

*The Industry of Death*

GERMAN TECHNICAL GENIUS made it possible to set up an efficient and rationalized industry of death within a few months. Like other industries, it had its departments of research, improvement, administrative services, a business office, and archives. Many aspects of these activities remain unknown because they were cloaked in greater secrecy than any of the other German war industries. The technicians who made the German fuses and torpedoes, the planners of the Reich's economy, have survived and delivered up their plans and procedures to the conquerors; almost all of the technicians of death perished or disappeared, after destroying their records.

The first extermination camps had primitive installations; the later ones were much improved. Who perfected them? A real mastery of mass psychology was required to secure the complete docility of the doomed. Who were these masters? These are questions which we can only answer now in a partial and hypothetical way. Having perhaps learned from their mishaps in Russia, the technicians of genocide left no stone unturned to work out an efficient system. Only once did the usually verbose Himmler unseal his lips about the "final solution": "We have written a glorious page of our history," he said in October 1943 to a small group of followers, "but it shall never appear on paper."

In the following pages we shall only consider the chief establishments where extermination was systematically carried out, and pass by those other murder methods which were used almost everywhere, of which mass shooting was always the leading one. The morbid ingenuity of the Nazis devised dozens of different individual and collective techniques: the quicklime method, used particu-

larly in Poland;<sup>1</sup> injections of carbolic acid into the heart, used in most concentration camps; or the one which made the Mauthausen camp infamous, which consisted of throwing the victims from the top of a quarry. But these represented an exercise of local initiative, the refinements of individual sadism. What concerns us here is the more or less official method commanded from Berlin by the officials charged with the job of genocide. This method, employed in specially prepared places, resulted in the death of the overwhelming majority of the victims of Nazism; the exact figures can never be finally established. The method chosen was asphyxiation; by carbon monoxide in the four large Polish camps (Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka), and by prussic acid fumes at Maidanek and in the huge Auschwitz installations in Upper Silesia. We shall review these camps successively, studying Auschwitz especially closely as we have far more information about it. But we must first consider another death campaign, launched in Germany itself at the end of 1939, and embracing those categories of Germans considered "useless mouths": "euthanasia" for the feeble-minded and mentally ill.

## EUTHANASIA

The technique of an effective and discreet extermination, conforming to what the Nazis considered the "German way," was first perfected in the laboratory by German doctors and scientists before being applied on a large industrial scale by Himmler's SS. Here the German mentally ill served as guinea pigs for determining the most efficient way to exterminate the European Jews. The "euthanasia" program, however, was not undertaken for this express purpose; it had an independent genesis. But though the connection between "euthanasia" and "final solution" seems fortuitous, they were linked by a deep inner logic.

Everybody knows what euthanasia is—a merciful death inflicted on the incurably ill. As the subject of many a dramatic trial, it has been passionately discussed in numerous countries. Nowhere, however, has it been given official sanction; in the contemporary world it has met with a refusal that finds its clearest expression in the principled stand taken on the matter by the churches. For the "humanitarian" considerations that might argue in favor of a mercy

killing are more than outweighed by the possibility of many other motives, so difficult to identify, influencing the decision to take another being's life. Are we sure it is a matter of pity, pure and simple, or are there entirely different considerations behind the decision to do away with a sick person whose unproductive existence is only a burden on his family or society?

Its planned and rationalized aspect, behind which one might see so many morbid possibilities, undoubtedly constituted euthanasia's appeal to the Nazi mind. The formula, "suppression of lives unworthy of being lived," was a large one and permitted of a broad interpretation. Hitler, however, hesitated for a long time before carrying euthanasia into practice. It is significant that the decree activating the program is dated September 1, 1939, that is, the day on which war was declared.<sup>2</sup> Certainly, in time of war the opposition to euthanasia would be less vigorous; at such a time, moreover, one needed all the hospital space, physicians, and medical personnel one could find, and the fewer "useless mouths" the better. For this reason, from the very beginning, the measure aimed less at those on the point of dying than at the feeble-minded and incurably insane.

Hitler took the precaution of keeping the euthanasia decree a strict secret, and it was never officially promulgated. Philip Bouhler, head of the Führer's personal chancellery, assisted by Kurt Brandt, Hitler's personal physician, was entrusted with its execution; he was to have the cooperation of the services of the Ministry of the Interior. The organization created for this purpose, and established in Berlin at 4 Tiergartenstrasse, was designated by the code figures "T-4"; its head, Viktor Brack, assistant to Bouhler, gave it the cover name of "Jennerwein."<sup>3</sup> Inoffensive names were coined to disguise euthanasia establishments and their associated services. (1) Several well-known German psychiatrists, such as Professors Heyde,

(1) The organization of doctors in charge of administering euthanasia was called "Reichsarbeitsgemeinschaft Heil-und Pflegeanstalten" (National Coordinating Agency for Therapeutic and Medical Establishments). The financing of euthanasia was provided by the "Gemeinnützige Stiftung für Anstaltspflege" (Foundation for Hospitalization). The association "Allgemeine Kranken-Transport-Gesellschaft" (General Ambulance Service) was, as its name indicates, responsible for the transporting of the victims. (Written deposition by Viktor Brack, Nuremberg, October 14, 1946)

Nietzsche, and Pfannmüller, gave T-4 their active and enthusiastic cooperation. Another prominent scientist, Professor Kranz, estimated at one million the number of Germans whose "removal" he deemed desirable.<sup>4</sup>

The offices of T-4 prepared a questionnaire which was sent to all mental hospitals and psychiatric clinics in Germany. On the basis of the completed questionnaire, which generally listed only the patient's name, age, etc., and the disease from which he suffered, a committee of three experts, chosen from among the doctors connected with T-4, made a decision. If this long-distance diagnosis was unfavorable, the patient was sent to an "observation station." There he stayed a few weeks, after which, unless there was a contrary diagnosis by the director of the "observation station," he was transferred to a euthanasia establishment proper. (According to Brandt's testimony only 4 to 6 per cent of the cases were not transferred.)<sup>5</sup> Because euthanasia was considered a state matter, decisions were made without consulting either the victims or their families. The successive transfers blotted out all traces of the patients and facilitated their quiet disappearance.

The first euthanasia station was established in an abandoned prison at Brandenburg, in Prussia, at the end of 1939; its administration was entrusted to Police Commissioner Christian Wirth. Five more stations were created in different regions of Germany during 1940. (2) They were set up in abandoned properties, or in asylums whose occupants were transferred elsewhere. At first Wirth deemed it sufficient to kill his patients by shooting them in the neck;<sup>6</sup> when doctors were placed at the head of these establishments, more efficient methods were introduced by the T-4 experts with the assistance of a chemist, Dr. Kallmeyer, assigned to them by Jennerwein-Brack. The method they devised was asphyxiation by carbon monoxide gas. The installations this required were simple—the euthanasia stations had a relatively insignificant "production." In each institution, there was a hermetically sealed room camouflaged as a shower into which pipes passed that were connected to

(2) In the order of their founding: Grafeneck, in Wurtemberg; Sonnenstein, in Saxony; Hartheim, in Austria; Bernburg, in Thuringia; and Hadamar, in Hesse. (Viktor Brack's deposition before the Nuremberg Tribunal, session of May 15, 1947.)

cylinders of carbon monoxide gas. Patients were generally rendered somnolent by being given morphine, scopolamine injections, or narcotic tablets before being taken, in groups of ten,<sup>7</sup> to this gas chamber. The euthanasia stations also included a small crematory where the cadavers were incinerated. Families were advised of the patient's death by form letters which stated that the patient had succumbed to "heart failure" or "pneumonia."

From January 1940 to August 1941, when the euthanasia program was stopped, 70,273 mental patients were so "treated." (3)

A section of T-4, the "Reich Committee for Research on Hereditary Diseases," was in charge of euthanasia for feeble-minded children or children suffering from serious hereditary ailments. This program was begun at the same time as the main euthanasia program and was carried out in the same way.

How a physician of National-Socialist Germany might avoid participating in euthanasia activities can be gathered from the following letter, addressed by Dr. Holzels, director of an institution for mentally deficient children, to Professor Pfanmüller:

August 20, 1940

My dear Director,

I am very grateful for your kindness in giving me time to think things over. The new measures are so convincing that I had hoped to be able to discard all personal considerations. But it is one thing to approve state measures with conviction, and another to carry them out yourself down to their last consequences. I am thinking of the difference between a judge and an executioner. For this reason, despite my intellectual understanding and good will, I cannot help stating that I am temperamentally not fitted for this work. As eager as I often am to correct the natural course of events, it is just as repugnant to me to do so systematically, after cold-blooded consideration,

(3) 35,224 in 1940, and 35,049 in 1941. These figures come from a German document published by the Commission for War Crimes in Poland (*German Crimes in Poland*, vol. 9, pp. 152-53).

This document, unknown to the prosecution, was not presented at the time of the arguments on euthanasia before the Nuremberg Tribunal. During the trial, Viktor Brack mentioned a figure of the same size (50,000-60,000) (session of May 15, 1947). The document in question states in another connection that T-4 estimated very exactly at 885,439,800 marks the savings realized by the Reich from the suppression of "useless mouths."

