz, *op. cit.*, p. xxxxx Butz' meaning of the word "hoax" is rather more subtle than his use of the word implies, compare a later discussion in Hoax, p. xxxxx The other revisionist most closely associated with the Hoax concept is Robert Faurisson.
64. Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 66, and esp. 67, 135, 136 [Ziegelboym's suicide], Morgenthau, Henry III, *Mostly Morgenthau*, Ticknor & Fields, NY:1991, p. 366, [Henry Morgenthau Jr.'s comment]
65. Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 56-58
66. Trombley, Stephen, *The Execution Protocol*, Anchor Books, NY: 1993, for further discussion of American execution techniques and their origins.
67. Gellermann, Günther W., *Der Krieg, der nicht stattfand*, Bernard & Graefe Verlag, München:1986, p. 186f

### 3. German Disinfection Procedures

DISEASE HAS MOVED hand-in-hand with warfare and migrations throughout history, and has brought more than one army to its knees. Eastern Europe was a particularly dreaded location for such epidemics: the Allies in the Crimean War, and the Napoleonic Army in 1812 were decimated by diseases, above all typhus and cholera, but also typhoid and dysentery.<sup>82</sup> For a long time the cause of these diseases was unknown, only towards the end of the 19th Century was it understood that cholera, typhoid, and dysentery were transmitted by microbes usually in contaminated water.<sup>83</sup> The vector of typhus -- the body louse -- was not identified until shortly before World War One.<sup>84</sup>

This lack of understanding did not prevent Europeans from attempting to control these diseases, since the general understanding was that filth and poor hygiene had something to do with their transmission.<sup>85</sup>

Towards the end of the 19th Century Germany developed a number of procedures for the delousing and disinfection of people and their clothing. These involved showering, smearing the body with petroleum or other substances to kill bugs, and steaming or boiling belongings.<sup>86</sup> The application of the these procedures soon came to a test in the 1880's.

Typhus was endemic in Eastern Europe, and cholera had swept through the region on several occasions in the 19th Century.<sup>87</sup> The constant saturation, particularly with typhus, conferred a certain immunity on the inhabitants.<sup>88</sup> Someone transplanted to these regions could easily catch these diseases.<sup>89</sup> Someone leaving the area might carry them.<sup>90</sup> The population of the area, comprising roughly the Western Russian Empire and the Eastern provinces of Austria Hungary, Jewish and gentile, were uniformly impoverished, hungry, and, by then current Western hygienic standards, filthy.<sup>91</sup> It is no exaggeration to state that most of the people in this region were but one crop failure away from death.<sup>92</sup>

In 1881, after the assassination of Tsar Alexander II, anti-Semitic riots became characteristic in the region.<sup>93</sup> That was the last straw for many Jews, who had borne impoverishment, hunger and filth as stoically as their gentile counterparts, in addition to government interference in their traditional way of life. As a result, many Jews chose to emigrate, and this led them in many cases through Germany.<sup>94</sup> In Germany, they were subjected to the standard disinfection procedures, of which Mary Antin gave a much quoted account in her memoirs <sup>95</sup>

In a great and lonely field, opposite a solitary house within a large yard, our train pulled up at last, and the conductor commanded the passengers to make haste and get out. [...] [The conductor] hurried us into the one large room that made up the house, and then into the yard. Here a great many men and women, dressed in white, received us, the women attending the women and girls of the passengers, and the men the others. This was another scene of bewildering confusion, parents losing their children, and little ones crying; baggage being thrown together in one corner of the yard, heedless of contents, which suffered in consequence; those white-clad Germans shouting commands, always accompanied with "Quick! Quick!" -- the confused passengers obeying all orders like meek children, only questioning now and then what was to be done with them. And no wonder if in some minds stories arose of people being captured by robbers, murderers, and the like. Here we had been taken to a lonely place where only that house was to be seen; our things were taken away, our friends separated from us; a man came to inspect us, as if to ascertain our full value; strange-looking people driving us about like dumb animals, helpless and unresisting; children we could not see crying in a way that suggested terrible things; ourselves driven into a little room where a great kettle was boiling on a little stove; our clothes taken off, our bodies rubbed with a slippery substance that could be any bad thing; a shower of warm water let down on us without warning; again driven together to another little room where we sit, wrapped in woolen blankets till large, coarse bags are brought in, their contents turned out, and we see only a cloud of steam, and hear a woman's voice to dress ourselves, -- "Quick! Quick!" -- or else we'll miss -- something we cannot hear. We are forced to pick out our clothes from among the others, with the steam blinding us; we choke, cough, entreat the women to give us time; they persist, "Quick! Quick! -- or you'll miss the train!" Oh, so we really won't be murdered! They are only making us ready for the continuing of our journey, cleaning us of all suspicions of dangerous illness. Thank God!

Mary Antin's bewilderment at disinfection and quarantine, arising from disorientation and novelty, is understandable, so too are the wild rumors that would come from incomprehension and anxiety. But it must be said that such measures were necessary: the year before Mary Antin made her passage in 1893, Hamburg had been hard hit by a cholera epidemic, and New York City had been hit with both a cholera and typhus epidemic.<sup>96</sup>

In the case of the New York epidemics we find many themes that would repeat themselves over subsequent decades. The immigrants, particularly Jews, feared the process of disinfection and quarantine, believing in some cases that their loved ones were being taken to a slaughterhouse.<sup>97</sup> They distrusted the health authorities, and sought to hide instances of typhus, never realizing of course that such opposition and concealment merely spread the disease further.<sup>98</sup> In addition, there were problems with the quarantine. By regulation, those dead of typhus had to be cremated, but this was a violation of Jewish law.<sup>99</sup> The quarantine stations did not make provision for kosher food, and, as a result, several pious Jews starved themselves.<sup>100</sup> The interactions between the New York health authorities and the immigrant Jews could almost be characterized as culture shock, so deep the chasm of non-comprehension and non-accommodation that divided them.

The same pattern emerged in World War One, and not only among Jewish people.

The Germans, in the context of reorganizing the Turkish army, spent a great deal of effort in controlling typhus and other diseases.<sup>101</sup> The two main tools of this effort were the *Dampfdesinfektionswagen* (mobile steam disinfection trucks) and the Turkish baths, which were converted for disinfection purposes.<sup>102</sup> The Germans used primarily sulfur gas, which required a generator (*Vergaser*) that would burn the sulfur and provide the gas.<sup>103</sup> Already at the beginning of 1914 the Germans were using *vergasen* (gasify, gas) as a synonym for *begasen* (fumigate).<sup>104</sup>

Cooperation among the local populations varied: the Turks did not understand why lice had to be killed, because Allah forbade it, the Greek Orthodox and Jewish subjects objected on religious grounds to the bathing and shaving that was part of the treatment.<sup>105</sup>

A severe typhus epidemic in Serbia in the winter of 1914-15 led to international intervention, including an American Relief Expedition that did much to control the disease in its early stages.<sup>106</sup> In 1915-1916, as Bulgaria entered the war on the side of the Central Powers, she was given large chunks of Serbian territory and this in turn required heightened vigilance on the part of the disinfection squads.<sup>107</sup> In this context a story appeared in the London Daily Telegraph in March, 1916, that alleged that 700,000 Serbians had been asphyxiated.<sup>108</sup> Robert Faurisson has successfully shown that this rumor or atrocity claim was directly related to the application of disinfection measures in the region.<sup>109</sup> Surely it is no coincidence that the first claim of mass exterminations in 1942, as we recall, also featured gassings, the Daily Telegraph, and 700,000 victims. The story also reminds us that a mobile steam disinfection truck could easily be converted in a frightened and ignorant mind into a traveling gas chamber.<sup>110</sup>

The reactions to disinfection procedures in Turkey and the Balkans were also apparent in Poland, whether the disease control was being administered by Germans, Americans, or the British.<sup>111</sup> The Germans went to extensive lengths to control diseases, and particularly typhus throughout Poland.<sup>112</sup> This involved carrot and stick methods: on the one hand, the Germans painstakingly wrote a brochure, that was published in the Yiddish language, trying to explain, with appropriate references to the Torah, the importance of personal hygiene, and the necessity of controlling lice.<sup>113</sup> On the other hand, the Germans would sometimes be required to force the local inhabitants to bathe and shower at bayonet point.<sup>114</sup> When the war was over, a terrible typhus epidemic swept through Poland and the Western Russian provinces.<sup>115</sup> American and British specialists went to Poland with a view to controlling the disease. They also sought to delouse and disinfect the residents.<sup>116</sup> But they too ran into resistance and non-compliance, particularly on the part of the Jewish population.<sup>117</sup> One feature of the American treatment that would soon become typical was the use of bottled cyanide gas as a means of destroying vermin.<sup>118</sup>

In the 1920's the Germans developed media for using cyanide gas that would be safer than the use of bottles or the so-called barrel system.<sup>119</sup> One substance developed, called Zyklon B, used clay-like pellets into which the gas was absorbed as liquid under pressure and then sealed in a can.<sup>120</sup> When the can was opened, the pellets would be strewn and the gas would slowly develop.<sup>121</sup> By the Second World War, through the addition of gypsum, Zyklon B had now achieved a stability such that three hours were required for the full evolution of the gas at room temperature,<sup>122</sup> which was ideal for its purpose as an insecticide.

Also during this period the Germans developed fumigation chambers or *Entwesungskammern*.<sup>123</sup> These were usually constructed out of steel, although brick and concrete could also be used.<sup>124</sup> About 10 meters square, the rooms would be filled with clothes and then the Zyklon pellets would be strewn among them. Such chambers, or *Apparate*, typically had two doors: the dirty clothes would go in one door, the disinfected clothes would be taken out of the other door.<sup>125</sup> The Germans also

developed a complicated machinery whereby forced air at or near the boiling point of hydrogen cyanide would be blown through the pellets to speed up the evolution time.<sup>126</sup> The same air circulation technology (*Kreislauf*) would be used in large railroad tunnels, which by means of the air circulation gas generating apparatus (*Kreislaufvergasungsapparaturen*) could fumigate an entire passenger train at one time.<sup>127</sup>

Although Zyklon B was widely used for disinfection, it is important to note that throughout the '30's and during the war many other gases and substances were employed to combat vermin.<sup>128</sup> One gas which was widely substituted for Zyklon was "T-Gas" a mixture of ethylene oxide and carbon dioxide which came in steel tanks and would be piped into the disinfection chamber.<sup>129</sup> Other gases included Tritox, Ventox, and Areginal.<sup>130</sup>

Delousing and disinfection procedures were also a major component of German municipal disinfection centers, temporary huts of the German Labor Service, and transit camps (*Durchgangslagern*) for POW's or deported populations. All three featured a division into a dirty and clean side (*reine und unreine Seite*), and all three featured undressing rooms, shower rooms, and standard size fumigation chambers with double doors.<sup>131</sup> There were some variations of course. The municipal disinfection center at Darmstadt for example, was enlarged in World War Two to make room for the influx of laborers from the East, which we assume to have comprised Poles, Soviet POW's, and Jews.<sup>132</sup> Its cellars were also adapted to air raid shelters.<sup>133</sup> The standard huts (*Unterkünfte*) for the German labor service were equipped with a diesel room, since diesels were expected to provide electricity in the absence of a power net for these outlying structures: these structures were also meant to be temporary and were designed to be put up and taken down in a minimum of man hours.<sup>134</sup>

In World War Two, the Germans aggressively pursued the containment of disease using all of these methods. As the concentrations of Jews in the ghettos increased, epidemics would break out, and the Germans would attempt to get the local Jewish authorities to implement disinfection procedures.<sup>135</sup> Sadly, concealment, non-compliance, and resistance were characteristic in many ghettos, on the other hand, the records indicate that the ghetto in Vilna (Vilnius) was able to successfully control epidemics throughout the war.<sup>136</sup>

The experience of the Wehrmacht in the field also suggests a successful effort at controlling epidemics, including the use of decontamination vehicles and mobile showering units, many of which were improvised by the men of the German Medical Corps (*Sanitatsdienst*).<sup>137</sup>

Of course, the most notorious example of the application of these procedures came in the concentration camps. Upon arrival, inmates were routinely stripped, searched for valuables, showered, and then given clothes that had been previously disinfected.<sup>138</sup> In fact, the most common procedure involved disinfecting the clothing in one part of the "bath and disinfection complex" while the arrivals showered in another part. Kurt Vonnegut's description shows how even American prisoners of war entering German custody could become anxious and fearful at the strangeness of the ritual:

The naked Americans took their places under many showerheads along a white-tiled wall. There were no faucets they could control. They could only wait for whatever was coming. Their penises were shriveled and their balls were retracted. Reproduction was not the main business of the evening.

An unseen hand turned a master valve. Out of the showerheads gushed scalding rain. The rain was a blowtorch that did not warm. It jazzed and jangled Billy's skin without thawing the ice in the marrow of his long bones.



The Americans' clothes were meanwhile passing through poison gas. Body lice and bacteria and fleas were dying by the billions. So it goes.<sup>139</sup>

There seems little reason to doubt that the level of disorientation and fear had changed since the time of Mary Antin 50 years before, to say nothing of the humiliation: indeed, there are witness testimonies that support the idea of such continuity.<sup>140</sup>

In recounting these aspects of German disinfection procedures, as well as Jewish responses, which ranged from sullen non-compliance and avoidance to paranoid fear, one finds a remarkable similarity and a probable point of contact for virtually all of the gassing claims from 1942 into the summer of 1944.

Sobibor, for example, was described in German documents as a transit camp [*Durchgangslager*].<sup>141</sup> Yet a transit camp would require facilities for showering arrivals and disinfecting their belongings before sending them further on their journey.<sup>142</sup> And indeed we find in survivor testimonies that that is exactly what happened to them there.<sup>143</sup> Yet at the same time, we have rumors reported in the West, and later we will have testimonies, that assure us that Sobibor was a camp where arrivals were simply exterminated via the familiar shower-gas-burning sequence.<sup>144</sup> The same situation applies to Treblinka testimonies, for the Malkinia disinfection establishment was only a few kilometers away.<sup>145</sup>

For Majdanek the situation is even more remarkable. As we shall see later, the Bath and Disinfection Complex II would be earmarked as an extermination center by the Soviets: but in its construction it is virtually identical to the standard hut for delousing incoming members of the Labor Service and disinfecting their belongings.<sup>146</sup>

In summarizing the gassing rumors for the period 1942 through the spring of 1944 we encountered several references to prussic acid, showers and baths, and mobile gas chambers that led us into a discussion of German disinfection procedures. We have found that over six decades before World War Two the Germans had devised, for purposes of disease control, procedures that called for the use of mobile delousing and disinfection chambers, baths and disinfection complexes, and fumigation chambers that would utilize a common pesticide, Zyklon B, whose active ingredient was cyanide gas.

But above and beyond the German procedures we have found characteristic reactions to such diseases control measures, among many ignorant or traditional religious communities, and also among Jews, particularly those from the traditional and insulated East European communities.<sup>147</sup> The reactions have ranged from avoidance and non-compliance, to anxiety, fear, and rumor-mongering of a particularly destructive sort. Finally, we note a haunting similarity between the delousing procedures known to have been applied and the rumors of mass gassing that were current at the time.

Therefore the most likely explanation for the evolution of the mass gas extermination legend, to this point in our analysis, is that the application of delousing measures on the populations of Eastern Europe, and particularly on the Jewish people who were being resettled to the East, or dragooned into the Labor Service, conjured up the typical rumors of extermination and slaughter as they had in the past. These rumors, in turn, were conveyed to Jewish parties in Western Europe and the United States, who appear to have all too readily believed them, the rumors in turn were propagated by the British in radio broadcasts back to Europe, including Yiddish language broadcasts, such that the rumors were already widely known, if not widely credited, throughout Europe by the end of 1942. We are now prepared to engage the next evolution of the mass gassing claim.



## NOTES

1. The preeminent revisionist work on the subjects discussed here are two articles by Friedrich Paul Berg, "Zyklon B and the German Delousing Chambers" and "Typhus and the Jews," both originally published in the *JHR* and now available on the CODOH website at: <http://www.codoh.com/gcgv.html> . The following texts on epidemic diseases and their role in history were found useful: Marks, Geoffrey and Beatty, William K., *Epidemics*, Scribners, NY: 1976; Cartwright, Frederick F., *Disease and History*, Barnes & Noble, NY: 1996; McNeil, William, *Plagues and Peoples*, Anchor Books, NY:1976; Rosenberg, Charles E., *The Cholera Years*, University of Chicago, Chicago:1962; Zinsser, Hans, *Rats, Lice, and History*, Black Dog & Leventhal, NY: 1963; Dixon, Bernard, *Magnificent Microbes*, Atheneum, NY:1979; Schimitschek, Erwin, & Werner, G. T., *Malaria, Fleckfieber, Pest*, S. Hirzel Verlag, Stuttgart:1985, Hobhouse, Henry, *Forces of Change*, Arcade, NY:1990.
2. Carwright, *op. cit.*, inter alia, discusses the water-borne diseases in detail.
3. Schimitschek, *op. cit.*, p. 90
4. To a large extent Rosenberg's book, *op. cit.*, is expressly concerned with the development of prophylaxis without a clear comprehension of etiology, and see Evans, cited below.
5. enumerated in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, [hereinafter, EB] 12th Edition (1922), *Typhus*, vol. XXXII, p. 825-827, and Evans, cited below.
6. consult Zinsser, *op. cit.*, Marks *op. cit.*, Hobhouse, *op. cit.*, also Goodall, cited below.
7. Note important characterization of typhus quoted in Dixon, *op. cit.*, p. 201f.
8. *Ibid.*, Also Goodall, cited below.
9. This very important concept involves the manner in which recrudescence typhus, which can recur many years after infection, can lead to a mild case of fever. However, if the person so afflicted with "Brill-Zinsser Disease" lives in a louse-ridden community, infection can then be transmitted to the louse and then to the louse matrix of the community with epidemic and lethal effect. Compare the comments by Zinsser, *op. cit.*, p. 235, 235-239, in which he sketches the outlines of two species of the louse-borne disease. For typhoid fever, it is well known that about 1% of victims (female only) can become permanent carriers of the microbe in their gall bladders, compare "Typhoid Mary."
10. Starkenstein, E., "Hygienische und sanitäre Verhältnisse Polens. Ein Beitrag zur Ostjudenfrage" in *Archiv für Soziale Hygiene und Demographie*, 1 & 2 Heft, 12.VI.1917, pp. 19-38, is characteristic; gentile populations had similar problems, consult EB, article on Typhus, *loc. cit.*
11. This is a truism of Russian history, due to the short growing and harvesting season, and other factors, such that grain yields rarely exceeded 3:1. Hobhouse, *op. cit.*, discusses in greater detail.
12. These are the "pogroms" which will continue until the end of the Russian Civil War; the roots of these anti-Jewish actions seem variable; partly attributed to religious anti-Semitism (i.e., Blood Libel accusations), partly due to the "Russification" tendencies of the Empire, which affected all minorities, not just the Jewish people, partly due to economic competition with other ethnics (Greeks, Germans), partly due to the peculiar position the Eastern Jews occupied vis-a-vis the peasantry, which was newly emancipated and striving to adapt, as well as other social, economic, and demographic conditions, some of which are adumbrated by Hobhouse, *op. cit.* In short, the circumstances that could contribute to anti-Jewish violence at this time and in the examined period were quite complex, what they all seem to have in common is the tremendous and radical changes taking place in the Empire, which will become even more rapid subsequent to the Revolution of 1917. To anticipate a later note, we register here merely the tendency of many Jewish observers to regard these causes as united only by hatred of the Jewish people, we note as well as the tendency of Jewish historians to regard these outbreaks by and large as the product of official instigation.
13. Discussed in, inter alia, Howe, Irving, *World of Our Fathers*, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, NY: 1976, pp. 29-38.
14. Antin, Mary, *The Promised Land*, Penguin, NY: 1997, p. 138f, the book was originally published in 1912, and was based in turn on From Plotzk to Boston, from the 1890's, which in turn was based on an epistle Mary wrote in Yiddish to an uncle in Russia shortly after her arrival in Boston in the spring of 1893. The text is given in truncated form in Howe, *op. cit.*, Markel, cited below, and Jan Van Pelt and Deborah Dwork, *Auschwitz: 1270 to Present*, W. W. Norton & Company, New York: 1996..
15. On Hamburg, see Evans, Richard J., *Tod in Hamburg*, a magnificent social history of the Free City (in German translation from the English), Rowohlt, Reinbek bei Hamburg: 1996; for New

York, see Markel, Howard, *Quarantine!*, Johns Hopkins UP, Baltimore and London: 1997.

