

# AUSCHWITZ CONCENTRATION CAMP - DEATH FACTORY



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# FOREWORD



Figure 1 Hell of Auschwitz camps – picture by David Olère



Figure 2 Hell of Auschwitz camps – picture by David Olère



Nazis marked a group of population as “unworthy of life”. The mass killing dates back before World War II. Within the T4 program (euthanasia) about 70 thousand mentally and physically handicapped German citizens are killed. Some sources say even 200 thousand were killed during this „purification „of German nation.

The first usage of gas as killing instrument happens in Brandenburg in January 1940. Twenty naked, mentally handicapped people are killed by exhaust gases in a sealed room. This mass killing is observed by scientists, doctors, chemists and engineers. They infer gas is the best and fastest way for this purpose.

The beginning of holocaust bears the sign of mass executions in the East. Jews are shot and buried in mass graves. Some speak about 500 to 850 thousand killed men, women and children.

The process of killing was gradually established. The victims were constrained to strip off, and then they were taken to a large pit and shot being robbed off everything. Stripping has one more crucial effect - naked people are deprived of their dignity, humbled and unable to defy.

Shooting executions are psychically difficult for the executioners so they are trying to find different ways of killing people. They experiment with throwing a grenade into a hole, but not everyone is killed and body parts are scattered all around. During various experiments quicklime is sprinkled into a hole with people lying in, water is poured into, and the people literally boil alive. Sometimes people are locked in a building being set on fire.

The usage of gas is, according to experts, the best way to kill in bulk.

At first, special trucks are used. People die because of exhaust gases. Later people die of suffocation in special rooms which are filled with exhaust gases from outside engines. At the end mass executions are done in specially built gas chambers where people are killed with cyanide released from crystals of Cyclone B.

Special camps are created in Nazi occupied Poland. There are more of them than in Germany itself, however the real symbol of holocaust becomes the Auschwitz concentration camp. It is a death factory, literally a death industry. Everything is forged into a smallest detail, including the lies about disinfection. Instead of it only cruel death awaits people in gas chambers.



Figure 3 On the way to execution-www.yadvashem.org





**Figure 4 Empty mass grave - [www.yadvashem.org](http://www.yadvashem.org)**



**Figure 5 Filled mass grave**





**Figure 6 Mass grave - [www.yadvashem.org](http://www.yadvashem.org)**



**Figure 7 Women and children waiting to be executed - [www.yadvashem.org](http://www.yadvashem.org)**





**Figure 8 Slaughter of the surviving children and women - [www.yadvashem.org](http://www.yadvashem.org)**



## Basic vocabulary and rules:

- **Organize** – provide everything, always and everywhere, and never get caught
- **Blockführer** – SS member who has oversight in the blocks and at work
- **Blockälteste** – elder of a block, a leading prisoner of a block, identified on his left sleeve, he has his own room and a thick stick
- **Blockschreiber** – block scribe and the representative of Blockälteste
- **Stubenälteste** – elder of a room, a leading prisoner of a room, responsible for cleanliness, gets double portion of soup
- **Vorarbeiter** – a prominent worker, a frontman, wears this inscription on his left sleeve, he shouts a lot, even though he beats few prisoners to death, soon is promoted to unterkapo.
- **Unterkapo** – a representative of kapo, wears this inscription on his sleeve
- **Kapo** – a kapo, a top prison functionary, wears the inscription „Kapo“ in the middle of his sleeve, he decides who to live and who to die
- **Oberkapo** – chief kapo
- **Musulman** – a prisoner destroyed by the camp, absolutely debilitated, his body almost consumed itself
- **Häftling** – a prisoner
- **„Abspritzen“** – in the Auschwitz jargon this is the way of killing by phenol injection into heart
- **Aufräumungskommando** – cleaning and classifying commando from so called “Canada”

Figure 9 Slaughter of the surviving children and women - [www.yadvashem.org](http://www.yadvashem.org)

crematatoriums

## Designation of prisoners:

- The first letter in the middle of a triangle, sewn on the upper left chest, right under the registration number indicating the prisoner's nationality (for example P for Poles)
- Red triangle = political prisoners
- Green triangle = professional criminals
- Black triangle = slobs, anti-social elements, gamblers, mostly Russians
- Pink triangle = homosexuals
- Violet triangle = members of the religious sect „Bibelforscher“
- Yellow triangle = worn by Jewish prisoners, combined with the red (black) triangle, by adding this yellow triangle the designation de facto changes into a star of David
- **Breakfast** – 1 litre of unsweetened substitute of tea or coffee.
- **Lunch** – 3 litres of tasteless soup, made from potato peels, beet, calorically equals about 10 g of salami. (about 350-400 calories)
- **Dinner** – 300 grams of bread, sometimes 25 grams of salami, margarine or a spoon of jam. (900-1000 calories)

The food rations were often cut short for prisoners on different levels of distribution. Prisoners working in tough conditions were given or very often just should be given more bread, margarine, salami.

## Daily routine – from Monday to Sunday

- 5.00 – waking-up time
- Breakfast
- Morning summation
- Work
- Lunch break
- Work
- Return from work
- Evening summation
- Personal free time
- Lights-out – 21.00

Sunday is a „rest“ day, however with some exercises, block clearance and the prisoners are of course being bullied during these activities.



Figure 10 Classical clothing of male and female prisoners - [www.auschwitz.org](http://www.auschwitz.org)



# A BLOODY OVERTURE



Figure 11 Hell of Auschwitz camps – picture by David Olère

## **21 February 1940, Wednesday**

Richard Glücks, the concentration camp inspector, tells Hitler that the former employment agency and Polish Army barracks in Zasole are suitable to be reconstructed as a concentration camp. At present, the barracks consist of eight two-storey and fourteen one-storey brick buildings.

## **27 April 1940, Tuesday**

Forty-year-old SS-Hauptsturmführer Rudolf Höss receives a building permit to construct a new camp for ten thousand prisoners after visiting Auschwitz (Oswiecim).



**Figure 12 Rudolf Höss**

## **4 May 1940, Saturday**

Rudolf Höss is officially named the commandant of the new concentration camp at Auschwitz. He receives 2 million marks to prepare the 22 buildings already standing, as well as for further construction.

## **20 May 1940, Monday**

The first 30 prisoners arrive; they are German criminals meant to assume the positions of camp functionaries.

Local inhabitants living in the environs of the camp are forced to move from the area of interest, which turns out to have an area of 40 square kilometres.

## **14 June 1940, Friday**

The first transport carrying 728 Polish people arrives; their task is to begin the construction of the concentration camp. The construction of the camp, occurring under inhumane conditions, is carried out by mostly Polish prisoners of war, comprised of the intelligentsia, arrested members of the resistance, and Catholic priests. Most of the men from this first transport eventually survive Auschwitz, as they gradually assume the positions of camp functionaries or of work commandos.



**Figure 13 Walter Quakernack**



## June 1940

The “Topf und Söhne” Company builds a modern, two-chamber oven in the building of the former munition warehouse, later known as Crematorium I. The chamber (muffle) is meant for one body, and it has an assumed cremating capacity of 70 cadavers per 24 hours. In reality, one can cremate a higher amount if the bodies are emaciated, as more bodies can be placed inside at once. Thus, in a period of 24 hours, one two-chamber oven can cremate up to 140 cadavers.

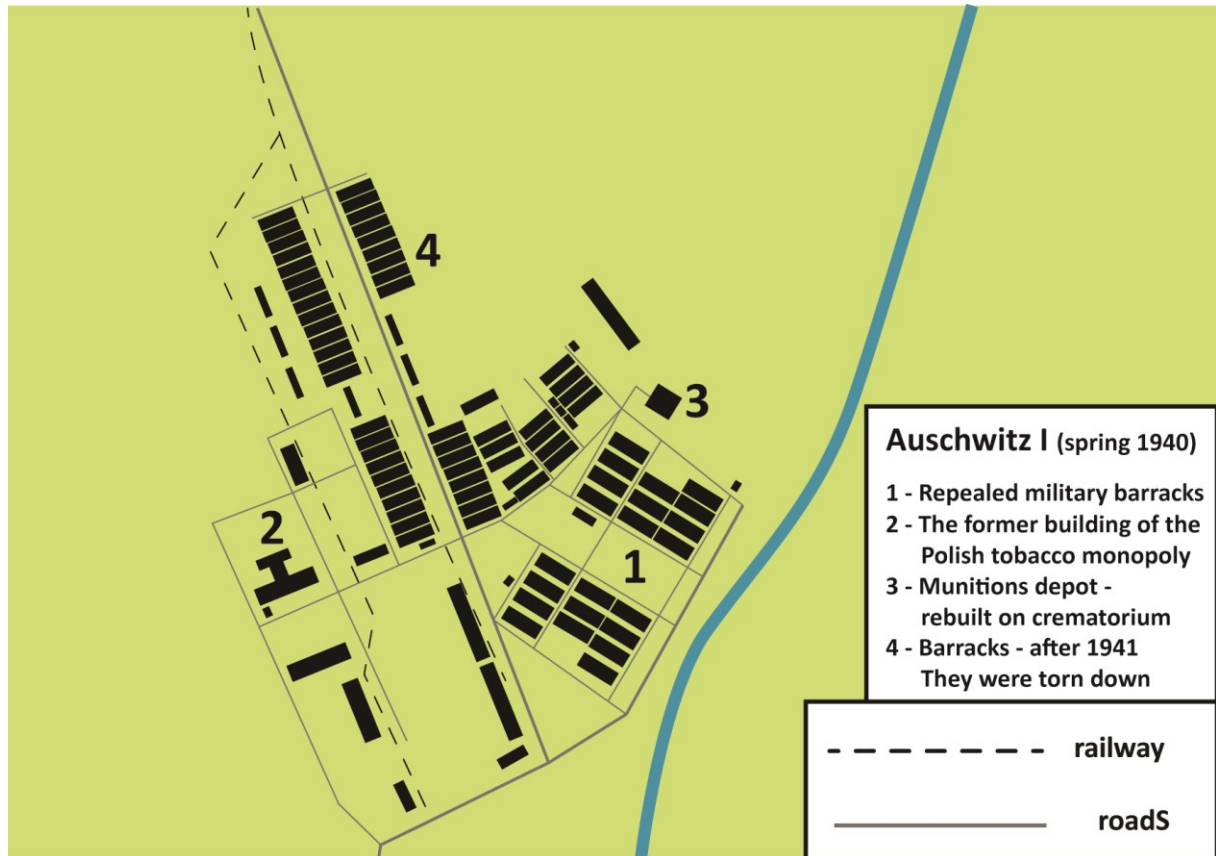


Figure 14 project of students of SSPŠ



**Figure 15 Model of Crematorium I- project of students of SSPŠ**



**Figure 16 Crematorium I - Jan Komski**

Thirty-three-year-old SS-Oberscharführer Walter Konrad Quakernack is in charge; sometimes, he personally executes the sentenced in the morgue by shooting them in the head.

## Summer 1940

Establishment of Block 13, renumbered in 1941 as Block 11

The political department of the camp, or the Gestapo, operates in Block 13, or 11, respectively. The building serves as a torture chamber for prisoners, for their internment in the basement, for meetings of the Military Court, as well as for the executions of those sentenced in the adjacent courtyards between Blocks 10 and 11. Those executed are led to the ground floor, are forced to strip naked in the washroom, and are shot in the head in the courtyard. The cadavers are then piled up near the gate, and after the executions are finished, are loaded onto a lorry and transported to the crematorium.

The first commandant of the Gestapo is 35-year-old SS-Unterscharführer (Junior Squad Commandant in English) Maximilian Grabner.

The most frequent executioner is 27-year-old SS-Oberscharführer (Senior Squad Commandant in English) Bernard Palitzch, who shoots those sentenced to death in the nape of the neck with a small-calibre rifle.

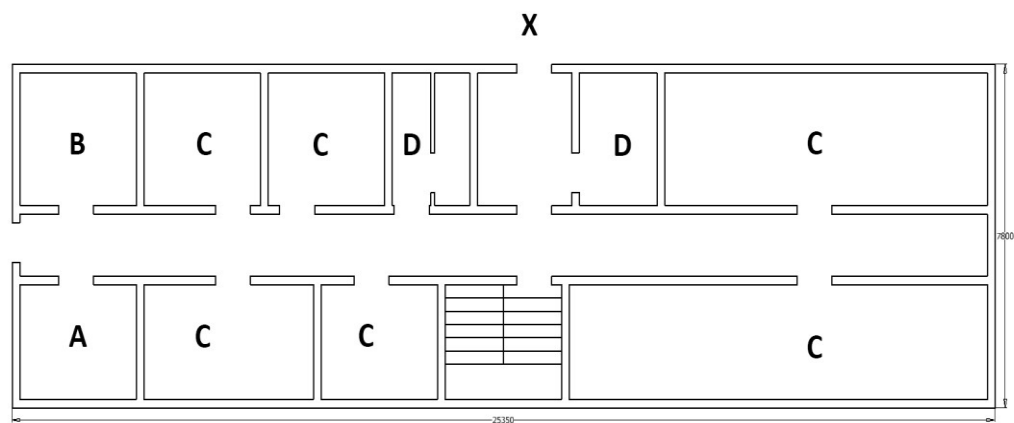


Figure 18 Bernard Palitzch



Figure 17 Maximilian Grabner





### Blok 11 - přízemí

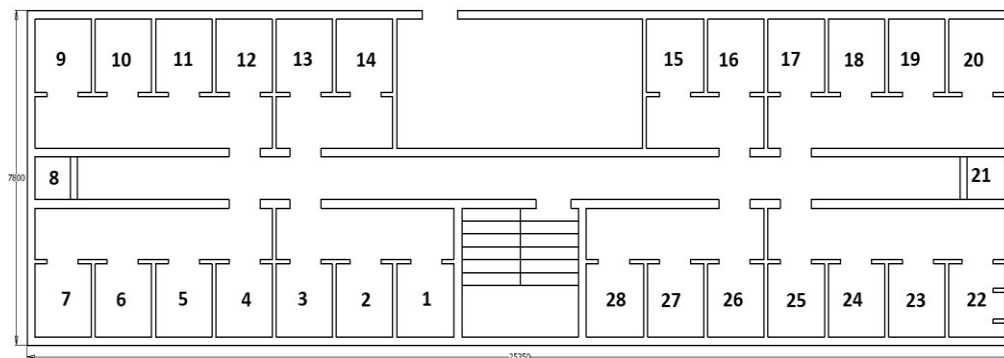
A - Room SS

B - Courtroom

C - The room where the prisoners were held

D - The room where the prisoners washed before being shot dead

X - Corridor that led to the "wall of death"



### Blok 11 - spodní patro

1 - 28 - penal cell

8 a 20 - cells with limited air and light

22 - This cell was so small that it was impossible to lie down

Figure 19 project of students of SSPŠ



**Figure 20 Model of block 11 - project of students of SSPŠ**



**Figure 21 Prison at block 11 – picture by David Olére**



**Figure 22 Execution between blocks 10 and 11 – picture by Jan Komski**

## **July 1940**

The use of Zyklon B for killing insect parasites is launched. When combined with air of a minimum temperature of 27 degrees Celsius, the deadly gas cyanide begins to waft from the crystals. When inhaled, death arrives within several minutes thanks to the paralysis of the breathing muscles. At the moment, only insects are dying, at most, one suffers mild poisoning when incorrectly handled.

## **15 August 1940, Thursday**

Thirty-seven-year-old Polish doctor Wladislas Dering is brought to the camp as a prisoner. He is arrested for his resistance activities and suffers cruel torture at the hands of the Gestapo.

First, he is put to hard labour, but soon he becomes a leading figure amongst the prison physicians. He is an excellent surgeon, and at first, he also has an excellent reputation. This all changes when he joins the programme of medical experiments performed on prisoners. This also leads to his increased brutality.

He is a very inconsistent person, which comes to light twenty years later in court during the trial of his own suit for defamation. The adjudication does find that he was defamed, but he only receives half a penny as compensation, which is the smallest coin value that is issued in England.



**Figure 23 Wladyslas Dering**



He collaborates with the resistance in the camp; he secretly operates on prisoners and thus saves many lives. But he also coolly and calmly mutilates women and men, girls and boys, and sometimes he is very brutal.

There are eye-witness accounts that he creates a tobacco pouch out of the scrotum of a castrated boy, and he also boasts of it to his fellow inmates.

## 21 August 1940

Thirty-nine-year-old Witold Pilecki, an officer of the Polish army, arrives at the camp. He himself approaches his seniors in the resistance with the suggestion of infiltrating the Auschwitz camp in order to glean information and to organise the resistance amongst the prisoners. Under the false name of Tomasz Serafiński, he lets himself be captured, and after two days of beating by the Gestapo, he finds himself at the camp.

At Auschwitz, he works in various work commandos, he survives pneumonia, and he organises the underground resistance organisation “Związek Organizacji Wojskowej”. With its help, he establishes an information network, and passes on information to the Polish underground government in London starting in March 1941. In 1942, he gives information using a radio transmitter that he secretly builds in the camp. Prisoners are on air for seven months, and then they decide to destroy the equipment themselves as they are at risk of being discovered.



Figure 24 Witold Pilecki



Figure 25 Counting the dead and alive – picture by Jan Komski

## September 1940

By the summer, it is evident that one oven in the crematorium is not sufficient. This is why another two-chamber oven is requested. The request is granted, and the crematorium becomes more efficient. On average, it is able to cremate 230 cadavers in 24 hours.



Figure 26 Bringing the dead – picture by Leo Haas

## Beginning of December 1940

A bus full of experts searching for an appropriate construction site for a factory for the I. G. Farben company arrives. They choose the plain between Auschwitz, Monowice, and Dwory.