The figure of 275,000 victims accepted by the International Tribunal of Nuremberg seems exaggerated.

according to the objective principles of science, without being affected by a doctor's feeling for his patient. It has not been scientific interest that has made work in a children's home worthwhile for me, but a doctor's hope to aid and bring about some improvement. . . . I feel emotionally tied to the children as their medical guardian, and I think that this emotional contact is not necessarily a weakness from the point of view of a National-Socialist doctor. It prevents me, however, from adding this new task to the one I have performed up to today.

If this leads you to put the children's home in other hands, it would mean a painful loss for me. However, I prefer to see clearly and to recognize that I am too gentle for this work than to disappoint you later. I know that your offer is a mark of special confidence and can honor it only by absolute honesty and frankness.

Heil Hitler!

Your devoted,  
F. Hölzel<sup>8</sup>

#### OPERATION 14 F. 13

In its operations, the euthanasia program came directly under the Führer's personal chancellery, and had nothing to do with Himmler's and Heydrich's RSHA. Was it an accident then that most of the euthanasia stations were established near large concentration camps? (4) The fact is that from the summer of 1940 on, the superintendence of the concentration camps kept in contact with T-4 and "commissions of experts" began making periodic selections of candidates for euthanasia from among the camp prisoners.

The code designation "14 f. 13" appearing on the files for these operations remains associated with this extension of the "euthanasia program."<sup>9</sup> In accordance with an agreement between Himmler and Jennerwein-Brack, T-4 experts visited the concentration camps and, with the cooperation of the camp physician, picked out the men who seemed to them mentally or physically defective. In fact, however, the reasons for the prisoner's arrest was a decisive element, particularly in the case of Jews, who according to the "expert," Mennecke, "were picked out not on the basis of their health but according to the reasons for which they were originally arrested."<sup>10</sup> In a letter that he sent to his wife from Buchenwald, Mennecke described the commission's work as follows:

(4) Brandenburg was not far from the Oranienburg camp; Bernburg was near Buchenwald; Hartheim in the immediate vicinity of Mauthausen, etc.

We continued our examinations until four o'clock; I examined 105 patients, Müller 78, so that 183 questionnaires were filled out. Our second batch consisted of 1,200 Jews who do not have to be "examined"; for them it was enough to pull from their files (very voluminous!) the reason for their arrest, and write them down on the questionnaires. So purely technical labor kept us busy until Monday. I copied out 17 cases from this second group, Müller 15, after which "we downed pick and shovel" and went to dinner. . . .

We shall continue with the same program and the same work. After the Jews will come 300 Aryans who have to be "examined." We shall be busy up to the end of next week. Then we shall go home.<sup>11</sup>

In the Dachau camp, "operation 14 f. 13" was started in the fall of 1941 by Professor Heyde himself. According to the camp doctor's story,

The commission of four members was headed by Professor Heyde. We four doctors sat at four tables placed between two huts, and several hundred prisoners had to file in front of us. The prisoners were divided according to their fitness for work and their political record. Since this commission stayed at Dachau only a few days, it was impossible for it to examine so many prisoners in so short a time. The examinations consisted solely of a rapid study of the documents in the prisoner's presence.<sup>12</sup>

This seems to have been the way in which the method of the future "selections" at Auschwitz and elsewhere was perfected with the cooperation of German physicians and professors.

#### THE END OF EUTHANASIA

Despite all the secrecy in which the euthanasia program was enveloped, its existence soon became known. Families that began to suspect something when they received death notices told their friends. The collective transfers of patients from asylums to "observation stations" and thence to the euthanasia establishments could not go unobserved, and stirred up popular feeling. Various reports tell of uneasiness even in the party ranks. The party delegate in the town of Ansbach reported that "the transfer of a part of the pensioners from the Bruckberg home caused a great deal of disquiet among the people of Bruckberg, the more so as some of those transferred—those who, in popular opinion, 'are still in possession of their wits'—insisted on saying goodbye personally to the village

people. . . . The disquiet will persist," concluded the official, "because it is supported by the churches. Matters will quiet down sooner if the Party doesn't respond to these attacks."<sup>13</sup> The Nazi "Kreisleiter" in Lauf, Franconia, reported the case of an epileptic young peasant who had been sent to an asylum to be sterilized; a few days later an urn containing his ashes was returned to his mother. "Since young Koch was well known in the neighborhood for his industriousness, the case of his 'violent' death naturally aroused great indignation. . . . The local physician tells me that families refuse to send their ailing people to the asylums, not knowing whether they would ever see them alive again. . . . Two murder complaints have been made at Nuremberg by the relatives of such patients."<sup>14</sup> "Ortsgruppenleiter" Langhof sent the following report from Langlau:

On last Friday, February 21, 1941, 57 inmates of the Alsborg Asylum were sent to Erlangen in two groups for a so-called examination at the clinic. When they climbed into buses, a large crowd of spectators collected because the loading was done in the street and not in the asylum courtyard. Some wild scenes took place, for some of the inmates did not get in willingly and the male nurses had to use force.

I found out that some people went so far as to criticize the National-Socialist State. Unfortunately, I could not identify them, as no one would say very much during my investigation. These incidents must be considered all the more serious as even some party members wept and cried out along with the other onlookers. Some of the spectators even shouted the following: "Our State must be very badly off if it has to send these poor people to their death so as to use the money saved to wage war."

It seems that these poor victims—at least that is what the church and the people of Alsborg call them—were even taken to the Catholic church for confession and communion. It is really a ridiculous thing for them to try to absolve from their sins people some of whom are completely insane.<sup>15</sup>

The feeling excited by the euthanasia program spread all over Germany. The popular outcry made it easy for the Catholic and Protestant churches to take a firm stand. Such Catholic and Protestant clergymen as Bishops Wurm and Gaalen protested more and more openly in their pastoral letters. One of the leaders of the Lutheran Church, Pastor Braune, undertook to warn ministers and

high officials, and sent a memorandum to the Reich Chancellery in which he summed up his arguments.

How far can one go in destroying unworthy lives? The wholesale actions taken so far have shown that many persons clearly of sound mind have been included. . . . Are they directed only at the hopeless cases, the idiots and the imbeciles? The questionnaire also lists the diseases of senility. The newest regulation calls for the elimination of children with illnesses resulting from birth trauma, as well. What serious misapprehensions must come to mind! Will they stop at the tubercular? The euthanasia program has already begun to be applied to prisoners. Where is the limit? Who is abnormal, asocial, hopelessly sick? How will the soldiers fare who acquire incurable ailments fighting for their country? Such questions have already been raised in the army circles.<sup>16</sup>

A few days after sending his memorandum, Pastor Braune was arrested by the Gestapo for "irresponsible sabotage of government measures." He was freed after three months of imprisonment. Brandt and Bouhler tried indirect conversations to change the churches' attitude, to no avail. Popular opposition grew. In the summer of 1941 the Bishop of Limburg informed the Minister of Justice that "the children, when they quarrel, say to each other: 'You are insane, you will be sent to the Hadamar ovens!' Young people who do not wish to marry say: 'Get married? Never! Bring children into the world so they can go through the racks?' Old people beg not to be sent to old age homes because they think it will soon be their turn."<sup>17</sup>

In the light of all this, Hitler decided to order the euthanasia program discontinued in August 1941. He assured Bouhler and Brandt that it was only a suspension, and that the program would be resumed at the end of the war.<sup>18</sup> So the T-4 machinery was kept intact and questionnaires continued to go out. Not until the winter of 1944-45 did Brack give orders to destroy the euthanasia installations. T-4 personnel were used for sanitary missions on the Russian front during the winter of 1941-42; but before this their skill and technical abilities were employed on another task: the total, methodical, and secret extermination, "German style," of the Polish Jews.

Such, in brief, was the history of the euthanasia program, which was certainly in perfect accord with the most intimate ideas of the

master of the Third Reich. The course its development took was quite significant. It shows the limits which were set to Hitler's power. By whipping up popular emotions Hitler could lead his people down all sorts of new and dangerous paths. But in this particular case, the people's spontaneous opposition forced him to retreat. Yet it needed a unanimous refusal on the people's part, a veritable reflex of horror that shook them to the bottom of their being.

#### THE POLISH EXTERMINATION CAMPS

Fragmentary information gives us a glimpse into the part played by the euthanasia technicians in the extermination of the Polish Jews. But many things still remain obscure. In general, our knowledge of the history of the Polish camps is incomplete. It seems certain, however, that according to the original RSHA plan, the Jews of Europe were to be exterminated, at least in part, in the occupied territories of the USSR, that "Reichskommissariat Ostland" to which the first convoys of German Jews were sent at the end of 1941. A few letters that passed between the "Reichskommissariat" administration in Riga and the "Ministry for the Occupied Regions of the East" in Berlin give us some exact information on the matter. We learn from them that after preliminary contacts between Eichmann and the high officials of this Ministry, the cooperation of the euthanasia experts was solicited for the establishment on the spot of the necessary installations. A report by Wetzel, whose specialty was "demographic planning" in the East, dated October 25, 1941, pointed out that "Oberdienstleiter Brack, of the Führer's Chancellery, has agreed to help us build the necessary buildings and gas machines."