16. Markel, *op. cit.*, p. 52, 50
17. Markel, *op. cit.*, p. 54, p. 44f. A case of typhus causes the rickettsia to course in the patient's bloodstream, where it can be communicated to lice and from the lice to others people. Hence, in a lice-ridden environment, and it must be stressed in 1892 that lice were not understood as the vector, refusal to comply with quarantine certainly would facilitate the spread of the disease.
18. Markel, *op. cit.*, p. 63
19. Markel, *op. cit.*, p. 65
20. Becker, Helmut, *Äskulap zwischen Reichsadler und Halbmond*, Helmut Becker, n. p., 1990, provides an extensive survey including many extracts from primary sources and memoirs.
21. Becker, *op. cit.*, p. 3, and compare discussion of *Badeanstalten* to control typhus, p. 126, Use of petroleum, p. 191, discussion of *Apparat*, p. 361-362, etc.
22. Ibid.
23. cf. "Ihm lagen zugrunde die Erfahrungen, die ich bei der Typhus- und Ruhrbekämpfung in Nordchina und bei der Genickstarrebekämpfung in München gemacht hatte. Sie lautete kurz: Heraus aus den versuchten Häusern, in weit angelegte, gesund gelegene, womöglich weit entfernte, auf Bergen gelegene Lager, vorher aber energische Reinigung aller Personen, Desinfektion aller Kleidungs- und Wäschestücke, die neuen Lager nur mit völlig gereinigten und neu gekleideten Truppen betreten lassen. Einschränkung des Dienstes, aber doppelte Rationen. So geschah es auch. Die Desinfektionswagen führen vor die Kasernen, Truppenteil für Truppenteil wurde gebadet. Dann die neue Kleidung empfangen, und sofort nach dem Zeltlager abgerückt. In der Kaserne wurde dann die alte Kleidung, Wäsche, Bettzeug desinfiziert, die Zimmer mit Formaldehyd und gegen die Läuse mit schwefelige Säure vergast." quoted from Meyer's memoirs, Becker, *op. cit.*, p. 38
24. Becker, *op. cit.*
25. EB, article Typhus, *loc. cit.*
26. Becker, *op. cit.*, inferred from the description of heightened procedures in the European portion of Turkey during this period, pp. 368-388, note also discussion of railroad delousing tunnels, p. 374.
27. "Request for Additional Information on the Myth of 'Gassings' of Serbs in World War One", Robert Faurisson, *JHR*, vol. 11, no. 2
28. Ibid.
29. The use of such vehicles in World War Two is well attested, consult Crowell, "Technique and Operation of German Anti-Gas Shelters in World War Two" for references.
30. For German disinfection procedures in World War One, titles include: Blumberg, Dr., "Über behelfsmäßig herstellbare Anlagen zur Entlausung und Desinfektion im großen" in *Öffentliche Gesundheitspflege*, Heft 10, 1918, pp. 353-364; Wolf, Dr. "Das Desinfektionsverfahren mit Blausäure" in *Öffentliche Gesundheitspflege*, Heft 2, 1919, pp. 54-66; Wolf, Dr. "Das Desinfektionsverfahren mit Blausäure (Zusammenfassende Übersicht II)" in *Öffentliche Gesundheitspflege*, Heft 4, 1922, pp. 126-130; For British procedures, see Goodall, below, for Americans in the Typhus Relief Expedition of 1919, see Cornebise, Alfred E., *Typhus and Doughboys*, University of Delaware Press, Newark, NJ:1982
31. e.g., Celarek, Dr., "Über die unter der Zivilbevölkerung Lublins im Jahre 1915/16 herrschende Fleckfieberepedemie und ihre Bekämpfung" in *Öffentliche Gesundheitspflege*, Heft 11, 1917, pp. 597-602; articles by Starkenstein above, and Frey, below.
32. Frey, Dr. "Die Bekämpfung der Fleckfieberpedemie in der Zivilbevölkerung des Generalgouvernements Warschau in den Jahren 1915/16", in *Öffentliche Gesundheitspflege*, Heft 1, 1917, pp. 12-30, [the Yiddish instruction appears on pp. 21-25, phonetically in German script, cf. Fig. 11, and the article contains many excellent photos; the following Heft contains the continuation of the article]
33. cited in Goodall, E. W., "Typhus Fever in Poland" in *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine*, vol. 13, April 23, 1920
34. Goodall, *loc. cit.*, Cornebise, *op. cit.*, Zinsser, *op. cit.*, and several others.
35. Goodall, *loc. cit.*, Cornebise, *op. cit.*
36. Goodall, *loc. cit.*, Cornebise, *op. cit.*, *passim!*, but see p. 94, p. 96, [the complaint of the Jews is characterized by Cornebise as "anti-Semitic"] p. 122., however, Isaac Bashevis Singer's

historical novel, *The Family Moskat*, (Fawcett Crest, NY:1950, p. 376) includes an instructive description of the situation at the time: "An epidemic of typhus threatened, and even cases of cholera had been reported; the authorities hastily assigned a barrack for the disinfection of the civilian population. Orthodox Jews were compelled to shave off their beards and earlocks, and girls had their heads shorn. Immediately there sprang up a group of "fixers," who, for a bribe, obtained forged disinfection certificates for those who would not submit to these indignities."

37. Cornebise, *op. cit.*, p. 93, 96-97, 98-100, 115, note in particular the quoted message, "Am looking forward with anticipation to the gas-squad with HCN that you promise sometime.", p. 96f

38. Berg, Friedrich, "Zyklon B and the German Delousing Chambers"

39. Berg, *op. cit.*

40. We say "slowly" here, but originally the development of the gas was rather rapid, this caused problems with the shelf life of the can and frequently caused danger, insofar as the liquid would then be de-stabilized within the can even before opening. Germar Rudolf's researches have found that gypsum was added in the 1930's to protract the evaporation,

41. This is indicated by the article of R. Imscher from 1942, which shows a 100% evaporation of the cyanide from the gypsum ("ERCO") composite pellets after three hours at 59 degrees Fahrenheit. For this and the preceding point consult the most recent version of the *Rudolf Report*, at: <http://www.vho.org>

42. Berg, "Zyklon B"

43. Berg, *op. cit.*

44. Berg, *op. cit.*

45. Berg, *op. cit.*

46. Berg, *op. cit.*

47. Handloser, Siegfried, ed. *Wehrhygiene*, Springer-Verlag, Berlin:1944, in the article by B. Schmidt, "Desinfektion, Sterilisation, Entwesung", lists several, including Zyklon, Ventox, Tritox, Cuprex, Formaldehyde.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 193f

49. Kalthoff, u. a., *Die Händler von Zyklon B, VSA*, Hamburg:1999, provides extensive details of these other gases, as well as the history of disinfection materials particularly as these touch upon the activities of the Hamburg-based Tesch & Stabenow.

50. Kämper, "Die Umgestaltung und Vergrößerung der Desinfektionsanstalt der Stadt Dortmund" in *Gesundheits-Ingenieur*, 27.IX.41; Stangelmeyer, Josef, "Genormte, zerlegbare Rohrleitungsnetze für die gesundheitstechnischen Anlagen der ortsveränderlichen Unterkünfte des Reichsarbeitsdienstes" in *Gesundheits-Ingenieur*, 25.VI.42; Konrich, Friedrich, "Über die Sanierungsanstalten der deutschen Kriegsgefangenenlager" in *Gesundheits-Ingenieur*, 19.VII.41; Puntigam, Franz, "Die Durchgangslager der Arbeitseinsatzverwaltung als Einrichtungen der Gesundheitsversorgung" in *Gesundheits-Ingenieur*, Heft 2, Jahrg. 1944, pp. 47-56; other references of relevance to World War Two include:(articles): Ruppert, Joseph, "Gesundheitsverhältnisse und Seuchenbekämpfung im Generalgouvernement", in *Der praktische Desinfektor*, June, 1941, pp. 61-74; Finger, Georg, "Grundsätzliches zur Läusebekämpfung mit Imprägnierungsmitteln" in *Der deutsche Militärarzt*, June, 1944, pp. 295-297. Relevant titles include Haag, Friedrich Erhard, *Lagerhygiene*, J.F. Lehmanns Verlag, München-Berlin: 1943; Walbaum, Jost, *Kampf den Seuchen! Deutscher Ärzte-Einsatz im Osten*, Buchverlag "Deutscher Osten", Krakau:1941.

51. Kämper, *loc. cit*

52. *Ibid.*

53. Stangelmeyer, *loc. cit.*

54. Walbaum, *op. cit.*, is one source for this, Trunk, *Judenrat*, describes the general reluctance to submit to these procedures, as do other Holocaust authors, including Browning, Christopher, *The Path to Genocide*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, 1992, pp. 145-168.

55. Discussed in Trunk, *Judenrat*, p. 165, and the whole of chapter 7 is very valuable and apt here. Unfortunately, Trunk follows the tendency among Jewish historians which we will discuss later, whereby all misfortunes that occur are viewed as part of someone else's conspiratorial designs, thus the diseases that occurred in the ghettos are said to have been part of the Nazi's "diabolical plan." [p. 143]. The enormous expenditure that the Germans made for controlling diseases tends to make this

interpretation unsupportable.

56. Buchner, Alex, *Der Sanitätsdienst des Heeres, 1939-1945*, Podzun-Pallas, Wölfersheim-Berstadt: 1995
57. Discussed in Rothschild, *op.cit.*, also Trunk, *Jewish Responses to Nazi Persecution*, Stein & Day, NY: 1981, both *passim*.
58. Vonnegut, Kurt, *Slaughterhouse Five*, Dell, New York:1988, p. 84
59. Compare Rothschild, *op. cit.*, p. 159, also Trunk, *Responses*, p. 162; Trunk has several more of these, in Yiddish testimonies most of which were given soon after the war.
60. Butz, *op. cit.*, p. 212, Hilberg, *op. cit.*, p. 619
61. Puntigam, "Durchganglager", *loc. cit.*
62. Novitch, Miriam, *Sobibor: Martyrdom and Revolt*, Holocaust Library, NY:1980
63. *Ibid.*
64. The standard work on Treblinka remains Steiner's novelistic treatment, essays by Andrew Allen and Mark Weber, and, in particular, the article by Arnulf Neumaier in *Grundlagen*, "Der Treblinka-Holocaust" actually discuss details, and put the workings of the camp in a wider context.
65. Consult and compare floor plan of Majdanek Bath and Disinfection complex, in *Grundlagen*, p. 276
66. Trunk, in *Responses* (see citation below) as well as Novitch, *op. cit.*, contain testimonies whereby the Westerners (chiefly Dutch) arriving at Sobibor welcomed the showers, the implication, sometimes explicit, being that the Polish Jews knew better.

#### 4. The First Reports on Auschwitz and Majdanek

IN THE SUMMER of 1944 the legend of mass gas extermination became solidified through a series of reports that were published by the Soviet government, and, at the end of the year, by a report issued by an agency of the United States government. At this point the gassing claims assumed authoritative status, so much so that by the end of the year the Germans would explicitly deny them. The issuance of official reports cannot be overstressed: a rumor of any kind repeated over an official medium, such as the radio, and particularly in print, gives enormous weight to the claim. Nevertheless, as we shall see, these claims were not accompanied by hard evidence.

The first document that is important is a communication that seems to have come from a Jewish circle in Slovakia at the beginning of July, 1944, which we will call the July Report. This report is noteworthy because it contains the first full series of allegations about the Auschwitz Birkenau camp. Gilbert reproduces the document in full.<sup>148</sup> In the context of the gassing claim, the report contains some data that may be considered accurate, in the sense that they do not contradict the current version. Thus we have a garbled reference to the Zyklon B issued by Tesch and Stabenow, and we have a reference to a bathing establishment, and holes in the ceiling where the gas drops down.<sup>149</sup> But there are other elements in the report that are clearly false, for example, the reference to the number of holes (three), the time required for execution (one minute), the rails that are said to have led to the cremation ovens, which are also incorrectly described and counted, and so on.<sup>150</sup>

While we can grant that different observers might incorrectly estimate the time of

execution, or the number of victims, because of the shock of what they were observing, it is another matter entirely that an observer would lose track of his or her ability to count or perceive. Therefore, while we may be inclined to dismiss the differences in the time of gassing, or the number of victims, the errors of physical detail are much more serious, and strongly suggest that whoever described these processes was never anywhere near a gas chamber or a crematorium. Therefore it must be conceded that the witnesses who wrote the report were repeating rumor, and, even if the witnesses believed it, the existence of a rumor is certainly not proof of the facts which the rumor alleges. The only thing the July report really shows is that gassing rumors were current in Auschwitz at the time.

The actual elements of the July report combine old and new features. The communiqué represents the first time that Zyklon B was specifically described as the source of poison gas. On the other hand, as we have seen, rumors about cyanide usage sprang up in the summer of 1942 and were abandoned late that year from the propaganda. The showering motif appears, which had been a common feature ever since late 1942. It seems that the association of poison entering through the actual holes in the shower nozzle was an easy inference -- we note that already in the previous year, in discussing the steam exterminations at Treblinka, the steam was described as emerging from holes in the pipes. This conceptualization of the gas dropping down on the inmates may also account for the idea of overhead openings needed for introducing the gas: obviously, Zyklon could not pass through a shower-head and would require a larger opening.

Another explanation, and a possible clue to another motif, involves the dusting with chlorine and lime which frequently accompanied the deportations, which goes back to the Karski report. That description had already led to some descriptions of chlorine gassing.<sup>151</sup> In the July Report, however, we have a situation in which the bathers are led into a room, allowed to stand for several minutes so that an optimum temperature is achieved, and then the gas in the form of powder is thrown on them. Of course the problem with this description is that it is false, Zyklon B does not act in this fashion.<sup>152</sup>

The next event in the evolution of the gassing legend is crucial, because it involves the first allied exposure to a German concentration camp. Majdanek was liberated at the end of July, 1944, during a massive Soviet offensive that destroyed Army Group Center.<sup>153</sup> For a month, the Soviets did not allow any visitors, then, at the end of August, they gave Western journalists a brief tour.<sup>154</sup> This tour, in turn, generated wide press reportage by the New York Times and the Christian Science Monitor, and was accompanied by an official report of the Soviet Special Commission on Majdanek.<sup>155</sup>

The gassing sequence at Majdanek is different from that described at Auschwitz in July or at any other camp to this point. Previous accounts had always stressed that the victims were disrobed and met their end in the shower or bath itself. But at Majdanek it was now alleged that the shower was a preliminary step to the gassing process, which occurred at the other end of the building.<sup>156</sup> This is a major divergence and we must inquire why.

The reason appears to lie in the physical layout that presented itself to the Russians. Most of the gassings were supposed to have taken place in the building labeled "Bath and Disinfection Complex II." This is a long narrow building that featured a series of rooms, including a dressing room, a shower room, a drying room (*Trockenraum* -- that is a heated room for drying inmates after showering) and, at the far end, three small squarish rooms (approx. 4 x 4 meters, but one larger), two of which had outside attachments with boilers that piped air into the rooms (the third was connected to the *Trockenraum*).<sup>157</sup> The showers in the building actually worked, therefore the gassings could not have happened there. The smaller rooms and the *Trockenraum*, brick faced on the outside and roofed with reinforced concrete, thus became the gas chambers.

There were other features present at the site. The *Trockenraum* (sometimes called Room "A") had two wooden openings carved into the concrete ceiling: the same room contained several wooden struts, apparently with some wire reinforcing.<sup>158</sup> It was also equipped with wooden doors with three sets of bidirectional handles.<sup>159</sup> The smaller rooms at the far end had heavy steel doors, gastight doors with peepholes, also with bidirectional handles.<sup>160</sup> In addition, two of the rooms had still extant piping running along the wall, about 30 cm above the floor, that appeared to be connected to five steel tanks located outside of the rooms.<sup>161</sup> At first glance the gastight doors and the ceiling openings seem to be peculiar additions for a bath and disinfection complex, but they do not necessarily support a gassing claim, beyond that the structure corresponds to typical bath and disinfection complexes.

The Soviet scenario that was presented to the world's press went like this: the people were told to strip, leave their clothes in one room, then pass into another room where they would shower.<sup>162</sup> After the shower, they would be led into one of the "gas chambers" where the Zyklon B would be dropped down on them after a waiting period. The three boiler rooms, on the other hand, would generate carbon monoxide gas that would be piped into the rooms, or else hot air to heat the rooms, or finally carbon monoxide would be piped in through the tanks.<sup>163</sup> Meanwhile, the Germans were supposed to watch the death throes of the victims through the peepholes.<sup>164</sup>

There are some problems with this scenario. Of four rooms designated as gas chambers, only one (Room "A") had openings in the ceiling for the Zyklon to be introduced, two of the other rooms had crudely cut holes in the reinforced concrete.<sup>165</sup> One of the rooms had no ceiling opening at all. Three of the rooms had boilers attached outside (hence, perhaps, the origin of the "three gas chambers"), the fourth room had no opening of any kind except the door.<sup>166</sup> Graf and Mattogno have noted that of the five tanks found, only two remain, and they are marked not CO, but CO<sub>2</sub>, that is, carbon dioxide, necessary for the generation of disinfection gases (T-Gas), but with no claimed extermination potential.<sup>167</sup> These, along with the boilers, would suggest that the rooms were used over time with a variety of disinfestation substances, including Zyklon B, T-Gas, and hot air. The gastight doors with peepholes, on the other hand, with bidirectional handles could be opened from inside or outside.<sup>168</sup> Finally, the idea that showering ahead of time would facilitate the evolution of Zyklon B is simply wrong.<sup>169</sup> What we have here is a clear case of forcing the facts to fit the theory.

Furthermore, while we continue to maintain that most of the elements in the gassing story arose more or less spontaneously and were just as spontaneously believed, at Majdanek we are confronted with grim evidence of a deliberate Soviet hoax. This is because while Room "A" of the complex features two carefully crafted and well dressed openings of wood in the ceiling, someone had attempted to replicate the openings in Rooms "B" and "C" by clumsily hacking small, squarish holes through the reinforced concrete roof and not even bothering to remove the rebar.<sup>170</sup> It is simply unbelievable that the workmanship that created the apertures in the ceiling of Room "A" created the hole in the roof in Room "B" and "C", and moreover the opening in Rooms "B" and "C" could never have been gas tight. To the extent that these latter openings are claimed as contemporaneous opening devised for introducing poison gas, to that extent we are looking at clear cut case of Soviet fraud.

The reverberations of the Majdanek Special Commission were extremely broad, many of the symbols of the Holocaust have their beginning here. Among these one may note the huge piles of clothes, shoes, and hair, which were taken as *prima facie* evidence of exterminations of a million and a half human beings, although we now know that these piles of belongings indicate no such thing, and the current evaluation holds that less than 100,000 perished at Majdanek.<sup>171</sup> Other elements include the red-brick facing of the gas chambers, the flat concrete roofs, the piping above the floor, and similar elements. But



the most notorious element of the Majdanek report were the gas tight doors with peepholes. The first place this would become apparent was in the War Relief Board report.

It is not known exactly how long and in what form the War Refugee Board (WRB) report circulated in the late summer and early fall of 1944.<sup>172</sup> It is known that repetition of some of its claims called forth a German rejection of the allegation in October.<sup>173</sup> Finally, on November 26, 1944, the WRB Report was issued, and was summarized in the world press.<sup>174</sup> The contents of the report, with respect to the gassing claim we are investigating, for the most part recapitulated material from the July Report, however there is one reference to the peephole not present in that earlier report that strongly suggests the influence of the Majdanek Special Commission:

Prominent guests from Berlin were present at the inauguration of the first crematorium in March, 1943. The "program" consisted of the gassing and burning of 8,000 Cracow Jews. The guests, both officers and civilians, were extremely satisfied with the results and the special peephole fitted into the door of the gas chamber was in constant use. They were lavish in their praise of this newly erected installation.<sup>175</sup>

The WRB report contains what would be considered many errors by the standards of today's knowledge of the subject.<sup>176</sup> Nevertheless it was for some months the most important document in propagandizing not only the shower-gas-burning sequence but also the alleged unique status of Auschwitz Birkenau as a slaughterhouse of vast proportions. But as we have seen, it contained enough errors that it could not be a reliable source for the mass gassings it alleged, and, in fact, it appears to have both influenced, and been influenced by, the Soviet Special Commission on Majdanek.<sup>177</sup> In the panicked atmosphere of the time, no doubt the similarities of the reports would have caused more than one sincere individual to feel that they were slowly piercing a veil of truth; 50 years later, however, it seems less likely that that was the case.

## NOTES

1. Gilbert, *op. cit.*, pp. 262-264, where it is described as a summary. The changes involved with this document, which will culminate in the War Refugee Board (WRB) Report, are detailed by Miroslav Karny, "The Vrba and Wetzler Report", in Gutman, Y. & Berenbaum, M., *Anatomy*, pp. 553-568.

2. *Ibid.*, Although the July Report is described as a summary, it contains errors of detail (e.g., "Megacyclon") that are absent from the November WRB Report, as well as an important omission (i.e., the peephole at the inaugural gassing) that is included in the later report. Karny's article suggests that the report was revised throughout the year, it is difficult to check exactly how because he further notes that the original manuscript has not survived. (Karny, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*, p. 564n5.)

3. *Ibid.*

4. Martin, *op. cit.*, p. 145

5. That is, Zyklon does not come in a powder, and the optimum temperature is not liable to be reached in a packed underground cellar. It should be noted that some cyanide products do come in powdered form, but these are not the substances alleged.

6. This was Operation Bagration, timed to coincide with the third anniversary of Barbarossa and the Western Allies, who continued to be pinned down in Normandy. An evaluation of precisely what the Soviets encountered during this advance, which surrounded huge amounts of territory, is crucial to settling claims of what occurred here during the war.



7. Martin, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.* The recent book of Jurgen Graf and Carlo Mattogno, *KL Majdanek: Eine historische und technische Studie*, Castle Hill, Hastings:1998 is a thorough and indispensable account of materials for this camp.

8. *Communique of the Polish Soviet Extraordinary Commission for Investigating the Crimes Committed by the Germans in the Majdanek Extermination Camp in Lublin*, Foreign Languages Publishing, Moscow:1944 This document, in the Hoover Library, Stanford, CA, placed on the Internet due to the efforts of Philip Traurig. cf. Also Graf & Mattogno, *op. cit.*, p. 119f for a detailed analysis of Soviet and Polish claims. On contemporary press coverage, consult, e.g., W. H. Lawrence "Nazi Mass Killing Laid Bare in Camp", in *Reporting World War II, Part Two: American Journalism, 1944-1946*, Library of America, New York: 1995, pp. 267-273.

9. *Communique, op. cit.*, pp. 13-17

10. Ibid.

11. noted by Aroneanu, *op. cit.*, but not the text of the communique we are using here.

12. Graf & Mattogno, *op. cit.*, p.

13. *Communique, op. cit., loc. cit.*

14. Graf & Mattogno, *op. cit.*, p.

15. *Communique, op. cit., loc. cit.*

16. *Communique, op. cit., loc. cit.* The source of the CO and/or function of the boilers is not completely clear from the text, although bottles of CO are described; apparently this led to some confusion subsequently, thus the photograph #0326 on the USHMM Internet website, at <http://www.ushmm.org> describes the boilers as "furnaces" which generated "carbon monoxide".

17. *loc. cit.*, consult photo of Majdanek "gas chamber" door.

18. *Grundlagen*, p. 278 provides four very interesting photos of features at Majdanek.

19. David Cole's "Forty Six Unanswered Questions About the Gas Chambers" is important not only for its discussion of Majdanek but also of Auschwitz Birkenau. On CODOHweb.

20. Graf & Mattogno, *op. cit.*, p. , and see the discussion in Schmidt, in Handloser, *op. cit.*

21. see Crowell, *Defending Against the allied Bombing Campaign, Part 2*

22. That is, humidity and moisture inhibits the evolution of the gas.

23. compare *Grundlagen*, photos on p. 278

24. *op. cit., loc. cit.*, p. 277, 129n

25. Gilbert, *op. cit.*

26. Gilbert, *op. cit.*

27. Gilbert, *op. cit.*, for coverage in the NY Times, see *Reporting World War II*, John H. Crider, "U. S. Board Bares Atrocity Details Told by Witnesses at Polish Camps", pp. 553-559

28. Dawidowicz, *Reader*, p. 119

29. compare Gilbert, *op. cit., loc. cit.*, or Dawidowicz, *op. cit., loc. cit.*

30. That the WRB report was combined from various rumors was corroborated at the first Zundel trial in 1985, during which Rudolf Vrba, under cross-examination, admitted that he repeated rumors, and was not an eyewitness to what he described, moreover "He defended 'errors in good faith' n his 1944 Auschwitz accounts, which he made two weeks after escaping, as due to 'great urgency' to warn Jews." "Book 'An Artistic Picture'", Dick Chapman, *Toronto Sun*, January 24, 1985

## 5. The Eastern Camps, Polevoi's Report, and the Gerstein Statement

ALREADY IN THE SUMMER of 1944, the Soviet propagandist Ilya Ehrenburg began acquiring testimonies from the Aktion Reinhardt Camps. Some of these were collected and published in *Merder fun Folker* in 1945.<sup>178</sup> Looking over some of these testaments today, one finds that while gassing claims are repeated, they are not usually presented with much detail.<sup>179</sup> We should keep in mind however that for these Aktion Reinhardt camps (Sobibor, Treblinka, and Belzec) the buildings had been dismantled and there were no physical traces of gas chambers.<sup>180</sup> No orders, correspondence, or documents concerning gas chambers were presented at the time, nor has there been any such documentation since.<sup>181</sup> Our knowledge of these three camps -- in which today it is said that close to two million were killed -- rested then, as now, solely on witness depositions and SS confessions.<sup>182</sup> The only corroboration for the actions alleged at these camps are some mass graves, which by normal estimation of grave mass, contain perhaps a few tens of thousands of bodies altogether.<sup>183</sup> This may indicate murders and mass executions of some type, but they do not indicate mass exterminations, let alone by poison gas.