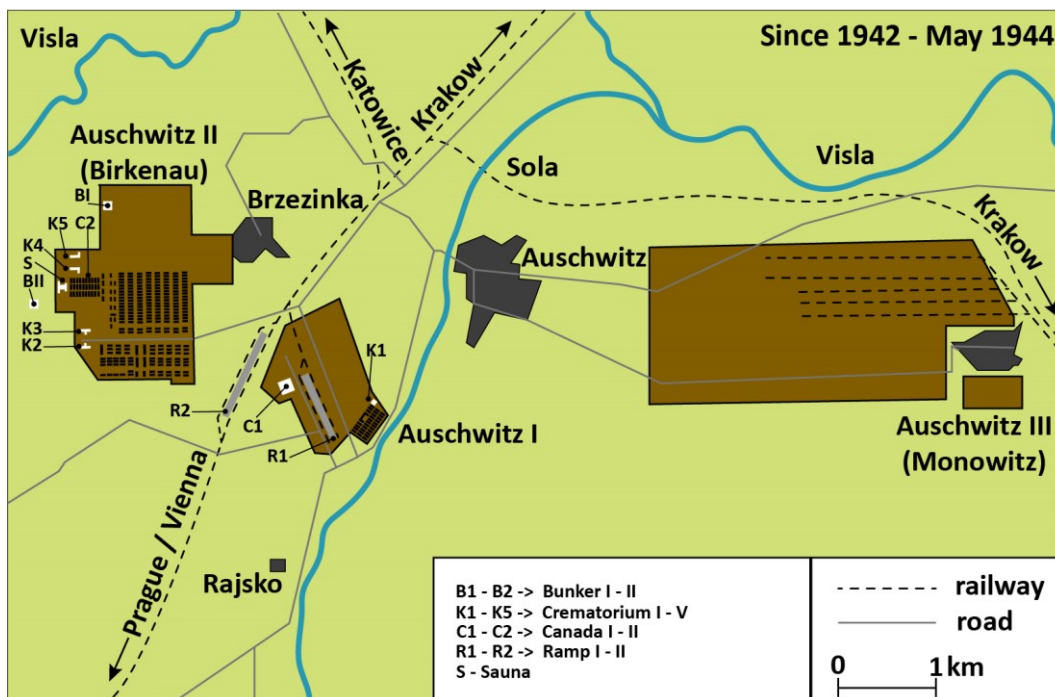


Figure 27 Schematic of Auschwitz camps - project of students of SSPŠ



## 15 February 1941, Saturday

Some areas around the camp are considered for drying out so that a large, experimental farm can be built. Prisoners will be put to work on it. In the next months, a study recommending that the riverbeds of the Visla and the Sola be adjusted, that the fish ponds be repaired, that the irrigation ditches be cleaned out and that new ones should be constructed, and that drainage pipes be placed in the land is published. Tens of thousands of prisoners work on the project in the subsequent years, in fact, until the end of 1944, and many of them die doing so.



Figure 28 Auschwitz I – picture by Mieczyslaw Koscielniak

## 1 March 1941, Saturday

Thanks to the plans of constructing the large farm and the factory of the I. G. Farben Company, Himmler needs a larger amount of prisoners. Therefore, he instructs Höss, the commandant of the camp, to increase the capacity of the camp from ten thousand to thirty thousand prisoners.



Figure 29 Heinrich Himmler



## 26 March 1941, Wednesday

A professor from Wrocław does research on the water in the Auschwitz II – Birkenau camp on the orders of Himmler. In his expert opinion, the water is not even suitable for washing out mouths.

The first advice that new arrivals at Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II – Birkenau is to never drink untreated water directly from the water pipes. Drinking it usually leads to diseases causing diarrhoea, including dysentery. Diarrhoea brings the prisoner to the hospital block. If they do not die there of natural causes, they usually do not pass selection and are sent to death by injection or by gas.



Figure 30 Lethal injection – picture by Mieczysław Koscielniak

## 1 May 1941, Friday

Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler visits the camp, and the decision of constructing a satellite camp around the village of Brzezinka is made; it should have a capacity of 100 thousand prisoners. The Reichsführer also repeats the demand of increasing the number of prisoners at base camp from ten thousand to thirty thousand.



Figure 31 Camp orchestra – [www.auschwitz.org](http://www.auschwitz.org)

## Summer 1941

The construction of both camps is feverishly worked on. The prisoners take the brunt of the work, the hospitals are full of malnourished human ruins. The number of executions increases, and those who are too weak to work are next to be murdered.

Every four to six weeks, the court-martial from Katowice, chaired by Doctor of Laws Rudolf Mildner, arrives to the camp. Prisoners and those arrested in the camp's environs are put before the court. These are usually rebels from Upper Silesia. Most of the sentences are death. Sometimes, they shoot the sentenced between Blocks 10 and 11; sometimes, when there is a greater number, they are shuttled off directly to the morgue of the crematorium. There, they must completely undress and are then shot to death. Their bodies are immediately cremated in the two ovens.



**Figure 32 Prisoners at block 11 – picture by Wladislaw Siwek**

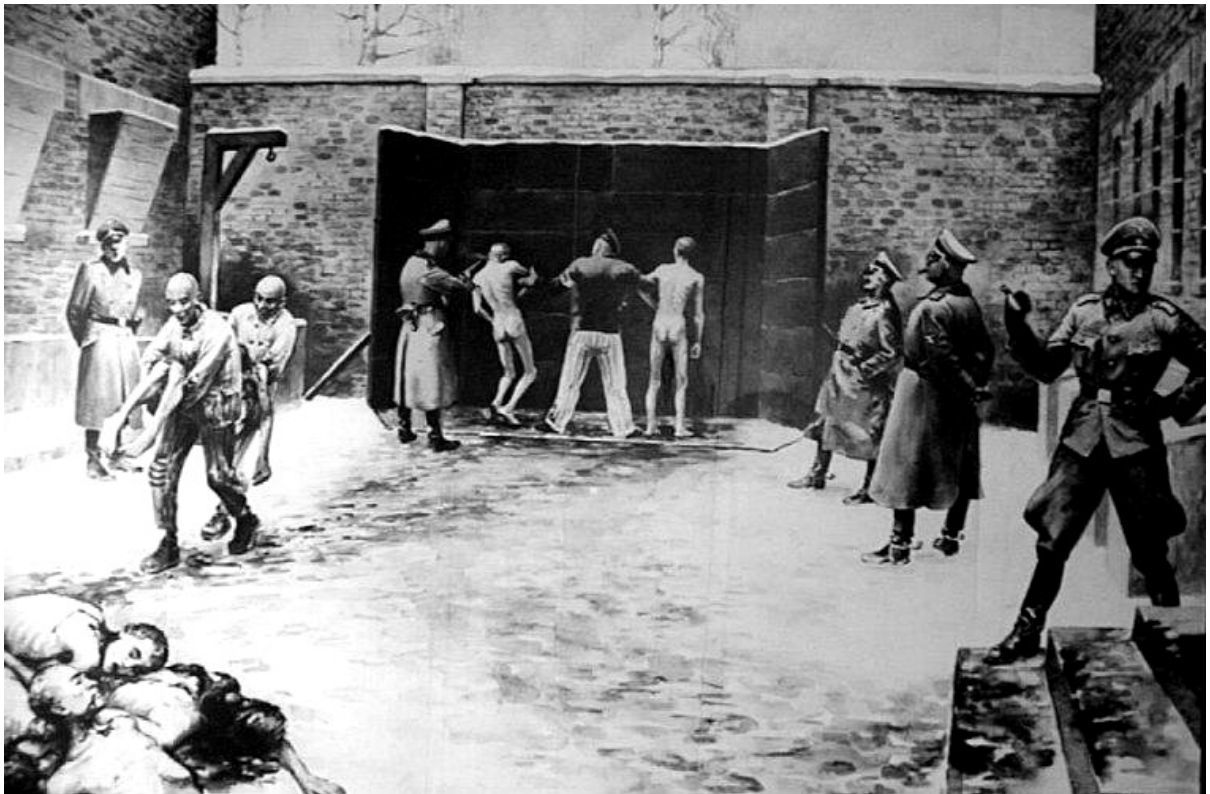


**Figure 33 Court-martial at block 11 – picture by Jan Kowski**





**Figure 34 Bringing the prisoners to be executed at block 11 – picture by Wladislaw Siwek**



**Figure 35 Executions between block 10 and 11 – picture by Wladislaw Siwek**



**Figure 36 Bringing the executed ones from the gallows between blocks 10 and 11 picture by Wladislaw Siwek**



**Figure 37 Model gallows between Blocks 10 and 11- project of students of SSPŠ**



## 22 June 1941, Sunday

Germany launches an attack on the Soviet Union. Soon, hundreds of thousands of Soviet soldiers become prisoners of war. The way the Nazis shall treat them is probably best summed up by the practices in the camp near Chełm for 150 thousand Soviet soldiers.

“The prisoners of war are literally dying of hunger. Dysentery spreads among them. There is no medical supervision. The German guards continuously torture them; they beat them with gun-stocks and stab them with bayonets. Naked prisoners are tied to the fence of the camp by their necks in such a manner that they have to stand on tip-toe. After some time, they strangle themselves.”

Statistics also provide significant evidence. During the war, the Germans take prisoner 5.7 million Soviet soldiers, of which 3.3 million will die.

Immediately after attacking the Soviet Union, Himmler's special patrols known as the “Einsatzgruppen” begin working on their tasks; the members of the patrols chiefly take part in the executions of Jewish men. At first, the local populations organise large pogroms on the Jews. However, from August 1941, the members of the German special units begin also to kill women and children. The genocide of the Russian Jews begins.

Soon, a traditional scenario solidifies: men, women, and children are forced to completely undress, then they are taken to large pits where they are shot. The so-called “sardine method” is established, where those still alive lie down on the dead so that as many as possible can fit into the pit. Sometimes, those who are about to be executed must straighten out the bodies of those already murdered.

The peak of this massacre, which claims more than a half million Jewish victims, is considered to be the murder of 33 thousand men, women, and children in the Babi Jar Gorge, located near Kiev, on 29 and 30 September 1941.



Figure 38 Mass execution - [www.yadvashem.org](http://www.yadvashem.org)





Figure 39 Dead soviet soldiers - [www.yadvashem.org](http://www.yadvashem.org)

## July 1941

The first Soviet prisoners arrive. Behaviour towards them is even more brutal than towards the Polish prisoners. Some are locked into cells in Block 11 and are left to starve.



Figure 40 Washing the new prisoners – picture by Wladyslaw Siwek

## **Second half of August 1941**

SS-Obersturmbannführer (translated as “Senior Assault (or Storm) Unit Leader”) Adolf Eichmann arrives at the camp. He discusses the deportation of the Jews to the camp, as well as the construction of a murdering machinery that would kill a larger amount of people at once. The decision is made to undertake the first experiment using Soviet prisoners of war. Höss suggests using hydrogen cyanide instead of the traditional exhaust gases. He bases his suggestions on the use of hydrogen cyanide in the delousing chambers of the camp.



**Figure 41 Adolf Eichmann**

## **3 September 1941, Wednesday**

In the basement of Block 11 in Auschwitz I, the experiment using Zyklon B takes place. Over 600 Soviet prisoners and 250 gravely ill Polish people are crowded into the tight cells of the basement, and then the gas crystals are thrown into the room. Most of the men choke to death within twenty minutes, others survive the torture and are then shot.

## **4 September 1941, Thursday**

The basement of Block 11 is cleaned out. The work commando is divided into four groups. The first, donning gas masks, tows out the cadavers into the courtyard. The second undresses them, the third puts them on trucks, and the fourth drives them off to the crematorium.

## **16 September 1941, Tuesday**

The second experiment takes place in the morgue of the crematorium. The morgue had been previously equipped with a ventilation system that drains smells from the room and conversely ushers fresh air in. Currently, there are three square openings in the roof, which are covered with tightly fitted wooden lids. The deceived Soviet prisoners are told to completely undress under the pretences of disinfection, after which they are led to the morgue and gassed. The undertakings go through without much fuss, and are considered to be a success by the Nazis, as all 900 men die after inhaling the gas. This is the entire transport that arrives at the camp.

The morgue, now operating as a gas chamber, is 17 metres long, 4.6 metres wide and 2.86 metres high. It thus has a total area of 78.2 square metres.



**Figure 42 Pulling dead from gas chamber – picture by Jan Komski**

## **Beginning of October 1941**

9,908 Soviet prisoners of war arrive to serve as a labour force for the construction of the Auschwitz II – Birkenau camp. In this same month, 1,255 of them are murdered. In November, another 1,238 Soviet soldiers are killed while at work or are executed.

## **21 October 1941, Tuesday**

The construction of three chamber ovens for the planned large crematorium near the Auschwitz I camp is agreed upon at a meeting with the representatives of the Topf Company. Eventually, the Crematorium II in the Auschwitz II – Birkenau camp is constructed according to these slightly altered plans.



## **November 1941**

A special Gestapo committee in Katowice chooses 300 men out of the group of Soviet prisoners of war, labelling them as commissars or as fanatic Communists, and has them executed.



**Figure 43 Execution between blocks 10 and 11 – picture by Jan Komki**

### **11 November 1941, Tuesday**

The camp commandant requests that a third oven be constructed in the crematorium. This request is granted.

### **17 November 1941, Monday**

Information about the use of gas to kill prisoners is published in the secret journal of the Polish underground forces.

26 November 1941, Wednesday

The intensive construction of Auschwitz II – Birkenau is begun. It should have a capacity of 97 thousand prisoners and cost 8.9 million Reichsmarks. It is constructed by Soviet prisoners of war, who make a forty-minute journey every morning to the construction site and return every evening to the Auschwitz I camp, where they are quartered.

## December 1941

The plan of constructing the Auschwitz II – Birkenau camp is re-evaluated. Instead of brick buildings in sectors BII and BIII, wooden prefabricated buildings that originally served as the army stables will be used. The material for their construction arrives to the camp at the beginning of spring 1942.

### 11 December 1941, Thursday

Twenty-seven-year-old SS-Hauptsturmführer Friedrich Charles Entress, a Nazi physician, begins working at Auschwitz I. He is an ethnic German of Polish descent. He is considered to be one of the most cruel Nazi doctors in the camp. He sends thousands of prisoners to death during selection, and sometimes, he executes the selected prisoners by injections himself and he performs experiments on them. He always keeps a straight face; he sends people to their death without mercy. Often, his decision is made only after a fleeting glance at the person.

Medicine of the company of I. G. Farben, or of the Bayer Company, respectively, which was a subsidiary of this company, is tested on the prisoners. During at least one testing round of researching the treatment of typhus, healthy prisoners are intentionally infected so that Entress can observe how infectious the disease is.



Figure 44 Friedrich Entress

Entress takes advantage of the opportunity to perfect his surgical skills, and so he operates on healthy prisoners. For him, they are merely biological material for experiments.



Figure 45 Selection – picture by Jerzy Potrzebowski

## **20 January 1942, Tuesday**

The conference at Wannsee takes place, where the liquidation of all European Jews is decided upon. This means almost 10 million people that should all be gradually murdered.

In relation to this, the idea to build a new, large crematorium at Auschwitz II – Birkenau arises.

## **15 February 1942, Sunday**

The first transport of Jews hailing from the town of Bytom in Upper Silesia arrives. They are usually all older people who go directly to the crematorium at Auschwitz I, where they are gassed.

## **27 February 1942, Friday**

It is definitively decided that the large crematorium will not stand near the Auschwitz I camp, but near the Auschwitz II – Birkenau camp.

## **Spring 1942**

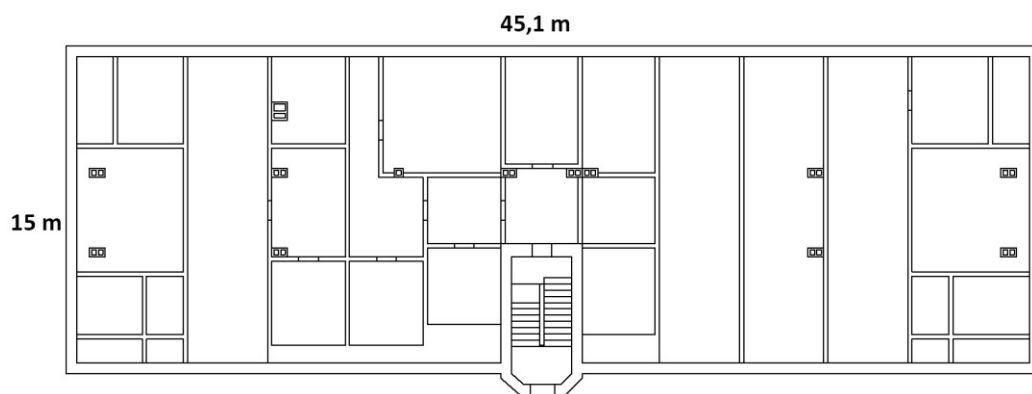
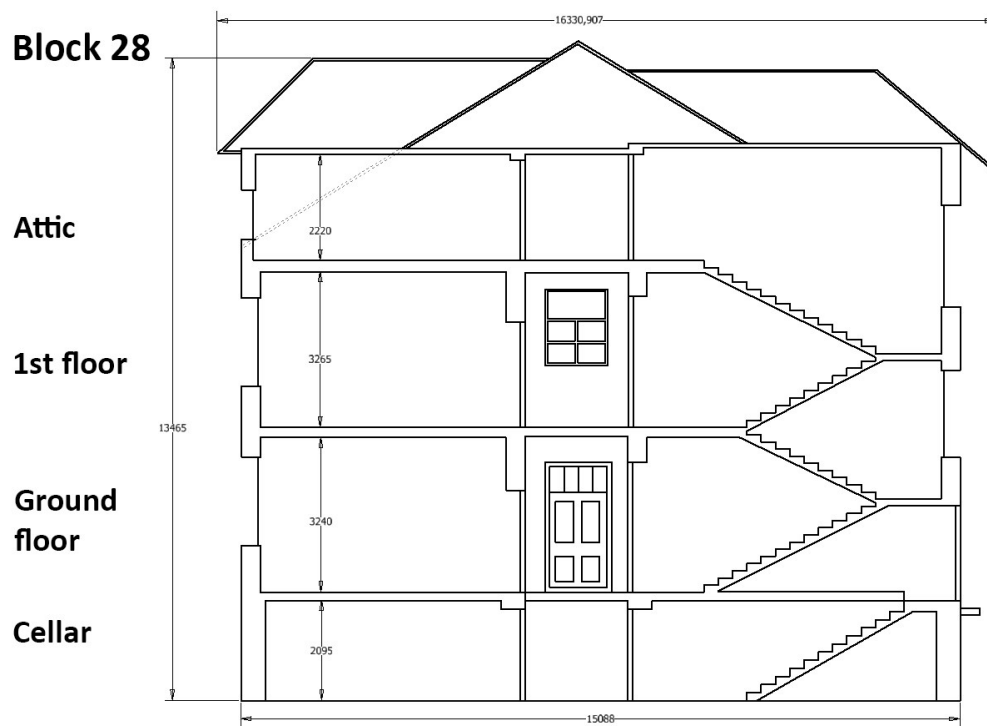
Since the spring, or no later than from the summer of 1942, experiments are done on the prisoners. Usually medicine from pharmaceutical companies is tested on them. Doctor Entress takes advantage of Block 28 in Auschwitz I, which soon gains the notorious reputation as being the male experimental block. At this phase of the research, Entress creates facilities for about two hundred patients. He tests typhus medicine for the Bayer company on the prisoners.

Entress also dabbles in a special treatment of tuberculosis, where an operation leads to the deflation of the affected lung. Prison doctor Dering assists during these operations, and the Nazi learns other surgical interventions from him, which they sometimes carry out together on healthy prisoners.