The machines in question are not at present available in Germany in sufficient quantity and must be specially built. Brack thinks that their manufacture in Germany itself would create more difficulties than if they were made locally. For this reason he prefers to send his men directly to Riga, particularly his chemist, Kalmeyer, who will take care of what is needed. I should like to point out that SS Major Eichmann, a specialist on Jewish questions in the RSHA, agrees with this procedure.<sup>19</sup>

For unknown reasons, probably because of a shortage of rolling stock, the project was not carried out in the USSR but in Poland, for the most part in the territories annexed to the Reich, but also in the Government General, and always with the capable cooperation of Viktor Brack's "people."

The first camp, Chelmo, near Lodz, began operations in the annexed territory in December 1941; it had a maximum rate of a thousand executions a day. Chelmo as yet had no permanent gas chambers; only a large garage on an isolated piece of property containing several "gas trucks" similar to those going up and down the roads of invaded Russia. In March 1942 the completion of the Belzec camp, with a daily rate of several thousand executions, made a real start on the "final solution" possible; with the completion of Sobibor and Treblinka in May and July 1942, respectively, "production" speeded up still more. All these camps were under the supreme authority of Odilo Globocnik, who had the help of a team of euthanasia technicians directed by Christian Wirth.<sup>20</sup> They had been "loaned" to Globocnik by Bouhler and Brack, on the express condition that these indispensable specialists would be returned when the euthanasia campaign started again in the Reich.<sup>21</sup> It should be noted that the Maidanek camp, near Lublin, was not an extermination camp proper, but a work camp—that is to say, a delayed extermination camp where according to the conclusions of the commission of investigation of the Polish Government, over 200,000 Jews, as well as non-Jews, died during 1943 and 1944.<sup>22</sup> (Auschwitz, as we shall see, combined these two methods.)

The victims are no longer alive to testify; the executioners have also disappeared or gone into hiding. Among the few statements that we have on the workings of these camps is one from an SS chemical engineer closely involved in the development of methods for mass murder. It is an indication of the hellish darkness into which the Nazis plunged Germany that this same man had unquestionably been an active anti-Nazi and had been imprisoned in 1936 for an offense against the security of the Reich; from 1942 on he had tried to alert the world to what was going on through Swedish diplomats and other channels. But the name of Kurt Gerstein will always be associated with the manufacture and distribu-

tion of the "Cyclone B" gas. Here, then, is his story, written in an uncertain French: (5)

In January, 1942, I was named chief of the Waffen SS technical disinfection services, including a section for extremely toxic gases. . . . One day SS-Sturmbannführer Gunther of the RSHA came into my office, dressed in civilian clothing. I did not know him. He ordered me to get him 100 kilos of prussic acid and to go with him to a place known only to the truck driver. When the truck was loaded, we left for Lublin (Poland). We took along Dr. Pfannenstiel, occupant of the chair of hygiene at the University of Marburg. SS Gruppenführer Globocnik was waiting for us at Lublin. He told us, "This is one of the most secret matters there are, even the most secret. Anybody who talks about it will be shot immediately." He explained to us that there were three installations:

- 1) Belzec, on the Lublin-Lwow road. A maximum of 15,000 people per day.
- 2) Sobibor (I don't know exactly where it is), 20,000 people a day.

(5) On May 5, 1945, the eve of German surrender, two officers of the American Sixth Army Group, Major Evans and Captain Haught, were approached in the small Black Forest town of Rothweil by a man who introduced himself as Kurt Gerstein, former head of the disinfection service of the Waffen SS. He assured them that he had important information and handed over a memorandum in French, which we reproduce in substantial part. To lend more weight to his statement he also handed over a set of bills for the purchase of "Cyclone B" gas (the toxic gas used for exterminations) by the RSHA. These bills were in his name. He later was captured and as a war prisoner placed in a French prison, where he committed suicide in the summer of 1945.

In his story, dated May 5, 1945, were certain details that could be known at that time only by a limited number of IVb officials. Some ten witnesses, most from the Lutheran Church (among others, the famous Pastor Niemöller), have testified that they knew Gerstein for many years; they guaranteed his veracity and the authenticity of his anti-Nazi sentiments. Finally, Gerstein swore that at the risk of his life, in August 1942, he had informed a member of the Swedish Embassy about what he had been able to learn; the truth of this statement has been confirmed by the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which in due time had transmitted the information obtained in this way to London.

Gerstein himself asserted that he had enlisted in the Waffen SS in 1941 only to trick his persecutors and to learn the truth about the "euthanasia program" which then preoccupied the German Lutheran Church. This is how he had found himself caught in the machinery. According to one of his correspondents, Pastor Mochalski: "By underestimating the SS system, he [Gerstein] succumbed to it, and offered his service for the extermination action, which he had wanted to fight. I consider it likely that he tried, or at least intended, to mitigate the sufferings of the internees, and to sabotage the delivery of prussic acid. I do not know whether he was able to do so."

- 3) Treblinka, 120 kilometers NNE of Warsaw.
- 4) Maidanek, near Lublin (under construction).

Globocnik said: "You will have to disinfect large piles of clothing coming from Jews, Poles, Czechs, etc. Your other duty will be to improve the workings of our gas chambers, which operate on the exhaust from a Diesel engine. We need a more toxic and faster working gas, something like prussic acid. The Führer and Himmler—they were here the day before yesterday, August 15—ordered me to accompany anybody who has to see the installation." Professor Pfannenstiel asked him: "But what does the Führer say?" Globocnik answered: "The Führer has ordered more speed. Dr. Herbert Lindner, who was here yesterday, asked me, 'Wouldn't it be more prudent to burn the bodies instead of burying them? Another generation might take a different view of these things.' I answered: 'Gentlemen, if there is ever a generation after us so cowardly, so soft, that it would not understand our work as good and necessary, then, gentlemen, National Socialism will have been for nothing. On the contrary, we should bury bronze tablets saying that it was we, we who had the courage to carry out this gigantic task!' Then the Führer said: 'Yes, my brave Globocnik, you are quite right.'"

The next day we left for Belzec. Globocnik introduced me to SS [Wirth?] who took me around the plant. We saw no dead bodies that day, but a pestilential odor hung over the whole area. Alongside the station there was a "dressing" hut with a window for "valuables." Further on, a room with a hundred chairs, [designated as] "the barber." Then a corridor 150 meters long in the open air, barbed wire on both sides, with signs: "To the baths and inhalants." In front of us a building like a bath house; to the left and right, large concrete pots of geraniums or other flowers. On the roof, the Star of David. On the building a sign: "Heckenholt Foundation."

The following morning, a little before seven there was an announcement: "The first train will arrive in ten minutes!" A few minutes later a train arrived from Lemberg: 45 cars with more than 6,000 people. Two hundred Ukrainians assigned to this work flung open the doors and drove the Jews out of the cars with leather whips. A loud speaker gave instructions: "Strip, even artificial limbs and glasses. Hand all money and valuables in at the 'valuables window.' Women and young girls are to have their hair cut in the 'barber's hut.'" (An SS Unterführer told me: "From that they make something special for submarine crews.")

Then the march began. Barbed wire on both sides, in the rear two dozen Ukrainians with rifles. They drew near. Wirth and I found ourselves in front of the death chambers. Stark naked men, women, children, and cripples passed by. A tall SS man in the corner called to the unfortunates in a loud minister's voice: "Nothing is going to hurt you! Just breathe deep and it will strengthen your lungs. It's a way to

prevent contagious diseases. It's a good disinfectant!" They asked him what was going to happen and he answered: "The men will have to work, build houses and streets. The women won't have to do that, they will be busy with the housework and the kitchen." This was the last hope for some of these poor people, enough to make them march toward the death chambers without resistance. The majority knew everything; the smell betrayed it! They climbed a little wooden stairs and entered the death chambers, most of them silently, pushed by those behind them. A Jewess of about forty with eyes like fire cursed the murderers; she disappeared into the gas chambers after being struck several times by Captain Wirth's whip. Many prayed; others asked: "Who will give us the water before we die?" [A Jewish rite] SS men pushed the men into the chambers. "Fill it up," Wirth ordered; 700-800 people in 93 square meters. The doors closed. Then I understood the reason for the "Heckenholt" sign. Heckenholt was the driver of the Diesel, whose exhaust was to kill these poor unfortunates. SS Unterscharführer Heckenholt tried to start the motor. It wouldn't start! Captain Wirth came up. You could see he was afraid because I was there to see the disaster. Yes, I saw everything and waited. My stopwatch clocked it all: 50 minutes, 70 minutes, and the Diesel still would not start! The men were waiting in the gas chambers. You could hear them weeping "as though in a synagogue," said Professor Pfannenstiel, his eyes glued to the window in the wooden door. Captain Wirth, furious, struck with his whip the Ukrainian who helped Heckenholt. The Diesel started up after 2 hours and 49 minutes, by my stopwatch. Twenty-five minutes passed. You could see through the window that many were already dead, for an electric light illuminated the interior of the room. All were dead after thirty-two minutes! Jewish workers on the other side opened the wooden doors. They had been promised their lives in return for doing this horrible work, plus a small percentage of the money and valuables collected. The men were still standing, like columns of stone, with no room to fall or lean. Even in death you could tell the families, all holding hands. It was difficult to separate them while emptying the rooms for the next batch. The bodies were tossed out, blue, wet with sweat and urine, the legs smeared with excrement and menstrual blood. Two dozen workers were busy checking mouths which they opened with iron hooks. "Gold to the left, no gold to the right." Others checked anus and genitals, looking for money, diamonds, gold, etc. Dentists knocked out gold teeth, bridges, and crowns, with hammers. Captain Wirth stood in the middle of them. He was in his element, and, showing me a big jam box filled with teeth, said, "See the weight of the gold! Just from yesterday and the day before! You can't imagine what we find every day, dollars, diamonds, gold! You'll see!" He took me over to a jeweler who was responsible for all the valuables. They also pointed out to me one of the heads of the big Berlin store Kauf-

haus des Westens, and a little man whom they forced to play the violin, the chiefs of the Jewish workers' commandos. "He is a captain of the Imperial Austrian Army, Chevalier of the German Iron Cross," Wirth told me.