At the end of January, Auschwitz was liberated, and the Red Army found about six thousand prisoners who were considered too ill by the Germans to march back to Germany.<sup>184</sup> Photographs of the liberated inmates, that included several hundred children, indicate old age, even infirmity, but neither starvation nor epidemics.<sup>185</sup> Obviously the fact that such inmates were alive tended to contradict the already reigning conception; later, an SS man would confess that Himmler had ordered all exterminations to cease the previous November, in fact, precisely on November 26, 1944, the day the WRB report was issued.<sup>186</sup> Needless to say no documentary evidence in support of this confession has ever surfaced.<sup>187</sup>

At the same time, the Soviets made reference of the liberated Auschwitz camp in their national propaganda organ, *Pravda*. After a brief reference on February 1, a full report, by correspondent Boris Polevoi, was published on Friday, February 2, 1945, less than a week after the camp had been liberated, and a full three months before the official Soviet report on Auschwitz.

Polevoi's indebtedness to the Majdanek reportage is explicit, but at the same time there are some differences:

Last year, when the Red Army revealed to the world the terrible and abominable secrets of Majdanek, the Germans in Auschwitz began to wipe out the traces of their crimes. They leveled the mounds of the so-called "old" graves in the Eastern part of the camp, tore up and destroyed the traces of the electric conveyor belt, on which hundreds of people were simultaneously electrocuted, their bodies falling onto the slow moving conveyor belt which carried them to the top of the blast furnace where they fell in, were completely burned, their bones converted to meal in the rolling mills, and then sent to the surrounding fields.

In retreat were taken the special transportable apparatuses for killing children. The stationary gas chambers in the eastern part of the camp were restructured, even little turrets and other architectural embellishments were added so that they would look like innocent garages.

There is one major surprise to this narrative: first, it is completely different from the report of the Soviet Special Commission on Auschwitz. That report, in turn, would show the influence of the War Refugee Board (WRB) Report of November 26, 1945. An obvious inference is that the Soviet Auschwitz narrative was revised subsequent to this report to make it harmonize with the various anonymous messages which comprised the WRB report. Nevertheless, Polevoi's report shows other influences and connections.

For example, the concept of the "factory of death" is today well-known in the Holocaust literature, but appears to have its beginnings here. That concept in turn seems clearly linked to Russian, Soviet, and Western symbolism rejecting the industrial factory system, compare the short stories of Anton Chekhov or various writings of Maxim Gorky, or further the *angst* of German Expressionism. Meanwhile, the concept of the Germans "wiping out the traces of their crimes" goes back, as we have seen, to the Katyn Forest revelations of 1943.

It hardly needs to be pointed out that the "electric conveyor belt" has no place in any subsequent Auschwitz narratives, this story element is probably linked to the reports concerning the large electric chambers at Belzec and elsewhere. The "special transportable apparatuses for killing children" are probably references to gas vans, their special utilization for that purpose first attested at the Krasnodar-Kharkov trials. The description of "stationary gas chambers" is apparently a reference to either the delousing stations BW 5/A and 5/B at Birkenau, or else Crematoria IV and V. The reference to the "gas chambers" as "garages" ("*garazhi*") was a characterization first made of the "gas chambers" at Majdanek.

What is most striking about this press report is not its derivative nature or that it is totally at variance with the version of Auschwitz that we have come to know, substituting the traditional atrocity record with another, completely imaginary one. Rather, that the first non-anonymous observer at the Auschwitz camp could be so far from the current narrative speaks not only to the inaccuracy of this initial report, but also to the artifice of subsequent ones.

Shortly after Polevoi's report was published, Soviet interrogators developed affidavits from Pavel Leleko, who had been a police guard at Treblinka.<sup>188</sup> Coincidentally, Leleko's interrogations are supposed to have begun on the same day that the WRB Report was issued, three months before. On the following February 20 and 21, 1945, Leleko contributed two affidavits, and these rehearse the structure of the Treblinka mass gassing claim, and indeed, the gassing claim for all the Aktion Reinhard camps.<sup>189</sup>

The Leleko depositions contain the following details of the gassing process:

1. The victims were detained, asked to turn in all valuables, were separated by sex, and stripped. Then the victims were walked to a separate area that housed the gas chambers.
2. The gas chambers had flowers growing alongside in boxes. Instead of a door the victims entered through a heavy hanging made from a rug.
3. A long passage moved through the length of the building, five rooms on each side (10 in all).
4. our rooms on each side comprised gas chambers, 6 meters square in size, 2.5/3 meters high.
5. The center of the ceiling had a light fixture with no wiring and two showerheads whereby the gas was let into the chamber.
6. The walls, floor, and ceiling were of cement.
7. Each gas chamber had two doors, one opening to the outside whereby the bodies were removed.
8. 500 people per chamber (500 people in 36 square meters).
9. Eight rooms out of the 10 used for gas chambers, the other two contained "powerful German engines" that fed the gas into the chambers.
10. After being filled, the gas chambers were sealed "by hermetically closing doors."
11. Progress of the gassing was observed by looking through a "porthole" "near each door."
12. The gassing took 15 minutes.
13. About 20 meters distant was the old gas chamber building, which had only three gas chambers.

14. The bodies were disposed in a concrete incineration pit about 20 meters long and 1 meter deep.<sup>190</sup>

The interrogation of Leleko is valuable because it is one of the most detailed description of a gassing at one of the Aktion Reinhardt camps.<sup>191</sup> All other confessions, to the extent that they describe the gassing process at all, show clear traces of harmony with Leleko's testimony.<sup>192</sup>

The problem is that Leleko's testimony offers nothing new. The entire shower-gas-burning sequence was already well known by this time, so Leleko's remarks are not revelatory and could have been derivative. More interesting are his comments on the unwired lightbulbs in each room, and the two showerheads through which the gas was supposed to have filled the chamber. Such details tends to confirm our surmise that the association of showers and gas would inevitably lead to the conception of the gas actually coming down through the nozzle: although this method does not seem that it would be particularly effective, given that carbon monoxide is lighter than air.

More serious is the fact that the description of the building sounds remarkably similar to the Bath and Disinfection Complex at Majdanek. Again, we have a long corridor. Again, medium sized rooms into which hundreds of people are forced in the nude. Again, the chambers are constructed with cement, or more likely reinforced concrete. Again, each chamber has two doors. Again, the doors are hermetically sealed, and again, the dying are observed through a porthole or peephole. Even the number of "gas chambers" of the old style (three) corresponds to the number alleged at Majdanek.

Finally there is the detail that is almost decisive in linking Leleko's account with Majdanek: the engines. As we recall, three rooms at the bathing complex were equipped with outside boilers that forced hot air into the rooms. This is entirely consistent with the idea of hot air delousing, disinfection with Zyklon or other cyanide products, or combinations of the two. But the Soviet Special Commission on Majdanek had suggested that these boiler rooms instead generated carbon monoxide gas that was led into the rooms in order to kill the people inside. (The Soviets also alleged that carbon monoxide was led into another room through a pipe.<sup>193</sup>) Leleko's description of powerful German engines that generated enough carbon monoxide to kill 500 people in 15 minutes seems clearly derivative of the Majdanek concept. Leleko's confession does not specify the type of engine; that would be left to Kurt Gerstein two months later, with even more problematic implications for the mass gassing claim.

Kurt Gerstein was a minor officer in the SS who was apparently involved in some anti-Nazi activities before and during the war.<sup>194</sup> He was, however, an engineer, and was apparently involved in the use of cyanide gas for disinfection purposes.

He fled the approaching Red Army and surrendered to allied custody in late April, 1945, and on May 6 was turned over to the French authorities.<sup>195</sup> During this period he wrote several versions of an affidavit or statement, which differ in small details, but which generally provide a picture of a gassing at Belzec concentration camp and a confirmation of gassing operations at the other Aktion Reinhardt camps.<sup>196</sup>

The Gerstein Statement, as the various drafts are known, is probably the most widely quoted document for those who claim that mass gassings took place.<sup>197</sup> The problem is that it is almost never quoted in full, because the entire document contains a number of errors and improbabilities.<sup>198</sup>

The Gerstein Statement, concerning gassing, and a few other matters, may be summarized as follows:

1. Gerstein visits Belzec and Treblinka,
2. Belzec has a capacity 15,000 per day,

3. Sobibor (not seen), has a capacity of 20,000 per day,
4. Treblinka, a capacity of 25,000 per day.
5. Globocnik, who controls the camps, instructs Gerstein to disinfect clothes and also increase efficiency of the gas chambers which are using old diesel engines.
6. Globocnik informs Gerstein that Hitler and Himmler had been to the camp August 15, 1942: Gerstein records an utterly incredible conversation between Hitler and Globocnik.
7. At Belzec the next day, Gerstein describes the bathhouse,
8. with flowers growing outside,
9. and a sign "To the baths and inhalations"
10. The building is accessed by a small stairway,
11. there are three rooms on either side, 4 x 5 meters, 1.9 meters high, "like garages" (the wording in one version appears to describe two doors per chamber, viz. "on return")
12. A transport arrives and everyone is forced to strip and turn in valuables in sequence,
13. the hair is shorn, someone tells Gerstein, "to make of it something special for the submarines, linings, etc."
14. The people are crowded into the gas chambers, 700-800 in 25 square meters.
15. The diesel engine fails to work, Gerstein times the delay, two hours and 49 minutes on his stopwatch.
16. One can see that many are still alive through a little window and the electric light in the room.
17. After 32 minutes of the gassing all are dead.
18. The next day he goes to Treblinka, there are 8 gas chambers,
19. mounds of clothes and underwear 35-40 meters high. and
20. The numbers reported on the BBC are too low: 25 million have been gassed.
21. that on June 8, 1942, Gerstein had spread rumors that the cyanide he was picking up at Kollin, in Czechoslovakia was for killing people
22. that the cyanide in his transport consisted of bottles which he later poured out,
23. that another method of murder consisted of leading people up staircases and throwing them into blast furnaces.<sup>199</sup>

The material or documentary evidence for any of these claims is nil.<sup>200</sup> It is not normally claimed that anyone was killed with bottled cyanide, when that claim is made, as for example, in postwar testimony by former SS, it is arbitrarily corrected by historians.<sup>201</sup> It is established that Hitler and Himmler were never at these camps in August, 1942.<sup>202</sup> The crowding elements and the piles of clothing are impossible exaggerations. Therefore we are not bound to analyze the document as fact but are rather entitled to move immediately to the question of the source of the statement's elements.

The diesel gas reference is probably connected either to Soviet revelations of gas vans, or else to Soviet discussions of Treblinka.<sup>203</sup> Other tropes can be identified, for example, the description of the gas chambers as appearing "like garages" is almost certainly indebted to Werth's description of Majdanek the previous summer, or Polevoi's description of Auschwitz two months previous.<sup>204</sup> It is interesting to note that if Gerstein really was involved in the spreading of rumors about cyanide use for human beings, then the timing of these rumors (June 8, 1942) would coincide with the rumor of cyanide use that reached Switzerland the following August.

Another element: The 25 million victims goes back to a usage manual on Zyklon.<sup>205</sup> The heaps of piled clothes are a reference to Majdanek.<sup>206</sup> Above all, the statement shows the influence of Leleko's February interrogations and probably other

testimonies concerning Treblinka and Sobibor made at the same time or before. In particular, the use of the "blast furnace" motif shows the clear influence of Polevoi. But many other elements, including the number of rooms, the arrangement of the building, the engines, the peepholes, even the flowers in front of the building, also appear derivative.

The main problem with the Gerstein statement is that one does not pick and choose from a document. Many elements of Gerstein's statement are simply false, if we reject these, we must legitimately ask why we should give credence to the other elements.<sup>207</sup> As it turns out the only part of the statement which is quoted, and considered unambiguously true, relates to its repetition of the now conventional shower-gas-burning concept. Yet this simply means that we are using a part of Gerstein to confirm what we already know.

The gravest structural difficulty with the Gerstein statement is that it insists on the use of diesel engines in the generation of carbon monoxide gas for the gas chambers. Since 1983, Friedrich Paul Berg, a professional engineer and former environmental expert, has demonstrated that this would be a most improbable method for mass exterminations: diesel engines emit virtually no carbon monoxide.<sup>208</sup> These analyses, in turn, cast grave doubts on the alleged gassings at all of the Aktion Reinhardt camps, because, following Gerstein, diesel engines -- usually from Soviet tanks but sometimes from submarines -- are nowadays always alleged as the means of the gas production at these three camps.<sup>209</sup>

Another point with Gerstein's statement is not that it can be shown as derivative of contemporary Aktion Reinhardt testimonies, or that it contains many absurdities, or that its description of the supposed 600,000 mass murders at Belzec remains essentially uncorroborated. It is rather that Gerstein, a Zyklon technician, was attempting by his confession to deflect guilt away from himself, which in turn proves the extent to which Zyklon was perceived solely as a death dealing mass murder weapon at the time.<sup>210</sup> In this regard he was unsuccessful: after his claims were widely publicized in the press in July, 1945, the French indicated their intention to try him as a war criminal, and Gerstein committed suicide.<sup>211</sup>

## NOTES

1. Novitch, *op. cit.*, passim
2. Ibid.
3. The standard story is that the Germans dismantled them to hide the traces of their crimes, but under our theory the huts would have been dismantled after use.
4. All "documentation" pertaining to these camps subsequent to the immediate postwar period has consisted of testimonies, thus, Gitta Sereny's *Into that Darkness*, Henry Holt, NY:1974, contains what are said interviews with former commandant Franz Stangl in the early 1970's, but aside from being very scanty on detail, these interviews also offer no proof, simply corroboration of the standard claim.
5. Ibid.
6. Ball, John Clive, "Luftbild Beweise", in *Grundlagen*, German translation of "Air Photo Evidence" which is rehearsed on Ball's website, at <http://www.air-photo.com>
7. noted in the Soviet Special Commission, USSR-8, discussed below.
8. Stiglich, *op. cit.*, contains several such photos.



9. This is according to a postwar SS affidavit, but is not corroborated. Interestingly, Czech, noted below, references this for the 26th, but then references for the day before (November 25th) a scrap of paper of unknown origin which refers to the order to dismantle the crematoria. The juxtaposition would repay careful scrutiny.

10. The facts behind the "stop the gassing" order are reconstructed in "Himmlers Befehl, die Vergasung der Juden zu stoppen" in *VffG*, I:4 (XII:97), pp.258-259

11. Documents of the US government reproduced in Sheftel, Yoram, *Defending Ivan the Terrible*, Regnery, Washington, DC: 1996, p. 378. It should be noted that the Leleko interviews are the earliest recorded in this document, however it is also important to note that the Soviets had already issued their "special commission" that is, had established the facts, of Treblinka, two months before Leleko's interrogations began. See discussion of "Canonical Holocaust" below.

12. The two later Leleko depositions played a crucial role in reversing the conviction of Ivan Demjanjuk, hence, they have been widely distributed and widely cited. We reference the versions found on the Nizkor site, at

<http://www.nizkor.org>

13. Ibid.

14. xxxxx

15. Compare, for example, the descriptions established at the various Treblinka trials from 1950, and also the testimony of Franz Suchomel in Lanzmann's *Shoah*.

16. Communique, *loc. cit.*

17. Roques, Henri, *The 'Confessions' of Kurt Gerstein*, Institute for Historical Review, Newport Beach, CA: 1989 is the standard analysis of his depositions and his life, cf. P. 90.

18. Ibid., p. 122f. It is important to note here that Roques is strictly concerned with analyzing the statements of Kurt Gerstein, not with overturning any other particular aspect relative to the gassing claim or the Holocaust.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid., cf. Dawidowicz, *Reader*, in whose anthology it constitutes the sole description of gassing, and the sole document not completely contemporaneous with what it describes.

21. Dawidowicz, *loc. cit.*, for an example, Roques cites several others, *op. cit.*, pp. 143-156.

22. Roques, *op. cit.*, detailed tables describing the elements of the eight (sic!) different versions are found between pages 117-118.

23. The only "corroboration" for Gerstein's testimony, at a camp where 600,000 murders are claimed, is the 1946 book of Rudolf Reder which describes the same lengthy diesel breakdown. That was precisely one of the elements mentioned in French news reports, July 4, 1945 (Roques, *op. cit.*, pp. 108ff reproduces the story in *France-Soir*.) The "confession" of Pfannenstiehl came later, consult Roques, *op. cit.*, pp. 299-309, esp. 302, for an interesting discussion of his interrogations by the postwar courts.

24. Furet, Francois, *Unanswered Questions*, Schocken Books, NY: 1989, Adam, Uwe Dietrich, "The Gas Chambers", 35n, p. 350, 72n, p. 352 pp. 134-154

25. Noakes, *op. cit.*, cited below, like most of those who use Gerstein, annotates when he doesn't omit.

26. This seems clear, although Friedrich Berg believes that the diesel motif goes back to the gas vans of the Krasnodar trial of July, 1943, if not earlier in Soviet propaganda thinking.

27. Werth's account will be given at the beginning of Section 15, below.

28. Roques, *op. cit.*, the document is known as NI-9912. A translation of this document into French was one of the early broadsides in Robert Faurisson's revisionist career.

29. cf. *Communique*

30. Rassinier summed this up beautifully in *Debunking*, q. v.

31. Berg's "The Diesel Myth" has existed in several different versions, consult the version in *Grundlagen*, or one of several articles which cover the same material on CODOHweb.



32. Eichmann, in his 1960-61 interrogations, referenced submarine engines as being the source of the carbon monoxide: this is almost certainly a garbling of Gerstein's assertion. It should be noted that the Germans collected hair from German women in both world wars, although the purpose was unclear. In World War One, a woman's hair was used to strengthen rubber driving belts.
33. ref. to effect of the Communique, and the WRB report.
34. Roques, *op. cit.*

## 6. The Canonical Holocaust

IF WE WERE TO PINPOINT the time when the gassing claim assumed its present shape, it would be in the three-week period from April 15 to May 6, 1945. During this period the Western Allies liberated a number of concentration camps, and at the end of this period the Soviets issued their Special Commission report on Auschwitz Birkenau.

On April 15, the British Army took over the Bergen Belsen complex, which at this point contained tens of thousands of prisoners.<sup>212</sup> The images of Belsen, cultivated by British military photographers, left an indelible impression: stacks of nude, discolored and disfigured corpses, many in advanced stages of putrefaction, lined like cordwood outside of buildings. Overcrowded barracks full of dead and dying inmates. Large mass graves full of contorted and twisted bodies. The universal reaction was one of shock, horror and disbelief: a common remark was that words could not describe what the liberators had seen.<sup>213</sup>

Also in April, the United States Army liberated Dachau and Buchenwald.<sup>214</sup> These camps too provided their own images: at Dachau, a group of open train cars containing the bodies of a few hundred dead prisoners, at Buchenwald, a handful of strips of human skin which had apparently been lifted from the corpses of tattooed inmates.<sup>215</sup> The American reaction to such death and destruction transcended shock in at least one instance: an American officer, confronted with the bodies at Dachau, lined up several hundred German soldiers (mostly youths) who had ended up in the camp at its liberation and machine gunned them in cold blood.<sup>216</sup>

The allied soldiers, confronted with these scenes of horror, interpreted them in terms of what they knew. And what they knew after three years of unchecked propaganda was that the Germans had been engaged in the systematic murder of millions of human beings in the camps by means of the shower-gas-burning sequence. The presence of a shower, or a crematorium, or a delousing chamber became *prima facie* evidence of the well-known gas extermination claim.<sup>217</sup> The nude, discolored, and disfigured bodies were no doubt victims who had been gassed just before the allied arrival.<sup>218</sup> Again and again one finds the sentiment that the corpses were the proof of the totality of the accusation which had been made for years, and that the Germans had been stopped, as one American put it, "before they had time to get their act together."<sup>219</sup>

The problem is that these perceptions were wrong. What the Allies had found in the Western camps was simply the result of the "last major epidemic of typhus in world history."<sup>220</sup> The epidemic had been precipitated by the complete breakdown of sanitation, transportation, and provisioning for the concentration camp system in the last weeks and months of the war.<sup>221</sup> The bodies were discolored and disfigured by the

process of putrefaction, they were nude because whenever a prisoner died the other prisoners would strip their clothing and burn the lice-infested garments.<sup>222</sup> Although widely publicized descriptions and photographs of gas chambers were proffered at the time for the western camps, these turned out to be nothing but standard delousing chambers.<sup>223</sup> In 1960, it was established that there were no gassings in the Western camps.<sup>224</sup> But none of this penetrated the western consciousness of the time which could not see beyond the piles of dead bodies, and saw in them proof of German evil and Nazi *Kultur*.<sup>225</sup> The imagery of the western camps, and above all Belsen, would remain for decades the proof of the Holocaust, and by extension, of the gas extermination claim.

Just before the end of the war, the Soviets issued a report which would authoritatively establish the nature of the extermination program. The Soviet Special Commission on Auschwitz., like most Soviet reports, was relatively brief, about 30 pages, and published in brochure format.<sup>226</sup> Given the emphasis given to the gassing claim there is very little descriptive material contained in the report, only two documents are cited: one, a reference to the construction of crematoria, second, a document that refers to baths for special purposes for either Crematorium IV or V.<sup>227</sup> We should note that this evidence is not only considered incriminating but sufficient proof of the crime: this shows the extent to which the shower-gas-burning sequence was fundamental to thinking at the time, any one of the elements was considered decisive for the others. The substance of the report, with respect to the gassing claim, can be summarized in the following extract:

1. Twelve crematory ovens with 46 retorts were available in four new crematoria.
2. Every retort could take three to five corpses.
3. The cremation procedure took approximately 20 to 30 minutes.
4. The baths for special purposes, that is, the gas chambers for the killing of human beings were located in the cellars of special buildings next to the crematoria.
5. There were also another two separate "baths", the bodies of people killed here were burnt in separate fires in the open.
6. Dogs helped to drive the men intended for death into the baths.
7. On the way, they were driven with blows from clubs and rifle butts.
8. The doors to the chambers were hermetically sealed, and the people in them were poisoned with Zyklon.
9. Death occurred within 3-5 minutes;
10. after 20-30 minutes, the bodies were removed and taken to the crematory ovens in the crematoria.
11. Before cremation, cremation dentists removed all gold teeth from the bodies.
12. The "production" of the "baths" and gas chambers by far exceeded the capacity of the crematory ovens; therefore the Germans used gigantic fires in the open to burn the bodies.
13. Ditches 4 - 6 m wide, 25 - 30 m long, and 2 m deep were dug for these fires.
14. Channels ran along the floor of the ditches and were used for air supply.
15. The bodies were brought to the fires by narrow-gauge railway, and placed in layers crossways in the ditches.
16. Oil was poured over them and that is how they were burnt.<sup>228</sup>

At the end of the report, the Soviets calculated the number of bodies that could be burned in each of the five crematorium, this totaled 279,000 per month, from which they concluded that the maximum capacity of the crematoria was over five million.<sup>229</sup> Nevertheless, their conclusion stated that "the technical commission established that the German hangmen killed not less than 4,000,000 citizens of the USSR, Poland, France, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Holland, Belgium, and other countries during the period of the existence of Auschwitz camp.<sup>230</sup>

Hence was born the Auschwitz four million.