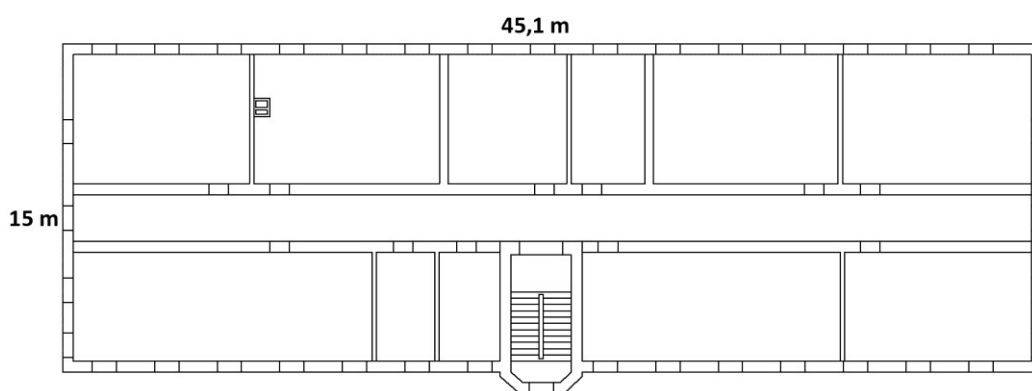
As for the tuberculosis, if a prisoner receives this diagnosis, they are immediately designated for liquidation by injections of phenol or in the gas chambers. Exceptions are only those that serve as subjects for research before their deaths.

Prison doctors often mask the diagnosis of tuberculosis with other diseases, and thus spare the patients from execution for at least several days more. However, in these horrible camp conditions, this disease usually leads to the demise of the patients anyway.

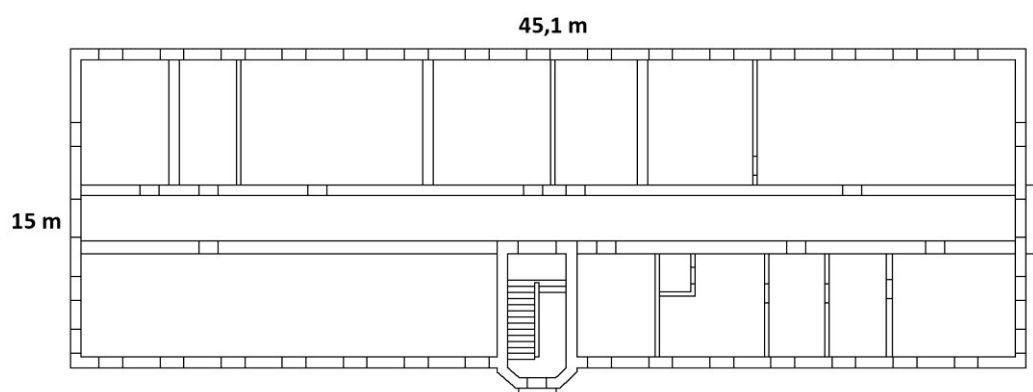




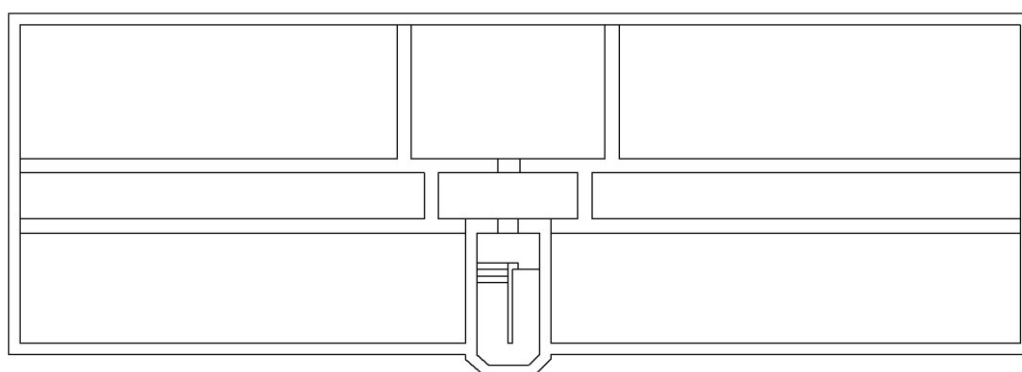
**Block 28 - attic**



**Block 28 - 1st floor**



**Block 28 – ground floor**



**Block 28 - cellar**

**Figure 46 Block 28 – schematic of floors - project of students of SSPŠ**



**Figure 47 Block 28 – present**



**Figure 48 Model of Block 28 - project of students of SSPŠ**

## **March 1942**

The tattooing of prisoners is introduced. Until then, prisoners have numbers only on their clothing. When they are stripped bare before execution, their numbers are written on them with a permanent marker to enable their identification in the morgue.





**Figure 49 Tattooing the prisoners – Jan Komski**

## **March 1942**

German union worker, twenty-eight-year-old Orli Ward, is transferred to the camp from Ravensbrück. She is labelled with a red triangle and works in the infirmary.

Later, she also works at the clinic of Dr. Mengele, where she witnesses many horrors. Sometimes, she helps choose the ill meant for the gas chamber during selection; however, she thus saves many other prisoners from death. Thanks to her helpfulness towards prisoners, including the Jewish ones, she receives the nickname “The Angel of Auschwitz”.

She survives the hardships of the camp, as well as the death march. After the war, she is raped by Soviet soldiers. All of these traumatic experiences irrevocably mark her, and she dies at the young age of 48 in a psychiatric ward.

### **20 March 1942, Friday**

A reconstructed farmhouse, called the “Red House” according to the colour of the non-plastered bricks, but also Bunker I, serves as a gas chamber for the first time. Groups of Jewish inhabitants from Upper Silesia are gassed here. In the two chambers, it is possible to kill up to 800 people at once. The dead are buried into mass graves on the adjacent field, where



**Figure 50 Orli Ward**

huge open-air pits that can hold up to a thousand bodies are dug out. The system of mass murder begins to take shape.

After the deported arrive, the first thing that occurs is selection, where healthy men and women are accepted for work in the camp, as well as older children. Usually, this includes men of 16 to 45 years of age. With women, it is their relationship to their children that decides their fate: if they do not want to abandon them, they die with them. Pregnant women also go directly to the gas chamber, as well as all of those that do not pass through selection, i.e. those that are too old, too young, or too weak or ill.

At first, the people are driven into the gas chambers fully dressed, which soon changes. Undressing cadavers is not easy, and the clothing is damaged and soiled. Also, the undressing of the victims is time consuming, not to mention that naked people are more submissive. Gradually, a manual according to which the murdering takes place up until October 1944, when the last victims are gassed, is created.

The Nazis convince the people with their lies that they are being disinfected before entering the camp; they are forced to strip down in the courtyard of the crematorium, in front of the bunkers, and later in the dressing rooms, and then journey to their death. Often, the whole proceedings take place calmly; the Nazis are nice, polite, and attentive up until the airtight doors are closed shut.

Dying usually takes from five to fifteen minutes, depending on the number of people, the number of Zyklon B crystals thrown in, and the temperature, which must be 27 degrees Celsius for the crystals to evaporate.



**Figure 51 Franz Hössler**

Panic ensues in the chamber, the stronger individuals trample the weaker ones; many are bitten, are scratched, and have ripped their hair out in despair. Blood, vomit, excrements are on the floor. Bodies are literally intertwined. When the gas begins to choke the people, everyone starts to scream, some cry out “Sh'ma Yisreal”, which is a death prayer. The stronger ones try to get to the ceiling and to the doors, and so they climb over the weaker ones. Sometimes, they are literally flattened. The dead have usually defecated themselves, are blackened, black and blue, or red-coloured. Some have nosebleeds. Most children are literally attached to their parents, and mothers often hold their little ones in convulsive grips. It is not easy to separate the bodies from each other. Many have bloody fingers and broken fingernails as they scratched the doors and the walls.

Faeces, blood, urine, and vomit cover the ground, sometimes even gold items, rings or precious gems that the dying had hidden in their orifices, are also found.

After opening and airing out the chambers, the dead are pulled and mined out. Their orifices are searched for any valuables, their gold teeth are pulled, rings and earrings are taken, and their hair is cut.

After being cleaned out and washed, the chamber is ready for more victims. Sometimes, the bloody walls are whitewashed and the rooms are sprayed with fragrance. Both steps are attempts to cover up the last mass murder.

In the first phase, gassing is overseen by the pair of SS officers, Maximilian Grabner and thirty-six-year-old SS-Obersturmführer Franz Hössler.

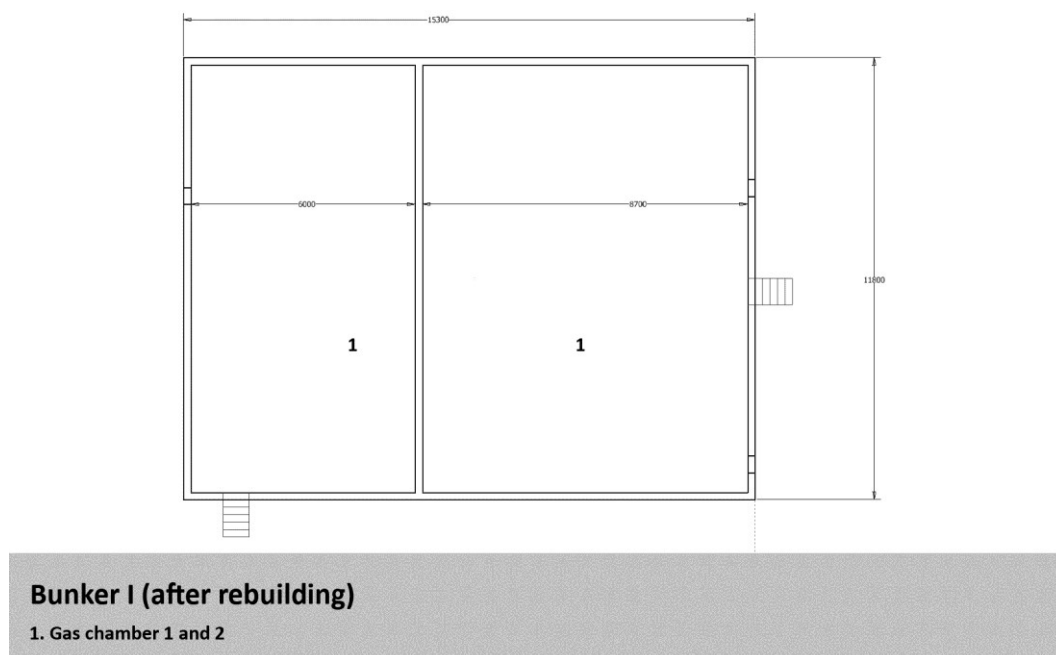


Figure 52 project of students of SSPŠ

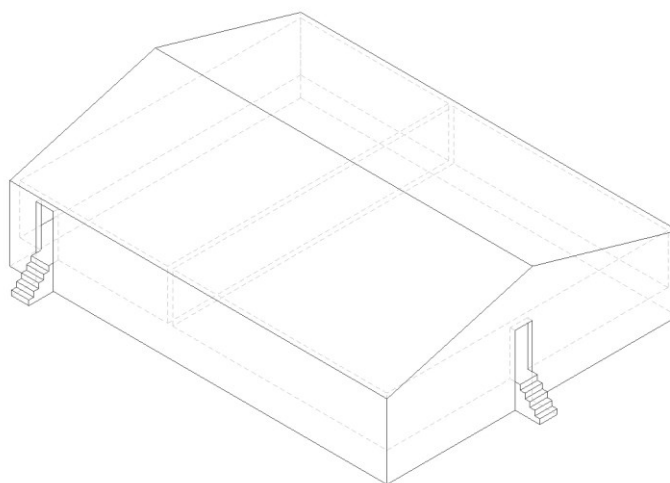


Figure 53 Bunker I schematics - project of students of SSPŠ

## 26 March 1942, Thursday

The first female prisoners arrive, 999 healthy Slovakian Jews. Since the camp at Birkenau is not yet completely finished, they are quartered in a part of the main camp of Auschwitz I. The female and male sectors are separated by a hastily constructed wall. The rest of the Soviet prisoners of war, as well as twelve hundred sick prisoners, are housed in Birkenau.

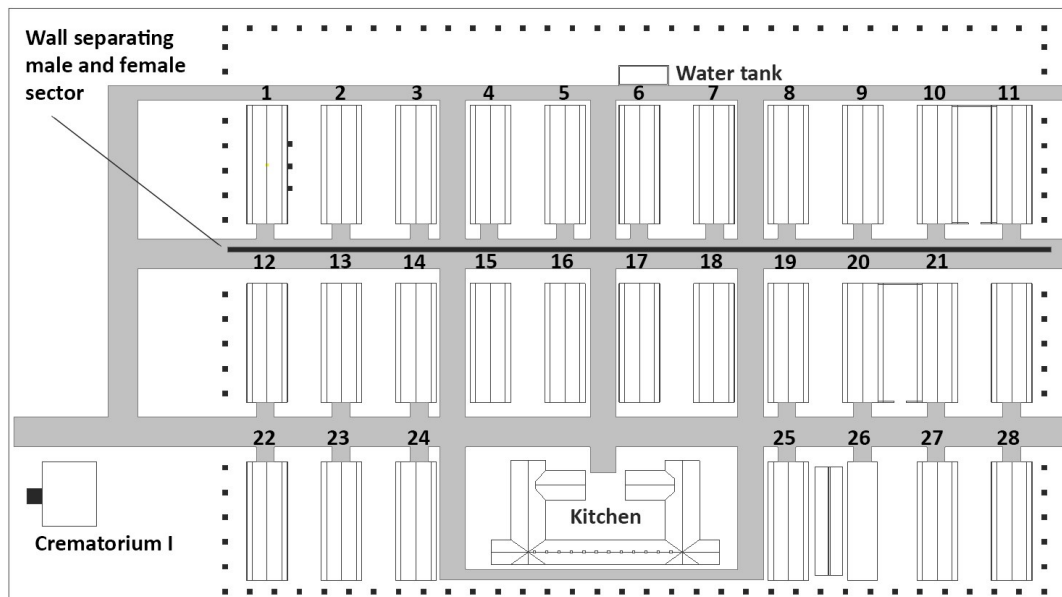




**Figure 54** Arrival of new female prisoners – picture by Jan Komski



**Figure 55** Work of female prisoners – picture by David Olère



## Auschwitz I (1942)

Block 28 - hospital, experimental block - men  
 Block 10 - hospital, experimental block - women  
 Block 11 - Gestapo office  
 Between blocks 10 and 11 is „Wall of death“ (executions)  
 Block 19, 20, 21 - hospital

Figure 56 Auschwitz I schematic project of students of SSPŠ

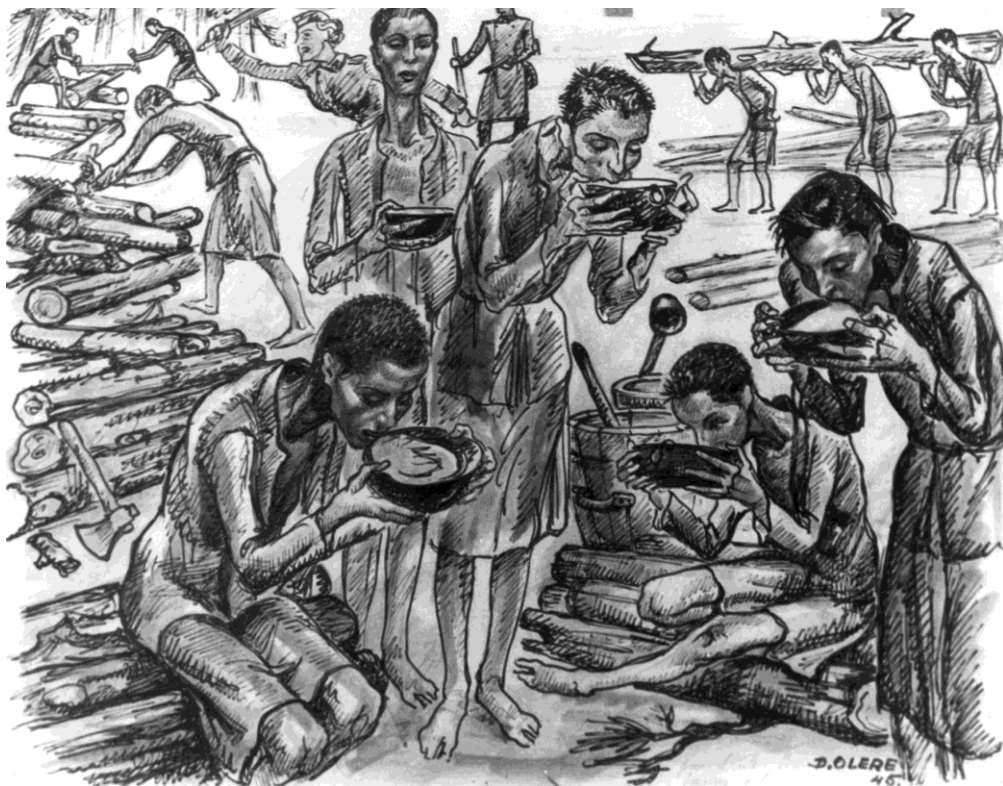


Figure 57 Work of female prisoners – picture by David Olère

## **7 April 1942, Tuesday**

The construction of the I. G. Farben synthetic rubber factory is definitely decided upon, and work should start as soon as possible. The camp known as Auschwitz III – Monowitz later springs up around the factory.

## **May 1942**

The third incinerator in the crematorium of Auschwitz I launches operation in order to increase its performance. After this alteration, it is possible to cremate 340 bodies in 24 hours.

Actually, the first small and stable Jewish Sonderkommando work unit is established and is housed in Block 11, isolated from the other prisoners. These inmates ensure the operations of the crematorium in two shifts. The Kapo is cruel twenty-two-year-old Polish inmate Mieczyslaw (Mietek) Morawa. He beats to death several Jewish prisoners with his bare hands. The stokers are two Poles, thirty-two-year-old Jósef Ilczuk and thirty-four-year-old Wacław Lipka, and the other eight members are Jewish prisoners. They are known as Fischl's commando according to their foreman's name. Twenty-three-year-old Goliath Fischl dies in August 1942 in the typhus epidemic.

One of the Jewish prisoners is also twenty-year-old Filip Müller, who serves in various crematoriums from May 1942 until January 1945; he survives the horrors of the camp and later serves as a key witness in court.

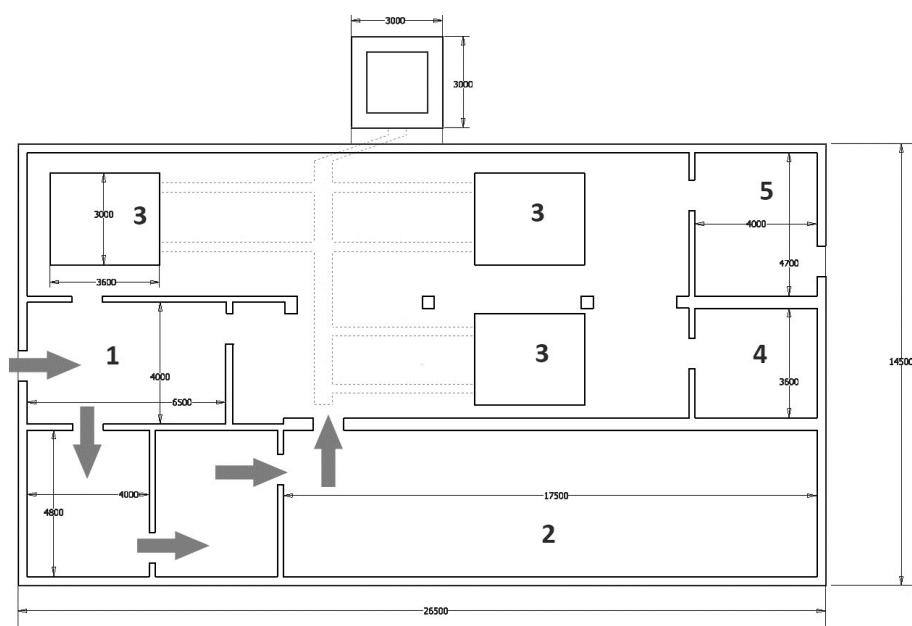
Twenty-one-year-old SS-Unterscharführer Hans Stark, who has been a member of the SS since he was 16, oversees the crematorium. He murders many people, including women and children, with his bare hands as they are driven into the gas chamber. After the war, he is sentenced to ten years in the penitentiary.