Then the bodies were thrown into big ditches near the gas chambers, about 100 by 20 by 12 meters. After a few days the bodies swelled and the whole mass rose up 2-3 yards because of the gas in the bodies. When the swelling went down several days later, the bodies matted down again. They told me that later they poured Diesel oil over the bodies and burned them on railroad ties to make them disappear.<sup>23</sup>

There is little to add to this description, which holds good for Treblinka and Sobibor as well as for the Belzec camp. The latter installations were constructed in almost the very same way, and also used the exhaust carbon monoxide gases from Diesel motors as the death agent. At Maidanek, which was built later and lasted until the last days of the German occupation, the method of asphyxiation by prussic acid fumes (Cyclone B) was introduced after the example of Auschwitz, although, as we have pointed out, Maidanek was not an extermination camp proper.

The inquiries of the Polish Commission for War Crimes have established that the total number of victims at Belzec was close to 600,000, 250,000 at Sobibor, more than 700,000 at Treblinka, and more than 300,000 at Chelmno.<sup>24</sup> More than 90 per cent were Polish Jews. However, there was not a European nationality unrepresented in the remaining 8 to 10 per cent. Of the 110,000 Jews deported from the Netherlands, at least 34,000 were exterminated at Sobibor.<sup>25</sup>

The Belzec camp ceased functioning in December 1942 after nine months of activity. In the fall of 1943 Sobibor and Treblinka were also shut down, once the "final solution" was practically completed in Poland, and their remains concealed as far as possible, the buildings dismantled or destroyed, and the terrain reforested. Only the first one, the Chelmno camp, functioned continuously until October 1944, being shut down only in January 1945.

Every Jew sent to one of these four camps was doomed to immediate extermination. There were few exceptions to this rule. In a small number of cases quick "selections" were made when the convoy arrived. Thus, in 1943, after the revolt of the Warsaw

ghetto, when the last convoys were reaching Treblinka, the Germans took away men who seemed able-bodied, in order to send them to Maidanek.<sup>26</sup> Some of these have survived. At Sobibor, too, as a survivor reports, appeals were made on the arrival of certain convoys for "volunteers for hard work."<sup>27</sup> In any case, however, the number of these survivors was scarcely more than a few dozen. Of the 34,313 Dutch Jews deported to Sobibor from March to July 1943, 19 people (16 women and 3 men), who were included in these rapid selections, lived to return to the Netherlands. According to them, the selections involved only 35 to 40 persons in each convoy.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, we know of only one survivor of Belzec.<sup>29</sup>

Within the extermination camps there was a category of Jews not doomed to immediate death. These were members of the commandos assigned to clean out the installations: to pull the bodies from the gas chambers, search them, bury or burn them. The imagination finds it hard to conceive a matter in which physical and moral horror are so intimately blended; we shall have to come back again to this terrible subject. The members of these "Sonderkommandos," or special commandos, who were themselves exterminated at regular intervals and replaced with new teams, rebelled at various times. Thus, on August 2, 1943, an armed revolt broke out at Treblinka. Part of the plant was set afire and more than ten SS men and Ukrainian guards were killed. The camp was closed down a few weeks after this revolt. The last surviving members of the Jewish Sonderkommando of Chelmno, forty-seven of them, also rebelled on January 18, 1944, on the eve of their execution; two of them, Srebrnik and Surawski, succeeded in escaping and are at present its only survivors.<sup>30</sup>

#### THE HISTORY OF AUSCHWITZ

Rudolf-Franz-Ferdinand Hoess, the son of a Baden-Baden tradesman, Franz-Xavier Hoess, member of the party from 1922, and a member of the SS "Death's Head Division" from 1934, went rapidly up the ladder of the SS administration of the concentration camps. He enjoyed the general esteem of the SS; had he not been one of the executioners in 1923 of Walter Kalow, the teacher who denounced Leo Schlageter, the Nazi national hero? After May 1,

in all, with a total capacity of close to 12,000 bodies every twenty-four hours.<sup>47</sup> In general, the rate of arrival of the convoys varied according to the efficiency of the deportation machinery. In certain periods, deliveries were such that entire convoys were gassed without any selections, because of lack of space.<sup>48</sup> The maximum of 12,000 to 15,000 a day was reached in May-June 1944 during the deportation of the Hungarian Jews. "In June 1944 they set a record of 22,000 incinerations in twenty-four hours," a witness wrote.<sup>49</sup> As with criminals, it was not so much the murdering itself as the getting rid of the bodies which continually worried Hoess and his associates. The four crematories were no longer adequate, and besides, the ovens were deteriorating, so enormous funeral pyres in the open made up the deficiency. During this last period, on a night in August 1944, 4,000 gypsies were gassed, the last survivors of Auschwitz's gypsy population; this is the only example of a complete and mass extermination of non-Jews.<sup>50</sup>

History, however, followed its course. As a result of a combination of factors, which we shall analyse later, Himmler ordered the exterminations put a stop to in October 1944. One of the last selections, the biggest and cruelest according to the survivors, took place on October 1, 1944.<sup>51</sup> There were no new convoys or selections after November.

After some thirty months of intense activity, the Auschwitz balance sheet showed close to two million immediate exterminations (this figure can never be fixed exactly), (8) to which one must add the deaths of some 300,000 registered prisoners—Jews for the most part, but not entirely—for whom the gas chamber was only one of any number of ways by which they might have perished. The crematories were dismantled at the beginning of November

(8) In his affidavits, Hoess spoke of two and a half million, "a figure set officially," he wrote, under the signature of Lieutenant Colonel Eichmann, in a report to Himmler. This figure has been accepted by several authors, and it appears in the verdict at the trial of the major war criminals. However, there is no reason for accepting without question the statistics attributed to Eichmann, which may err on either side. Adding the number of victims to those deported from different countries gives a lower figure, although we have little data, for example, on the number of Polish Jews sent to Auschwitz.

An approximate figure in the neighborhood of two million seems closer to the truth.

1944,<sup>52</sup> though the camp was kept up without any great change for two months more. Evacuation of Auschwitz's principal industries began at the end of the year. The Russian winter offensive of January 1945 hastened the evacuation. Nearly 5,000 untransportable sick prisoners were freed on January 27 by the Red Army. Nearly 60,000 prisoners considered physically fit, Jews for the most part, were evacuated to the interior of the country, especially to Buchenwald in central Germany.<sup>53</sup> Though there was no systematic extermination of this group, the conditions under which the evacuation took place and the life in the "small camp" at Buchenwald were such that only a few thousand were able to live through the three months until the Americans arrived.

Today, only the crematory I and some huts and dismantled factory sheds are left at Auschwitz-Birkenau, now turned into a museum by the Polish government. For months after the liberation of the region, Polish peasants came to dig in the heaps of ashes or at the site of the latrines, looking for bits of gold or other valuables left over from the incineration of the thousands of bodies.<sup>54</sup>

#### THE SELECTIONS—"CYCLONE B"

A secret order from Himmler dated April 1942, issued at the very moment when the extermination program went into high gear, expressly stated that Jews able to work were not to be exterminated right off, but were to be used as a labor force. (This order was mentioned at the Nuremberg Tribunal, but it has not been located.)<sup>55</sup> Thus the selections were established in principle.

At Auschwitz they were carried out on the station platforms immediately after the trains arrived. The cars would be unsealed; the deportees driven out onto the platform with blows and curses, stripped of their baggage, and subjected to a rapid selection. Here is how one witness, Professor Robert Waitz, describes it:

The deportees move little by little toward the end of the platform. Two SS men stand in the center of the platform, one of them a medical officer. The deportees pass in front of him. With his thumb or a cane the officer sends them to the right or left. In this way two columns collect at both ends of the platform. The one on the left includes men between twenty and forty-five who have a more or less healthy appearance. These age limits are flexible and sometimes men from six-

teen or eighteen to fifty are chosen. The prisoner's appearance and bearing, the fact that he is more or less well-shaven, influences the choice. A few young women are also put into this column.

The column on the right includes the older men, the aged, most of the women, children, and the sick. Families try to get back together again. Sometimes the SS officer then picks out those who are young and physically fit from the family. More rarely these are allowed to stay with their family in the right-hand column.

The women in the column on the left are marched off to the neighboring camp; the men are piled one on the other into trucks and trailers, which then drive off. The prisoners in the right-hand column are loaded on trucks.