The Soviet Special Commission on Auschwitz is probably the most important document ever issued on the gas extermination claim. Indeed, it is somewhat shocking to see the extent to which the claim is traced back to this slim and insubstantial brochure. But at the time it established not only the fact of the gas extermination claim but also the implementation of that alleged policy at the largest of all of the concentration camps. On the other hand, the report offers no proof of the claims which it makes, only two documents in circumstantial support, an assertion of the number of victims based merely on arbitrary multiplication of cremation rates, and is buttressed only with large amounts of eyewitness testimony that fail to even come close to providing details of the gassing procedure.

The importance of the document immediately became apparent in the interrogations, confessions, and immediate postwar trials. The first of these was at Belsen in the fall of 1945.<sup>231</sup> Although the purpose of the trial was ostensibly to try the SS personnel who had been captured at that camp, it turned out that many of the SS and many of the prisoners had been transferred to Belsen from Auschwitz in late 1944 and early 1945.<sup>232</sup> As a result, the Belsen trial was also a trial about the reality of what happened at Auschwitz: indeed, the proceedings included the showing of a Soviet film on Auschwitz.<sup>233</sup>

The German defendants were almost all former Auschwitz guards. The Belsen commandant, Josef Kramer, had formerly served briefly as commandant at Birkenau. Höbner had been the head of the women's camp. Irma Grese had been a warder at Birkenau. All of them were accused of participating in selections for the gassing process and all of them eventually admitted their participation. The extent to which the Soviet commission colored their confessions can be readily seen.

On May 22, 1945, the day after Heinrich Himmler was taken into British custody, Josef Kramer gave a lengthy statement describing the conditions in all the camps where he served, including Belsen, Birkenau, and Natzweiler Struthof. He explicitly denied the existence of "a gas chamber" at Auschwitz.<sup>234</sup> The next day, Himmler was dead, an apparent suicide.<sup>235</sup> In a later interrogation, Kramer admitted to the existence of "a gas chamber" at Birkenau over which he had no jurisdiction.<sup>236</sup> From the stand, he would declare that his initial denial was motivated by an oath of silence to which he was no longer bound by the death of Hitler and Himmler.<sup>237</sup> Unfortunately we do not have the date of the second statement by Kramer, but it seems likely that the revelations of the Soviet Special Commission were instrumental in getting him to admit to the gassing claim. The idea that he would be silent about the gassing claim, if it was true, when the WRB report had made essentially the same charges as far back as November, 1944<sup>238</sup>, and when the Soviet Auschwitz Report had been issued two weeks earlier, is very difficult to believe. The idea of an oath to remain silent makes no sense with regard to Hitler, who had been dead for weeks, nor is it likely that Kramer would deny, while his superior Himmler was also in British custody, something his interrogators were surely expecting him to admit.<sup>239</sup>

The rest of the defendants at the Belsen Trial also endorsed the gassing claim, with varying degrees of vagueness -- Grese, for example, would claim that she heard of the gas chamber from the prisoners' grapevine -- and after being found guilty 11 of the 45 defendants were hanged.<sup>240</sup>

The Auschwitz Special Commission definitely set the tone not only for subsequent confessions but also for eyewitness testimonies: in early September, 1945, the former political officer at Auschwitz, Grabner, gave a confession in Vienna in which he said that 3 million had been exterminated at the camp by the time he left in December, 1943.<sup>241</sup>

This generally accords with the Soviet projections, in the sense that if 3 million had died by the end of 1943, that would project to another million or so by the time the camp was liberated in January, 1945. Even more precisely, at the Belsen Trial, two former Auschwitz prisoners, Dr. Bendel and Ada Bimko, also attested to the reality of the gas chambers, Bimko in particular supporting the four million figure in two places.<sup>242</sup>

The fact that the eyewitness testimonies and confessions in the postwar period correspond to the Soviet Special Commission could be taken as simple corroboration of the Soviet report, except that it has now been recognized that the Soviet report was wrong, in particular on its totally arbitrary calculation of four million victims (current estimates hold one million or less.<sup>243</sup>) That figure derived from the Soviet calculation of cremation capacities. It did not derive from testimony. On the other hand, we have several testimonies and confessions which support it. But since the figure is wrong, it follows that the testimonies and confessions which support the calculation were influenced by that report.

If a witness or a confessor makes statements that corroborate statements in an official and widely publicized report, that witness or confessor may be viewed as independently verifying the truth, although the absence of material or documentary support would still leave the matter in doubt. But when the witness or confessor corroborates statements and the statements are false, then one can presume that the witness and confessor statements were simply derivative of the reports. To put it another way, several testimonies may converge on a truth, but several testimonies cannot converge on a falsehood: in such a case one is dealing either with statements derived from a common erroneous source or a kind of mass hysteria determined by the authority of an erroneous source.

Such is the problem with all witness testimonies and confessions for the gas extermination claim, particularly for this initial period, but even more subsequently. The allegations of mass gassing had been widely disseminated since 1942, and had assumed official status by the fall of 1944. Under these circumstances it would have been impossible to obtain "blind" testimony or an untainted confession. Only statements that provided high levels of corroborative detail would be probative, yet that is precisely what was never offered. Eyewitness testimonies and confessions made the gravest errors whenever they strayed into details, for example, in Ada Bimko's odd notion that the cyanide gas was kept in large round tanks<sup>244</sup>, or Josef Kramer's assertion that a gassing at Natzweiler was carried out by pouring half a pint of salts into a pipe.<sup>245</sup>

The Auschwitz Special Commission derived its authority partly because the Soviet government issued it and partly because there were no other reports -- as in the case of Katyn -- to contradict it. Its authority was certainly not due to any exhaustive forensic, documentary, or material calculations. As a result it became the fundamental document for anyone who wished to know what had transpired there. Witnesses, preparing to testify, would consult it so that they could refresh their memories or to put their own experiences in a wider context. Most importantly, allied officials, confronted with former Auschwitz personnel, would have to consult the report in order to know how to distinguish truth from falsehood in the course of their prisoner interrogations.<sup>246</sup>

As soon as a witness or confessor made statements corroborating the Soviet Special Commission, then those statements themselves acquired the Soviet report's weight of authority because they matched its claims. Over time the proof of the mass gas exterminations at Auschwitz would not be traced in the popular mind back to the Soviet Auschwitz report itself, but rather to testimonies and confessions that were clearly produced under its influence. Thus a version of the gassing claim, what we would call the Canonical Holocaust, evolved almost entirely through oral testimonies that built upon the basis of a report which had no substance. Meanwhile, the damning newsreels of Belsen would be manipulated and juxtaposed from camp to camp according to the whim of the prevailing culture, and provide the unanswerable ground to the claim.<sup>247</sup>

## NOTES

1. Reilly, Jo, ed., *Belsen in History and Memory*, Frank Cass, London:1997; Gödecke, Monika, ed. *Konzentrationslager Bergen-Belsen: Berichte und Dokumente*, Vendenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen:1995
2. Reilly, *op. cit.*, see especially the article by Paul Kemp, "The British Army and the Liberation of Bergen Belsen April 1945", pp. 134-148
3. Buchenwald was liberated a few days before Belsen, but the bulk of the camps, including the scenes at Dachau and Mauthausen, came towards the end of the month, see the discussion of the chronology in Hackett, David A., *The Buchenwald Report*, a translation of a contemporaneous US Intelligence Report, translated by Hackett with an introduction, Westview Press, Boulder, CO:1995
4. cf. Aroneanu, *op. cit.*, p. 106
5. Irving, *Nuremberg*, provides a photograph of the American officer manning his machine gun
6. cf., Edward R. Murrow, "For Most of it I Have No Words", pp. 681-685, and Martha Gellhorn, "Dachau", pp. 724-730, in *Reporting World War II*, *op. cit.*
7. The inference is that such sentiments must have informed the decision to conduct autopsies at Natzweiler-Struthof and Dachau: no autopsy report from any camp has ever yielded a verdict of cyanide poisoning.
8. Aroneanu, *op. cit.*, p. 129, quoting from American report on Buchenwald
9. Kamp article, *loc. cit.*, in Reilly, *op. cit.*, p. 147. Fritz Berg however has suggested that it was followed by a little-known but widespread epidemic in Poland. Indeed, this, like most events between the Bug and the Dniepr between 1944 and 1948, still requires enlightening scrutiny.
10. This is the standard revisionist view, consult Butz, *op. cit.*, for Commandant Kramer's description, and Berg, "Typhus and the Jews", for material on infrastructure destruction. Nevertheless, traditional Holocaust writers sometimes view these deaths as intentional (see article by Lattek, in Reilly, *op. cit.*), in this regard it is interesting to note that during the epidemics that raged through Bergen Belsen in the spring of 1945, of 18,168 total dead between March 1 and April 6, only 183 were from the "Star Camp" especially set aside for Jewish prisoners, and only 321 from the three main subcamps specifically for Jewish prisoners (the balance were approx. 4 thousand in the Women's Camp and 11 thousand in the Prisoner Camp #2), table cited in Gödicke, pp. 164-165.
11. Testimony of Dr. Russell Barton, in Kulaszka, Barbara, ed. *Did Six Million Really Die?*, on the Zündel-site.
12. Aroneanu, *op. cit.*, photo, before p. 138, reproduces perhaps the most famous of these photographic hoaxes or misunderstandings, a pensive GI standing before a delousing chamber, with the caption: "An American soldier contemplates the entrance to the control room from which cylinders of Zyklon B were released into the gas chamber."
13. Martin Broszat's letter was published in *Die Zeit*, 26 August 1960, cf. Butz, *op. cit.*, p. 47
14. "Nazi Kultur" the sign put up by the British at Belsen, a photo of which in Reilly, ed. *op. cit.*
15. The entire text of this document, "The Soviet War Crimes Report on Auschwitz, Nuremberg Trial - 6 May 1945" referenced as USSR-8, itranslated by Carlos W. Porter maybe found at <http://www.codoh.com/trials/triussr8.html>
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. The main source for this trial is Philips, Raymond, ed., *Trial of Josef Kramer and 44 Others, (The Belsen Trial)*, William Hodge and Co., London: 1949. Also known as volumr II of *War Crimes Trials* under the editorship of Sir David Maxwell-Fyfe. On Irma Grese, see Brown, Daniel Patrick, *The Beautiful Beast*, Golden West Historical Publications, Ventura: 1996.
21. Brown, *op. cit.*
22. Philips, *op. cit.*, p. 653
23. Philips, *op. cit.*, pp. 718-737, 738f. Gödecke gives two dates: 2 May, and 22 May. If the latter, the proximity with the death of Himmler is striking. If the former, the weight of the Soviet Special Commission, issued four days later, is increased.
24. Reitlinger, *SS: Alibi of a Nation*, Da Capo, NY: 1995
25. Philips, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*
26. Ibid.
27. Preceded, as we have seen, by the Soviet Kharkov Trial of December, 1943.
28. Butz, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*, makes the same arguments about Kramer's confessions, and further on the quality of Kramer's confessions see Robert Faurisson, "Sur la pretendue 'chambre a gaz' homicide du Struthof, les trois confessions successives et contradictoires de Josef Kramer", see <http://aaargh.com.mx/fran/archFaur/RF80xxxx4.a.html>
29. Gödicke, *op. cit.*, pp.231-233 provides a list of the defendants for the three Belsen trials (55 defendants in all) and sentences. What is less well known is that a dozen of the defendants were kapos, that is, prisoners. It should be obvious then that prisoners had a strong incentive to maintain a low profile and an orthodox interpretation: one prisoner was apparently denounced and put on trial because he was in an SS uniform at liberation.
30. Grabner's confession cited in Klee, Ernst, u.a., Hrsg., "*Schöne Zeiten*", S. Fischer Verlag, p. 228
31. Philips, *op. cit.*, p. 68, 740ff, in both direct testimony and sworn affidavit.
32. The general consensus from Reitlinger (1953) through Pressac (1993) that the overall death toll at Auschwitz was less than one million, although there have always been those who have claimed higher totals, e.g., Dawidowicz (1974), Yehuda Bauer (1982), etc.
33. Carlo Mattogno, "Two False Testimonies from Auschwitz", in *Journal of Historical Review*, Vol. 10, Number One, spring, 1990.
34. quoted in Shirer, *Rise and Fall*, p. 1141
35. It is understood that an interrogator will seek to elicit information; therefore he must have some kind of focus as to which information is valuable and truthful and which is not: the Canonical Holocaust provided this. Compare the comments in Ruthven, Malise, *Torture: The Grand Conspiracy*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London: 1977, p. 275
36. Reilly, *op. cit.*, in an article provides several references to ways in which the Belsen images were appropriated for other camps, thus, for Buchenwald for the film *Judgment at Nuremberg*; see also *Grundlagen*, p.223 for an example where a photo of a Belsen pit grave is transposed to Auschwitz.

## 7. The Nuremberg Trials

THE ORIGINS of the Nuremberg Trials lay in the desire of the Allies as far back as



1943 to take revenge on the Nazi leadership, and punish the German people.<sup>248</sup> It is clear that part of the desire was to ensure that there would be no more wars with Germany: hence at this early date one frequently encounters statements of simply executing tens of thousands of the leadership cadre in Germany, or even sterilizing the total German population.<sup>249</sup>

A general aspect of this hostile attitude was one of paranoia, evinced in conspiracy thinking about the Germans or at least about their leadership. The roots of such paranoia could be variously explained. For one thing, wars always generate suspicions and anxieties that frequently go over the top: one thinks of the English Army, confused and disoriented by the German offensive of May, 1940, finding secret messages in the plowings of Belgian farmers.<sup>250</sup> Another contributing factor is the death and destruction of the war: history provides many instances where terrible misfortunes have been attributed to the secret plotting of others. Jews, for example, were frequently scapegoats in times of plague and disease.<sup>251</sup> In the context of war-hatred against Germans, such attributions were a natural extension: during the influenza pandemic of 1918-1919, an American official attributed this terrible outbreak to a German submarine which had brought the disease to America under the Kaiser's order.<sup>252</sup>

Still another contributing factor to such paranoia is the extent to which war hysteria attributes malevolent "fifth column" tendencies to specific minority groups. The internment by the Allies of the Japanese and other European nationals, the Soviet deportations of the Volga Germans and Crimean Tatars, as well as the German deportations of the Jews, all seem to have been influenced by this kind of thinking to at least some degree.

To a certain extent such conspiratorial thinking is probably a throwback to shamanistic thinking; the idea that misfortune has a direct cause that can be traced back to a specific malevolent agent: one thinks of the various witchhunts that have cropped up here and there in European history.<sup>253</sup> As it applied to the Germans in the 20th Century, such conspiratorial thinking about German motives and German conduct clearly preceded World War Two: one thinks of the Reichstag fire and even more sinister theories traced back hundreds of years.<sup>254</sup>

In the context of the postwar period this simply meant that the Allies were not inclined to trust the German people and least of all their former leadership.<sup>255</sup> The Allies were convinced, on the basis of the Canonical Holocaust, that the German people, or at least the SS, had engaged in the most barbaric crimes and they would not be dissuaded by denials.<sup>256</sup> Down to the common soldier, one finds that whenever any German denied knowledge of "what was going on in the camps" the usual conclusion drawn was that he was simply lying.<sup>257</sup> A final contributing element to this Allied paranoia involved the fact that they were essentially occupying with relatively small numbers a nation of 80 million people; history again shows that when such a small group attempts to impose its will on the majority, conspiracy thinking is a natural result.<sup>258</sup>

Simply put, a profound gulf existed between occupier and occupied. Allied paranoia created the certainty of German conspiracies, of which the mass gassing program was merely one. The Germans were not to be trusted to tell the Allies what had happened and why, they were merely expected to confirm what they were told. The source of the information for what had happened was, after all, available in reports that had been authoritatively issued by the Soviet and later Polish communist governments, as well as by confessions and affidavits that simply restated what everyone had known all along. In this atmosphere of assumed guilt and conspiracy, it was unfortunate that the presentation for the mass gassing and extermination claims at Nuremberg fell almost entirely to the Soviet Union, which already had long experience with conspiracies, paranoia, and show trials.

What transpired at Nuremberg cannot be fully grasped without some understanding of the psychology of Soviet judicial procedure under Stalin. In the 1930's, the Soviets conducted several trials, mostly involving prominent communists but also "saboteurs" who, it was said, were attempting to destroy the Soviet Union.<sup>259</sup> It is generally granted that the accusations made in these trials were false, an extract from one confessor's affidavit, who was charged with sabotaging Soviet agriculture as part of a German plot, is very revealing:

The chief task assigned to me by the German intelligence service at that time was to arrange to spoil grain within the country. This involved delaying the construction of storehouses and elevators, so as to create a discrepancy between the growing size of the grain collections and the available storage space. In this way [the German agent] said, two things would be achieved: firstly, the grain itself would be spoiled; and secondly, the indignation of the peasants would be aroused, which was inevitable when they saw that grain was perishing. I was also asked to arrange for the wholesale contamination of storehouses by pests, especially by corn-beetle ... The German intelligence service made a special point of the organization of wrecking activities in the sphere of horsebreeding in order .. not to provide horses for the Red Army. As regards seed, we included in our program muddling up seed affairs, mixing up sorted seed and thus lowering the harvest yield in the country. As regards crop rotation, the idea was to plan the crop area incorrectly and thus place the collective farm peasants in such a position that they would be virtually unable to practice proper crop rotation and would be obliged to plough up meadows and pastures for crop growing. This would reduce the size of the harvests in the country and at the same time arouse the indignation of the peasants, who would be unable to understand why they were being forced to plough up meadows and pastures when the collective farms wanted to develop stock-breeding and required fodder for the purpose. As regards the machine tractor stations, the aim was to put tractors, harvester combines and agricultural machines out of commission, to muddle the financial affairs of the machine and tractor stations, and for this purpose to place at the machine and tractor stations useless people, people with bad records, and above all members of our Right organization. As regards stock-breeding, the aim was to kill off pedigree breed stock and to strive for a high cattle mortality ... to prevent the development of fodder resources and especially to infect cattle artificially with various kinds of bacteria in order to increase their mortality ... I instructed [the head of the veterinary department] and Boyarshinov, Chief of the Bacteriological Department, to artificially infect pigs with erysipelas in the Leningrad region and with plague in the Voronezh region and the Azov-Black Sea Territory. I chose these two bacteria because the pigs are inoculated not with dead microbes, but with live ones, only of a reduced virulence. It was therefore quite simple from the technical standpoint to organize artificial infection ... For this purpose three factories were selected at my suggestion ... In these factories serums were made with virulent bacteria and given special serial numbers. Boyarshinov was informed of these serial numbers and he transmitted them to the chiefs of the veterinary departments in the localities who could be relied on in this matter, and they in turn transmitted them to veterinary surgeons who had anti-Soviet feelings and who in case of a heavy cattle mortality would not raise a big fuss.<sup>260</sup>

The detached reader notes first of all the tremendous scope of the secret conspiracy alleged as well as the fact that every conceivable shortcoming of Soviet agriculture is being attributed to it. A natural conclusion is that the Soviet government had orchestrated a tremendous hoax. But that is probably too radical an interpretation. It is hard to believe that any rational government, intent above all on simply suppressing its enemies,<sup>261</sup> would devise such a lunatic indictment. Rather it suggests that, probably with some rational and deliberate coaxing from above, the concept of sabotage took on a life of its own in the minds of the security apparatus, the interrogators, and probably even among many of the defendants as well. In other words, we are looking at an instance of mass hysteria in which Soviet society had been taken over by rumors of secret "wreckers" whose secret agenda was so skillfully masked that no hard evidence

existed, and whose works comprised all of the misfortunes of the process of collectivization and de-kulakization. To say that it was wholly deliberate is to go against the weight of analysis from history: as Malise Ruthven pointedly notes, histories of the witchcraft mania never suggest that the inquisitors were perpetrating a fraud.<sup>262</sup>

A similar hysterical atmosphere of endlessly ramifying atrocity appears to have prevailed at Nuremberg. The Americans had found half a dozen strips of human flesh at Buchenwald ornamented with tattoos.<sup>263</sup> At Nuremberg, this freak discovery became a veritable cottage industry in the concentration camps: according to Dr. Blaha, the Germans made riding breeches, gloves, and ladies' handbags from human flesh at Dachau,<sup>264</sup> while the witness Balachowsky assured the court in his testimony that it was used to bind books.<sup>265</sup> The Soviets then produced samples of what they claimed was tanned human skin along with a few exhibits that were purportedly human soap.<sup>266</sup> It need hardly be said that none of these claims have ever been verified; the Soviet samples have disappeared.<sup>267</sup>

The prosecution's case at the Trial consisted mostly of reading into the record miscellaneous atrocity claims from affiants who never appeared to testify.<sup>268</sup> (The defense was allowed half a day to summarize 300,000 affidavits in rebuttal.)<sup>269</sup> With regards to the gas extermination claim, an important document was an affidavit from Höttl, who subsequently evaded prosecution, which explained that secret orders from Himmler had established the extermination program, and that four million had been killed at Auschwitz, six million Jews in all.<sup>270</sup> Later testimony by Wisliceny repeated Höttl's claim, and put the blame for the events on the missing and presumed dead Adolf Eichmann.<sup>271</sup> No documents, then or now, have ever been advanced that point to the planning, budgeting, or ordering of a gas extermination program.

The Soviet presentation, covering most of February, 1946, was considered excessive by some: after presenting an affidavit that a German commandant had taken Jewish children, thrown them in the air, and then shot them for the entertainment of his small daughter, Justice Parker of the United States would be heard to privately comment: "They have gone too far!"<sup>272</sup> When Mesdames Vaillant Couturier and Shmegelovskaya presented fantastic testimonies of the mass gassings at Auschwitz, Justice Biddle of the United States would note privately "I doubt this"<sup>273</sup> and Justice Birkett of the United Kingdom would express private misgivings.<sup>274</sup> But it points to the hysterical atmosphere of the time that neither they, nor anyone else, had the courage to publicly dissent and inject some rationality into the proceedings.<sup>275</sup>

In the summer of 1946, Soviet hubris finally overreached itself when they submitted a 56 page octavo pamphlet that claimed that the Germans had murdered 11,000 Polish officers and had buried them in the Katyn Forest in order to discredit the Soviet Union: under the rules of the Court, the mere submission of such a report would normally be enough to establish it as "fact of common knowledge."<sup>276</sup> The depressing thing about the Soviet Katyn report is that it is in fact longer and more substantial than either the Majdanek or Auschwitz reports.<sup>277</sup> It is also completely false, since it has been reasonably well known since 1952 and was admitted by the Soviet Union in 1989 that Katyn was a Soviet atrocity.<sup>278</sup> The Germans, who finally had evidence to contradict a Soviet claim, tested the assumption, and finally, after some conflict, were able to present their own witnesses to the affair.<sup>279</sup> The court made no mention of Katyn in its final judgment, making it very clear that at this trial justice and morality had to defer to political expediency.<sup>280</sup>

At the end of the Soviet prosecution case, the defense phase of the trial began. About a week after that, Winston Churchill, borrowing a phrase from Joseph Goebbels, spoke of an Iron Curtain descending over the continent of Europe.<sup>281</sup> Almost simultaneously, a week long trial was held in the Hamburg Curio House against the principals of the firm Tesch and Stabenow, which sold Zyklon B to the Auschwitz camp.