It is tolerated if members of the commando take food or clothing, and later alcohol, cigarettes, and medicine from the belongings of the gassed. They must not, however, take any valuables. This rule remains in effect for all of the future Sonderkommandos. Despite of this interdict and the threat of death, the prisoners successfully “organise” such valuables and then do business with them. Bribery and barter trade also concerns the guards ranking among the SS.



**Figure 58 Hans Stark**





### Krematorium I / Crematorium I

1. Vestibul / Vestibule / Vorhalle
2. Plynová komora / Gas chambre / Gaskammer
3. Kremační pece / Ovens / Feuerbestattung Öfen
4. Sklad na urny / Funereal urns / Lager auf Urnen
5. Sklad koksů / Coke / Lager von Koks

Figure 59 project of students of SSPŠ

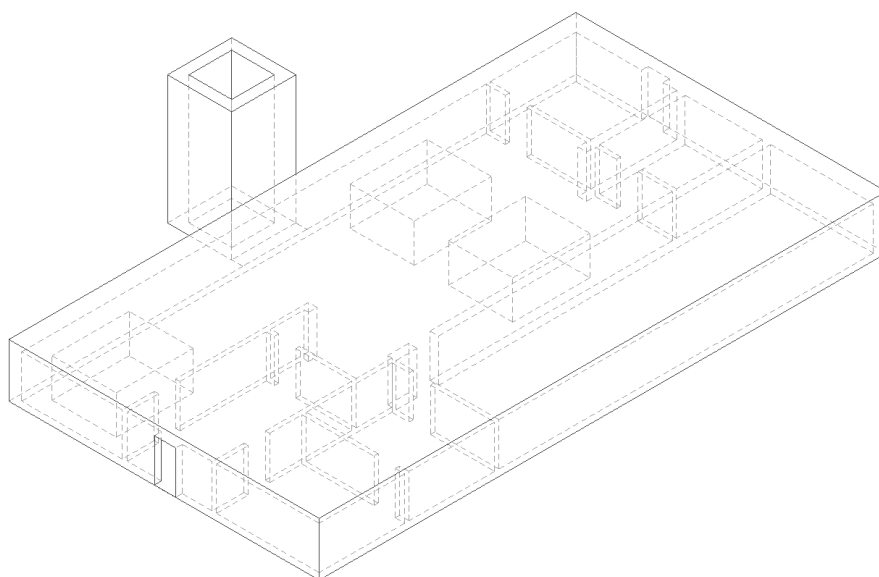


Figure 60 Schematic of Crematorium I at Auschwitz I - project of students of SSPŠ

## May 1942

The first prisoners of Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II – Birkenau come down with typhus. The peak of the epidemic comes in the summer months.

## 17 May 1942, Sunday

In Auschwitz II – Birkenau, about 100 prisoners begin to dig a construction pit on the site where the future Crematorium II will stand. The construction of the first death factory is launched.

## June 1942

Two families from around Katowice, numbering each about 20 members including children ageing from 5 to 12, gradually arrive at Auschwitz I. They must all strip bare in the courtyard of the crematorium, and are then led to the morgue, where SS-Oberscharführer Palitzsch kills them with a bullet to the head.

This method repeats itself several times throughout 1942. In the case that only a smaller amount of deported people arrive, gas is not wasted on them, but they are shot dead directly in the crematorium. This means groups of up to 230 persons; executions by shooting sometimes even take place three times a week. Aside from Palitzsch, the SS officer Quackernack also executes the deported. The crematorium attendants who are inmates are shut in the coal warehouse. At first, leading the people to execution and holding the victims during the shooting was the task of Kapo Morawa, or sometimes of his Polish colleagues working in the position of stokers. Later, some members of the Sonderkommando are forced to do this.



Figure 61 Picture by David Olère

## **June 1942**

The masonry school in Auschwitz II – Birkenau is established. Young Jewish prisoners, usually hailing from Slovakia and France, gain experience there that is later utilised in the construction of the camp.

### **27 June 1942, Saturday**

A transport from Pithiviers in France arrives. Thirty-three-year-old André Balbin is in it. He is chosen to be in the Sonderkommando that buries the cadavers near the open-air pits. After three weeks, he switches places with his friend Salomon who works in a twenty-member electrician commando. Decades later, he still suffers a guilty conscience, as he saved his own life by transferring to this elite commando and his friend died in his stead.

### **End of June 1942**

The second provisional gas chamber in Auschwitz II – Birkenau is built; another farmhouse known as the “White House” or Bunker II serves this purpose. In its four chambers, it is possible to kill up to 1,200 people at once. The cadavers are buried in the adjacent meadow. The pits are 20 metres long, 5 metres wide, and 2.5 metres deep. Up to 1,000 bodies can fit into one pit. Prisoners are forced to straighten them into layers.

The deported who pass selection and are admitted into the camp are welcomed by the following speech: “You have not arrived to a sanatorium, but to a German concentration camp, and the only way out is through the smoke stacks of the crematorium. If any of you disagree with this, you are free to run into the barbed wire. If there are any Jews in the transport, you have the right to live two weeks, any priests a month, all others three months.”

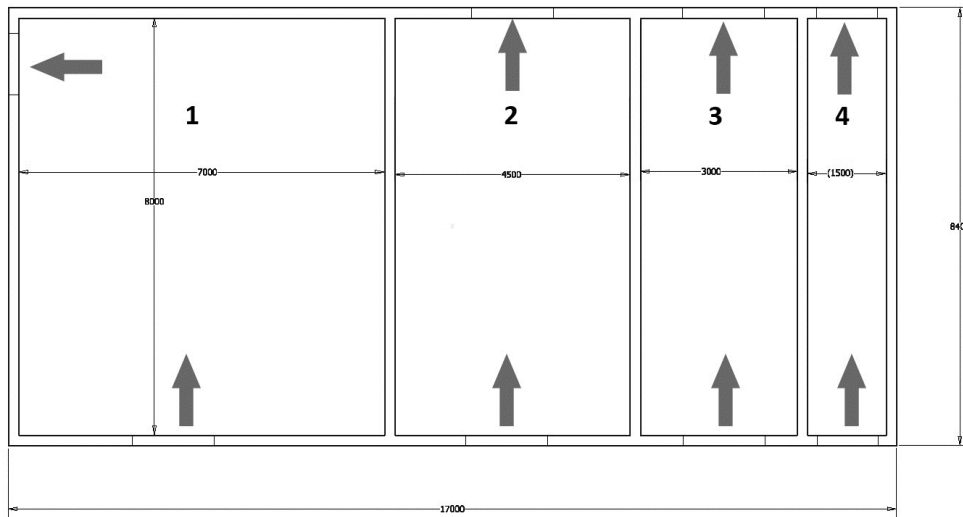
Cans with Zyklon B are supplied to the gas chambers in an ambulance with the emblem of the Red Cross.

Later, wooden houses are built near the gas chambers for the victims to undress in. Up until then, they must place their clothing on the ground in front of the chambers. Also, a narrow-gauge railway is built from Bunker II to the pits, and the cadavers are transported on it on wagons that are 2 metres wide and 3 metres long.

The tactics also change, as members of the Sonderkommando are sent to mingle among the arriving victims in order to calm them down before their departure for death. They are severely warned that if they tell the victims the truth, they will be immediately shot. If any of the sentenced starts to panic, the members of Sonderkommando must take them aside, hold them, and the prepared SS officer shoots them with a small-calibre firearm.

Sometimes, a member of the Sonderkommando finds one of their relatives among the dead. They either mentally withstand it, or do not, in which case they are immediately shot. Shortly after, they are replaced with another, usually young and strong inmate.





## Bunker II

Gas chamber 1 - 4

Figure 62 project of students of SSPŠ

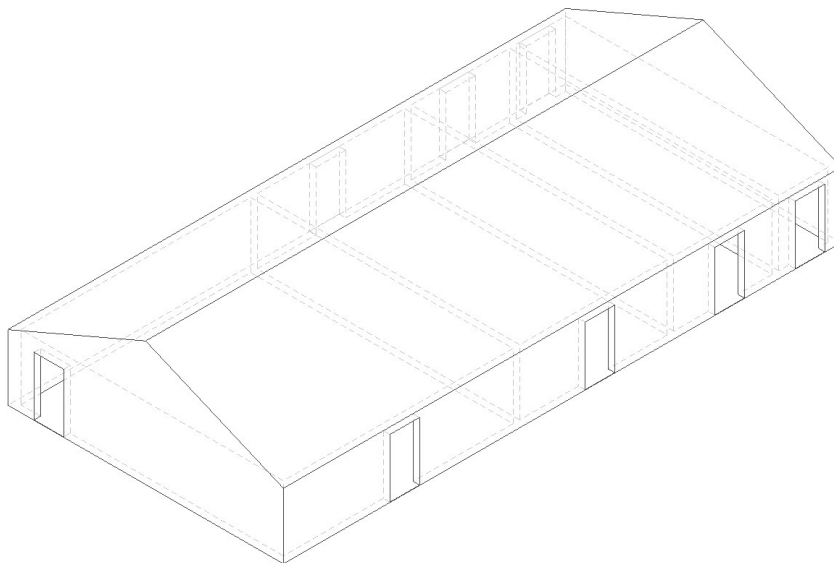


Figure 63 Schematic of Bunker II - project of students of SSPŠ

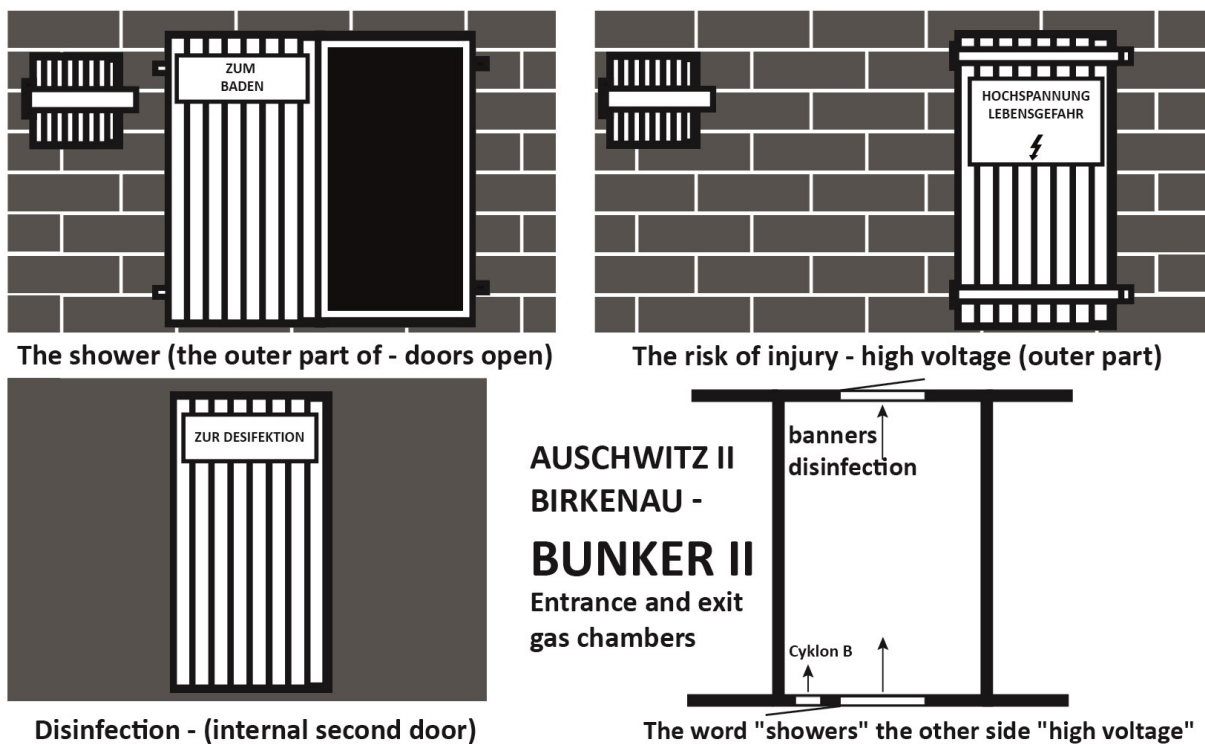


Figure 64 Bunker II door with fake inscriptions - project of students of SSPŠ

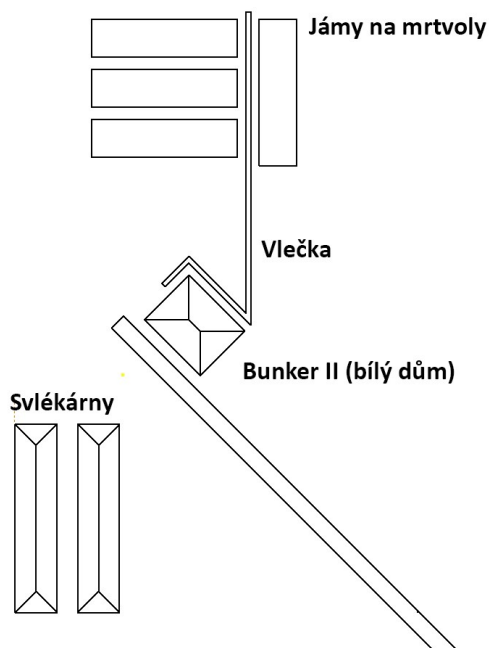


Figure 65 Schematic picture of Bunker II and his surroundings - project of students of SSPŠ

## 4 July 1942, Saturday

A stable Jewish Sonderkommando is established, and they get the task of aiding in the process of extermination. The very same day, 638 people from a transport of Slovakian Jews that just arrived are gassed. From the transport, 264 men and 108 women are spared for work.

## 17 and 18 July 1942, Friday and Saturday

Himmler visits Auschwitz, and spends two days there. In this time, he witnesses the gassing of a transport from the Netherlands in the “White House”, as well as the beating of female prisoners. Primarily, however, he discusses the future construction of the main and of the smaller satellite camps. By the end of the war, several tens of them are established.



Figure 66 Punishing the female prisoners – picture by Zofia Rosenstrauchová

## Summer 1942

The first special group of prisoners that have the task of sorting the belongings of the murdered and the interned. At first, the belongings are sorted in Block 26 in Auschwitz I, but there are already so many things, that six buildings near the Auschwitz I camp must be built. The prisoners of this commando call this place Canada, as they believe Canada is the land of plenty. This is a privileged commando, as its members have access mainly to the food that they find in the belongings of the victims. Soon, however, they also learn to “organise” valuables, to trade with them and also to corrupt the Nazis with them. Many SS officers let them steal the valuables on purpose, and then let themselves be bribed by them. Corruption begins to flourish.



Figure 67 Sorting things at Canada - [www.yadvashem.org](http://www.yadvashem.org)



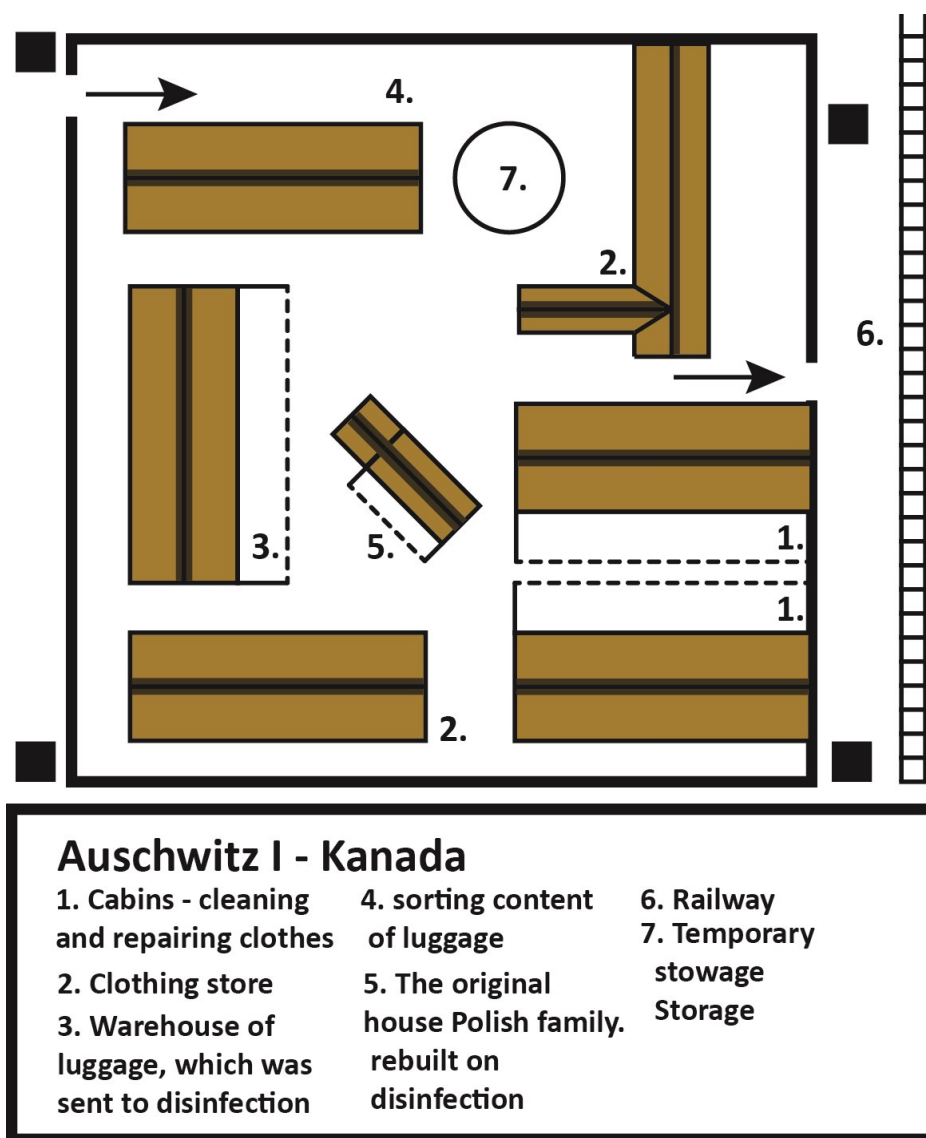


Figure 68 Project of students of SSPŠ

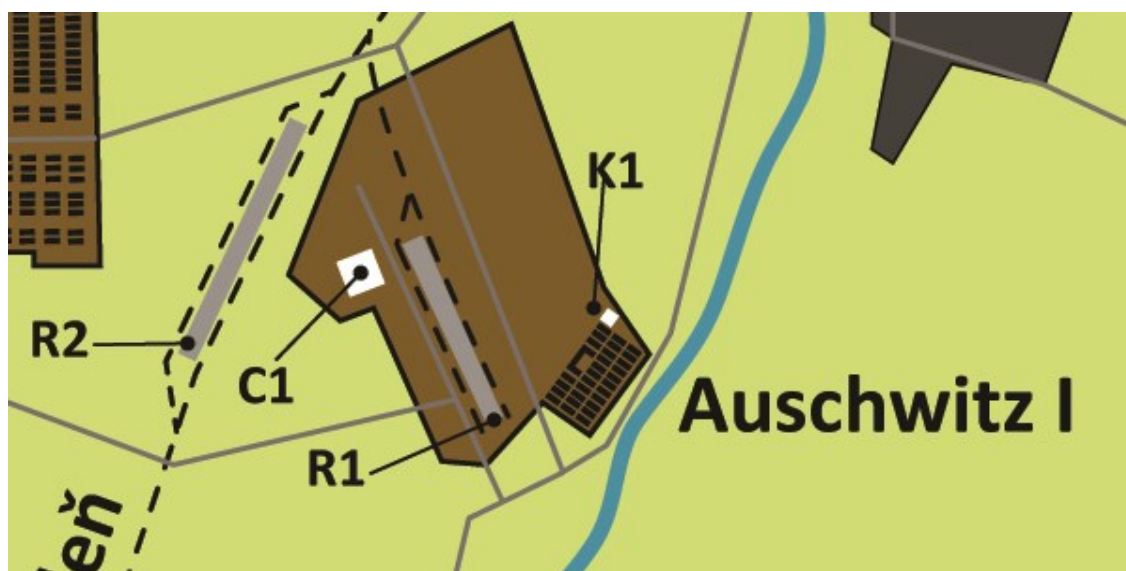


Figure 69 Location Canady : C1 – object Canada, R1 a R2 – railway ramps, K1 – Crematorium I. -

## 28 July 1942, Tuesday

Thirty-six-year-old Nazi physician SS-Sturmführer Horst Schumann begins working at the camp. This Air Force lieutenant soon begins working in the sterilisation programme. Immediately after arriving, he does selection and sends the first prisoners to death by phenol injections.