In my convoy, a very large proportion of the 1,200 deportees (about 830) was kept, along with a few women. This figure is unusual. Rarely are more than 150 to 200 men selected per convoy.<sup>56</sup>

A remarkable statistical analysis made by the Dutch Red Cross<sup>57</sup> confirms the accuracy of this description insofar as the age and sex of those selected are concerned. The number of those selected, however, seems to have varied; on the average, the percentage of deportees temporarily spared seems to have been slightly higher than that indicated by Professor Waitz. Hoess spoke of 25 per cent in his depositions; this figure is substantiated by documents in which the RSHA set forth its manpower requirements, estimated, in one case, for example, at 10,000-15,000 out of a total of 45,000 deportees. (9) All this is of course of no great importance when one remembers that the normal life expectancy at Auschwitz was three months, survival for even six months being considered excep-

(9) This refers to a telegram sent to Himmler by the RSHA, and signed SS General Müller.

Berlin, December 16, 1942.

In view of the increased shipment of labor to the concentration camps ordered for January 30, 1943, the following details can be given for the Jewish section:

1. Total number: 45,000 Jews.
2. Beginning of transportation: January 11, 1943.
3. End of transportation: January 31, 1943.

These 45,000 Jews include 30,000 from the Bialystok region and 10,000 from the Theresienstadt ghetto. . . . As before, only Jews with no particular connections or without special decorations have been picked for deportation. Finally, 3,000 Dutch Jews, 2,000 from Berlin, which makes [a total of] 45,000. These 45,000 include the sick, the aged, and children. When the selection has been made, at least 10,000-15,000 workers will be available after the assignment of the Jews at Auschwitz.

tional. We should add that selections were made in a quite superficial way; often, to give an example cited by Hoess, women standing in the left-hand column were able to hide their infants under their skirts or in their bundles.

But let us return to the right-hand column. The men and women who could walk went to the crematories on foot, the old and sick in trucks. There, either right away or after a few hours, they were told by an interpreter or by the SS man on duty that they were going to take a shower and be disinfected. Then they were led to the "dressing rooms," where numbered hooks lined the walls; the guide advised them not to forget their numbers. Bars of gritty soap were distributed to complete the deception. The trick worked in the great majority of cases. The gas chambers proper, into which they were brought undressed, even had simulated shower heads in the ceiling. An SS man wearing a gas mask (this must have been the only instance of the gas mask being put to any real use in World War II) dropped the necessary quantity of cans of Cyclone B gas (from five to seven kilos for every 1,500 persons) through several small windows which had been installed in the roof for this purpose. In accordance with Wehrmacht regulations on the use of asphyxiating gas, a camp doctor was required to be present at each extermination.<sup>58</sup> The asphyxiation process lasted three to ten minutes, depending on resistance, and also on "atmospheric conditions" (Hoess)—that is, the gas acted more rapidly when the weather was warm and dry. The reader has perhaps had enough horror documents set before him; we shall spare him another. A half hour later, members of the "Sonderkommando" opened the doors and carried off the bodies to the ovens, after first cutting off the women's hair and removing all gold teeth, rings, and earrings. Crematories I and II used electric hoists. Incineration took half an hour, with four or five bodies at a time in each oven. The ashes were at first dumped into ditches; but later on they were loaded onto trucks and emptied into the nearby Vistula.<sup>59</sup>

Since the fake showers and cakes of soap generally served their purpose, the victims remained unaware of their fate until the last moment. Hoess, who complacently discussed all this in his depositions, insisted on "this advance" which had been made over Treblinka. "The Treblinka victims almost always knew they were going

to be exterminated, while at Auschwitz we joked with them, made them believe that they were going to have a delousing treatment." <sup>60</sup> "Naturally, they sometimes discovered our real intentions," he added, "especially in the convoys from the east, in which case we strengthened our security measures; the convoy would be split up into small sections which were then sent separately to the different crematories in order to avoid any disturbance [*sic!*]. The SS formed a chain and dragged along the ones who balked by force. But this happened very seldom." <sup>61</sup>

The Sonderkommando was kept strictly isolated. The SS chose its members from the prisoners as needed. "It was completely isolated from the rest of the camp; it lived entirely inside the crematory buildings, was not allowed to leave the area which was enclosed by a double row of barbed wire, was supplied with its provisions in a special way, had its own doctors who worked on the spot and were under the direct authority of the *Politische Abteilung*, that is, the camp Gestapo." <sup>62</sup> The Sonderkommando ended up with 900 members, divided into three teams working eight hours apiece. Its members were themselves exterminated and replaced with others about every three months. (10) Since they were better fed, these men were not so debilitated; it was among them that the only organized uprising in the history of Auschwitz broke out, in August 1944. A last-minute betrayal wrecked a carefully worked out plan to blow up the crematories; one month later, at the beginning of October 1944, another attempted uprising took place, during which Crematory III was burned and two German "Kapos" killed on the spot. Needless to say, all the rebels were shot. <sup>63</sup>

Along with the main "selection on arrival," partial selections were constantly taking place at Auschwitz among the Jewish prisoners whose age and physical condition had spared them immediate extermination, so as to eliminate those whose work output was no longer sufficient. These partial and unexpected selections took place either at the camp infirmary once or twice a month, or in the barracks or huts every three or four months. <sup>64</sup> Like the main selec-

(10) According to the confession of Ziereis, commander of the Mauthausen camp, secret instructions provided for the extermination of the Sonderkommandos every three weeks.

tion, they were made by an SS camp doctor. At Auschwitz they were one of the chief features differentiating the fate of the Jewish prisoners from that of the "Aryans." "The few 'Aryans' could die of natural causes," Georges Weller wrote, and he added a brief description of a "partial selection":

Cell block by cell block the Germans made the people file stark naked in front of them, and a glance at their buttocks decided their fate, for no part of the human body so faithfully reveals a person's loss of flesh. . . . The skeletons and half-skeletons made an heroic effort for the minute to put on a brave and gay front before the Germans, puffing out their fleshless thoraxes. But the pitiless buttocks allowed no cheating! <sup>65</sup>

Other witnesses point out that there were doctors who swore by other criteria: swollen legs, pimples on the face, etc. <sup>66</sup> The condemned were brought together and locked in a separate barracks to wait their turn; this might often take as long as three days. <sup>67</sup> Apparently these partial selections took place on orders from Berlin. For the camp administration, they were a way of adjusting the size of their effective labor force. The manpower needs of the moment, as well as the arrival rate of new convoys, determined the frequency and the severity of the selections.

A few words remain to be said about Auschwitz' most remarkable innovation: Cyclone B. Here is disclosed one of those instances of enterprising business men and hard-working German technicians taking their place alongside the Nazi murder experts. In the foreground, however, looms the sinister shadow of I. G. Farben, the huge trust symbolizing German industrial power whose name will forever be linked to the Buna factories of Auschwitz III-Monowitz.

Gerhard Peters, <sup>68</sup> director of production of Cyclone B, stated before the Allied court that it "is an invention of Dr. Heerd's. It is highly concentrated prussic acid absorbed into various porous retainers and combined with an irritant that serves as a warning." Cyclone B had been developed around 1924 by the Degesch Company of Frankfort on the Main. In 1941 Peters became one of the directors of this company, which about this time was absorbed by I. G. Farben, becoming one of its branches. A third company came on the scene as the product's distributor. East of the Elba, Degesch

had given exclusive distribution rights to the Testa company (Tesch and Stabenow) of Hamburg, which supplied the Wehrmacht with disinfectants and insecticides and, as was customary, gave instructions in its use and put on the necessary demonstrations. According to the account given by E. Sehm, the accountant for the Testa company, Bruno Tesch, the head of the company, had suggested Cyclone B when consulted at the beginning of 1942 by the SS administration on the question of using prussic acid to get rid of the "useless existences."<sup>69</sup> Tesch, who was condemned to death by the British tribunal, denied this during his trial. Be that as it may, the Testa company's books show the delivery of more than 27,000 kilos of Cyclone B to the SS camp administration during the years 1942 and 1943, of which more than 20 tons were for the Auschwitz camp alone; they made a gross profit of 32,000 Reichsmarks in 1942 and 128,000 Reichsmarks in 1943 on this one item.<sup>70</sup> The SS administration, on the other hand, was inclined to eliminate a middleman whom it probably considered useless. On orders from Professor Mrugowski, "supreme hygienist" and physician of the SS, Peters went to Berlin at the beginning of 1944 to deal directly with Kurt Gerstein. During this last year, most of the deliveries to Auschwitz were made directly by Degesch without going through Testa. Deliveries were made by rail or the camps sent a small truck to pick up the stuff. According to Peters, Gerstein asked him to "humanize" Cyclone B by eliminating the irritant factor, which apparently increased the suffering a great deal. Peters stated that he had a lot of trouble carrying out Gerstein's request, since he was not able, he said, to find suitable reasons to give to his colleagues for the modification. This was so, even though he considered Gerstein's request perfectly "legal," as he considered "legal" "a great many other things that are to be explained by the distortion of all the moral concepts of the time."<sup>71</sup> A German tribunal condemned Peters to five years in prison in the spring of 1949.