That trial, which yielded two death sentences, brought to the fore a number of witnesses -- Bendel, Broad, and Bimko -- whose narratives had already been before the public eye. Just days after the conclusion of that trial, and not far away, the British Field Police seized the former commandant of Auschwitz, Rudolf Höß.

## NOTES

1. This is widely attested, see especially Morgenthau, *op. cit.* Tusa, Ann and John, *The Nuremberg Trial*, Atheneum, NY:1983, pp. 21-28, Irving, *Nuremberg*, discusses the matter extensively in chapter 2, "Lynch Law".
2. The widespread fascination with castrating Germans elicited comments from none other than President Roosevelt himself; see Morgenthau, *op. cit.*, Butz, *op. cit.*, cites Clifton Fadiman and Ernest Hemingway, Irving traces the concept back to a book written by an embittered American Jew, in *Goebbels*, p. 369, 372-373
3. Deighton, Len, *Blood, Tears and Folly*, Harper, NY:1994, pp.194-195
4. Cohn, Norman, *Warrant for Genocide*, Serif, London:1996, a study on the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, recapitulates much of this material, and also shows the composite roots of that document. Unfortunately, Cohn takes an uncritical and erroneous view of statements derived from the Gerstein statement, cf. p. 236. The reader will have perhaps already noted that the concept of the National Socialist mass gas extermination program is an inversion of the Protocols concept which many, including many National Socialists, held about Jewish people. Therefore, in this sense, Cohn's choice of quotes is apt: the Gerstein Statement is the mirror image of the Protocols. Further, the reader would note that the wide-spread popularity of the Protocols concept (which nowadays embraces most conspiracy theories) is fundamentally a mythic reaction to certain aspects of modernity; in other words, just like our subject.
5. Collins, Richard, *The Plague of the Spanish Lady*, Atheneum, NY: 1974, p. 83.
6. Cohn, Norman, *The Pursuit of the Millenium*, also Ruthven, *op. cit.*, Both authors (indeed, most modern authors) trace the witch hunts to social and hence ideological stress.
7. The Reichstag Fire is a classic instance of paranoia striking in both directions; the National Socialists were convinced that the communists had set the blaze, most everyone outside of Germany was convinced of German guilt. Fritz Tobias' study eventually showed that van der Lubbe set the fire by himself; thus the Law of Parsimony eventually gets rid of conspiracy theories, see Tobias, Fritz, *The Reichstag Fire*, Secker and Warburg, London:1962. Because Hitler benefited from the fire, in the sense that it facilitated the Enabling Acts, it was long considered another Nazi plot, cf. Shirer, *Rise and Fall*. xxxxx
8. One theme that is not pursued here but certainly deserves fuller treatment involves the allied desire to pacify Germany; this meant not only the demilitarizing of the nation by also the discrediting of its military and political elite. Lucius Clay, in his memoirs, *Decision in Germany*, discussed with frankness the result of the Nuremberg Trials: the National Socialist party was thoroughly discredited. [Doubleday, NY:1950, pp. 250-252] At the same time, Clay noted that the attempt to discredit the military leadership was less successful. [Ibid.] Therefore the reader should understand that one of the reasons that the atrocity charges (including the gassing claim) were pursued with such abandon, and were allowed to be pursued, and have been allowed to propagate unchecked, is because very quickly they became narrowed in function to the simple discrediting of National Socialism. However, just because these charges have been allowed to stand because they discredit National Socialism, it does not follow that to question these charges is the same thing as an endorsement of National Socialism.
9. The interrogation of Dr. Pfannenstiehl, who Gerstein mentioned in his statement, is characteristic. See Roques, *op. cit.*, pp. 299-308
10. cf. Life Magazine, May 8, 1945, provides some examples, but this is a very common sentiment expressed in GI memoirs and the press.

11. This is the central thesis of Ruthven's book, *op. cit.*, interestingly the notion is recapitulated by the conspiracy of Hitler's resurrection, cf. Life, issue cited above, cf., New Yorker, article cited below, as well as the generalized paranoia about "Werewolves" and the "Alpine Redoubt."

12. Tucker, Richard, *The Great Terror*, is the standard reference, but see also Ruthven, *op. cit.*, pp. 218-278.

13. quoted in Ruthven, *op. cit.*, pp. 245-246

14. Ibid.

15. Ruthven, *op. cit.*, p. 265

16. Butz, *op. cit.*, p. 238, provides a photograph of the Buchenwald exhibition that the German people were forced to view, again, as proof of the moral bankruptcy of the National Socialist regime. The photograph featured various anatomical exhibits, two shrunken heads, and half a dozen strips of human skin, most with tattoos, one of almost the complete frontal torso. Over on the far right of the photo one can see a lampshade on a stand, this was also claimed to have been made of human skin although basic visual inspection indicates that it is of a different order of material than the others. This lampshade appears to have been made of goatskin, and is the root of all of the rest of the "human skin" stories. Cf. Aroneanu, *op. cit.*, p. 106, quoting Supreme AEF report on Buchenwald. As far as is known, neither that lampshade nor any of the other materials discussed in the text has ever been positively identified, many, not even seen; it is doubtful that such materials would be unavailable for testing even today if they had ever existed, since it is known that the United States government retains human skulls gathered by American soldiers and sailors in the South Pacific, Iserson, Kenneth, *Death to Dust*, Tucson, AZ, 1995.

17. cited in Porter, *Holocaust*, the reader is reminded that Porter's text simply involves captioned pages from the trial record that have been photographed and presented in legible format whole, i.e., his book does not comprise interpretation of these affidavits and testimony, other than, of course, in his selections.

18. cited in Porter, *Holocaust*

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Taylor, Telford, *Anatomy of the Nuremberg Trials*, Back Bay, NY: 1992, p. 315

22. cited in Porter, *op. cit.*

23. discussed in Irving, *Nuremberg*

24. Irving, *Nuremberg*, and see also Harris, *Tyranny*

25. Tusas, *op. cit.*, p. 198

26. Irving, in both *Goering* and *Nuremberg*, makes references that are keyed to Biddle's private papers, the first gives the impression that it was Shmegelevskaya who was doubted, the second, Vaillant-Couturier. Perhaps Biddle doubted both.

27. quoted in Taylor, *op. cit.*, p.315

28. This ties directly to the judges and lawyers at Nuremberg, and the community of historians, who have failed to oppose censorship today. It is of course one thing for historians to avoid investigating contentious matters. That is not praiseworthy but it is understandable; although we should keep in mind that tenure was not designed to cover minor personal peccadilloes but rather to protect scholars when pursuing difficult questions. It must be said that Dr. Butz, regardless of the merits of his book or his arguments, is the only American academician to have used tenure for the purpose for which it was designed. On the silence of historians in the face of censorship, that is another affair. On the other hand, we are bound to record the statements of professors emeritus Raul Hilberg and Gordon Craig, who have both publicly denounced both censorship and taboo on this subject.

29. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 313, reference to Article 21 of the London Charter.

30. The Majdanek report comes in at 26 pages, the Auschwitz report would be estimated at about 35, the brochure of Katyn introduced in evidence was 56 pages long.

31. Paul, *op. cit.*

32. Harris, *Tyranny*, summarizes the German counter, as well as the 1952 Congressional Hearings.

33. No mention in judgment, cf. Taylor, *op. cit.*, Generally speaking it seems odd that historians continue to use Nuremberg testimony, especially unattested Soviet-generated testimony, as proof of German atrocities. The Soviet Katyn testimony, that described how the Germans dug up the bodies of the 11,000 Polish officers, transported them to Katyn, went through their pockets and planted papers, then reburied them, and then dug them up again, as part of a plot to discredit the Soviet Union, is just as detailed, cogent, and realistic as that provided by the Soviet Union for the extermination camps.

34. Churchill's speech, 6 March 1946, Fulton, Missouri, first stated by Goebbels, [date], Irving, *Goebbels*, p. xxxxx

## 8. The Confessions Of Rudolf Höß

Höß WAS SEIZED on March 13, 1946, on a farm in the British Zone where he had spent the past several months as a common laborer. [282](#) His affidavits deserve particular attention: for many years historians have been content to merely quote extracts from Höß' affidavits, usually the one from April 5, 1946, as proof of the mass gassings. [283](#) The popularity of this affidavit, also known as PS-3868, is directly related to the fact that it is the only thorough narrative concerning Auschwitz made by Höß that was entered into the trial record at the IMT. In later writings, Höß would claim that he had been severely beaten in the early period of his confinement, [284](#) and later revelations, largely developed by Robert Faurisson, indicate that he was systematically tortured, largely by sleep deprivation. [285](#)

These factors probably explain the incoherence of his very first affidavit of March 16, 1946, which betrays a British influence in its many references to Belsen. The most interesting of these concerns a legend concerning 1,800 Belsen inmates who were sent to Auschwitz, a particularly venerable Holocaust story. [286](#)

The April 5, 1946 affidavit is the one most frequently quoted and the one which makes the various gas extermination claims with some semblance of order. [287](#) The claims may be summarized:

1. Mass gassings began in the summer of 1941 and continued until fall 1944.
2. 2,500,000 were gassed, another 500,000 died from other means for a total of 3 million.
3. Höß left Auschwitz in December of 1943, but he kept informed.
4. The "Final Solution" meant the complete extermination of Jews in Europe.
5. Höß was ordered to establish extermination facilities in Auschwitz in June, of 1941, on direct orders from Himmler.
6. Höß visited Belzec, Treblinka, and Wolzek, where carbon monoxide was used.
7. Höß decided to use Zyklon B.
8. "We knew when the people were dead because their screaming stopped."
9. Gas chambers could hold 2,000 people at a time.
10. Children were invariably exterminated and mothers tried to hide their children.
11. The exterminations were secret, but
12. The stench from the burnings informed everyone for miles around that exterminations were going on.

Offhand, the affidavit seems impressive and authoritative. But on closer analysis it is clear that the document contributes absolutely nothing to what was already known as a "fact of common knowledge" at the time. [288](#) Indeed, it seems remarkable that nearly all prior commentators on Höß fail to recognize the significance of the fact that by the



time of his capture the gassing narrative had achieved almost finished form at the bar of the International Military Tribunal. 289

In detail: that the exterminations were directly ordered by Himmler simply repeats the unsubstantiated assertion found the Höttl affidavit of 1945. 290 The idea that the exterminations went back to 1941, and that the Final Solution was a code word for the extermination of the Jews, goes back to the Nuremberg testimony of Dieter Wisliceny given in January, 1946. 291 The emphasis on the fate of the children reflects the testimonies of Shmegelevskaya and Vaillant-Couturier in January and February. 292 The reference to the stench of the burnings is, as we shall see, a hoary exaggeration that goes back to rumors of the euthanasia campaign in 1941. The claimed number of victims for Höß' tenure -- 2.5 million gassed and 0.5 million dead by other means -- is traceable to the confession of Grabner the previous September. Both reflect the calculations of the Soviet Special Commission on Auschwitz, which claimed 4 million for the entire period of the camp's operation, which, if it came to 3 million by the end of 1943, implied approximately 1 million in 1944. It is also interesting to note that the range of victims -- 2.5 to 3 million -- as well as other details, coincides with the testimony of Pery Broad at the Tesch and Stabenow trial in Hamburg just weeks before. 293 On the other hand, there was no "Wolzek" camp, and none of the three camps Höß claimed to have inspected existed in 1941.

In short, the April 5, 1946 Höß affidavit is simply a confirmation of what was already known. 294 What it contributes is not new, and where it is new it is clearly wrong. It provides no elaboration or explanation for any of the claims which it repeats, in fact, most of Höß' testimony at Nuremberg, ten days later, consisted of making statements that failed to confirm the contents of the affidavit. 295 After his testimony on behalf of Kaltenbrunner, his cross-examination by the prosecution consisted merely of nodding or answering "yes" as his affidavit was read into the record. 296 The affidavit is ultimately an extension and confirmation of the Canonical Holocaust as represented by the Soviet Special Commission on Auschwitz. As such it is practically valueless from a historiographical point of view.

Within a few weeks, Höß was transferred to Poland, where he was put on trial. 297 A number of affidavits were prepared in November, 1946, and these, stitched together with some other materials he composed during and after his trial, have frequently been issued as his "autobiography." It is frequently stated -- erroneously -- that these memoirs were composed in their entirety after his death sentence, so that he would have had no reason to lie or shade the truth. 298 This is not accurate. Höß was not condemned to death until December 27, 1946, a month after deposing his only extensive narrative of gassing while in Polish custody 299 (and which explicitly contradicted the affidavits of March 16 and April 5, recorded in British and American custody respectively, which leads one to the inference that his British, American and Polish interrogators all had different expectations in their questioning.) Furthermore, his death sentence was not confirmed by the Polish People's Court until April 2, 1947, just two weeks before his death, and two months after his memoirs had been penciled. 300 In addition, there is simply no material or documentary support for the claims made either here or in his various affidavits. Finally, the memoirs are a model of incoherence and contradiction, containing a number of demonstrable untruths, as for example the reference to the secret files recording the "several millions" of Germans who were killed in the Anglo-American bombing campaign. 301 Nevertheless the memoirs remain the most frequently cited "official" source for the reality of the gassing claim, although what actually happens is that their mere existence is used to give retroactive authority to the problematic April 5, 1946 affidavit.

## 9. Interpreting Documents and the Postwar Literature

A DISCUSSION of Höß' various confessions, and particularly those in the spring of

1946, leads naturally to the quality and context of the documentary evidence offered at the Nuremberg Trials. 302 Thousands of documents were submitted; but the documents were selected and submitted with a view to convict, not to understand. This was recognized by AJP Taylor years ago. 303

The evidence of which there is too much is that collected for the trials of war-criminals in Nuremberg. Though these documents look imposing in their endless volumes, they are dangerous material for a historian to use. They were collected, hastily and almost at random, as a basis for lawyers's briefs. This is not how a historian would proceed. The lawyer aims to make a case; the historian wishes to understand a situation. The evidence which convinces lawyers often fails to satisfy us; our methods seem singularly imprecise to them. But even lawyers must now have qualms about the evidence at Nuremberg. The documents were chosen not to demonstrate the war-guilt of the men on trial, but to conceal that of the prosecuting Powers. [...] The verdict preceded the tribunal; and the documents were brought in to sustain a conclusion which had already been settled. Of course the documents are genuine. But they are "loaded"; and anyone who relies on them finds it almost impossible to escape from the load with which they are charged.

It is advisable therefore to pause momentarily and look at some of the documents that were presented as proof of exterminations, and particularly gas exterminations.

It is surprising to note that it appears no documents referencing gas chambers were entered into the record of the International Military Tribunal, if we exclude affidavits and testimony. 304 Most of the few documents that we have were recorded by the Nuremberg Military Tribunal, an American court that ran from 1946 to 1949, and which comprised 12 cases against the Nazi leadership. The most important of these, in terms of the gassing claim, was Case #4, the "Concentration Camp Case" which occupied most of 1947. Of the seven hundred documents entered by the prosecution, only four can be interpreted as referencing gas chambers: NO-4473, the so-called "*Vergasungskeller*" letter, NO-4465, a letter referencing "three gas chambers" specified as "*gasdichte Türme*", and NO-4344 and 4345, which references the construction of "extermination chambers" specified as "*Entwesungskammern*" at the concentration camp of Gross-Rosen. 305

Two of these documents are definite mistranslations, and the third is quite possibly so. As we have seen, "*Entwesungskammern*" were standard delousing and disinfestation chambers, and had nothing to do with extermination gas chambers. Similarly, "*gasdichte Türme*" are better translated as "gastight turrets" or "towers" but in any case cannot be associated with "gas chambers." Finally, as we have seen, "*vergasen*" (to gas) was widely used as a synonym for "*begasen*" (to fumigate) -- even in Auschwitz documents 306 -- and has no necessary relationship to extermination gassing. The fact that at least two of these documents were clearly misused goes far to prove the argument that in the immediate postwar period the gassing claim was buttressed by the ignorant misuse of German documents taken completely out of context.

Probably for this reason, present day arguments in favor of the mass gassing claim rarely depend on such obvious mistakes, but rather on a second order of documentation that suggests, without directly attesting, to the existence of mass gassing. 307

One example concerns a draft memo, the so-called Wetzel-Lohse correspondence, concerning conditions around Riga, and entered into the Nuremberg Military Tribunal as NO-365. The draft letter mentions putting large numbers of Jews into the Labor service, and discusses the need for building the necessary "*Unterkünfte*" with the appropriate "*vergasungsapparate*". 308 In the context of the disinfection literature, this is clearly a reference to a Labor Service hut that would be equipped with the standard *Entwesungskammern* for delousing clothing. 309 Yet this same document has been

occasionally put forth as evidence of a homicidal gassing program, even though there is no material or documentary support for that interpretation, and even though there never were any gas chambers in Riga. 310

Another example concerns the Diary of Dr. Kremer, who arrived at Auschwitz at the beginning of September, 1942. 311 The Diary makes one reference to Zyklon B, in the unambiguous context of a barracks fumigation ("*vergasungs eines Blocks*") and then goes on to record the arrival of a convoy of Western Jews arriving at the camp at a time when typhus is ravaging the camp and killing thousands. Yet this document, unambiguous on its face, is constantly advanced as proof of a mass gas extermination campaign. Two quotes are usually given: 312

September 5, 1942. In the morning attended a Sonderaktion from the women's concentration camp (Muslims); the most dreadful of horrors. Hschf. Thilo -- army doctor -- was right when he said to me that this was the anus mundi. In the evening towards 8:00 attended another Sonderaktion from Holland. Because of the special rations they get of a fifth of a liter of schnapps, 5 cigarettes, 100 g salami and bread, the men all clamor to take part in such actions. [ó.]

October 18, 1942. Attended 11th Sonderaktion (Dutch) in cold wet weather this morning, Sunday. Horrible scenes with three naked women who begged us for their lives.

It is conceivable that Kremer is describing here selections for hospitalization, disinfection, or even euthanasia. 313 But it is extremely unlikely that a gassing process is being described. For example, the *Sonderaktionen* (special actions) appear to be taking place outside, and there is a rush of SS men who wish to participate for extra rations. Yet, according to Pery Broad's writing, this is precisely the description of the rewards given to the SS men for helping in the processing of a new transport, not mass murder and not gas exterminations. 314 Moreover, gassings would not take place outside nor would they require large participation -- the role of the SS in the gassings was supposed to have been limited to one or two individuals throwing the cans of Zyklon down some kind of chute. 315

Nor are the terrified Dutch women determinative of mass murder. We know that Thomas Mann had broadcast rumors of gassings (specifically, train gassings) on the 27th of September. 316 We further know that Anne Frank was aware of such gassing rumors from the "English radio" in Holland on the 9th of October. 317 Other European Jews, recalling the war years, also regularly listened to the BBC. 318 So we have every reason to believe that many of these Dutch deportees were at least aware of these kinds of rumors, and, regardless of the eventual fate of these people, since the Dutch Jews lost many lives in the camp system, there is a valid reason for suspecting that the reaction of the Dutch women was, in this particular instance, one of panic and hysteria. This is further borne out by the fact that Dr. Kremer told his interrogators where the diary was after the war was over, believing that its contents would exonerate him. 319

Such examples as these could be multiplied many times over, although not that many times, because the documentary basis for the gassing claim is so slender. The simple fact remains that most of the documents generated at Nuremberg that were said to apply to mass gas extermination are simple references to known German delousing and disinfection procedures, or else documents that are benign onto which a gassing interpretation has been placed. It is noteworthy that those who use these documents as a means of proving the mass gassing claim tend to give short shrift either to the disinfection use of Zyklon B, German disinfection procedures in general, or the rampant epidemics that probably killed hundreds of thousands in the camps. 320

The same situation pertains to documents that claim to prove the extermination program *per se*. The vast majority of these involve the substitution of terms. In other

words, the Germans had a policy of deporting Jews to Eastern Europe (*Evakuierung zu dem Ost, umsiedlung*), drawing off the able-bodied for labor, or the unfit for concentration in ghettos through special actions (*Sonderaktionen*) where selections (*Selektionen*) were made, by way of achieving a final solution (*Endlösung*) to the Jewish problem in Europe. [321](#) But according to the gas extermination interpretation, following on the assertions of Höttl and Wisliceny, all of these terms were simply code words for gas extermination.

The problem is that this interpretation is undercut by many other documents, for example, by the following extract from the summer of 1942, when the "Final Solution" had been in effect for almost a year:

In order to get initial control over the Jews, regardless of whatever measures may be taken later, Jewish Councils of Elders have been appointed which are responsible to the Security Police and Security Service for the conduct of their fellow Jews (*Rassengenossen*). Moreover, the registration and concentration of the Jews in ghettos have been started.... With these measures, the foundations for the Final Solution of the Jewish Problem -- planned for a later time -- have been laid in the territory of Byelorussia (*Weissruthenien*) [322](#)

As well as by Hitler's own words in the fall of 1941:

From the rostrum of the Reichstag, I prophesied [in 1939] to Jewry that, in the event of the war's proving inevitable, the Jew would disappear from Europe. That race of criminals has on its conscience the million dead of the First World War and now already hundreds of thousands more. Let nobody tell me that all the same we can't park them in the marshy parts of Russia! Who's worrying about our troops? It's not a bad idea, by the way, that public rumor attributes to us a plan to exterminate the Jews. Terror is a salutary thing.

Hitler's interlocutors at this particular table-talk were Himmler and Heydrich: therefore, to read this text as something other than what it says one would have Hitler dissembling to the two main architects of his anti-Jewish policy. [323](#) It is also worth pointing out that the "marshy parts of Russia" is a reference to Byelorussia (Belarus).

Finally the interpretation of Final Solution as a mass murder policy is undercut by a document shown by David Irving in his most recent book on Nuremberg, in which *Staatsekretär* Franz Schlegelberg wrote, in the spring of 1942, that Dr. Hans Lammers had phoned him, telling him that Hitler had repeatedly said that the Final Solution was to be postponed until after the war. The document was missing for many years. [324](#)

Therefore, to maintain that these documents pertain to an extermination plan, one must argue that sometimes these words meant extermination, and sometimes they did not. The reader is left to ponder how the German bureaucracy would ever have been able to function under such conditions, if such was the case.