Murder by phenol injections has already become a traditional method of execution in the camp. It is used when a smaller number of camp prisoners, deemed to no longer be able to work, is selected. The victim is forced to strip bare, is led into the respective rooms in Block 20, is sat down on a chair and is held by two executioner's aides, who are also inmates. The right arm is straightened out and the left is held up so that the chest is tightened. The medic then jabs a long needle directly into the heart. The prisoner falls into a coma within 15 seconds.

The most active applicator of phenol injections is thirty-eight-year-old SS-Oberscharführer Josef Klehr, who has a special room reserved for this purpose in hospital Block 20 in Auschwitz I. Prisoners undress in the adjacent washroom; then they are murdered in the special room by injection, and their cadavers are towed to the room across the hall. From here, they journey to the crematorium. Klehr boasts that he can manage to kill up to three prisoners per minute, and sometimes he uses two stools in order to save time. He often travels in the ambulance to the Bunkers, where he pours out the crystals of Zyklon B from the cans into the gas chambers.

Others who apply the phenol injections are the SS officers in the positions of medics, thirty-five-year-old Herbert Scherpe and forty-year-old Emil Hantl. Since they are very polite, and always meet and greet, they are considered among the inmates to be civil murderers.

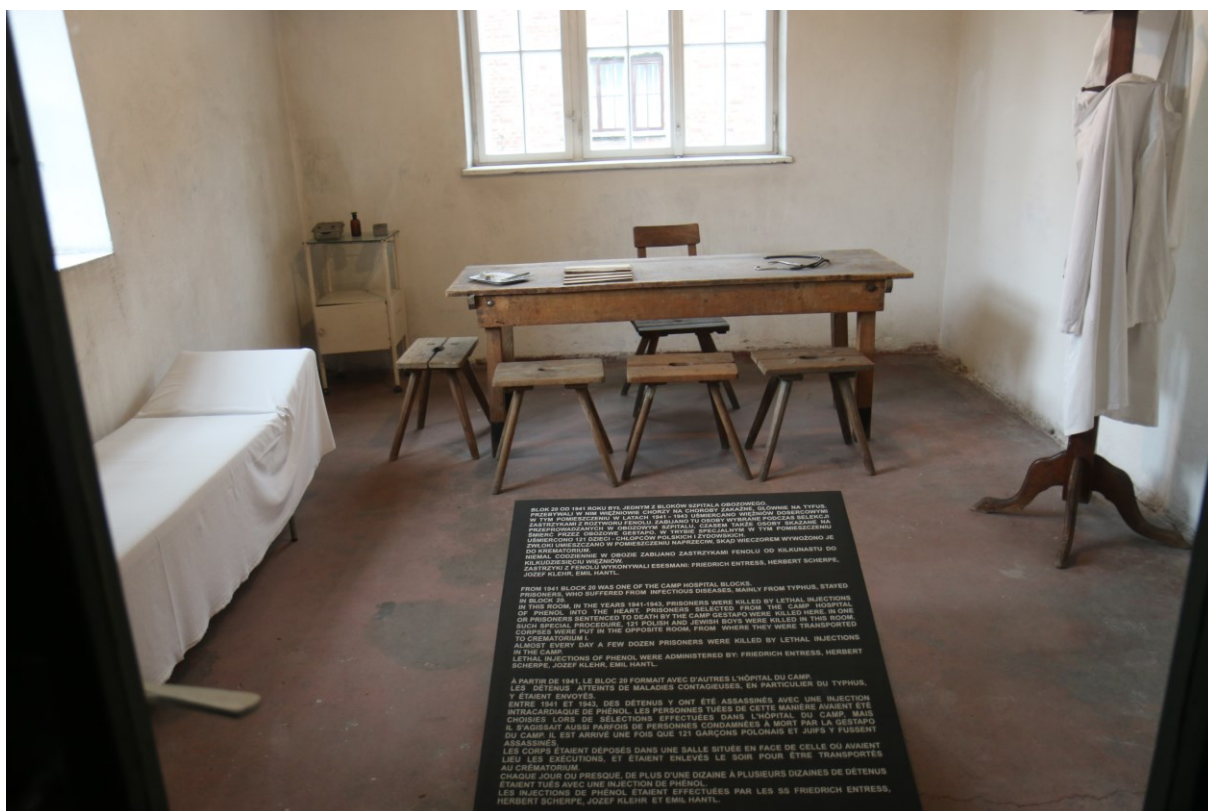
Dr. Schuman later also comes up with the brand T. M., which is very morbidly ironic. It stands for "Therapia Magna Auschwitzcience", or "Grand Auschwitz Therapy". This is how this doctor labels the prisoners that are sent to the gas chambers. The brand eventually becomes common.



Figure 70 Horst Schumann



Figure 71 Josef Klehr





## **29 July 1942, Wednesday**

The German industrialist and Nazi opponent, Eduard Schulte, travels to Zürich, from where he informs Jewish organisations in the USA about the fact that Himmler was present at the gassing of 449 Jews in Auschwitz II – Birkenau. This and a series of further information convinces the British and American governments to condemn these practices in December 1942, and to warn those Nazis responsible about the repercussions of their crimes, but the Allies take no other effective action in order to save the European Jews.

## **July to September 1942**

Thanks to the swampy environment and to the high temperatures, typhus becomes rampant in both the Auschwitz I and the Auschwitz II – Birkenau camps. Perhaps the epidemic is also fuelled by the mass graves in Birkenau; the bodies in the pits are decomposing, the ground bursts and an incredibly foetid red-black mass oozes from it. There are swarms of flies everywhere. The decomposing bodies are also contaminating the groundwater, which brings in the complaints of people living in the environs of the camp.

## **August 1942**

Transports of French Jews arrive, as well as Jews from Slovakia, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Those not able to work are immediately gassed upon arrival.

## **August 1942**

The camp Auschwitz III – Monowitz is established. The factory I. G. Farben is constructed. Thousands of prisoners die during its construction; many are beaten to death when considered to be inefficient, or are shot directly at the construction site.



**Figure 74 Wretched prisoners – picture by Mieczysław Koscielniak**

## **August 1942**

Thirty-year-old inmate Herman Langbein is transferred from Dachau to Auschwitz I. This Austrian Communist and veteran of the Spanish Civil War becomes the scribe for the main doctor Eduard Wirths. He joins the resistance, and provides valuable testimony about life in the camp after the war.

### **7 August 1942, Friday**

The transport from Beaune-la-Rolande, France arrives, and with it seventeen-year-old Samuel Hejblun. He is chosen to join the Sonderkommando, and he hauls the cadavers to the pits. His mother, younger brother, and aunt go to the gas chamber. He, himself, is forced to load his own mother and brother out of the gas chamber onto the wagon.

Hejblun works at the Sonderkommando for only two weeks before he manages to get into the masonry school. This saves his life; he survives and later gives eye-witness accounts about the goings-on in the camp.



**Figure 75 Herman Langbein**

## Mid-August 1942

Female prisoners are transferred from Auschwitz I to Auschwitz II – Birkenau. Here, they are placed into sector BIa, as sector BIb is inhabited by male inmates. The wall separating the women's sector in Auschwitz I is demolished, and the entire camp serves for the imprisonment of men.

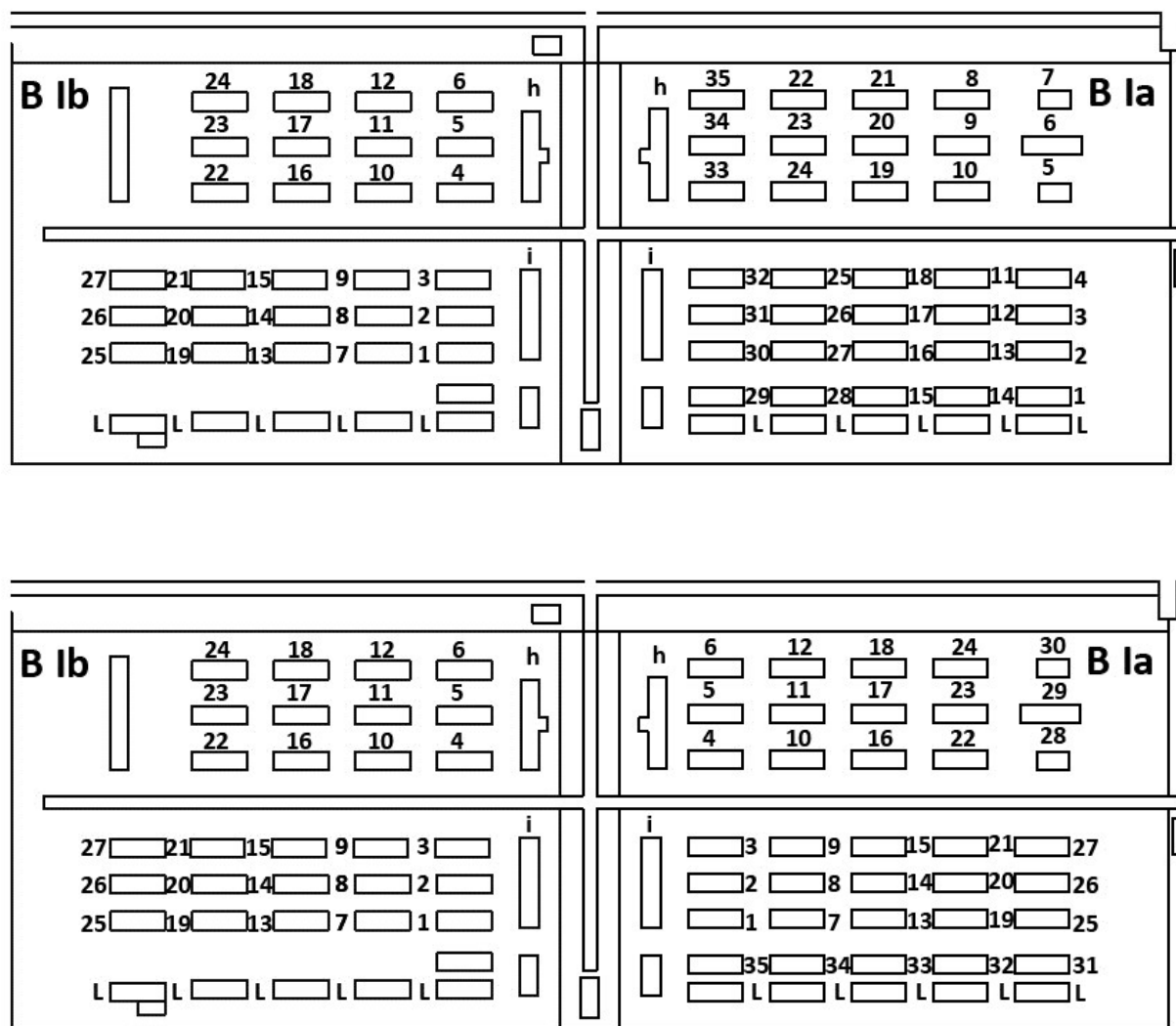
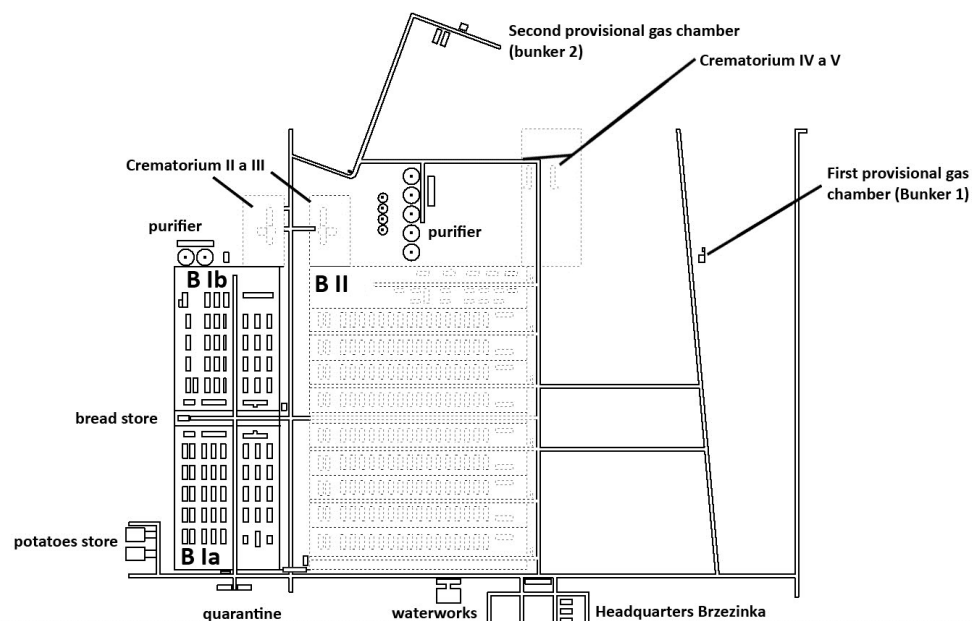


Figure 76 Sector BI. in Auschwitz II. – Birkenau, old and new numbering - project of students of SSPŠ





### Auschwitz II (BRZEZINKA) 1942

**B Ia** - Female camp from August 1942 to January 1945

**B Ib** - Soviet prisoners and male prisoners. Since 1943, women's  
Sector B II and crematorium II, III and crematorium IV, V builds

Figure 77 Project of students of SSPŠ

## 18 August 1942, Tuesday

Some Soviet prisoners of war who are afraid of being gassed attempt a collective escape. At the time, only several hundred of the original ten thousand are left. The escape is not successful, and many of them are shot. A day after the escape, a mere 163 of them remain registered at Auschwitz. Eventually, only 96 survive the hell that is Auschwitz.

## 19 August 1942, Wednesday

The construction of four crematoriums in the Auschwitz II – Birkenau camp is decided at a special meeting. Although we cannot be sure that the idea of establishing gas chambers directly in crematoriums is talked about at this meeting, it is certain that the decision of transporting bodies from Bunker I and Bunker II is made. Also, the immense number of dead that the crematoriums are to cremate indicates much.

Engineers and architects now must know what the equipment really will be meant for. Thus, the number of Germans, i.e. the civilian employees working at the various constructions sites, who know about the mass murders at the camp is not small.



**Figure 78 Brutality against the prisoners – picture by David Olère**

## **August 1942**

Fifty-nine-year-old Dr. Johann Kremer arrives at the camp. This university pedagogue not only takes part of selections, but also searches for extremely emaciated prisoners in order to study their organs during autopsies, as he is interested in how extreme emaciation affects the body. Sometimes, he does not wait for them to die, but has them killed by phenol injections.

From September to November 1942, Kremer is present as a physician at 15 gassings in Bunker I and Bunker II. He keeps a very detailed journal about everything, which later is used as evidence in court. He is sentenced to death, but receives amnesty and is released after ten years.



**Figure 79 Johann Kremer**

## **29 August 1942, Saturday**

The decision for a radical solution to the typhus epidemic is made. After returning from work, selections take place with all commandos long into the night. Prisoners must stand at attention in front of their dormitory, strip bare and run in front of a Nazi physician. Whoever he finds to be weak or sick is sent to the group of death. Several thousand prisoners are chosen this way, some sources indicate up to four thousand, and they are led to special

blocks where they wait for death. They now know their fate and experience extreme mental anguish. They are gradually taken to Birkenau and murdered there in gas chambers.

Some of the victims include Jewish doctors. Sometimes a mere pustule on the body or a saggy backside is enough to be sent to death, and in some cases, an appendectomy scar suffices.

The Nazi physician Entress sends almost all inmates who are hospitalised in the hospital blocks of Auschwitz I to the gas chambers.

Those prisoners who are sent back to work are thoroughly cleaned and held naked in the disinfected blocks emptied by the transferred women until their own blocks are also disinfected.



**Figure 80 Selected ones waiting for their death**





**Figure 81 Selected ones waiting for their death – picture by Mieczyslaw Koscielniak**

## **2 September 1942, Wednesday**

A new head physician, thirty-three-year-old SS-Hauptsturmführer Eduard Wirths, begins working at the camp. He familiarises himself with the horrendous situation of the hospital blocks, which are basically only waiting rooms for death. Prisoners with anything except for a classic injury try to avoid them. Selections occur often in the hospital blocks; naked prisoners are forced to stand in front of a Nazi doctor who then decides if they are already worthy of a phenol injection, or in the case of a greater number of the selected, the gas chamber. Thus, prisoners who are ill remain in their commandos as long as possible with their healthy colleagues, which helps spread the epidemic.