#### THE HANGMEN: THEIR METHODS AND PSYCHOLOGY

In Rudolf Hoess's personal file, under the heading "branch of service," the word "cavalry" was originally noted; this was crossed

out and over it was entered "concentration camps." And indeed the units assigned to guard the camps constituted a veritable special branch of service inside the SS; they were "Death's Head" formations (SS *Totenkopf*) trained since 1933 to guard, degrade, and torture the "sub-humans" and enemies of the regime. The essential function of these specialized troops was to crush the slightest tendency to resistance in the prisoners, and to surround their bleeding expiations with horror and mystery, "darkness and mist"; to this there had originally been added the task of "re-educating" and reforming the German prisoners. They had only one method: the infliction of a varied, cruel, and refined suffering. The Death's Heads benefited, then, from a long tradition. To the attitude of professional insensibility engendered in these men by long habituation was added the uneasy pleasure some of them got from sufferings inflicted on order and, what was more important, in the service of a higher and ideologically consecrated purpose.

Thanks to the methods used at Auschwitz as well as in the other extermination camps, only a few dozen officials actually saw and lent a hand to the extermination process proper. The Sonderkommandos, composed of prisoners, served the crematories; a handful of SS men and a few doctors constituted the German personnel. It was indeed a factory working with great efficiency on the assembly-line principle. "I have never personally killed or struck anybody," Hoess could state.

Perhaps the reader will be interested in glancing into the consciences of these technicians. Here is an abstract from the diary of one of them, a professional man, Dr. Kremer:

1. IX. 1942. I wrote to Berlin for a leather belt and suspenders. During the afternoon I was present at the disinfection of a cell block with Cyclone B, to kill the lice.
2. IX. 1942. This morning at three o'clock I attended a special action for the first time. Dante's hell seemed like a comedy in comparison. Not for nothing is Auschwitz called an extermination camp.
3. IX. 1942. I was present this afternoon at a special action applied to prisoners in the female camp (Moslems), (11) the worst I have ever seen. Dr. Thilo was right this morning in telling me that we are in the *anus mundi*. Tonight, about eight, I was present at a

(11) At Auschwitz the prisoners who had reached the limits of physical endurance were called "Moslems."

special action on the Dutch. All the men are anxious to take part in these actions because of the special rations they get on such occasions, consisting of  $\frac{1}{2}$  of a liter of schnapps, 5 cigarettes, 100 grams of sausage and bread.

6-7. IX. 1942. Today, Sunday, an excellent lunch: tomato soup, half a chicken with potatoes and red cabbage, *petits fours*, a marvelous vanilla ice cream. After lunch I was introduced to . . . [illegible word]. Left at eight in the evening for a special action, for the fourth time.

23. IX. 1942. Present last night at the sixth and seventh special actions. In the morning, Obergruppenführer Pohl arrived with his staff at the Waffen SS house. The sentinel at the door was the first to salute me. In the evening, at eight o'clock, dinner in the commanding officer's house, with General Pohl, a real banquet. We had apple pie, as much as we wanted, good coffee, excellent beer, and cakes.

7. X. 1942. Present at the ninth special action. Foreigners and women.

11. X. 1942. Today, Sunday, rabbit, a good leg, for lunch, with red cabbage and pudding, all for 1.25 RM.

12. X. 1942. Inoculation for typhus. Following this, feverish in the evening; still, went to a special action that night (1,600 Dutch). Terrible scenes near the last bunker. The tenth special action.<sup>72</sup>

Dr. Kremer's diary goes on in this way to the end of the year, alternating between noting the menus he particularly enjoyed and the carefully numbered special actions he attended, on which he commented with growing indifference. Professional habituation? For that a particular mentality was undoubtedly needed. Rudolf Hoess furnishes a typical example. "One gets the general impression of a man who is intellectually normal but with the schizoid apathy, insensitivity and lack of empathy that could hardly be more extreme in a frank psychotic," according to the diagnosis of Dr. Gilbert, the Nuremberg prison psychiatrist. Dr. Gilbert questioned Hoess several times in his cell while in search of some emotional reaction, and could only get the following out of him: "You can be sure that it was not always a pleasure to see those mountains of corpses and smell the continual burning.—But Himmler had ordered it and had even explained the necessity and I really never gave much thought to whether it was wrong. It just seemed a necessity."<sup>73</sup> Tranquil and apathetic, Hoess did not show the slightest sign of remorse: "Even the prospect of being hanged does not seem to bother him too much." When pressed by questions, Hoess tried to explain: "The thought of refusing an order just didn't enter

one's head, regardless of what kind of order it was. . . . Guess you cannot understand our world.—I naturally had to obey orders and I must now stand to take the consequences."<sup>74</sup> To illustrate the professional attitude of the great hangmen with a different example, let us quote from a document about Eichmann, Auschwitz's great provider. A report by Röthke, his representative at Paris, describes a telephone conversation with Eichmann on the subject of a convoy that was to leave Bordeaux in July 1942, but which had been called off at the last moment. Röthke tried to explain the reasons for this over the telephone, but Eichmann flared up angrily.

Major Eichmann reminded me that our prestige was at stake. There had been laborious negotiations with the Ministry of Transportation. These had been successful and now we are canceling a train from Paris. It's the first time such a thing has happened to him. What a shame! He did not want to tell SS General Müller about it for fear of making himself a laughing stock.

And how does the great organizer of the deportation of the European Jews conclude? By threatening this punishment: "He said that he was forced to consider whether there were grounds for having France dropped as an evacuation country."<sup>75</sup>

If a few dozen Germans, some hundreds at the most, actually observed the last agony of the Jews in the gas chambers, those who witnessed their long Calvary were numbered in the hundreds of thousands. The SS formations stationed in the camps; the German workers, Army units, and officials at the numerous yards and factories where the Jewish slaves were used, whom they passed by daily; the railway men handling the innumerable transports of deportees all over Germany, which they saw coming back empty, if they were not loaded with the used clothing which was distributed to the needy by all the welfare offices in the country. This is a very incomplete list of those who can properly be called eyewitnesses. As for the rest of the Germans, the press and radio of the Reich undertook to inform them more and more openly of what was going on. The time for vague and prophetic imprecations by Hitler had passed. The language now sharpens and it is the past tense that is employed. "The Jewish population of Poland has been neutralized, and the same may be said right now for Hungary. By this action five million Jews have been eliminated in these two countries," a

Danzig newspaper wrote in May 1944.<sup>76</sup> And the next day Goebbels' *Der Angriff* published under the byline of Ley: "Judea must perish that mankind may be saved."<sup>77</sup> The fate of the Jews was an example and a warning: "Whosoever imitates the Jew deserves the same end: extermination, death," threatened *Der Stürmer*. The extermination policy thus became a matter of common knowledge and enough information filtered through a thousand channels for the location of the murder camps and the methods of execution to become notorious. A witness states that in the trains passing near Auschwitz (where, we will recall, four rail lines crossed) "the passengers stood up and leaned out the window to see as much as they could."<sup>78</sup> Another witness, none other than Rudolf Diels, the first director of the Prussian Gestapo in 1933-34, later police prefect of Cologne and administrator of the Hermann Goering Works during the war, stated that as far as he knew, the expression, "You will go up the chimney," had become proverbial in Germany toward the end of the war.<sup>79</sup> Only those who did not wish to know might continue to pretend ignorance. During a dramatic session at one of the Nuremberg trials, a highly qualified witness, SS General Bach-Zelewsky, who was "head of the anti-partisan campaign" of the German armies during the war, insisted on clarifying the matter.

For me it is a question of principle. Though imprisoned for years, I see that people are still saying: Who knew? Nobody wants to be in the position of having known anything. I want to establish the truth here, regardless of whether it hurts or helps me. . . . Of all the German generals, I am perhaps the one who traveled most all over Europe during the war, since it was my job to manage the entire fight against the guerrillas. I talked to hundreds of generals and thousands of officers of all categories, and it is a fact that exterminations began on the first day of the war. This is the truth; anything else is a lie and a euphemism. . . . And anyone who traveled knew from the beginning that the Jews were being exterminated in a way that at first was not systematic. Later, when the Russian campaign began, the extermination of Judaism was an explicit part of the aim.<sup>80</sup>

A veil of absolute secrecy, however, hung over the actual work of extermination action, and the participants were sworn to silence on pain of death. In addition, propaganda aimed at the neutral and Allied countries, and especially meant for the foreign press, strove to picture the lot of the "Jewish workers" in the rosier colors.

"Jews unfit for work are transferred to family ghettos, all the others are used according to their professional background, the principle being that couples stay together. Food and lodging are the same as for other workers." (Press conference held by Sündermann, "Deputy Press Chief of the Reich," on April 19, 1944) This sort of thing might be reported in Rumanian or Hungarian newspapers, but was rarely published in Germany itself. The fate of the Jews, and all the police operations and administrative steps connected with it, fell into the category of *Geheime Reichssache*, state secrets, with which it was better not to get involved. Those fearless Germans who dared publicly bring this matter up, or even, like Protestant Bishop Wurm, to protest in writing to the Führer—"I must state . . . that as Christians we feel that the policy of exterminating the Jews is a very grave iniquity and fatal for the German people."—These brave sentences were dated December 18, 1943.) (12)—could be counted on the fingers of one hand. In the continual concern for secrecy, one may see something else than just the desire not to noise abroad a state of affairs which under other circumstances the Nazis allowed to become known. Around the holocaust they wished to draw a veil of sacred horror, to transform it into a sanctifying and purifying mystery. We have already cited some of the Nazi feats of circumlocution; one cannot insist too much on the significance of this constant perversion of ordinary ideas and words by the SS. Thus, Hoess's work is commented upon in his administrative file as follows: "H. is not only a good camp commander, he has been a real pioneer (*bahnbrechend gewirkt*) in this field thanks to [his] new ideas and new methods of education."<sup>81</sup> Mind, this is not a propaganda statement, but confidential service notes. Apart from the question of secrecy, why dwell on Hoess's qualities as an "educator," and what is the true meaning of this verbal mumbo-jumbo? One is inclined to see it as a real exercise

(12) Letter from Bishop Wurm to the Chief of the Reich Chancellery. In a preceding letter, dated July 16, 1943, and addressed directly to the Führer, the bishop made a similar protest.