Beginning in 1946, and therefore concurrent with the introduction of these documents at the International Military Tribunal, a number of personal eyewitness accounts were published for mass circulation. These included, among others, Olga Lengyel's *I Survived Hitler's Ovens*, and Miklos Nyiszli's *Auschwitz: A Doctor's Eyewitness Account*. [325](#)

It seems clear when reviewing this literature that it was written in a deliberately sensational style meant to appeal to the lowest common denominator in reading tastes. Lengyel's book, for example, is full of lurid gossip about Irma Grese, her supposed affair with the notorious Dr. Mengerle (sic!), grotesque medical experiments, and lesbian affairs among the women inmates. [326](#) Nyiszli is an endless series of hard to believe

mass murders, by various means. 327 On the other hand, Nyiszli is considered an important source for all Holocaust historians, even though, by the time his book achieved prominence in the West in 1953, he was already dead and therefore incapable of being cross-examined. 328

The books, which, incidentally, were both written by Hungarian physicians, are clearly derivative of the Soviet Special Commission on Auschwitz. This is made clear not only by the number of victims (4 million), 329 but also by the general arrangement of gas chambers and crematoria, the precise arrangement of the burning pits, 330 and the numerous descriptions of medical experiments. In fact, when read in conjunction with the Soviet report these two books read almost like novelizations of that document. But it is precisely where the Soviets are silent in their report, that is, on the actual layout and carrying out of the gassing process, that Drs. Lengyel and Nyiszli make mistakes. Thus Dr. Nyiszli makes a number of observations about the size of the crematoria and gas chambers that are clearly wrong, 331 while Dr. Lengyel writes that the gas crystals were introduced from a trapdoor on top of the chamber, and that a glass porthole had been fitted into the trap for observing the operation, which contradicts the current version. 332

Such sensational and inaccurate studies are doubtless the most popular medium whereby knowledge of the mass gassing claim has been disseminated. But as we have seen these treatments are heavily indebted to, if they are not completely derived from, the Canonical Holocaust of the Soviet Special Commissions on Auschwitz and other camps. That decreases their historical value greatly.

But in fact what has happened over time is that the exaggerated claims in these sensationalist efforts have multiplied and acquired an authority almost equal to that of the Nuremberg court itself, for the simple reason that, having accepted the claim of mass gassing without adequate documentary or material support, we are in no position to deny the claim of streams of melted human fat gathered from the runoff of burning corpses, which is then either made into soap or ladled back onto the pyre to expedite the burning. 333

In the fall of 1946, the International Military Tribunal gave its final verdict, and endorsed both the gassing claim and the soap making claim. 334 Having thus officially passed into the historical record, any further proof would have been considered superfluous. But the problem, as we have seen so far, is that little in the way of proof was offered at Nuremberg.

The most troubling aspect of the mass gassing claim is not that it was made on the basis of slender or non-existent evidence. It is rather that nothing has been produced over the past 50 years that supports the claim. In the past several years numerous archives have been opened to study, and the British government has released many of its ULTRA decrypts for scholarly use along with the transcripts of conversations among detained Germans that were secretly recorded. 335 The tapes and decrypts indicate a knowledge of mass shootings as far back as the summer of 1941, as well as the confessions of SS officers who took part in such procedures, as well as secret concentration camp radio traffic, including that of Auschwitz, but there is nothing in any of these materials about gassing.

This should represent a serious problem for historians. To maintain the gas extermination claim, purely on the basis of the documentation at Nuremberg, is to also maintain that it was carried out with such stealth and cunning that no record was ever made, not even in secret radio traffic or eavesdropped conversations. Because of the broad currency of the gassing claim, it is sometimes said that to deny it is to accuse the Jewish people of a grand conspiracy to create it. But the truth would seem to be the other way around: given the lack of evidence, it is those who assert that mass gassings



took place who are in the position of having to explain why the evidence does not exist. They are the ones who end up asserting the existence of a grand conspiracy.

## 10. Retrofitting the Euthanasia Campaign

SO FAR WE HAVE SEEN that through the spring of 1946 the gassing claim continued to develop, acquiring weight from authoritative reports and the judicial notice of the court, and acquiring immediacy and broad acceptance through the medium of popular paperbacks, graphic photos and newsreel footage. After two years, the claim had fastened on the now-familiar shower-gas-burning sequence, and beginning in the summer of 1944 that claim was imposed upon the physical facts of the camps. By the summer of 1946, the mass gassing claim, as a "fact of common knowledge" had been saturating popular consciousness for four years, even though up to this point, as we have seen, no direct material or documentary evidence had been offered in its support. The next development, starting in July, 1946, was remarkable: the gassing claim, and specifically the shower-gas-burning sequence, was now extended to the time period before the spring of 1942, and in particular to the National Socialist euthanasia program.

That there was a euthanasia campaign, beginning in the fall of 1939, is not in dispute. [336](#) The program, never publicly discussed in Germany, was meant to provide for the mercy killing of the insane, and others who suffered severe mental and physical handicaps, or were near death. The program also provided for the euthanizing of children with severe disabilities. [337](#) The severe mental and/or physical limitations of the victims is something that should be kept in mind, because of the euthanasia scenarios that would emerge in the fall of 1946. [338](#)

The euthanasia program generated many rumors which indicated the strong opposition of the German people. In December, 1941, Thomas Mann claimed over the BBC that 10,000 individuals had already been killed in the euthanasia program with poison gas. [339](#) Before that, there had been widespread rumors in 1941, that elicited strong comments objecting to the program by Catholic clerics. The most famous of these was the sermon by Cardinal Count von Galen of Munster, on August 3, 1941, which explicitly discussed the claims that the mentally handicapped were being put to death and which vigorously condemned them. [340](#) No method of execution was discussed; but what had registered in the minds of the people was the fact that the deceased were in all cases cremated: this alone gave rise to suspicions. [341](#)

Ten days later the Bishop of Limberg wrote a letter to the Reich Minister of Justice which demonstrated the extent to which the rumors had now filtered down even to children at play, once again emphasizing the extent to which cremation was the source of rumors:

Buses arrive at Hadamar several times a week with a large number of these victims, school children know these vehicles and say: "Here comes the murder wagon." After the arrival of such vehicles the citizens of Hadamar see the smoke coming from the chimney and upset by constant thoughts about the poor victims especially when, depending on the direction of the wind, they have to put up with the revolting smell. The consequence of the principles being practiced here is that children, when quarreling with



one another make remarks like: "You are thick, you'll be put in the oven in Hadamar."  
342

It should be noted in passing that the references to the stench and smoke from the cremations are inaccurate exaggerations, but we will have more to say about cremation shortly. 343

What we have then, as early as 1941, are rumors concerning the euthanasia program which have fastened on the cremation or burning element of the usual sequence. Going even farther back, we find rumors from 1940 that help to round out the picture. William Shirer's Berlin Diary was published in June of 1941, and, as a note for November 25, 1940, we find the following entry:

Of late some of my spies in the provinces have called my attention to some rather peculiar death notices in the newspapers. [....]

I am also informed that the relatives of the unfortunate victims, when they get the ashes back -- they are never given the bodies -- receive a stern warning from the secret police not to demand explanations and to 'spread false rumors.' [....]

No wonder that to Germans used to reading between the lines of their heavily censored newspapers, these [death] notices have sounded highly suspicious.[....] And why are the bodies cremated first and the relatives told of the deaths later? Why are they cremated at all? Why aren't the bodies shipped home, as is usually done?

A few days later, I saw the form letter which the families of the victims receive. It reads: 'We regret to inform you that your ---, who was recently transferred to our institution by ministerial order, unexpectedly died on --- of ---. All our medical efforts were unfortunately without avail. [....]

Because of the danger of contagion existing here, we were forced by the order of the police to have the deceased cremated at once."

This is hardly a reassuring letter [....] and some of them, upon its receipt, have journeyed down to the lonely castle of Grafeneck [....] They have found the castle guarded by black-coated SS men who denied them entrance. Newly painted signs on all roads and paths leading into the desolate grounds warned: "*Seuchengefahr!*" (Keep Away! -- Danger of Pestilence!)..

[....]

What is still unclear to me is the motive for these murders. Germans themselves advance three:

1. That they are carried out to save food.
2. That they are being done for the purpose of experimenting with new poison gases and death rays.
3. That they are simply the result of the extreme Nazis deciding to carry out their eugenic and sociological ideas.

The first motive is obviously absurd, since the death of 100,000 persons will not save much food for a nation of 80 million. Besides, there is no acute food shortage in Germany. The second motive is possible, though I doubt it. Poison gases may have been used in putting these unfortunates out of the way, but if so, the experimentation was only incidental. Many Germans I have talked to think that some new gas which disfigures the body has been used, and that this is the reason why the remains of the victims have been cremated. But I can get no real evidence of this. [...] 344

Therefore no later than the fall of 1940 we have a full range of speculative rumor concerning the euthanasia program. There are associations with cremation, which is considered incriminating, the association with cremation has in turn led to rumors about death administered by poison gas and death rays which disfigure the victims. There are associations with disease control: first, the justification given by the government for the rapid cremations, and second, the quarantine signs that Shirer reports. So already we have in this period identified the burning element of the familiar sequence, which has in turn generated the gassing element. What we appear to be missing is the showering element, although we do have an association with the dread of disease and disease control measures.

Beginning with the affidavits of Konrad Morgen in July of 1946, which were intended to absolve the SS of responsibility for the mass extermination gassings, we have an attempt to link the latter procedures to the prior rumors of euthanasia gassings. [345](#) The proof offered then, and which has been considered sufficient since, consisted not of direct material or physical evidence, but rather post-war testimonies. [346](#)

The numbers arriving varied between 40 and 150. First, they were taken to the undressing room. There they -- men and women in different sections -- had to undress or they were undressed. Their clothes and luggage were put in a pile, labeled, registered, and numbered. The people who had undressed then went along a passage into the so-called reception room. [...] Then the people were led [...] through a second exit back into the reception room and from there through a steel door into the gas chamber. The gas chamber had a very bare interior. It had a wooden floor and there were wooden benches in the chamber. Later, the floor was concreted and finally it and the walls were tiled. The ceiling and other parts of the walls were painted with oil. The whole room was designed to give the impression that it was a bathroom. Three showers were fixed in the ceiling. The room was aired by ventilators. A window in the gas chamber was covered with a grill. A second steel door led into the room where the gassing apparatus was installed. [...] The steel doors were shut and the doctor on duty fed the gas into the gas chamber. After a short time the people in the gas chamber were dead. After around an hour and a half, the gas chamber was ventilated. At this point, we burners had to start work. Before I deal with that I would like to make a few more statements about the feeding of the gas into the gas chamber. Next to the gas chamber was a small room in which there were a number of steel canisters. I cannot say what kind of gas was in these canisters or where it came from. The contents of these canisters was fed through a rubber pipe into a steel pipe. On the canisters there was a pressure gauge. When the gas chamber was full, the doctor went to the canisters, opened the tap, and the gas poured through a 15-20 mm pipe into the gas chamber. As I have stated previously, between the gas chamber and the gas canister room there was a steel door. A third door led from the gas chamber into the yard. These doors had a brick surround and there was a peephole into the gas chamber. Through this peephole one could see what went on in the gas chamber.

The remarkable thing about this testimony, generated in 1946 or thereafter, is that it so closely parallels the kind of procedure said to have taken place according to the Canonical Holocaust. Hence, we have the arrival of a bus or train of people. They are separated by sex. They are led to undressing rooms where their belongings are sorted and registered. Then they are led into a shower, where they are gassed. Finally, they are burned. The other remarkable thing about this testimony is that its physical description strongly suggests the disinfection chamber arrangement at Majdanek: the steel doors with peepholes, the small pipe that leads to nowhere, but which is here explained as connected by rubber tubing to carbon monoxide in tanks, [347](#) the two steel doors with peepholes to the gas chamber, one of which leads to the outside, but for no apparent reason, and the brick facing on the concreted structure.

There are two fundamental problems with such testimony: one is that it simply

repeats the by-then universally known shower-gas-burning sequence. Second, the concept behind the extermination procedure makes no logical sense.

Let's just assume for the moment that the shower-gas-burning sequence had actually been developed for the extermination of people being deported to the East. There would be some logic to the procedure, but only to this extent: some means would have been needed to deceive the victims so that they could be concentrated into a small enclosed space, and the regulation delousing procedure might theoretically provide cover for this deception. 348 But such a procedure would have been purposeless for the euthanasia victims, since many were incapable of any rational thinking and would hardly require such subterfuge, let alone the fact that many could probably not even stand, to say nothing of standing in a camouflaged shower room waiting to be gassed.

There is a confusion of deceptions here: the deception to get people into the gas chambers is not the same as the deception whereby people are gassed with carbon monoxide so that they die painlessly and without premonition. 349 The trappings of a shower would be irrelevant to bring about the deceptive death by CO to a euthanasia victim. Moreover, there has never been any testimony that the extermination gassing victims did not know that they were being killed.

As a result the euthanasia eyewitnesses contradict each other: on the one hand we are told that the victims would go into the shower facility, and then within a few moments would go lie down on the benches where they would pass into a lethal sleep unawares, 350 while others assure us that the death agony would take 10 minutes or more and would be accompanied by horrible scenes. 351 And this leads to another confusion: euthanasia victims in Germany were not passing through zones where diseases were endemic, indeed, in most cases they were simply being transported from asylums or sanitariums. A delousing procedure would not be necessary, so, apparently for this and for other reasons the showers were now to be equipped with benches: in other words, in the testimonial descriptions, the shower rooms were transformed into steam baths. But what is the purpose of showerheads in a steambath?

Nevertheless, to the Allies prosecuting the Doctor's Trial it must have made sense. After all, it was known by virtue of the International Military Tribunal's judicial notice that millions of people in Eastern Europe had been exterminated by the shower-gas-burning sequence, and it was further alleged that thousands had been gassed and burned in the euthanasia program. Therefore it must have seemed obvious to the Allies that the euthanasia program would have employed the shower element and all that was necessary was to get the defendants -- on trial for their lives -- to confess to these facts. This led to one of the strangest exchanges in the Nuremberg Trials, during the questioning of Dr. Viktor Brack:

Question: And these people thought that they were going to take a shower bath?

Brack: If any of them had any power of reasoning, they had no doubt thought that.

Question: Well, now, were they taken into the shower rooms with their clothes on or were they nude?

Brack: No. They were nude.

Question: In every case?

Brack: Whenever I saw them, yes. 352

Given the chronological order of these testimonies and the context of the evolution

of the shower-gas-burning sequence it seems clear that these descriptions of euthanasia shower-gassings represent a clear case of concept transference: that is, the shower element from the camps has been retrofitted onto another situation, with a correspondingly poor fit.

A similar case occurred in World War One propaganda. At that time, the legend arose that German soldiers were cutting off the hands of Belgian children. [353](#) The claim was of course false, and furthermore no logical reason was ever advanced for the procedure. However, if we go back to the turn of the century we can find the likely source of the story. In 1903, Roger Casement published an expose of the brutal treatment which King Leopold's concessionaires were carrying out in the Belgian Congo. [354](#) This included the use of bounty hunters, who were supposed to provide proof of their kills. The proof consisted in the hand of the victim. Hence, the claims of sacks of hands, taken as bounty, figured prominently in this scandal. The practice, as grotesque as it was, makes some sense in the context in which it is said to have occurred. It seems likely that this claim was simply transposed from the Belgian Congo to Belgium proper in 1914 and the identities of the malefactors were changed, but in the process of transference the concept acquired a certain telltale illogic.

Since there was a euthanasia program, and since it antedated the mass gassing program, the acceptance of the shower-gas-burning sequence for the euthanasia program provides strong support for the chronologically later, but earlier reported, claim of mass gassing. [355](#) Yet the description of the sequence for the euthanasia program comes after, and is clearly influenced by, the establishment of the canonical shower-gas-burning sequence, and furthermore has no material, documentary, or physical support. [356](#)

There are, however, elements in the euthanasia rumors which may have influenced subsequent developments. The stench and smoke from the crematoria, and the "murder wagons" are two such elements. [357](#) It is significant that within days of Bishop von Galen's protestations about the euthanasia program, rumors of gassings were alleged in Poland, both of these followed Shirer's gassing rumor, published in June. [358](#) There is also the possibility that the disease control measures supposedly invoked to conceal the operations of the euthanasia program, as well as to justify its cremations, inspired rumors analogous to the disinfection rumors from the turn of the century. [359](#) But, here again, it is clear that the invocation of disease control for the sake of secrecy and cremation would have been applied to the outside world: there would have been no reason to continue such an elaborate charade for the victims of the program itself. The presence of the showering element in the euthanasia program thus makes no sense.

This observation leads us back to the presence of the gassing element in the euthanasia program. We know that gassing had been alleged as far back as the fall of 1940 because it was conceived as causing disfiguration, which would then require cremation to hide the traces. Gassing is not being claimed for any other reasons, or based on any other evidence. This simply means that the suspicion of cremation, and fear of disfiguration caused by poison gas, were the real source of the gassing claim at that time. Therefore we most now turn and consider the social and cultural attitudes about cremation and poison gas in the 1930's.

## **11. The Fear of Cremation and Poison Gas**

THE MODERN ADVOCACY OF CREMATION was only about sixty years old by the time the National Socialist dictatorship began. 360 Two factors tended to support the procedure: a chronic lack of burial space, and hygienic requirements, including disease control. 361 On the other hand, the procedure inspired sometimes violent opposition, largely because it conflicted strongly with both Christian and Jewish conceptions of body disposal and the hopes of the afterlife. 362 As a result, the development of the procedure in the 20th Century was slow. 363

Advocacy of the process increased throughout the late 19th and early 20th Century, especially in Germany, where it was associated with rationality, modernity, and public health. 364 By the beginning of the 1920's, less than 2% of the deceased in Germany were cremated, but by 1930 that number had increased to over 7%. 365 The National Socialist government gave its support to the process by the law of 1934, placing cremation on the same level as more traditional burial practices. 366 Many have commented subsequently on the rapid development of the practice, and have noted that it represents the "full mechanization" of modern life, 367 and, as such a strong rupture with traditional life. What needs to be appreciated, however, is that rapid changes in how people live also affects how they perceive the life they are living: no doubt many of the fearful perceptions of cremation were related to that rapid cultural change which shook traditional faiths 368 -- "The modern world is an anti-Christian world," so wrote the leader of German Social Democracy, August Bebel, in 1884, who, in accordance with his Will, was cremated in 1913. 369

Probably as a result of these anxieties about cremation, the procedure became the focus of a number of strange ideas. One of these was that cremation was suspicious, because, by burning a body a post mortem on the cause of death would be next to impossible to carry out. 370 Under such conditions, all manner of murder, poisoning, and other activities could be carried out secretly. 371 It was this element that clearly excited the German people, especially after the National Socialist government not only endorsed cremation for an overcrowded Germany but also made it mandatory in all concentration camps. 372

A second aspect of cremation concerned utopian and futuristic ideas of recycling. Aldous Huxley would clearly articulate the idea in his negative utopia "Brave New World" in 1932:

Following [the train's] southerly course across the dark plain their eyes were drawn to the majestic buildings of the Slough Crematorium. For the safety of night flying planes, its four tall chimneys were flood-lighted and tipped with crimson danger signals. It was a landmark.

"Why do the smoke-stacks have those things like balconies around them?" enquired Lenina.

"Phosphorous recovery," explained Henry telegraphically. "On their way up the chimney the gases go through four separate treatments. P<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub> used to go right out the chimney. Now they recover over 98 percent of it. More than a kilo and a half per adult corpse. Which makes the best part of four hundred tons of phosphorous from England alone." Henry spoke with a happy pride, rejoicing whole-heartedly in the achievement, as though it had been his own. "Fine to think that we can go on being socially useful even after we're dead. Making plants grow." 373

Cremation was not only associated with recycling and various sinister motivations. Some of the claims made about the process can be connected to various other fantastic claims made about German technological and even medical innovations which were typical during the war and in the immediate postwar period. For example, it was claimed by the Soviets at Nuremberg that German doctors had perfected a method of infecting

people with cancer 374, and General Patton, in his memoirs, seemed to take seriously a claim that a German doctor had been able to keep a brain alive, separated from its host. 375 When plans for a German space station were uncovered -- a development which made sense in terms of the German space program -- it was reported in the American press as a plan for a platform that would use a giant mirror to reflect the sun's rays back to the earth in concentrated form in order to incinerate cities or boil "part of the ocean." 376 Speculation about the development of the so-called "Sun Gun" was matched by the hysteria of Allied pilots beginning in the Fall of 1944, who began to report small balls of fire tracking their aircraft over Germany -- these "Foo Fighters" or "Kraut Balls" were said to be remote controlled flying objects sent up by the Germans to sabotage the electrical systems of Allied planes; although they appear to have been nothing more unusual than St. Elmo's fire.

Cremation falls into this category of technological superstition because of the fantastic burn rates attributed to German crematoria. It was not uncommon during the immediate postwar period to hear testimonies asserting that German cremation ovens could burn thousands of people in a single day 377, or that the Germans had devised a "special procedure" for burning thousands of bodies in the open air without fuel, 378 just as one could hear testimonies arguing that thousands of people could be packed into a space for gassing which normally would scarcely contain hundreds by use of "the German method." 379

Notwithstanding these attributed rates of cremation, which according to one document, suggests that bodies could be burned to ash in fifteen or twenty minutes, 380 the facts, developed by the Italian researcher Carlo Mattogno, are simply otherwise. The cremation of a body has a thermal barrier of about 40 minutes for the reduction of body proteins and about 20 to 30 minutes more to reduce the bones to ash. 381 Bearing these facts in mind, derived in empirical tests by British cremationists in recent years, 382 we are forced to conclude that the daily capacity of German crematoria are more realistically measured in the several dozens rather than the several thousands. It follows also that the existence of crematoria cannot be cited as evidence of an intent to exterminate, as was argued then, and even though that claim is still encountered from time to time to this day.

To a certain extent the German leadership is responsible for encouraging the Allies to make exaggerated claims about German technological prowess. The constant talk of wonder weapons that would turn the tide of war helped maintain homefront morale. On the other hand, such claims, coupled with the very real German innovations in weapons technology, including jet aircraft, rocket planes, cruise missiles, guided missiles, and many others, were bound to lead the Allies to believe that the "latest word in fascist technology" 383 would have no limits and thus any claim became plausible: even crematoria that could defy the laws of nature, or which were in fact "gas ovens". 384

There were also cases where the Nazi leadership, and specifically Adolf Hitler, would attempt to gain a psychological advantage by exaggerating German technological capabilities. For example, when the Germans invaded Belgium in May, 1940, they seized the fortress of Eben Emael in 24 hours, much to the astonishment of the Allies. In a speech, Hitler attributed the success to a special weapon or *Angriffsmittel*, whose character he would not divulge. His coy announcement immediately created apprehension among the Allies, as well as speculation about the nature of the wonder weapon: bombs containing liquid oxygen as well as a paralyzing and non-lethal nerve gas were both suggested as possibilities. 385 In fact, the legendary *Angriffsmittel* turned out to be nothing more complicated than a shaped explosive charge, but that does not mean that these other contemporary speculations are valueless to the historian. On the contrary, because they represent almost pure projection, they tell us a great deal about the widely-held beliefs in German technological and scientific prowess as well as about then common concerns with specific types of weapons, including poison gas.