**Figure 82 Eduard Wirths**

Views of Wirths are inconsistent. Even the prisoners confess that the situation improves upon his arrival, and that the number of sick prisoners sent to death decreases. The position of Jewish doctors also significantly improves, and it is indubitable that he even protects them starting at the end of 1942. However, he later gets involved in the experiments done on prisoners. For instance, he infects four healthy prisoners with typhus, since there are momentarily no typhus patients, and all four die. He does experiments on women in connection with cervical cancer. Sometimes, he gives orders for unnecessary operations.

As the head physician, he is, without any doubt, responsible for all experiments done on prisoners, who sometimes literally serve as guinea pigs for testing various medicines for pharmaceutical companies. The doctors have personal relationships with such companies, and most probably also have personal profit from these experiments.

## September 1942

The construction of Crematorium III is begun. This should be a mirror image of the already constructed Crematorium II. It will have dressing rooms with an area of 392.45 square metres and gas chambers with an area of 210 square metres. At first, both rooms are labelled as Morgue 1 and Morgue 2.

The gas chambers are 30 metres long, 7 metres wide, and 2.41 metres high. The undressing room is 49.49 metres long, 7.93 metres wide, and 2.3 metres high. Experts calculate that, if properly crammed, up to 2,500 people could be killed at once.

## September 1942

The I. G. Farben concern begins constructing its factory in the Auschwitz III. – Monowitz labour camp. Until 1944, about 35 thousand prisoners go through the Buna – Monowitz camp, and 23 thousand of them do not survive the forced labour for the company.

## September 1942

Five heavy-duty dump trucks are purchased for the transport of selected people from transports or amongst the prisoners. Thus, the weaker and the ill no longer need to walk to the gas chambers on foot, but are driven there.



Figure 83 Prisoners on their way to crematorium – picture by Jan Komski





**Figure 84 Prisoners on their way to crematorium – picture by Jan Komski**



**Figure 85 Prisoners on their way to crematorium – picture by Jan Komski**



## **5 September 1942, Saturday**

According to the journals of Dr. Kremer, those women who were deemed to be too infirm are gassed. They well know what awaits them; they cry and beg for mercy. They are, however, brutally driven into the gas chamber. The dogs of the SS officers tear pieces of meat from the naked women. The doctor writes into his journal that this is the worst of all horrors, and that they are in what he dubs *anus mundi*. One can also read in this journal that Dante's *Inferno* is a mere comedy in comparison.

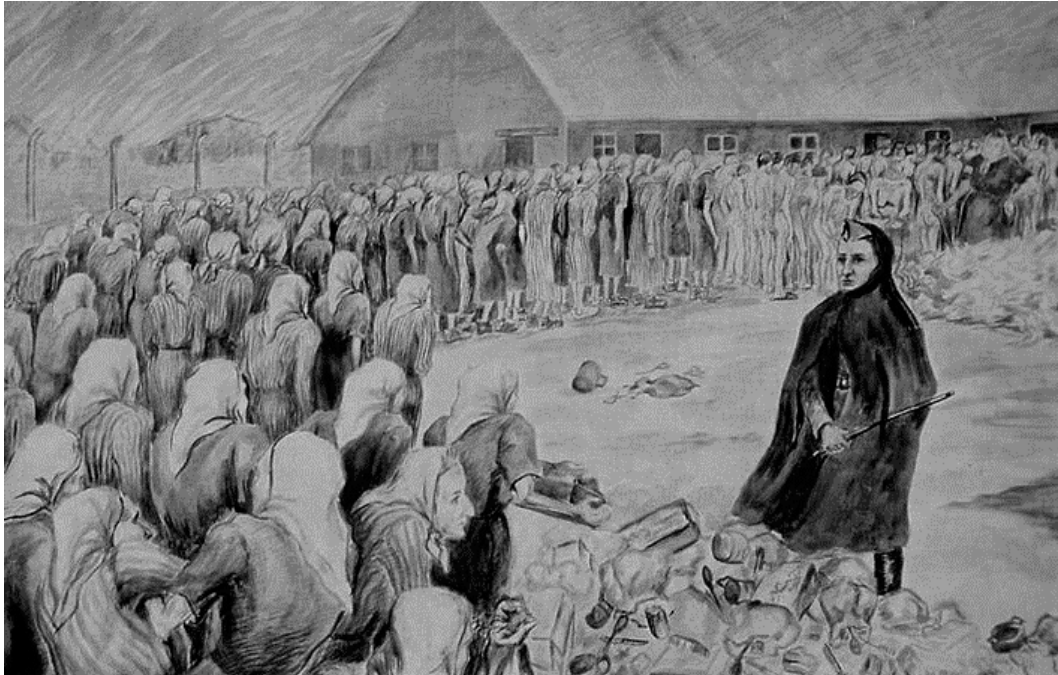


Figure 86 Selection of the camp women – picture by Janina Tollík

## **6 September 1942, Sunday**

According to the notes of Dr. Kremer, 759 Jews from France are gassed.

## **15 September 1942, Tuesday**

The commandant of the camp, Höss, travels with Hössler to visit the camp in Chełm to see how they cremate the dead, as the problem with the interred dead is unbearable. The unbearable smell wafts everywhere; a blackish liquid bursts from the ground, and a new epidemic is imminent not only in the camp, but also in its environs.

## **21 September 1942, Monday**

Under the command of Hössler, the excavation and burning of the bodies buried in the mass graves begins. A special commando that must gradually excavate more than 107 thousand variously decomposed male, female, and child remains is established. Often, pieces of bodies or limbs fall off. Those prisoners who cannot stomach this horrible work are shot on site. They are often stuck up to their waist in foetid muck. Work continues in two shifts 24 hours a day; at night, the site is illuminated by lamp columns.

Work continues up into November, when the last cadavers are cremated. Out of the 1,400 prisoners forced to do this sorrowful task, 1,100 of them are murdered during it and the remaining 300 after the task is finished. Only a handful survive, those who escaped to other commandos at the beginning of the action with the help of friends. Some survive the war and live to tell about this task.

First, the cadavers are cremated in huge pyramids created by interlacing frets and bodies. One pyramid consists of around two thousand bodies. The Nazis mock the situation, calling it a “nature theatre”. Eventually, large open-air pits are dug out and the bodies are cremated in them. The fires burn day and night; the smell is horrible, and no one can escape it. Not even the people living in the surroundings. The four open-air pits are 30 metres long, seven metres wide, and three metres deep.

Those who were just killed are liquidated in the same manner. Their bodies are transported from the gas chambers to the pits, where they are cremated.

Fragments of bone that have not burnt must be crushed by the prisoners. Then, the ash is taken away by lorries to the Sola River, where it is dumped

## **26 September 1942, Saturday**

The reconstruction of the work camp into an extermination camp is approved. Part of the plan is also the construction of two large crematoriums with gas chambers, labelled as Crematorium II and III, and two smaller crematoriums with gas chambers, labelled as Crematorium IV and V. Commandant of the camp Höss receives orders from Berlin regarding what to do with the property of the gassed victims.

The original morgues of Crematoriums II and III are changed to gas chambers in the plans, and hollow columns made of wire are placed inside. A basket with the crystals of Zyklon B is lowered into these columns from the roof.

Both Crematorium II and III have an expected performance of 1,440 cremated bodies in 24 hours, and Crematoriums IV and V have an expected capacity of 536 bodies cremated in 24 hours. The constructors therefore expect that up to 3,952 bodies in 24 hours can be cremated in all four crematoriums. In reality, this performance was never achieved.

## **28 September 1942, Monday**

The execution of selected prisoners by phenol injections takes places in Block 20 at Auschwitz I. They are applied by Josef Klehr. One of his aides is also prisoner Jean Weiss, who even must hold down his own father during his execution. The next day, he is devastated, and Klehr asks him what has happened. When he tells him about the execution of his father, the medic replies that if he had said something, he would have spared him. When a judge asks Weiss in court why he did not tell Klehr about his father, Weiss answered that he was afraid that Klehr would seat him next to his father.

## 1 October 1942, Thursday

The Nazi physician Kremer notes in his journal that he has taken specimens from fresh bodies, namely specimens of the liver, the spleen, and the pancreas. For his research of emaciated prisoners, of course.

## 2 October 1942, Friday

Female criminals from the camp in Ravensbrück arrive. They are meant to start working in the women's camp as functionaries. Their task is to keep order in the camp. Many of them are sadistic, and sometimes the female prisoners suffer sexual abuse.

The same can be said for the men's camp. Here, also, the positions of Kapo and other functionaries are filled primarily by criminals. They often choose young and handsome youths from the prisoners to become their personal servants, known as pipels. Some pipels are fairly well-off, since they receive food and are spared from hard labour, but they pay a high price for such favours, since they must provide sexual services.

There are also some cases when the prison functionaries, both men and women, organise various perverted games, and for which they choose handsome youths and pretty girls. Often, such sadistic orgies end in the deaths of the inmates.

The Polish prisoners that have been in the camp for a longer time form the administrative infrastructure of the camp; they work in offices as scribes. Thanks to this, they can significantly help place prisoners into better commandos, such as Canada or the commando of craftsmen. Here, the prisoners receive larger food portions so that they do not starve to death within three months, as is the case of normal work commandos. To get into a better commando, one either needs good luck, or, as it is usual, through connections. The chosen ones are desperately few, and most of the prisoners perish or are selected to die within three months of their arrival.

Many prisoners are beaten to death or shot while working, in their blocks, or during roll call. Sometimes, the Kapo murders an inmate only to gain a gold tooth, sometimes only for entertainment. The conditions are truly atrocious, and human life has absolutely no value. Not just the Nazis, but any prison functionary can kill anyone at any time, and are praised for their zeal, to boot.



Figure 87 Bringing the dead prisoner out of the block – picture by Jan Komski



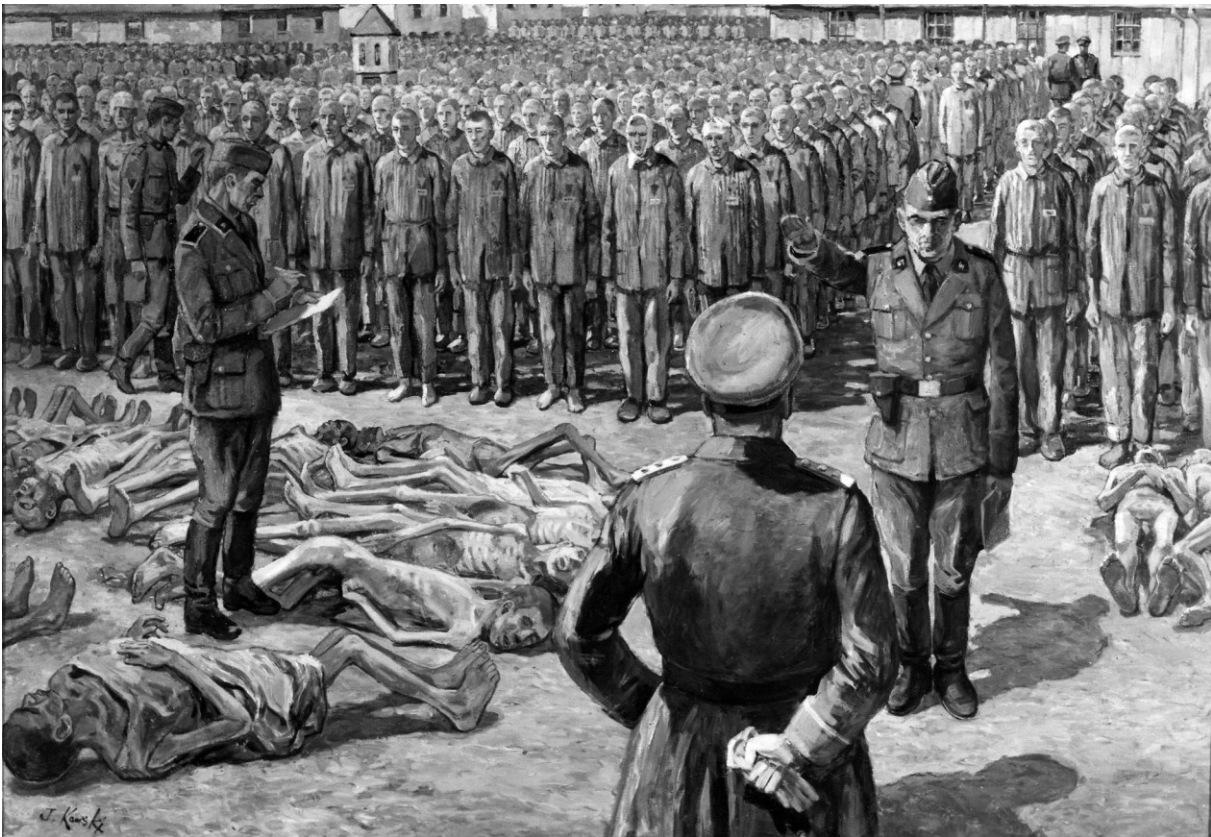


Figure 88 Counting of the still alive and dead – picture by Jan Komski

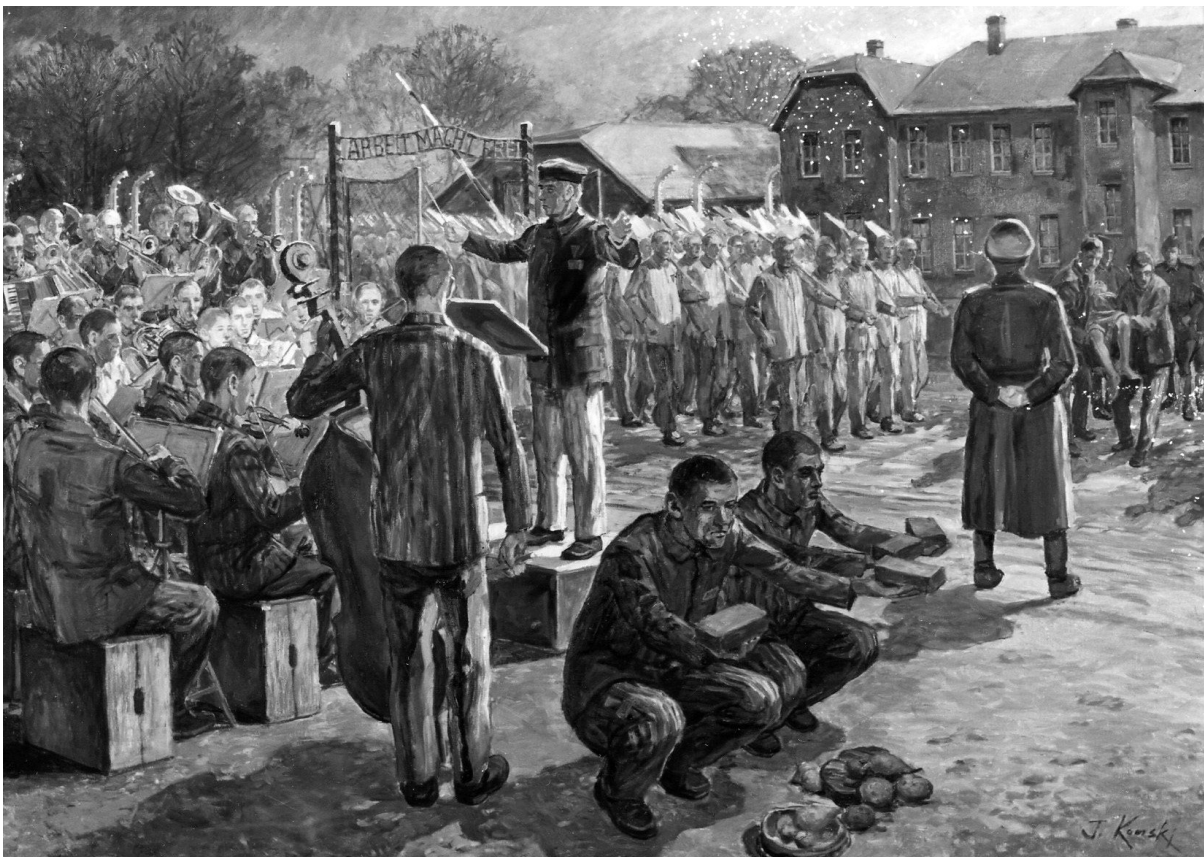


Figure 89 On the way to work, the camp orchestra is playing – picture by Jan Komski



Figure 90 On the way to work - picture by Mieczysław Koscielniak

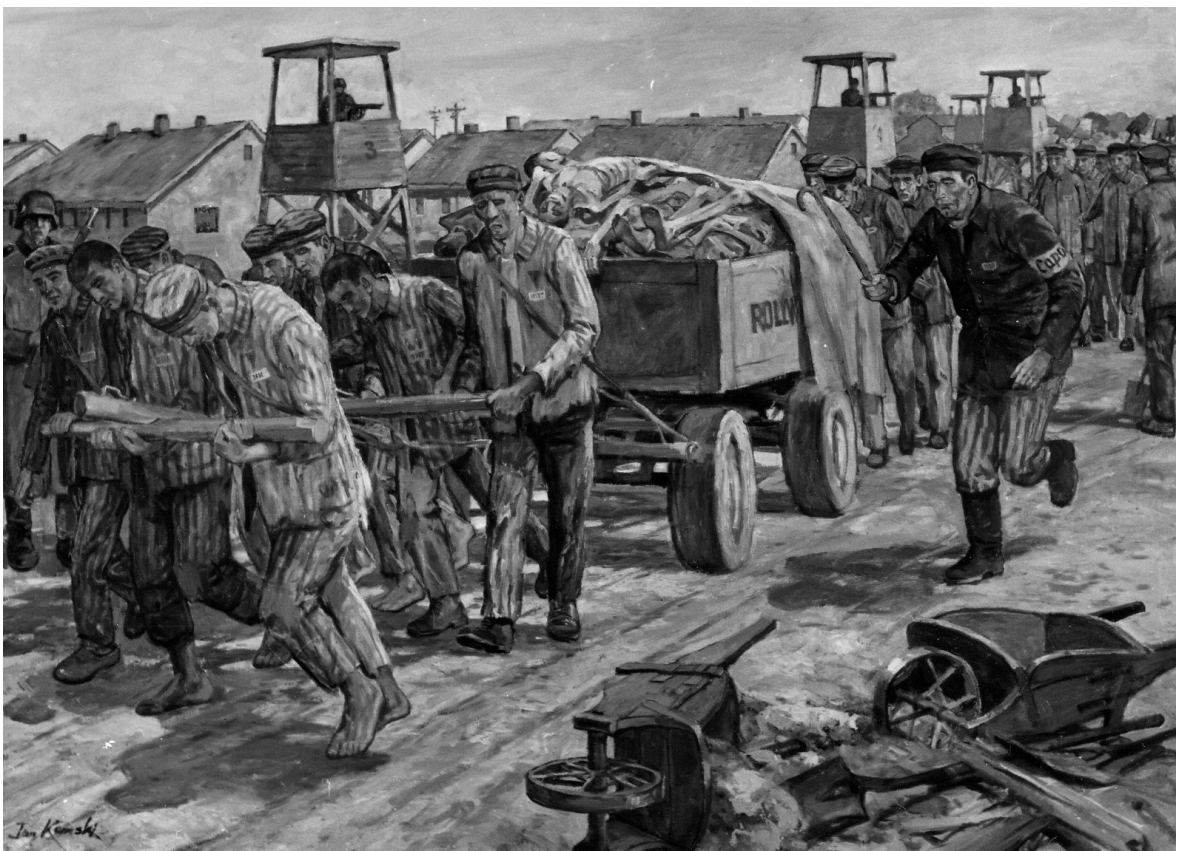


Figure 91 Bringing the dead into crematorium – picture by Jan Komski





Figure 92 Capo and his subordinates – picture by Jan Komski



Figure 93 Prisoners at work, raising of the prison functionaries – picture by Jan Komski