It is interesting to note that, at the time of the debate in the German post-Hitler press which accompanied or followed the Nuremberg trials Bishop Wurm showed his disapproval of Allied justice in scarcely less vehement language.

in magic, an attempt to influence things (to make the obscene innocuous and even noble) by manipulating words. Genocide was no small matter even for Himmler's unleashed pack. Despite their professional habituation, the hangmen, big and small, felt a vague uneasiness; their fear of punishment, which sharpened as the war progressed, found an echo in some deeper disquiet, so true was it perhaps that even amid the worst excesses of these bestial natures certain mental barriers still remained. (Let no one be misled as to our meaning. We do not mean that the SS men were tormented by pangs of conscience. Not all, however, attained the attitude of sovereign indifference that was held before them as an ideal.) Himmler, otherwise so talkative, never mentioned extermination in his numerous speeches with but one exception, when he was addressing a small group of faithful SS chiefs:

I should also like to talk very frankly to you about a very important subject. We can discuss it quite frankly among ourselves, though we must no more speak about it in public than we do about June 30, 1934. . . . Not to have discussed it was a question of tact for us. Everybody was dismayed by it and yet everybody knows that he will do it again on the next occasion if he is given the order and it is necessary.

I should like to talk about the evacuation of the Jews, about the extermination of the Jewish people. This is something that is easy enough to talk about. "The Jewish people will be exterminated," every party member says. "That's clear enough, it's in our program: elimination of the Jews, extermination." Well, we set about doing that, and eighty million brave Germans turn up and each has his "good" Jew. Obviously, the rest are pigs, but this one is a first-rate Jew. Not one of those who talk like this has seen the corpses, not one of them has been there. Most of you know what it is to see a pile of 100 corpses, or 500, or 1,000. To have gone through that, and to have remained an honest man just the same, save for the exceptions due to human nature, that is what has made you tough and strong.

This is a glorious page in our history, never before, never again to be written.<sup>82</sup>

Let us return now to the Death's Head units of the SS who guarded Auschwitz and its constantly replenished force of 100,000 slaves. Their extreme cruelty, their sadistic jokes, their ingenuity in evil have been repeatedly described, and were only the inevitable result of factors we have already considered. Because of one fea-

ture of the system progressively introduced at Auschwitz and the other camps, the SS took less and less of a hand in directing the internal life of the camps, leaving matters to be run by a complicated hierarchy of authority established by the prisoners themselves. Even Jews could sometimes aspire to certain positions in this hierarchy. Thus, once inside the camp, the rigidly religious kind of anti-Jewish discrimination was softened.

Just being alive was a kind of defiance in a Jew, as one can gather from the innumerable SS sayings, such as: "You leave here only through the chimney," "An honest prisoner dies before three months," and the like. A Jew who lasted two or three years found himself wearing a kind of halo in the eyes of the SS, and they allowed him numerous tacit privileges; he ran practically no risk of being selected. But prolonged living in a concentration camp, as we shall see, necessarily worked deep changes in the prisoner himself.

Another feature of the concentration camp system, even more astonishing, perhaps, than the general sadism, was its pervasive didacticism and moralizing. "Work is freedom" (*Arbeit macht frei*) was inscribed on scrolls above the camp entrances. "On the road to freedom there are four milestones: work, justice, discipline, and patriotism," was another maxim, carved on stone plaques posted up everywhere. Dressed in rags, the slaves had to march at parade step and with a martial air when going off to work, while other slaves played military marches. Crippled by disease, their feet running with sores, the prisoners were forced to make their beds with geometric precision. Some of the new cell blocks, like those of Auschwitz I, were model barracks from the architectural point of view. The concern for decoration extended even to the crematories: "In accordance with an order from Lieutenant Colonel Hoess, camp commander, Crematories I and II shall be provided with a green strip of decorative shrubs, to serve as a natural boundary for the camp."<sup>83</sup>

The sadistic punishments, beatings, and executions took place with elaborate pomp, in the presence of thousands of prisoners specially mustered for the occasion according to a carefully prepared ceremony. While prisoners were being murdered by the thousands, some few murders, because they were "committed with-

out orders," or an individual case like that of the "bad treatment inflicted on the prisoner Eleonore Hodys"<sup>84</sup> would arouse the ire of a special SS department, which sent its men to Auschwitz, Buchenwald, and Dachau to investigate. All this rigmarole, this drilling, bureaucratic pedantry, and bloody buffoonery, was calculated to strengthen the blind and mechanical obedience of the SS and of the prisoners who were the foundation of the system. At the same time, wasn't this another aspect of that huge magical rite which we have already described, a deliberate effort to call white black, and black white? In short, was it not the elaborate ritual of a demoniacal cult? "They call evil good, and good evil. And they put darkness for light and light for darkness."

We may conclude these few fragmentary observations by pointing out that even in the world of concentration camps human differences sometimes exercised their claim; even in the SS one found a few less ferocious guards, a few physicians moved by pity, like Dr. Munch, at Auschwitz I, whom Professor Marc Klein described as a "very rare, but not unique, example of an SS doctor who had remained a man beneath his uniform";<sup>85</sup> or SS Lieutenant Schottel, adjutant to the commandant of Auschwitz III, who adopted an almost benevolent manner toward "his prisoners." . . . Such examples, however, are more characteristic of the last years of war, when the Death's Head division's rigorously selective system of recruiting of the first years began to be replaced with mass drafts. There was even—five hundred kilometers from Auschwitz, it is true—the unusual case of a handful of Jewish prisoners who had been forgotten in the small Osterode camp, in Lower Saxony; when a Jewish prisoner died, he was buried in the town's Jewish cemetery, while the physician at the camp had to attend the funeral service.<sup>86</sup>

#### THE AGONY OF THE SLAVES

All over Europe there are men and women today, numbering no more than a few tens of thousands, who are united in a close fraternity. These are the people who survived the German concentration camps. Of all nationalities, backgrounds, and social classes, some of them "political deportees," others "racial deportees," they are joined together by the memory of the unparalleled ordeals they

underwent, and which mark them out from all other mortals. What they endured throws a new and disquieting light on certain human tendencies and possibilities. In the world of the concentration camps we can distinguish three principal types, according to their degree of cruelty. There were also different phases in the over-all development of the concentration camps; the first camps and the last ones were the most terrible. In short, there were successive circles in this inferno, the last being reserved for the Jews; and at the dead center of this world stood Auschwitz and its crematories.

It should be remembered that in the majority of the cases, deportees arriving at Auschwitz were completely unaware of what lay in store for them; they imagined, perhaps, that they were being sent to some kind of "reservation," a Jewish colony in the heart of Poland. Once the barrier of the selection on arrival had been surmounted, the prisoners thus granted a few months' reprieve were initiated into their new life by a series of ordeals that soon undermined their capacity for physical and moral resistance. Stripped of their belongings, deprived of even the smallest object or personal souvenir, they were forced to undress in the open, whatever the weather and season, and carefully searched, in this way losing every vestige of their previous life. Then they were sent to the showers, sometimes after a long wait in the rain or snow; finally they were issued the cast-off clothing of convicts, blue-and-white striped pyjamas that were tossed to them haphazardly. The next step was to be inscribed in the camp books, to have a serial number tattooed on one's forearm, all this to the accompaniment of a storm of insults and blows; after which the deportees were marched to their huts or tents. Some older prisoner would then tell them about the crematories, whose glare reddened the night sky. The fate of their wives or children became clear to them, at the same time as their own situation. Two or three days later they were assigned to a work commando, and were now definitely a part of the life of their new world.

In very rare cases they could find easier jobs, sometimes even in their former occupations; this was the case, for instance, with a few doctors, draftsmen, and musicians. Chances for survival in these few cases were better. But the immense majority who worked in the mines, factories, or open yards, subjected to every hardship

and difficulty, found themselves launched almost inevitably upon that terrible path of physical and moral decline which began with the first shock of the "reception." The fate of any prisoner in the camps was bad enough; but in three specific regards Jews were at a disadvantage in comparison with their "Aryan" fellow prisoners: they could not receive packages from the outside; they had much less chance of getting a privileged position; and they were subject to periodic selections. Because of the selections, their average life expectancy in the camps could be estimated at approximately three months. (This period varied according to circumstances; it was the shortest at the beginning of the mass exterminations in 1942—for the first Dutch Jewish convoys it was only six weeks.)<sup>87</sup> It was customary at Auschwitz to consider the Jews of some nationalities as being more resistant than others. The Polish, Slovakian, and German Jews were thought to be more tenacious of life; these were followed by the Hungarians and French; the Dutch, Greek, and Italian Jews came last.<sup>88</sup> However, it should be noted that most of the Poles and Germans benefited from a certain training in concentration-camp life. Other factors, such as the time of one's arrival at the camp or the language one spoke, also made a difference. It is doubtful how much importance should be assigned to such judgments, or to others based on social class.<sup>89</sup> For the decisive factor was a purely personal one—the physical, and above all, moral resistance, vitality, will to live, and general adaptability of each individual.