Even more than cremation, poison gas raised great fears. Doubtless much of this was directly due to the extensive use of gases in the First World War, which injured over a million men. [386](#) A number of gases were used in that war, but two appear to have particularly excited the popular imagination. The first of these were the blister gases, or vesicants, commonly called mustards, which were notorious for scarring and disfiguring their victims. [387](#) It was clearly this kind of gas that the German people were thinking of when the euthanasia rumors developed.

The second gas was hydrocyanic acid, or cyanide gas, whose usage in the war was not very successful, but which nevertheless created a very odd optimism about the use of this odorless, invisible, almost instantly lethal and therefore painless gas. [388](#) A practical side effect of this optimism was the appropriation of cyanide gas for executions in the United States in 1924. [389](#)

A brief perusal of inter-war culture makes it clear that poison gas, and the effects of its use, were very much a part of the cultural landscape. The Austrian Vicki Baum's novel, *Grand Hotel*, later made into a widely popular film in 1932, featured events in a Berlin Hotel, the narrator of which was a doctor, whose face had been hideously scarred by mustard gas in the Great War. [390](#) Pabst's *Kameradschaft* (1931), a film that describes a group of German miners who bravely tunnel across the border to rescue their French comrades, features at its climax the hallucination of a wounded Frenchman, who sees the German trying to save him suddenly as a soldier, in gas mask and coal scuttle helmet, emerging from a cloud of gas. The film also juxtaposes the gas explosion in the mine that traps the Frenchmen to the communal shower room of the German miners: perhaps already here we have the popular image of showering and gas combined. [391](#)

In one of his better known assaults on the German bourgeoisie, the *Weltbühne* critic Kurt Tucholsky would casually mention gassing his opponents, sardonically describing the gas that would seep into the houses and kill children, women, and men alike. [392](#) And Ernst Krenek, in his opera, *Der Diktator* (1926), which tells of a dictator that controls a nation with hypnotic powers, features a character blinded by poison gas who sings a lyric describing the horror of a poison gas attack, emphasizing disfiguration and discoloration. [393](#)

This constant awareness of poison gas increased after the Italians made a much publicized, but perhaps overstated, use of aerial mustard gas attacks against the Ethiopians in 1935. H. G. Wells' *Things to Come*, in the 1938 film version, also would feature such an aerial gas attack. [394](#)

At the same time, in the fall of 1938, Europe was gripped by the threat of war as the Munich crisis unfolded. Fear of bombing was great, but so too was the fear of aerial poison gas attacks. The British government had prepared to distribute some 38 million gas masks, and after the Fleet was mobilized on "Black Wednesday", panic became a feature of gas mask distribution. [395](#) Two other aspects of public attitudes during the crisis are worth noting: the proliferation of rumors such that, for example, a clouds of autumn mist might be interpreted as poison gas, [396](#) and psychosomatic reactions, as when the rumor of a squadron spraying chlorine gas in East London caused the physical illness of several. [397](#) Indeed, a government committee of psychiatrists estimated that, in the event of war, the two million estimated dead by bombing and gassing would be joined by some five to six million victims of panic and hysteria. [398](#)

The generalized fear of poison gas inarguably played a role in one of the most notorious episodes of mass hysteria in modern times: *The War of the Worlds* radio broadcast of October, 30, 1938. [399](#) Following directly on the heels of the Munich crisis, and the popularity of a play that described aerial warfare, the fictionalized and updated account featured a Martian invasion of New Jersey that caused panic among tens of

thousands nationwide. 400 Two points about the broadcast are noteworthy: the initial destruction, at the precise point when most people would have tuned in, discussed the discovery of bodies that had been horribly disfigured and burned, and the fact that the broadcast contained a lurid description of a cloud of poison gas moving across Manhattan destroying everyone that it touched. 401 The accounts in the New York Times the next day are interesting in assessing public reaction: 402

*Radio Listeners in Panic, Taking War Drama as Fact*

Despite the fantastic nature of the reported "occurrences", the program, coming after the recent war scare in Europe and a period in which the radio frequently interrupted regularly scheduled programs to report developments in the Czechoslovak situation, caused fright and panic throughout the area of the broadcast.

Many sought first to verify the reports. But large numbers, obviously in a state of terror, asked how they could follow the broadcast's advice and flee from the city, whether they would be safer in the "gas raid" in the cellar or on the roof, how they could safeguard their children, and many of the questions which had been worrying residents of London and Paris during the tense days before the Munich agreement.

*"They're Bombing New Jersey!"*

Jersey City police received similar calls. One woman asked Detective Timothy Grooty, on duty there, "Shall I close my windows?" A man asked, "Have the police any extra gas masks?" Many of the callers, on being assured the reports were fiction, queried again and again, uncertain in whom to believe.

The incident at Hedden Terrace and Hawthorne Avenue, in Newark, one of the most dramatic in the area, caused a tie-up in traffic for blocks around. The more than twenty families there apparently believed a "gas attack" had started and so reported to the police. An ambulance, three radio cars, and a police emergency squad of eight men were sent to the scene with full inhalator apparatus.

They found the families with wet cloths on faces contorted with hysteria. The police calmed them, halted those who were attempting to move furniture on their cars and after a time were able to clear the traffic snarl.

East Orange police headquarters received more than 200 calls from persons who wanted to know what to do to escape the "gas."

The role of the radio in propagating the *War of the Worlds* broadcast was duly noted in the contemporary media. Thus the New York World Telegram would editorialize on November 1:

It is strange and disturbing that thousands of Americans, secure in their homes on a quiet Sunday evening, could be scared out of their wits by a radio dramatization of H. G. Wells' fantastic old story, *The War of the Worlds*.

Mr. Welles did not plan deliberately to demoralize his audience. But nerves made jittery by actual, though almost incredible, threats of war and disaster, had prepared a great many American radio listeners to believe the completely incredible "news" that Martian hordes were here. 403

While columnist Hugh Johnson opined:

... the incident is highly significant. It reveals dramatically a state of public mind. Too many people have been led by outright propaganda to believe in some new and

magic power of air attack and other development in the weapons of war. 404

Columnist Dorothy Thompson was even more emphatic:

The immediate moral is apparent if the whole incident is viewed in reason: no political body must ever, under any circumstances, obtain a monopoly of radio.

The second moral is that our popular and university education is failing to train reason and logic, even in the educated.

The third is that the popularization of science has led to gullibility and new superstitions, rather than to skepticism and the really scientific attitude of mind.

The fourth is that the power of mass suggestion is the most potent force today and that the political demagogue is more powerful than all the economic forces. 405

The reminiscences of the "survivors" of the Martian invasion also tell us a great deal about common attitudes about Germans, poison gas, and other subjects. One recalled:

The announcer said a meteor had fallen from Mars and I was sure he thought that but in the back of my head I had an idea that the meteor was just a camouflage. It was really an airplane like a zeppelin that looked like a meteor and the Germans were attacking us with gas bombs. 406

And a Californian remembered:

My wife and I were driving through the redwood forest in Northern California when the broadcast came over our car radio. At first it was just New Jersey but soon the things were landing all over, even in California. There was no escape. All we could think of was to try to get back to LA to see our children once more. And be with them when it happened. We went right by gas stations but I forgot we were low on gas. In the middle of the forest our gas ran out. There was nothing to do. We just sat holding hands expecting any minute to see those Martian monsters appear over the tops of the trees. When Orson said it was a Halloween prank, it was like being reprieved on the way to the gas chamber. 407

These fears were clearly carried over to World War Two itself, especially around the time of D-Day. The Allies, in their dress rehearsals at Slapton Sands, were clearly concerned about the possibility of gas attacks, 408 and this fear appears to have had something to do with the disaster at Omaha Beach, when a brush fire was taken as a cloud of poison by pinned down American soldiers. 409 Within a month, Winston Churchill would dictate a memorandum discussing these very matters, as well as the possibility of drenching the German cities and armaments centers with mustard gas. 410

There is no question then that the fear of poison gas was very much a part of the inter-war consciousness. But we should also note that poison gases, like poisons generally, are well suited to paranoid and hysterical reactions, because by definition the substances tend towards the impalpable. 411

If, for example, gas is conceived as having an odor, then any unfamiliar odor could be attributed to a deadly gas. Berton Roueche provided a case study of such a hysterical reaction that occurred in 1971 in a Florida school: a new carpet had been laid, leaving an unfamiliar smell, a young woman fainted, because she had the flu, and within an hour dozens of students complained of being poisoned. 412 This association of odor with poison, by the way, is particularly deeply rooted in Western culture, in the sense that it ties into the miasmatic theory of disease, 413 as well as with the Victorian belief in "vapours" which were the supposed source of hysteria among women.

On the other hand, if a gas is conceived as a cloud of smoke or mist, then any cloud of smoke or mist may be perceived as a poison gas, and this is apparently what happened at Omaha Beach.

Again, if the gas is conceived as both odorless and invisible, then we have a case where simply the suggestion of poison gas can lead to the claim of its use: this occurred during the Gulf War, when a Iraqi SCUD missile landed in Israel. [414](#)

Finally, if the gas is conceived as disfiguring -- and this is what most people had in mind during World War Two -- then the result is that any decomposed or otherwise disfigured body would be attributed to poison gas usage, and this happened in Germany following an allied raid. [415](#) Since the Americans and British found similar scenes in the Western camps when they liberated them, there is little reason to doubt that they suspected poison gas usage for the same reasons. [416](#)

The fear of poison gas usage in the West was pervasive even before World War Two. It was variously believed that it would come in a visible cloud, or be dropped from the skies, or be both odorless and invisible, and would kill instantly with terrible disfiguration. Thus the culture was primed for accusations of poison gas usage. But, since the main fear was that such gas would be delivered from the air, we would also expect gas protection to be a prominent feature of German civil defense. And indeed it was.

## 12. German Civil Defense

THE GERMANS INVESTED hundreds of millions of dollars in the preparation of air raid shelters. [417](#) From the beginning, all German air raid shelters were designed to protect against poison gas as well as against bombs. [418](#) As a result, special air raid shelter doors were developed, usually made of steel. The doors would feature a round peephole covered with a perforated steel plate to prevent breakage, the peephole meant to facilitate visual inspection without having to break the gas-tight seal by opening the door. [419](#)

Because the particular concern for poison gas, a number of other measures were adopted. Part of every municipal air raid crew was designated as a decontamination squad, whose uniforms and equipment would come in handy for other sanitation procedures, including corpse disposal. [420](#) Because of the particular fear of mustards, municipal disinfection centers, bathhouses, and laundries, would all be adapted for decontaminating people and their belongings in the event of a gas attack. [421](#)

The Germans devised a number of different shelters, including an emphasis on above-ground air raid and anti-gas shelters that the Western Allies never matched. [422](#) Every basement or Keller was also supposed to serve doubly as a gas-proof bomb shelter if needed. [423](#)

In one of the strange ironies of history, the allied bombing campaign, that killed perhaps 3/4 of a million German civilians, gassed and burned most of its victims. [424](#) Most of the victims, trapped in the basement shelters of their buildings, could not escape the carbon monoxide generated by the bombs and fires, whose small molecular size was almost impossible to filter, and so were in effect gassed. [425](#) Meanwhile, the tremendous heat from the fire-storms, which often exceeded 1,000 degrees Centigrade, would effectively cremate their bodies with dry heat. [426](#) But in the aftermath of the war this

destruction of the German people with gas and fire was completely overlooked in the allied prosecution of claims of gassing and burning made against them.

### 13. Civil Defense in the Concentration Camps

THE CONCENTRATION CAMPS also featured extensive civil defense paraphernalia. There are three reasons why this would be so. In the first place the Guidelines for air raid shelter construction from the fall of 1940 mandated that all new constructions, particularly in the armaments industry, should be equipped with (gas tight) air raid shelters. 427 Secondly, it is well known that the concentration camp system was regarded as crucial as a source of labor for the armaments industry. 428 Third, a directive from Heinrich Himmler dated February 8, 1943, makes it clear that the SS was very concerned about the possibility of air attacks on the concentration camp system. 429

The main shelters found in the concentration camps were covered trenches dug out of the ground. 430 But given the concerns among the civilian population, we should expect similar adaptations in the camps, especially for gas warfare. A cursory inspection of contemporary photographs and documents further support the inference of widespread air raid and gas protection in the concentration camps. The dwelling of the Auschwitz Commandant, for example, clearly shows a gas-tight shutter or *Blende* attached to the right front of the building, along with a ventilation pipe, 431 while the blueprints for the Central Sauna at Birkenau indicate that its basement was equipped with an emergency exit. 432

The hypothesis concerning air raid shelters at Auschwitz is confirmed by the recent discovery of three documents from the Moscow archives that prove that the Germans were concerned with developing an extensive network of air raid shelters at Auschwitz Birkenau starting from the summer of the 1943, that is, at the same time that the building office of that camp was flooded with work orders for gastight fixtures. 433

The Bath and Disinfection Complex II at Majdanek has a number of features that support an air raid shelter, and thus gastight, interpretation. Clearly, the gastight doors with peepholes are air raid shelter doors, constructed by the Auer firm in Berlin, which was a major supplier of air raid shelter equipment in Germany throughout the war. 434 Other doors in the complex appear to be rudimentary air raid shelter doors constructed of wood. The CO gas mask filter found on site were also produced by Auer, and was specifically constructed according to air raid shelter specifications. 435 The overhead openings in Room "A", discussed earlier, were constructed simultaneous to the delivery orders for the gastight doors, 436 and furthermore meet German industry standards (DIN) for the construction of emergency exits from air raid shelters. 437

Of course, as we have seen, other features point to a disinfection use. These include the overall construction and context, the external boilers, the piping, the tanks of carbon dioxide, and the positioning of a thermometer in one of the peepholes. However, these features can be squared with air raid shelter usage in the context of decontamination, inasmuch as hot air was a recommended form of decontamination, required gas tight doors, as well as openings for thermometer consultation. 438 Furthermore, a wartime pamphlet of the German Gas Protection Service of the Wehrmacht specifies that existing structures can be adapted for decontamination use.

The simplest explanation is that the Bath and Disinfection Complex II at Majdanek was modified in the fall of 1942, such that it could continue its use as a delousing station while in addition being available for air raid and gas protection as well as decontamination. 439 Support in the surrounding context lies in the fact that these

modifications to the Majdanek camp in occupied Poland occurred at the same time as the Germans were providing the Jewish inhabitants of the Warsaw Ghetto with materials for air raid shelters, materials that were used instead to construct a network of defensive bunkers that were used against the Germans in May, 1943. 440 Surely a more thorough analysis of concentration camp buildings would extend the evidence of air raid shelters and gas protection. 441

## 14. Pressac's "Criminal Traces"

THE ISSUE OF AIR RAID SHELTERS and gas protection at the concentration camps leads directly to the purported evidence of gas chambers in the Birkenau crematoria, which have been the subject of an important study by the Frenchman, Jean Claude Pressac.442

Pressac's study represented an attempt to prove that the four Birkenau crematoria were equipped with gas chambers, strictly on a material and documentary basis. The centerpiece of Pressac's massive tome was a list of some three dozen "criminal traces" which represented the totality of material and documentary evidence that can be offered in support of the thesis that mass gassing occurred at the Birkenau crematoria. 443 (There is no material or documentary evidence for gassings at any other locations at Auschwitz.) 444

We have not yet had occasion to review this part of the documentary evidence because almost all of it was produced at the time of the Polish run Auschwitz trials in 1946 and 1947 after which it was filed away. 445 With one or two exceptions, these documents were never used to support the claim of mass gassing in the West. 446 Only in the late 1980's, after the revisionist critique had cast major doubts on the veracity of the gassing claim, were these documentary traces unearthed and offered as authoritative and final proof of the mass gassing claim.

But when we review the "criminal traces" we do not find evidence of gas chambers after all. Indeed, looking at the "criminal traces" in the light of German civil defense literature, we find instead that Pressac has unwittingly made a convincing argument that each of the Birkenau crematoria was equipped with a gas-tight bomb shelter, and that these shelters also included decontamination facilities in the form of showers and baths. 447 In this respect it is important to note that the crematorium at the base camp was known to have been used as an air raid shelter, although its poison gas protection features have rarely been commented on. 448

We should emphasize that all of the material and documentary evidence, when placed in a larger context, points to gas tight air raid and anti-gas shelters, although it is likely that at least two of the traces -- the gas detectors, and possibly the term "*Vergasungskeller*" -- are rooted in other benign procedures, including disinfection. 449 There is no direct material or documentary support for the claim that these spaces were designed, let alone used, as extermination gas chambers.

Since all of the criminal traces at Auschwitz Birkenau can be explained in terms of civil air defense literature, disinfection literature, and other technical literature, it means, first, that there is no longer any documentary or material evidence that mass gassings took place at all. This is important because, as we have already noted, no documents pertaining to gas extermination have ever been offered for the other camps, for example, Sobibor, Treblinka, or Belzec. Second, these documents, which the context shows clearly concern either disinfection or civil air defense procedures, were just as clearly used out of



context by the Polish communists who conducted the original Auschwitz trials. One can possibly suggest that they were used out of context unwittingly, but the fact that documents pertaining to civil air defense and disinfection were so clearly misused strongly indicates that there was never any merit to the extermination gassing claim in the first place.

In other words, civil air defense literature, along with disinfection literature, does more than explain all of the alleged documentary and material for mass gas exterminations. Shown in their proper context, these documents, now clearly seen as having been misused, bring us face to face with the possibility of a deliberate Polish and Soviet communist fraud. [450](#)

## 15. The Gas Chamber of Sherlock Holmes

WE HAVE SEEN SO FAR that the concept of shower-gas-burning underlay the accusation of gas exterminations in World War Two, and we have also seen that no material or documentary evidence in support of the accusation has surfaced. This leads us naturally to the question as to whether the claim is entirely fictitious.

Here are some excerpts from a gassing narrative:

And then we stopped in front a large barrack marked Bad und Desinfektion II. "This," somebody said, "is where large numbers of those arriving at the camp were brought in." The inside of this barrack was made of concrete, and water taps came out of the wall, and around the room there were benches where the clothes were put down and afterwards collected. [...] Anyway, after the washing was over, they were asked to go into the next room: at this point even the most unsuspecting must have begun to wonder. For the "next room" was a series of large square concrete structures, each about 1/4 the size of the bathhouse, and unlike it, had no windows. The naked people (men one time, women another time, children the next) were driven or forced from the bathhouse into these dark concrete boxes -- about five yards square -- and then, with 200 or 250 people packed in each box -- and it was completely dark in there, except for a small skylight in the ceiling and the spyhole in the door -- the process of gassing began. First some hot air was pumped in from the ceiling and then the pretty pale-blue crystals of Cyclon were showered down on the people, and in the hot wet air they rapidly evaporated. In anything from two to ten minutes everybody was dead. There were six concrete boxes -- gas chambers -- side by side. "Nearly two thousand people could be disposed of here simultaneously," one of the guides said. [...] At first it was all very hard to take in, without an effort of the imagination. There were a number of very dull-looking concrete structures which, if their doors had been wider, might anywhere else have been mistaken for garages. But the doors -- the doors! They were heavy steel doors, and each had a heavy steel bolt. And in the middle of the door was a spyhole, a circle, three inches in diameter composed of about a hundred small holes. Could the people in their death agony see the SS-man's eye as he watched them? Anyway, the SS-man had nothing to fear: his eye was well protected by the steel netting over the spyhole. And like the proud maker of reliable safes, the maker of the door had put his name round the spyhole: "Auert, Berlin". Then a touch of blue on the floor caught my eye, it was very faint, but still legible. In blue chalk someone had scribbled the word "vergast", and had drawn above it a skull and crossbones. [451](#)

and here are some excerpts from another:

I was ordered by Brack to attend the first euthanasia experiment in the Brandenburg asylum near Berlin. I went to the asylum in the first half of January 1940. Additional building work had already been carried out especially for the purpose. There was a room similar to a shower room which was approximately 3 by 5 meters and 3 meters high and tiled. There were benches round the room and a water pipe about 1 inch in diameter ran along the wall about 10 cm off the floor. There were small holes in this pipe from which the carbon monoxide gas poured out. The gas cylinders stood outside the room and were already connected up to the main pipe. [...] There were already two mobile crematoria in the asylum with which to burn the corpses. There was a rectangular peephole in the entrance door, which was constructed like an air raid shelter door, through which the delinquents could be observed. The first gassing was carried out by Dr. Widmann personally. He turned the gas tap and regulated the amount of the gas. [...] For this first gassing about 18-20 people were led into this 'shower room' by the nursing staff. These men had to undress in an anteroom and they were completely naked. The doors were shut behind them. These people went quietly into the room and showed no signs of being upset. Dr. Widmann operated the gas. I could see through the peephole that after about a minute the people had collapsed or lay on the benches. There were no scenes and no disorder. After a further five minutes the room was ventilated. [452](#)

and here is are excerpts from a third:

Then came the idea of a room such as you see here with iron door and shutter -- a hermetically sealed room. Put those two facts together, and whither do they lead? [...] Observe what I found. You see the gas-piping along the skirting here. Very good. It rises in the angle of the wall, and there is a tap here in the corner. The pipe runs out into the strong room, as you can see, and ends in that plaster rose in the center of the ceiling, where it is concealed by the ornamentation. That end is wide open. At any moment by turning the outside tap the room could be flooded with gas. With door and shutter closed and tap full on I would not give two minutes of conscious sensation to anyone shut up in that little chamber. By what devilish device he decoyed them there I do not know, but once inside the door they were at his mercy. Now, we will suppose that you were shut up in this little room, had not two minutes to live, but wanted to get even with the fiend who was probably mocking at you from the other side of the door. What would you do? ... Now, look here! Just above the skirting is scribbled with a purple indelible pencil, 'We, we --' That's all. [453](#)

What is the difference among these accounts? They all sound similar. The first is from Alexander Werth, and fairly represents the kinds of arguments he and others made in September, 1944 in describing the operation of the Majdanek gas chamber. As we have seen, the gas tight door, which he found so incriminating, is merely an air raid shelter door. The second account comes from testimony about a euthanasia gassing, which we have seen involves a probable retrofitting of the shower-gas-burning concept. The final excerpts come from a Sherlock Holmes story, *The Adventure of the Retired Colourman*, by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, written in 1924 or 1925.

The Holmes story reminds us of two things. First, that a clearly fictional -- but meant to be realistic -- depiction of a gassing could antedate any gassing stories by almost 20 years. Indeed, we are almost inclined to think that Conan Doyle's adventure -- bearing in mind the universal popularity of the Sherlock Holmes stories back then -- contributed some detail to the other two later accounts.