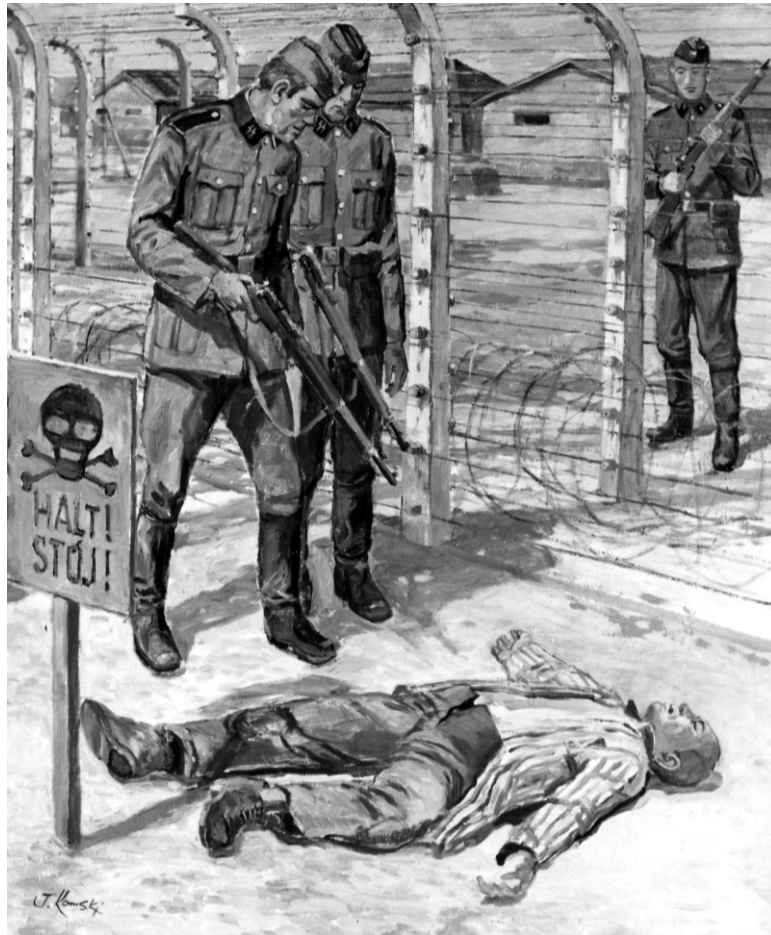




Figure 94 At work – picture by Mieczysław Koscielniak



Figure 95 Bringing „food“ onto the worplace – lowcalorie „soup“ – picture by Jan Komski



**Figure 96 Anyone who comes closer to the barbed wire is shot before he causes short circuit – picture by Jan Komski**



**Figure 97 Rage of capo during work - picture Jan Komski**





**Figure 98 Return from work – picture by Jan Komski**

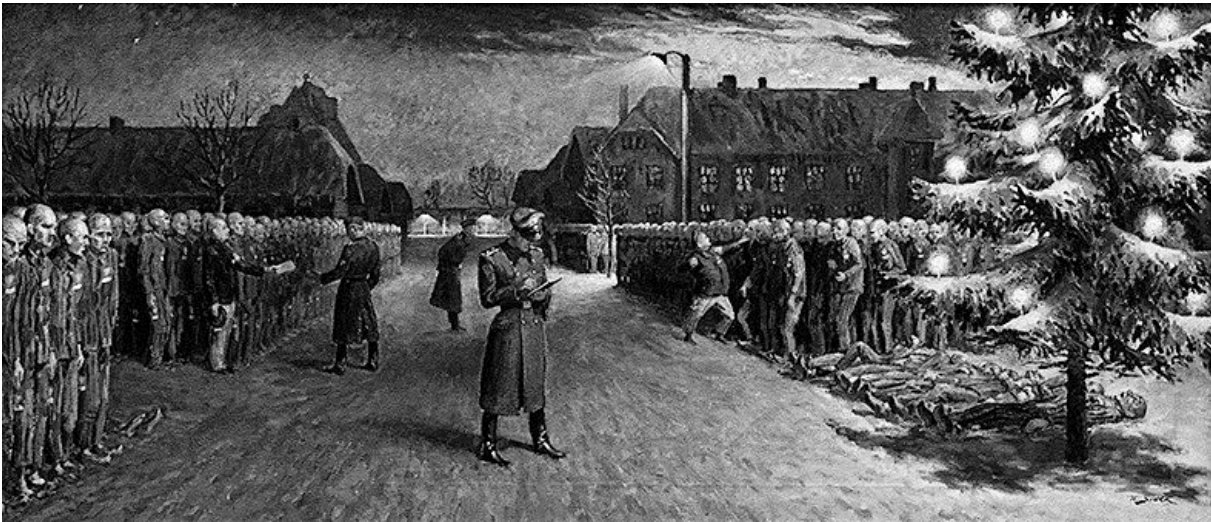


**Figure 99 Return from work – picture by Mieczysław Koscielniak**

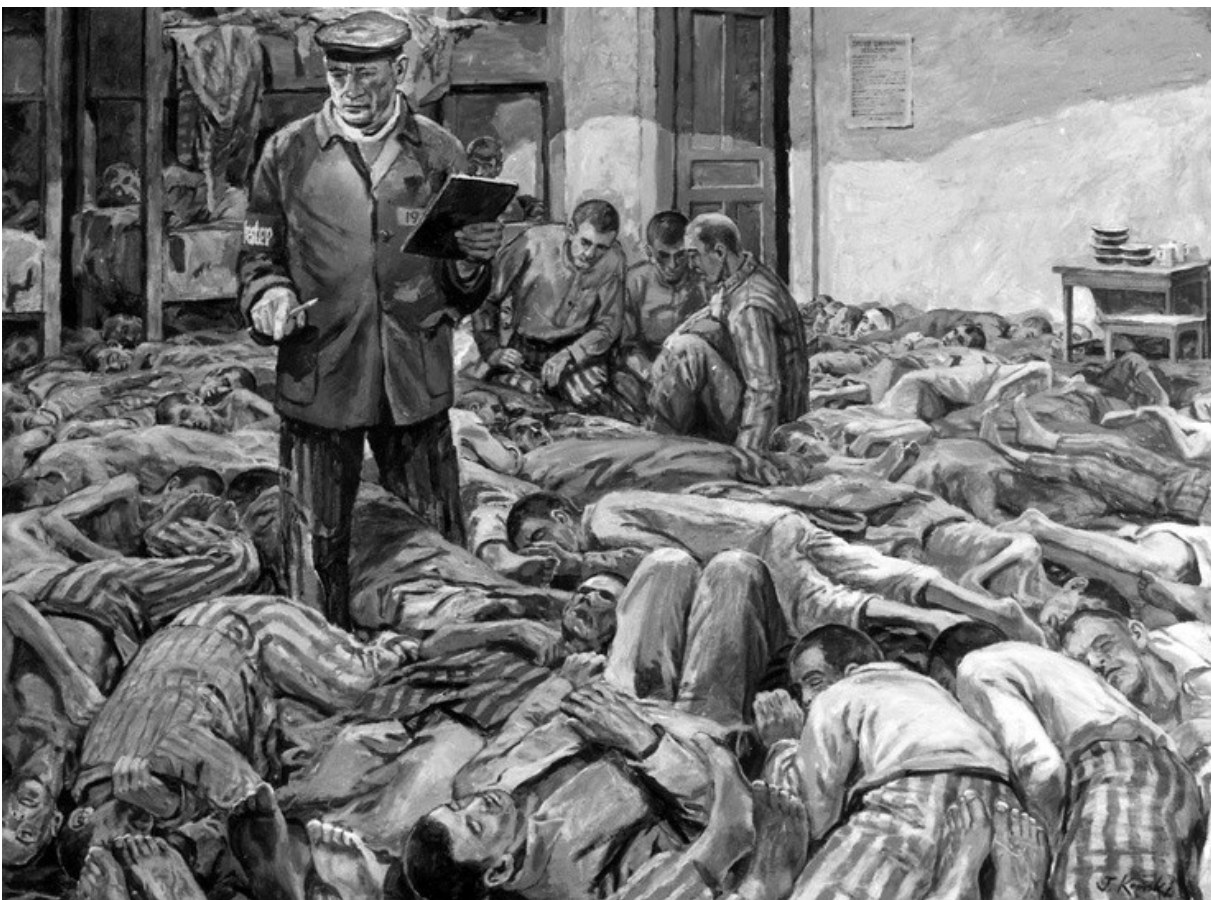


**Figure 100 Punishing prisoner for stealing food – picture by Jan Komski**





**Figure 101 Counting of the still alive and dead – picture by Wladyslaw Siwek**



**Figure 102 Accommodation of prisoners in the blok – the block leader is recounting them – picture by Jan Komski**



**Figure 103 Model of prisoners - project of students of SSPŠ**



**Figure 104 Model of prisoners at work - project of students of SSPŠ**

## **October 1942**

The inmates of Institutes for the Feeble-Minded from all parts of Europe are transported to the camp to be liquidated. The first transport arrives from Holland, and in it are 1,000 men and women who go directly to the gas chambers without selection.

## **10 October 1942, Saturday**

The first transport of Czech Jews from Theresienstadt arrives. After selection, those left of the three thousand people go to the gas chambers.

## **November 1942**

It is decided that 27 satellite camps will be built near the factory. The first is the Buna Camp in Monowice, then there is the camp in Jawiszowice for those prisoners working in the Brzeszcze mine, and a small camp that provides workers for the Bat'a factory in Chelmek.

In 1943, another five camps are established, and another 19 are founded in 1944. By this point, 33 thousand prisoners live in the satellite camps.

## **November 1942**

Construction work on Crematoriums IV and V is launched. The firm Huta is responsible for the work, as they are already building Crematoriums II and III. Crematoriums IV and V are surrounded by trees, and they are dubbed the “forest crematoriums”.

The buildings have dressing rooms with an area of 245 square metres, which simultaneously serve as morgues. The three gas chambers have a smaller area – the first has an area of 98.19 square metres, the second 95.34 square metres, and the third 43.25 square metres. The airtight doors have the same character as those in Crematorium II and III.

Since it was originally planned that these two crematoriums will cremate the cadavers from Bunkers I and II, the gas chambers do not have ventilation. Instead, the architects design another set of airtight doors for the two larger chambers, leading out. After they are opened along with the entrance doors, a draught occurs.

It is possible to heat both larger gas chambers with the installed furnaces, and it is planned that the smaller chambers should be heated with portable coke furnaces. Of course, they are always removed just before the act.

The dressing rooms without ceilings have benches and hooks for clothing; however, the gas chambers do not have fake showers.

## **November 1942**

Thirty-one-year-old Stanislaw Jankowski (really named Altner Feinsilber) joins the Sonderkommando of Crematorium I in Auschwitz I. He survives the terrors of the war and later acts as a witness in court.

## **2 November 1942, Monday**

Nazi physician Horst Schumann starts working at Block 30 in the women's camp at Auschwitz II – Birkenau. There, he begins to arrange a workplace where he can work on his sterilisation experiments with the help of radiating the genitals of youths and girls with x-rays.



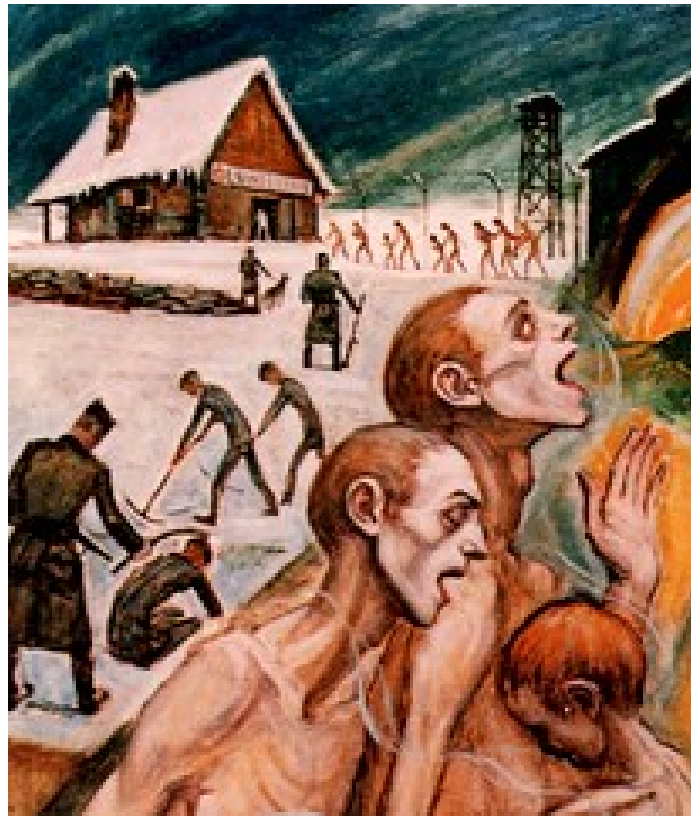
## **7 November 1942, Saturday**

Two members of the Sonderkommando escape, thirty-year-old Ladislaus Knopp and forty-one-year-old Samuel Culea; SS officers cannot find them. It is thus decided that shortly, the entire Sonderkommando will be liquidated. Both refugees are eventually caught, and are killed in Block 11 on 15 December 1942.

As for escape attempts in general, two prisoners attempt to escape in 1940, 17 prisoners in 1941, 173 prisoners in 1942, 295 prisoners in 1943, and 312 prisoners in 1944. Usually, these attempts are unsuccessful and are followed by cruel retaliation. If the escapee has any relatives at the camp, the persecution focuses on them. If not, the retaliation is aimed at their colleagues in the given commando. Sometimes, they are beaten to death, sometimes they are publicly hung, and sometimes they are starved to death in Block 11.

## **12 November until 5 December 1942**

An idea of the chances of surviving in the camp can be made from the following statistics on the number of deaths in a mere 24 days. In the Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II – Birkenau camps, there are 30,000 prisoners, of which 8,200 are women. Of these, 2,000 are gassed in the 24 day period, another 461 inmates who are ill are executed by phenol injections, 25 are executed by shooting, 2 are shot trying to escape, 1 is hung, and 1 is tortured to death. Another 837 starve to death or die of exhaustion, what we could consider to be “natural causes”. Of course, aside from these 3,327 deaths of registered people, another 13,000 people are killed immediately upon arrival in Bunker I and II in this period, who are not registered at all.



**Figure 105 Going inside the Bunker - picture by David Olère**

## 27 November 1942, Friday

In the construction designs of Crematorium II from this date, the underground Morgue I is no longer mentioned as such, but is called a “special underground room”. Since gassing is referred to as “special care”, the change in the name is logically explained.

Also, holes for the pouring in of Zyklon B are created, as well as special, hollow wire columns, into which the crystals shall be lowered in baskets.

Likewise, the doors of this “special morgue” are exceptional, 1.92 metres high, one metre wide, and mainly, have an airtight construction. With the help of iron barriers and tightened screws, they can be hermetically closed. An eyelet at eye-level made of strong, double-layered glass is created, and the Nazi physicians can peep inside through them, and thus discern whether the victims have died yet.

This special “morgue” in Crematorium I has a heating system, which is somewhat impractical for the storage of dead bodies, but it is essential for reaching the 27 degrees Celsius needed to release the cyanide from the crystals in the wintertime. Engineer Kurt Prüfer, an employee of the Topf Company, personally designs the construction of the heating system on 19 February 1943.

However, since the heating system breaks down, the rooms of Crematorium II are pre-heated in the winter before gassing with portable coke stoves, just like in Crematorium III.

The blueprints provide clear evidence that the decision of constructing gas chambers directly in the crematoriums was made no later than in Autumn 1942.

## 6 December 1942, Sunday

A transport with 2,500 Polish Jews arrives, of which 2,094 people do not pass through selection. Some of them go directly to the gas chambers in Bunker II, others, however, must wait for death in the dressing rooms until the next day. They hear the cries of the executed throughout the night, and experience pure terror until 11:00 a.m. Then, they, too, die the same agonising death.



Figure 106 Bunker II. – picture by David Olère

## **9 December 1942, Wednesday**

Another six men of the Sonderkommando escape. Two are caught and are executed on 17 December 1942, and the fates of the four remaining men is unknown. It is thus not clear whether they survive the war or are later killed.

## **9 December 1942, Wednesday**

The Sonderkommandos of Bunker I and Bunker II are gassed in Crematorium I of the Auschwitz I camp. This is about 300 men. Afterwards, their bodies are cremated in the crematorium.

## **9 December 1942, Wednesday**

That evening, twenty-seven-year-old SS-Hauptscharführer Otto Moll chooses 300 Jewish men of the transport from the Mława ghetto that just arrived, and names them as the new Sonderkommando. He also replaces SS-Obersturmführer Franz Hössler in the position of commandant of Bunker II.

One of the prisoners new to the Sonderkommando is twenty-year-old Shlomo Dragon, as well as his twenty-three-year-old brother Abraham Dragon and twenty-one-year-old Eliezer Eisenschmidt. After the first day, Shlomo attempts suicide, Eliezer sometime later by taking 20 tablets of Luminal, which are sleeping pills. All three survive the camps and the war, and later provide valuable witness testimonies.

Another chosen inmate is thirty-two-year-old Lejb Langfuss, who becomes the chronicler and main persona of the Sonderkommando. He clings to his faith, and also helps the other members of the commando to deal with their traumas. On 26 November 1944, he is chosen to transfer to another camp, which means that he is probably murdered shortly afterwards along with another hundred members of the Sonderkommando.

Thirty-three-year-old Salmen Gradowski also joins the commando probably on this day, and he also becomes a significant member of the group and chronicler. He is killed during an uprising on 7 October 1944.

The Sonderkommando is housed in the isolated Block 2 in the BIb sector.

## **10 December 1942, Thursday**

Another 3,700 men, women, and children are gassed in Bunker I and II. The new Sonderkommando starts its work.