Out of almost 115,000 French political deportees, nearly 40,000 returned from the different German camps; out of the 110,000 Jews deported from France to Auschwitz, hardly 2,800 survived. The mere juxtaposition of these figures shows how precarious the life of the Jews was in the concentration camps. Each case of survival was unusual and needed the assistance of special circumstances. Here we shall mention only one of these: rising up the ladder of the internal camp hierarchy to some sort of post as head of a cell block, a "Kapo" or commando head, or a *Stubendienst* or barracks guard. In order to survive in such position, one needed a great fund of brutality and very few scruples.

The prisoner thus became more or less of a cog in the SS machine, and even began to think and feel in the manner of the SS. Apart

from all other considerations, the yellow triangle marking the striped pyjamas of the Jews was a major, though not always an insurmountable obstacle to their adaptation. In any case, only the lower or middle positions in the hierarchy were open to them. The luxurious privileges enjoyed by a small class of prisoners belonging to the camp "aristocracy," such as recreation, sports, and private quarters, were forbidden them.

Another way Jews might survive, especially members of certain professions, was by finding work in their field in one of the numerous SS institutes or laboratories, in the research departments of factories, in the camp hospital, or even in the camp orchestra. Such jobs did not force their holders to make moral compromises; these men, the doctors especially, could render innumerable services to their less fortunate comrades. Most of the Auschwitz survivors owe their existence to having had such privileged posts. In order to survive, a certain amount of luck was necessary: running into a friend already "established" in something, or a job becoming open, etc. But in addition, to stay alive one needed a strong will to live and also a faculty for not feeling things. Life in the concentration camp worked very strange changes on body and soul.

First of all, one needed an insensibility to physical hardships: Underfed men with hardly any clothes on had to endure the interminably prolonged roll calls, sometimes standing eight or twelve hours exposed to the rigors of the Polish winter; later came the evacuation marches, the terrible trip from Auschwitz to Buchenwald in January 1944, seventy kilometers on foot in one night, then three days and three nights in open cars in 20 degrees below Centigrade temperature. At the same time, one needed a moral insensibility: a callousness to the disappearance daily of friends and relatives. The glow from the crematories could never be escaped, and yet "with the calmness of a citizen reading his newspaper," the deportees told each other in the morning how many convoys had arrived, how many people had been gassed—the day's news. Thus by an apprenticeship, the prisoners learned how to be hard and unfeeling, qualities on which the whole concentration camp system was based and which were so carefully cultivated in the guards.

It would be difficult and even presumptuous to try to describe all changes worked in people by the Auschwitz environment, espe-

cially when one considers the inevitable diversity of individual reactions. The martyrdom of the Jewish people in the camps, the cruelest ordeal to which a human collectivity has ever been subjected, gave certain exceptional natures an opportunity to elevate their moral qualities to the heights of sublimity; they preserved their individual humanity in spite of and against everything. The circumstances were such, however, that their heroism could most of the time be expressed only in a stoic and resigned acceptance of a fate worse than death (inevitably followed in a short time by death itself). For the value of moral example, the crystallizing virtue that it possesses in human societies, was reduced to nothing in the camps. A Gandhi there would have been the object of general laughter. (13)

When one tries to define the dominant reaction of the prisoners, it is the general passivity which is most striking. The consequence of this, regardless of what group the prisoner belonged to, was apparently an absolute obedience, a perfect submission to the orders of the SS, their henchmen, block leaders, or Kapos. This obedience actually reached the point of automatism. Even if an order meant grave and sometimes directly fatal consequences for the prisoner, it was nonetheless carried out. This kind of behavior can best be understood with the help of a few examples. The "beret trick," an SS amusement in vogue at certain periods, consisted of snatching off a prisoner's cap and throwing it beyond the line of sentries into the zone where they had orders to fire on sight. He was then ordered to go and pick it up; prisoners regularly committed suicide in this way, such cases being listed as "killed while trying to escape." There were also the Kapos who would hand a prisoner a rope and order him to hang himself. It was normal at Auschwitz for such an order to be carried out. The writer M. Rusinek, in his book *Listy spod Morwy*, describes the case of a block leader one night ordering a poor unfortunate "to hang himself at midnight."

(13) The Jewish historian Wulff, who was himself a survivor of Auschwitz, relates how during a discussion he had in the camp with his fellow prisoner, B. Kautsky, the question had been raised: What would have become of Gandhi in the camp? The speakers agreed that, after having been the object of some of the coarse jokes and pranks in which the SS and the Kapos shared, he would have passed into the category of the "Moslems" in a few days, and would have succumbed at the first selection. . . .

When the time arrived, the victim, who slept next to his tyrant, got up and went slowly on tiptoe, so as not to waken his persecutor, and hanged himself. Other such cases are reported in numerous authentic testimonies.

Thus an act of disobedience became impossible, not because a healthy and rational prudence forbade it, or because one instinctively recoiled from it, but as the result of a flagrant violation of the laws of self-preservation. Between the imperatives of self-preservation and obedience, the latter proved the stronger. It was as if, under the terrible pressure of life in the camps, by a kind of psychic osmosis, the utter obedience that had been so consciously inculcated in the SS was communicated to their victims.

It may seem incredible that men could have been turned into such robots. But if we study other examples of prison life and organized suffering, we may perhaps discover indications of similar tendencies, less marked and developed only because they were produced by a system that was not so extremely cruel and all-embracing as the Nazi one.

Is it possible to give a psychological explanation of such behavior? An attempt has been made by Professor Bruno Bettelheim, a Viennese psychiatrist who spent a year as a prisoner in the Dachau and Buchenwald camps before the war. His interpretation is a psychoanalytic one and is specially relevant to the prisoners in the German camps in the years 1938-39; but it furnishes us, perhaps, with the beginning of an explanation for the behavior at Auschwitz. The shocks to which the prisoners were subjected, he says in substance, were so strange and terrible that they could not be assimilated by the normal psychic mechanisms, and their own existence seemed to the prisoners to be tinged with unreality. New psychic mechanisms had to be developed to enable them to adjust to the reality of the camp, their development being preceded by a regression to, a taking refuge in, purely infantile behavior. (Perhaps here we have put our finger on the methodology of the "re-education" so dear to the hearts of the SS.) This evolution, which was almost inevitable, according to the author, was favored by the camp environment. The system of collective punishment, by which an individual's least slip was harshly expiated by his entire block, if not by the camp itself, forced the prisoners to spy on one an-

other and thus espouse the interests of the SS. "All the changes brought about by camp life seemed to cause the prisoner to regress to infantile attitudes and behavior, making him a more or less conscious instrument of the Gestapo."<sup>90</sup> The only possible way of finally adapting oneself to life in this infernal world was by an imperceptible but progressive acceptance of the SS universe and values. The author cites many examples of this; imitation of the SS embraced not only their brutality of feeling and cruel behavior, but also such details as vocabulary, general bearing, and dress, choice of amusements, and, insensibly, even the very ideas and sentiments that dominated in the dreadfully mutilated souls of the SS. This transformation required one to five years, according to Professor Bettelheim.

The survivors of Auschwitz who came in contact with the small group of veteran German prisoners at that camp confirm Professor Bettelheim's descriptions, and the kind of psychic evolution he analyzes would explain many of the things reported in this chapter. Such a transformation could only begin to take place in the few Jewish prisoners who managed to keep alive; the immense majority quickly traveled the steep road whose inevitable last stage was known in the camp as "Moslemization." This was the term used to describe the state of total debility which preceded death. Most prisoners arrived at this stage of incredible emaciation and utter mental languor after two months in the camp:

When they could still walk, they moved like automatons; once stopped, they were capable of no further movement. They fell prostrate on the ground; nothing mattered any more to them. Their bodies blocked the passageway. You could step right on them and they wouldn't draw back their arms or legs an inch. No protest, no cry of pain came from their half-open mouths. And yet they were still alive. The Kapos, even the SS men, could beat and push them, but they would not budge; they had become insensible to everything. They were men without thoughts, without reactions, without souls, one might say. Sometimes, under the blows, they would suddenly start moving, like cattle, jostling against each other. Impossible to get them to tell their names, much less the date of their birth. Even gentleness was not enough to make them talk; they would only give you an expressionless stare. And when they tried to answer, their tongues could not touch their dessicated palates to produce sounds. You smelled

only a poisonous breath, as though it issued from entrails already in a state of decomposition.<sup>91</sup>

Such was the description that a former Buchenwald prisoner gave of the "Moslemized" prisoners transferred from Auschwitz to Buchenwald.

Although an average of 25 per cent of all Jewish deportees survived the first selection, scarcely 2 or 3 per cent of these returned to their homes; in general these were men with less than twelve or eighteen months of concentration camp life; 2,800 of the 110,000 Jews deported from France survived; 600 of the 90,000 deported from the Netherlands; 1,800 of the 60,000 deported from Greece, and so on. Among the different extermination methods perfected by the Nazi technicians of mass murder, that of immediate death in the gas chambers was by no means the cruelest.