The second thing that comes to mind is the ultimate origin of these concepts. That is, we are not merely interested in the idea of poison gas, but also the concepts of delousing and burning, and how they evolved and were associated in the Western mind. In addition, we should also take note of those concepts that we specifically associate with

the Holocaust, namely, an extermination program, carried out by higher orders in a secret fashion, and consuming a predetermined number of Jewish victims. What we are proposing is no longer a simple history of what happened, but how what happened was interpreted by those who experienced it on the basis of their expectations and beliefs.

Such an investigation takes us far from mere literary analysis and almost into a kind of literary archaeology that would take years to unravel. Nevertheless it is still possible to adumbrate some of the roots of these various concepts.

From the 19th Century "gas" seems to have conjured up above all the firedamp of coal mines which engendered several terrible disasters. [454](#) Alternatively, gas was related to medicine because of its use as an anesthetic for surgery and dentistry. [455](#) Probably the mining concept inspired H. G. Wells' *War of the Worlds* from 1898 where exploding gases provide not only propulsion for the Martian craft but also a potent weapon. [456](#) Gas usage again would figure in the Martian stories of Edgar Rice Burroughs, from 1913, although here the association clearly seems to be with nitrous oxide, which frequently is known to cause out of body experiences. [457](#) Folk conceptions of gas probably also involve gas lamps and gas ovens, both of which were used for suicides after World War One. [458](#) Probably the Holocaust researcher should be familiar with as many associations of gas as possible when reviewing the construction of gassing claims.

Gas warfare in terms of air power also figures in the European mind earlier than we might think. Already in 1912, a Leipzig correspondent, reviewing the political scene in the Balkans, spoke of the need to develop "poison gas bombs" [459](#), and, as far back as 1932 the author of a novel about the coming war would provide a vivid description of the bombing of Paris, ending with a gas attack. [460](#)

It is interesting in this regard that Conan Doyle is a veritable fount of references to poison gases of various kinds but also cyanide. [461](#) Particularly interesting in this respect is *The Poison Belt*, from 1913, which describes Planet Earth entering into a celestial cloud of poison gas that apparently kills all, the only hope for the five survivors is to turn the Madame's boudoir into a kind of "anti-gas shelter" complete with bottled oxygen. [462](#)

Most remarkably, we find already in the 1930's references to gas killings remarkably similar to those that arose in 1940. A Jehovah's Witness publication from 1937 already reported on the alleged use of poison gas in German camps, and Sinclair Lewis' *It Can't Happen Here* from 1936 features an episode in which twenty Jews are asphyxiated in the basement of their synagogue with bottled carbon monoxide. [463](#)

We have already touched on delousing procedures and cremation in the popular culture, as shown in Huxley and the memoirs of Mary Antin. Doubtless there are many more. The Soviet poet Mayakovsky used the motif of a delousing station in his futurist play *The Bathhouse* (1926) to describe a process of exclusion, cleansing, and as it were "ideological delousing". [464](#)

Turning now to the concepts important to the Jewish perspective on the Holocaust, the usage of the term "extermination" is deserving of further excavation. In this respect the researcher is surprised at how easily the term is employed to describe the persecutions and hardships of the Eastern Jews since the early 1880's. Thus, in 1882, a speech in the United States House of Representatives concluded "The Hebraic-Russian question has been summed up in a few words: 'Extermination of two and one-half millions of mankind because they are -- Jews!'" [465](#) And, in a letter written in 1939, the legendary Jewish historian Simon Dubnow would write of conditions in Germany: "Hitler's 'system of extermination' is simply a translation of Haman's plan to 'destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all Jews.' [...] Hitler has almost realized his plan. One million Jews in Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia are destroyed, plundered, mutilated [...]." [466](#)

With due regard to the frightful excesses of the initial wave of Russian pogroms and the effects of *Kristallnacht*, to use the term "extermination" seems either hyperbole or irresponsibility, certainly in the sense in which we construe the term today. But then the obvious conclusion is that "extermination" did not have quite the meaning it has today in the 1930's and World War Two. 467

These remarks also refer back to the concept of "six million" Jews endangered with "extermination" a construction which has been traced back to a speech by the governor of New York in 1919, in the context of the Russo-Polish war and typhus epidemics. 468 As Arthur Butz was perhaps the first to note, the final figure for Jewish losses as a result of National Socialist persecution seems to have been firmly set early in the war, certainly long before any accurate accounting could be done. 469 One has to inquire on the fixation with this number, especially in light of both traditional and revisionist studies that indicates the loss of life -- if not the loss of community -- was rather less. 470

Finally, it seems to be worthwhile to study Jewish historians to grasp their vision of historical causality. Simply put, the explanations put forward by Jewish historians for the pogroms, as for any of the other misfortunes of Jewish history, is almost always expressed in terms of the conspiratorial plotting of members of the ruling elite. 471 Rarely does there seem to be an appreciation of the social tensions that could give rise to largely spontaneous episodes of violence, or that the interests of Jewish people could conflict with those of non-Jews, thus generating tensions which would lead to tragic upheavals.

This last factor appears to be particularly instrumental in the tendency to view the Holocaust in a rather simple and monocausal way, as the personal pursuit of the Hitler-Haman, driven by unnamed demons to utterly destroy the Jews. But aside from the biblical resonance of such an explanation it does not fit the patterns we normally associate with any other upheavals in history. Nor does such an explanation account for the complexity of the time, or for the nature of the very real persecutions and dissolution effected by the Stalinist regime, the pre-war Polish regime, or other East European governments. 472 To put the onus for the Holocaust solely on Hitler the Man, is merely to brandish a caricature of Hitler the Devil, and certainly such historical perception is useless in preventing future holocausts. Instead, all too often, such approaches to historical judgment merely descend into a vein of highly colored condemnations, first of Hitler, then the Nazis, and finally the German people. 473 Such moralistic diatribes may soothe the suffering soul, but they contribute nothing to our understanding, nor, it must be said, do they contribute anything to reconciliation.

## 16. Conclusions

THE AIM OF THIS ESSAY was to trace in a rudimentary form the evolution of the gassing claims from the summer of 1942, when they began in the form of wartime propaganda, until the end of the Nuremberg Trials, by which time they had assumed the stature of facts. Our main assumption was that in tracing the development of these stories we would be able to define precisely where and how the various story elements evolved. Of course, if the evolution of the stories had ended up in a solid documentary or material base, that would have strongly corroborated the factuality of the mass gassing

allegations. But in our traversal, we have found two things:

1.

There is no unambiguous material or documentary basis for the gassing claims: what has been put forward as indirect evidence of mass gasings turns out, in context, to overwhelmingly pertain either to German disinfection procedures or German civil air defense measures.

2.

Gassing claims similar to those from World War Two were made on several occasions long before the Germans are supposed to have embarked on the project.

We conclude that since the gassing claims were able to evolve and develop independent of any reliable material or documentary evidence, and indeed were able to evolve to a high degree even before the war began, the gassing claim should be recognized as a delusion, indeed, as one of the greatest delusions of all time.

The critical response could be twofold. First, the critic could say that the hundreds (really, dozens) of eyewitnesses and confessors could not be lying, they must be telling the truth in describing gas chambers, because if they were lying one would have to hypothesize a massive amount of collusion among them in order to make their stories converge.

There are several problems with this rejoinder. The most serious is that it absolutely ignores the context of the testimonies and confessions, all of which were generated in an atmosphere saturated with rumors of the shower-gas-burning sequence. The so-called "convergence of evidence" as it applies to testimonies and confessions could just as easily be attributed to a ground of generalized rumor as to one of empirical fact. Nor is this reliance on testimonies and confessions very convincing when we have seen that testimonies (e.g., Bendel, Bimko), memoirs (e.g., Lengyel, Vrba), and confessions (e.g., Grabner, Höß) are all liable to be inaccurate and untruthful, even if we were to grant that, of course, no one would ever be untruthful about these events on purpose.

As we have seen, the essentials of the gassing legend as embodied in the shower-gas-burning model was widely disseminated during the war, including via radio broadcasts to Europe. Literally anyone in 1945 or thereafter could have devised, or imagined, or attested to, a mass gassing scenario. And in fact we find further that the testimonies and confessions frequently contradict on almost all details, but only have the shower-gas-burning sequence in common.

It is probably no coincidence that the three predicates of the sequence indicate things that prompted widespread anxiety and fear in the early 20th Century: disease and disease control measures, poison gas usage, and cremation. Looked at from this angle, the shower-gas-burning scenario, along with the vacuum chambers, the electrocution plates, the lampshades, the soap, the medical experiments, and the films of executions and mass murders that were purportedly the delight of the Nazi leadership, are all, at least on some level, simple expressions of a myth of a 20th Century Inferno: [474](#)

Excuse me, please go on drinking. Are you better now? Or do you have progressive ideas about hell and keep up with the reformists? I mean, instead of ordinary cauldrons with sulfur for poor sinners there are quick boiling kettles and high pressure boilers. The sinners are fried in margarine, there are grills driven by electricity, steam rollers roll over the sinners for millions of years, the gnashing of the teeth is produced with the help of dentists with special equipment, the howling is recorded on gramophones, and the records are sent upstairs for the entertainment of the just. [475](#)

Returning to the objection that the many witnesses and confessors could not be wrong, such an objection sounds eerily similar to claims made by those who assert the

reality of alien abductions: "All the major accounts of abduction in the book share common characteristics and thus provide a confirmation of one another," wrote David Jacobs, "Even the smallest details of the events were confirmed many times over. There was a chronology, structure, logic -- the events made sense .... and the displayed an extraordinary internal consistency." 476 Yet Elaine Showalter, in her book *Hystories* has a ready response for those who see in such narrative similarity something more than spectral evidence:

Literary critics, however, realize that similarities between two stories do not mean that they mirror a common reality or even that the writers have read each other's texts. Like all narratives, hystories [Showalter's term for hysterical narratives - SC] have their own conventions, stereotypes, and structures. Writers inherit common themes, structures, characters, and images; critics call these common elements intertextuality. 477

To the extent that we can see traces of the gassing claim in the popular culture in the decades before World War Two simply strengthens the notion that it arose out of such "intertextuality", or, less ornately, out of the common sense of the time.

That the mass gassing claim can be explained as a cultural construct leads us naturally to consider whether it can be successfully explained by recourse to other approaches borrowed from psychology, crowd and social psychology, and sociology.

One approach would be to look at the gassing claim in the context of the "conveyor belt of death" imagery that is frequently crops up in the Holocaust literature. 478 From a sociological point of view, such imagery is above all a hypostasis and rejection of the industrialization and modernization process that at this moment in historic time was completely transforming Eastern Europe. It is a truism of sociology and the sociology of knowledge that such transformations destroy the "plausibility structures", or belief structures, of the previous craft-based or agricultural-based societies, and above all their legitimizing structures in religion. 479 No doubt the emotion, verging on religious devotion, that for many imbues this topic and this claim can be linked back to such crises of faith and society.

Then again, there are those who would prefer to characterize the gassing claim as a hoax. A hoax it may well be, especially when, in studying it, we limit ourselves to the cheap and salacious gossip of far too many of the immediate postwar treatments, and, unfortunately, characteristic of most of the widely read ones. 480 Yet, that this great tragedy has over the years accrued a thick silt of fantasy does not on its own dispute the sincerity or the pain of those who experienced the deportations or lost loved ones during the war. Still, on the other hand, the gassing claim does seem to meet many of the wish-fulfillment and projection characteristics of true hoaxes. 481 It would probably be better to say that, if the claim is a hoax, then surely a hoax of limited participation, and we should emphasize the number of those deceived, rather than the small number of those deceiving.

Then we might ask ourselves to what extent we may call the gassing claim a rumor, or whether it even qualifies to the status of a legend. That the gassing claim began as rumor seems indisputable: it meets the general criteria of disorientation and anxiety in its formation. 482 But on the other hand does it have sufficient value for it to remain in our collective cultural consciousness as a legend? 483 This brings us to the fundamental value of the Holocaust to the Jewish people.

Our general position is that the Holocaust can only be understood in the wider context of the two wars between the Slavic states and the Germanic states for East European hegemony from 1914 to 1945 and thereafter. That conflict, in turn, can only be understood in terms of the social, economic and demographic transformation of the



region over the previous several decades. Such a putting into context certainly does diminish the Holocaust, because then it is placed between the horrors of collectivization in Russia on the one hand, and the expulsions of the Eastern Germans on the other. But while such a putting into context is probably apt for a more global and inclusive concept of 20th Century European history, it is not going to satisfy the identity needs of the individual communities in Europe, nor can it satisfy those needs for the Jewish people. To put it another way, every group is entitled to regard their history and their trials as unique, although some mischief undoubtedly begins when one group seeks to make its group judgment the regnant judgment in a pluralistic society.

Therefore we may ask: how must the Jewish people perceive the Holocaust? From a long perspective, the erosion and gradual destruction of the Eastern European Jewish communities had been going on ever since the Polish partitions, but there is no doubt that in the 20th Century those communities not only came to an end, but were extirpated in scenes of terror and horror. Yet, given the long history of the pogroms from 1881, [484](#) the extent of pre-war Polish anti-Semitism, [485](#) the non-German participation in many of the massacres, [486](#) the massive Soviet deportations of 1940, [487](#) and the anti-Semitism and persecutions of the Soviet Union, [488](#) it seems naive to insist, "No Hitler, No Holocaust." [489](#) Given the predilection for ruthless transformations among the leaders and theorists in the region, it seems likely that had Hitler never lived someone else from some other country would have devised some other Final Solution. It should be clear, on empirical grounds alone, that to focus solely on Hitler, or National Socialism, or the German people, is to seek a simple answer and a convenient scapegoat for a process of destruction that is still difficult to grasp or reconcile with the will of the Lord of the Universe.

The rational traditions of Judaism make it doubtful that thinking men and women in the Jewish community will forever endorse claims that have been shown to be lacking empirical foundation. Therefore we should understand that the concept Holocaust, as usually discussed, can be construed and memorialized in different ways. We have noted the emphasis on "extermination" among Jewish historians before Hitler's Russian War: we take this to be above all a reference to the communal and social nature of the Jewish life. In other words, we should be sensitive to the idea that while extermination may not mean death, to the extent that it involves the destruction of a Jewish community it is almost the same thing as death. Therefore, whether the victims are numbered in millions or hundreds of thousands, whether they died from typhus, or bullets, or poison gas, in German ghettos, Soviet camps, or gas chambers, and whether it was done by plan or occurred as plans unraveled, the Jewish people undoubtedly experienced a terrible bloodletting and a virtually complete loss of community in World War Two. Whether we wish to call this "Holocaust", realizing that to do so brings one to the endorsement of a very particular vision of Jewish-Gentile relations and a very specific political ideology, namely, Zionism, lies outside of the province of historical analysis. But whether we call it Holocaust or Judeocide [490](#) the general outlines of the destruction are clear and inarguable. We should respect this first, just as we should insist on the humanity of the German people in this troubled period, and then the facts will take care of themselves.

Returning to the objections of a would-be critic, we could imagine that our interpretation of the facts could be called into question: that in our analysis we have wrongfully explained the meager documentary or material data, that in fact the buildings really were gas chambers, and the documents really were references to mass gassing. There are three ways to respond to this argument.

The first is to note that, because of their inaccuracy and variability, the testimonies and confessions absolutely require corroboration with reference to material, physical, or documentary data. Moreover, due to the fact that delousing paraphernalia was inarguably misconstrued both after the war and during the postwar trials as being related to gas extermination means that skepticism is indeed called for and that the threshold

of proof must be kept to a high standard.

The second point to make is that, if it is true that the documents usually offered do indeed have the sinister meaning attributed to them, such an interpretation cannot stand without contextual corroboration. In other words, it is not enough to impose a gas extermination interpretation on a few dozen documents. The effort must be made to place the documents not only within the full context of the documentary record, but also in the context of alternate interpretations. Over the past several decades, revisionists have offered a number of different contexts in which these documents can be explained, including disinfection, camp hygiene, crematoria construction, and civil air defense, and these alternate explanations are backed up by large contemporary literatures. No such literature -- large or small -- buttresses the gas extermination interpretation of these documents. The onus is therefore on the traditional interpretation to explain in detail why these alternate explanations for the documents are unsound. But instead, the general trend of the traditional school has been to ignore these other contexts entirely, preferring to support their out-of-context interpretations by recourse to the same testimonies and confessions whose authority in turn depends on the gas extermination interpretation of the documents in question. The circularity of the argumentation is manifest.

The third response to the critic concerns the concessions that must be made to the standard narrative, if it is to stand. Those now wishing to claim that the mass gas extermination campaign took place must begin their analyses by acknowledging that the claim is traceable to a process -- delousing and disinfection -- that gave rise to similar claims in World War One. They must further admit that accusations of mass gassing, clearly rooted in cultural anxiety about poison gas use but not in reality, were current in Germany in the 1930's and before the invasion of the Soviet Union. They must grant that rumors, specifically of poison gas, have contributed to cases of mass hysteria, before, during, and after World War Two. Finally, they must concede that the common reaction of allied liberators in the West was also hysterical, resulting in several false allegations of gassing.

Holocaust historians in the future must also acknowledge that the Allies, and, in particular the BBC, broadcast rumors about mass gassings back to Europe, including at least one in Yiddish, thus compounding the rumors that went back to the 1930's and giving them legitimacy. In spite of all this they must insist that the mass gassings took place, that the Nazis sought to carry out these gassings in utter secrecy even after they had been accused of them over the radio, with such success that no material or documentary trace of the operation remains. One can, by straining credulity, accept the proposition that a conspiracy would carry out a wicked deed without leaving any trace. But, in our opinion, it is simply impossible to assert that a conspiracy of such size and scope would have been organized and carried out after receiving public instruction on how it was supposed to be carried out from enemy radio broadcasts.

That brings us to the second point, which is the verdict of posterity. Historians may be gullible, but they are not permanently gullible. Historians are natural storytellers, hence they will often repeat historical details because they find them illustrative or colorful. But even historians will have to engage the details of the gassing legend some day, and when they do they will realize that there is little or no empirical substance to the claim. At that point the historian will be bound to look to the documentary record, and, finding it non-existent, will step away from the gassing claim. It makes no difference, therefore, whether revisionists are declared right or wrong on the gassing issue at this time. The point is that future historians will certainly reject the gassing claim. Those who would propose censorship, and have a care for posterity, should re-think their steps.

The gassing claim of the Holocaust derives from a complex of delusion and censorship. We are now in a position to encapsulate how both tendencies reinforced the

other. The gassing legend seemed to have been endemic in Europe for several years before the outbreak of World War Two. At that time, and in conjunction with the National Socialist euthanasia program, conducted in secret, the rumor of gassing developed more widely. Once the Germans began large-scale deportations in the spring of 1942, the typical disinfection rumors arose, as they had in previous decades, but this time they tended to focus on the gassing claim. These rumors passed through the BBC, which gave the rumors authority, and in turn created the feedback loop for their further development. In this respect the growth of the gassing rumors should be distinguished from such phenomena as the *War of the Worlds* panic, because in the latter case official denunciation of the claim was immediate. But in this case there were no official pronouncements about the extermination rumors at all, but simply the repetition of these claims.

The combination of frightful epidemic scenes in the Western camps combined with a series of Soviet Special Commissions, including the Auschwitz report, set the seal on the story, providing the Canonical Holocaust, which, in its function was scarcely distinguishable from one of the manuals of interrogation from the days of the great witch hunts or the Inquisition. The evolution of the Canon continued at the postwar trials, where the presentation on the alleged mass gassings and exterminations was in the hands of a state which had already demonstrated its schizophrenic tendencies in its approach to handling various internal crises while following a path of rapid and forced industrialization and modernization in the previous two decades. The residue of such rapid change is furthermore well understood to be anomie, disorientation, and other social pathologies, and these also profoundly affected the Jews of Eastern Europe, who were themselves not only subject to almost continuous persecution during this time but also to the disorientation and social disintegration characteristic of grand socio-economic transformations.

The claim of mass gas extermination arose and found its fulfillment in this context.

With some imagination and sensitivity we can see how the gassing legend arose, but the decisive factor in all cases was the impeded flow of information, characteristic of censorship, along with the silence of responsible voices of reason that could have destroyed destructive rumors before they created a hysterical reaction.

In this sense we can see how Germany, falling sway to a dictatorship which carefully monitored public information, created its own resistance. The German people, excluded from the unvarnished truth by the censor, sought to fill in the gaps of their knowledge by guessing: in this way they were like any other people. When the threat of war became prominent in the late 1930's, when the concentration camp system began to expand, and, finally, when the Third Reich embarked on its saddening experiments in euthanasia, the German people could now include fear along with ignorance in their speculations. The result was the gassing claim in embryo.

In 1942, when the Germans followed up on their avowed aim to deport all of Europe's Jews to the East, the gassing rumor reemerged with new virulence, now by a clear reference backwards to the anxiety that delousing and disinfection procedures had long engendered. The rumors thus produced filtered their way back to the West, to the dozens of prominent Zionists overwhelmed in their impotence and their concern for their people. They had no way of knowing, of course, precisely what was happening, no more than the German people knew what was happening in the Euthanasia centers. The rumors of gassing were plausible, and fit the cultural script. Their acceptance by the Western Zionists and particularly by prominent American Jews and US officials is not especially surprising.

Towards the end of the war in the east, the claims of mass gassing went hand in hand with emerging political interests. It was useful for the Soviet Union, stung by the

revelations of Katyn, to ascribe even more monstrous crimes to its enemy, and it was also useful for the United Kingdom and the United States, who pretended to honor human rights, to have the Soviet Union portrayed as a progressive force. But this last could only be achieved by a completely monochromatic depiction of German evil. From the late spring of 1944 also it seems that even Zionists, while no doubt accepting the general validity of the extermination claim, began to manipulate it for political purposes.

When the war was over, the gassing claim gradually died out in the West, asserting itself only in the East, shielded by the Iron Curtain of censorship. And later, as relations with Eastern Europe thawed, and as revisionists began putting hard challenges to the truth of the gassing claim, one by one the governments of the free world began to censor their voices in turn.

Two conclusions should be obvious. The first is that the Holocaust gassing claim arose because of censorship. The second is that today the Holocaust gassing claim can only be maintained by censorship. But censorship does more than perpetuate false belief. Because it separates and divides people from access to information, it encourages conspiratorial thinking, and hence mistrust, stereotyping, prejudice, and hatred of other groups. Because censorship involves the government in suppressing the rights of individuals, it encourages individuals to feel helpless, impotent, resentful, and bitter. But precisely because the State, in its arrogance, would prevent free people from speaking their minds, there is then no more outlet for their frustrations, except a slow, constant, and alienated simmer. And having been thus separated from the State, which is supposed to exist to serve their interests, individuals turn their backs on society, which in turn leads to the gradual erosion of civil society, leaving only atomized individuals at the mercy of the State.

The Holocaust gassing claim may have been the false fruit of censorship, but certainly the holocaust of the common people in Europe in the 20th Century was a direct result of too much state intervention, and too little respect for the rights of ordinary people. By upholding censorship of Holocaust revisionists, we duly uphold false beliefs. And we also invite the very real holocausts of the future.

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