**Figure 107 Otto Moll**



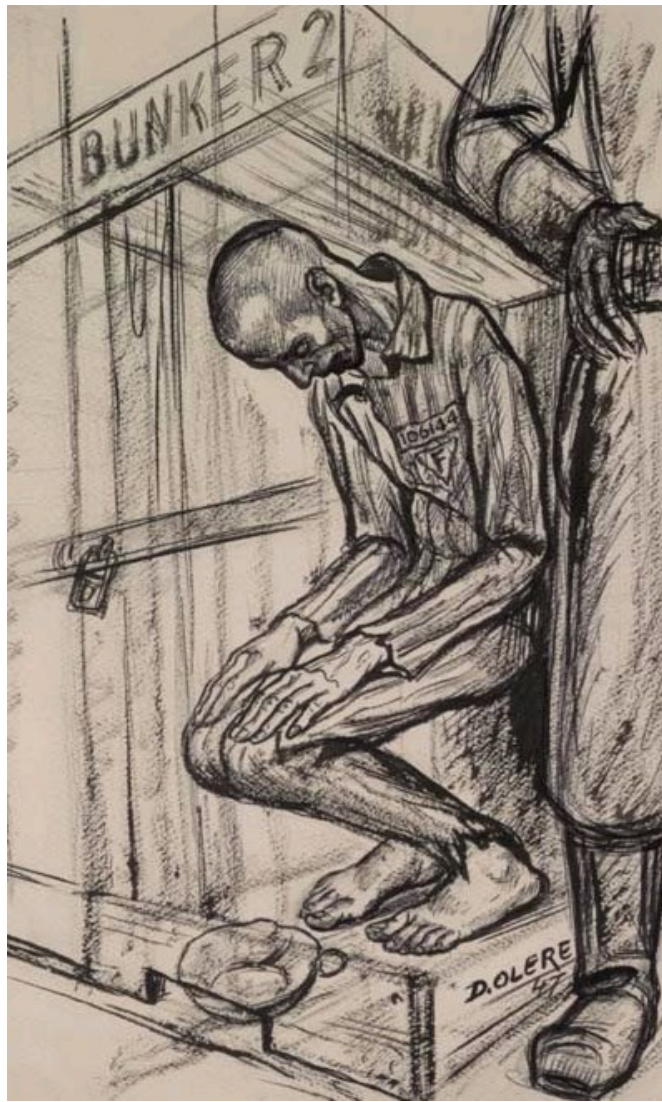


Figure 108 Prisoner waiting by the Bunker II for the people to die inside – picture by David Olère

# BUILDING AN INFERNO

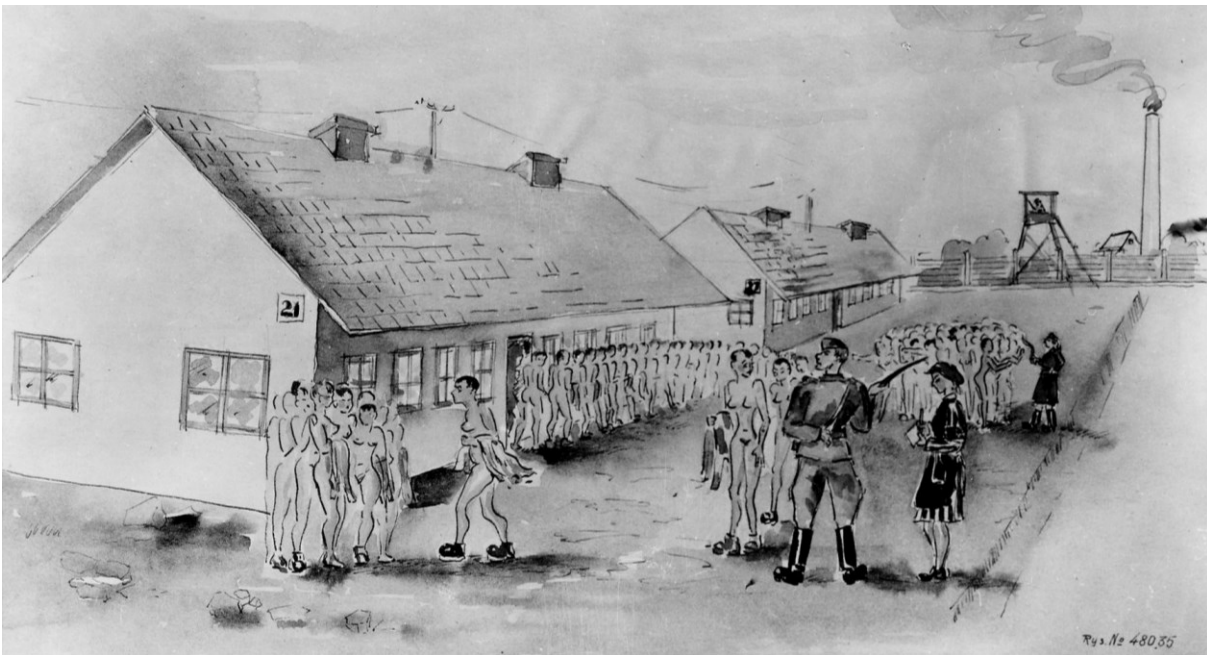


Figure 109 Hell of Auschwitz – picture by David Olère

## December 1942

The female prisoners of Auschwitz II – Birkenau are deloused. After being bathed, they are forced to stand naked in the frost. Many of them do not survive this procedure. Some freeze to death on the spot, others die of the effects of hypothermia later.





**Figure 110 Women after their purgation – picture by Zofia Rosenstrauch**

## **December 1942**

A change in the attitudes of Nazi physicians towards the Jewish doctors occurs. The increasing number of inmates results in a need for more doctors. Thus, Jewish doctors are placed into the hospital blocks and they work as full-fledged physicians. Before this point, their help was required only in exceptional cases, and some did not even work as medics, but were placed into work commandos.

## **December 1942**

Forty-four-year-old doctor Carl Clauberg begins working in Auschwitz II – Birkenau. This respected gynaecologist joins the Nazi programme of sterilisation, which is personally supported by Himmler. He has calculated that amongst the European Jewish population, there are two to three million healthy, strong young men and women, who could be spared by being selected, sterilised, and then forced to work for the Reich without the risk of their further procreation.

Doctor Clauberg does research on women between the ages of twenty and forty that have already given birth. His method lies in applying sticky substances through the uterus into the fallopian tubes in an attempt to glue them shut. The injections are applied in three stages throughout several months. He x-rays the women before and after the procedure. He is cold towards them, and is sometimes quite cruel. The injections are applied without anaesthetics, and the women suffer great pain.

Although the small and stocky Clauberg is ranked as a general in the reserves, he is employed as a civilian. In addition, he has his own private clinic not far from the camp.



## **December 1942**

Simultaneously with Clauberg's actions, Nazi physician Horst Schumann begins experimenting with the sterilisation of men and women in hospital Block 30 of the women's camp in Auschwitz II – Birkenau. He, however, decides to use x-rays for this purpose.

He personally chooses youths and girls 18 to 20 years of age. They have to strip bare, and then stand in between two x-rays that radiate their genitalia for several minutes. Several of them die during the experiments after great suffering, and most of the survivors are sent to the gas chambers after the suffering ends, as they have radiation burns and are not able to work.

In order to discern the effects of the radiation on youths, Schumann tests their sperm. He uses a cane covered with a rubber hose, that is stuck into the anus of the victim, brutally massages the prostate and forces ejaculation. He sends the ejaculate to a laboratory in Breslau, today known as Wrocław.

Also, he has the testicles of selected youth removed and the ovaries of selected girls operated out. Sometimes, they are operated twice; in the first operation, one testicle or ovary is removed, and then, after some time, the victim loses possession of their other testicle or ovary. The obtained specimens are again sent to the laboratory in Breslau.

### **16 December 1942, Wednesday**

Ninety youths from a group of 180 young prisoners whose genitals were radiated in the previous days are castrated with only minimal anaesthetics, with only an injection into the spine. Those operated, paralysed by the injections, remain conscious and witness their mutilation. Their desperate cries resound in the surroundings of the operation room. Both, or just one, testicles are removed. The operations have an audience of SS officers, who are thoroughly entertained.

The castrations last all day into the night, and the surgeons are the prison surgeon Dering and the Nazi physician Entress. Due to the speed of the surgical interventions, some operations are shoddily done.

In the next days, the ovaries of the girls are removed, and again with the same speed and under the same amount of anaesthetics.

Unfortunately, some of the operated inmates must undergo another operation in the next few December days, in which they lose their other testicle or other ovary.

Several people die already during the experiments, and the entire episode ends for this group of youths and girls by their selection, and most of them are sent to the gas chambers. Some are sent back to work, but almost all of them either die in the gas chamber or are killed with a phenol injection.

### **24 December 1942, Thursday**

The medic Josef Klehr takes advantage of the absence of Nazi doctors and plays God, deciding on the life or death of prisoners. He sets out to do a selection in the hospital block by himself, and then kills the selected prisoners by phenol injection.

## **End of the year 1942**

The facilities for the SS officers are completed. They have pleasant quarters and servants coming from the ranks of inmates.

## **End of the year 1942**

In the period between May and December 1942, 183,270 deported Jews from Poland, France, Slovakia, Belgium, Germany, Bohemia, Moravia, Norway, and Yugoslavia arrive at the camp. About 120,000 of them are murdered shortly upon arriving, usually older men, women, and children.

SS-Obersturmführer Franz Hössler stands guard during the so-called “special events” in Bunker I and Bunker II.

## **January 1943**

A transport of mentally ill Jewish patients meant for the gas chamber arrives from Holland or Germany. They are in a terrible state, some are dead, other injured, half-naked, or naked. Driving them into the lorries becomes a problem for the SS officers and the members of the prison commando Canada. Many of the ill are beaten to death directly on the ramp by the SS officers.

Nurses have arrived along with the mentally ill, and they calm their patients, helping to pacify them. Maybe this is the reason that these young and healthy women end up in the gas chambers with them, although some of the SS officers are of the opinion that qualified health workers are needed in the camp.

## **January 1943**

From January 1943, children are killed more and more often by phenol injections. These are children that have been temporarily admitted to the camp for various reasons, but their liquidation is decided upon.

## **January 1943**

Prisoners undergo what is known as the “Finnish Sauna”. In sector BI of Auschwitz II – Birkenau, there are two special buildings called the “sauna”. The buildings have two rooms separated by an airtight door. In the first room, a massive brick oven heats up large rocks. Primitive benches, cascading down from the ceiling, are located on the opposite wall. Naked prisoners sit on these benches, one next to the other, as many as can possibly fit. Water is poured over the heated-up rocks, making the people sweat.

Then, the doors to the adjacent room are opened, and the prisoners are herded under the cold showers in it. After the shower, one towel is used to dry off as many as ten prisoners, or they must dry off by themselves. In the next room, they receive their deloused clothing. Chaos reigns, many do not get their clothing, and often, it is the survival of the fittest.

In the winter months, this procedure often results in pneumonia and the ensuing death of prisoners.

One camp punishment is to pour water over a naked inmate and leaving them to stand in freezing temperatures. It is then only a matter of time before they perish.



Figure 111 Sauna building – present



Figure 112 Sauna building – present

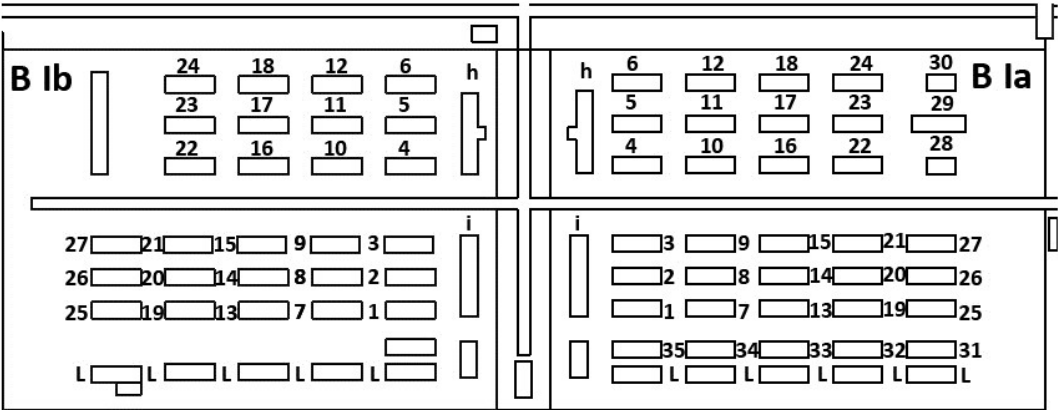


Figure 113 Sector BI – buildings of sauna are marked with letter h - project of students of SSPŠ

January 1943

The Canada group, which cleans out the chambers and sorts belongings, moves to the Auschwitz II – Birkenau camp, to Block 16 in sector BIb. Simultaneously, it is expanded.



Established in the summer of 1942, the original commando numbers 100 men and 100 women in the day shift, and 50 men and 100 women in the night shift. After being expanded, the day shift has 400 men and 200 women, and the night shift has 150 men and 200 women.

The belongings of the interned and the murdered are sorted in a special area not far from the Auschwitz I camp, also known as Canada. It is not until the summer of 1944 that the sorting area and the storage room are moved to the Auschwitz II – Birkenau camp, to special sector BIIg, located not far from the Central Sauna, as well as Crematoriums IV and V.



Figure 114 Collecting stuff after the murdered and internees – illustration image - [www.yadvashem.org](http://www.yadvashem.org)

## February 1943

The funeral commando in Crematorium I of Auschwitz I is expanded. It consists of 22 young Jewish men, and one of them is twenty-six-year-old Henryk Tauber, who survives and becomes a trial witness. They receive basic training in servicing the crematoriums in Auschwitz II – Birkenau. Twelve of them survive this period of initial training.



Figure 115 Henryk Tauber



Figure 116 Herbert Scherpe

## **February 1943**

119 Jewish boys aged 13 to 17 are transported to the camp from Zamość; the boys are probably dispossessed orphans that the Germans have caught. They are kept in civilian clothing and are placed in the men's camp at BIId in Auschwitz II. - Birkenau. The boys come across as apparitions. The prisoners arrange for a ball and play football with them in the camp. At the same time, however, all of the male prisoners are worried what is going to happen to the boys.

### **23 February 1943, Tuesday**

39 boys interned in Block BIId are selected. They are told to strip bare in the washroom, and are presented to the SS medics one by one; they are murdered by phenol injections applied directly to the heart. This task is assigned to medics Herbert Scherpe and Emil Hantl.

After killing several boys, Scherpe has a mental breakdown. He refuses to kill any more boys. Hantl, however, finishes off the killing.

Scherpe is surprisingly promoted and transferred to Golleschau.

### **26 February 1943, Friday**

The first transport of Romanis leaves Germany for the Gypsy Family Camp, located in sector BIId in the Auschwitz II – Birkenau camp. The Romanis lived together in the camp, and even had civilian clothing. The sector is quite a mess, and infectious diseases thrive there.

The fatal and disfiguring disease noma quickly spreads especially among the young. It is this very disease that later interests Dr. Mengele, and thirty-six-year-old Jewish doctor Berthold Epstein, who led the Children's Hospital in Prague before the war, aids him in his research. He tried to escape persecution by going to Norway, where he was arrested and handed over to the Nazis. His family dies in the gas chambers, and he works as a camp physician. He also helps Mengele with his experiments on Jewish children. He survives his stay at the camp and the war.



**Figure 117 Emil Hantl**

### **28 February 1943, Sunday**

The so-called general appeal takes place in the Auschwitz II – Birkenau camp, in which Nazi doctors select the ill and weak from all of the commandos and send them to their death. The selection takes place outside, and prisoners must strip naked in the freezing cold. That is why some of those who pass selection later get pneumonia, and their fates are sealed.

In the men's sector BIb, this selection literally empties Block 7 where the hospital is located, and over 1,000 women from women's sector BIa do not pass selection. All of those selected are led to the blocks of death, and their lives are ended in the gas chambers in the following days.

The women are transported already naked to the crematorium on the hull of the lorries, and are dumped into a pile in the courtyard. Many are too weak to stand up, and so they are carried into the gas chambers by members of the Sonderkommando. All prisoners know what awaits them; they have already been in the camp for some time and they know its secrets. They are in such a devastated state that they can hardly put up a fight.

Similar scenes occur every time the selected prisoners are executed. According to their testimonies, these are the worst moments for members of the Sonderkommando. They are embarrassed that they are strong, clean, and well-clothed, whereas the victims of the selection are emaciated, have lice, and are dirty.



**Figure 118 Slection and desinfection of women – picture by Jan Kowski**



**Figure 119 Bringing of the half-dead women to the gas chamber – picture by David Olère**



## **1 March 1943, Monday**

On this day, the fates of the 80 remaining Jewish boys from Zamość are sealed. The entire event has the same course as the mass murder of their colleagues a week earlier. The boys are again told to strip down, and then they receive phenol injections. Except this time, Scherpe is replaced by Josef Klehr, who does not hesitate nor does he breakdown. Thus, all are killed, even the eldest, who could have certainly worked in the camp. The only thing left in the block reminding one of the boys is the orphaned ball.

## **March 1943**

The secret radio station of the Polish Resistance announces that so far, 65 thousands Poles, 26 thousand Soviet prisoners of war, and 520 thousand Jews have been murdered in the camp. Although these numbers are exaggerated, they do, however, confirm that Poland and the Allies fighting Hitler are aware of the mass murders taking place in the camp. Their inactivity becomes the reason for future reproaches coming from the Jewish nation.

## **2 March 1943, Tuesday**

A foreman of the “Riedel und Sohn” Company writes the following in the journal on hours worked on Crematoriums IV and V: ***“Concreting the floors in the gas chamber.”*** This is fairly telling evidence that people are aware of the purpose of the buildings. It is also evidence that the gas chambers existed.

## **2 March 1943, Tuesday**

Another transport from France arrives. Of the 1,132 deported people, 100 men are chosen to strengthen the ranks of the three-hundred-member Sonderkommando. Again, most of the people from the transport are sent directly to the gas chambers. One of those chosen is forty-two-year-old Chaim Hermann. Before his death in November 1944, he manages to write a message about his work in the Sonderkommando and to hide it in a glass bottle under a pile of ash. This testimony in the form of a letter to relatives, dated 6 November 1944, is found in February 1945.

## **4 March 1943, Thursday**

Crematorium II in Auschwitz II – Birkenau begins trial operations. Twelve trained Jewish inmates arrive from Crematorium I in Auschwitz I, among them is also Henryk Tauber. Kapo Morawa accompanies them. The first true death factory built by German engineers and architects awaits.

Also, thirty-six-year-old German prisoner August Brück arrives from the crematorium in the Buchenwald camp. Brück, a career criminal, becomes the head Kapo of a special commando for all four crematoriums.

At this point, the Sonderkommando consists of about 400 men, which is the status quo until February 1944. Those members who die or are murdered are always replaced. The physician of the Sonderkommando becomes thirty-five-year-old Jacques Pach from Paris,

who dies in November 1944. With the silent acceptance of the guards, he uses the medicines from those murdered from transports. This way, they build up an entire pharmacy. Sometimes, however, the members of the Sonderkommando try to kill themselves with the sleeping pills.

The commandant appointed for all four crematoriums is forty-six-year-old SS-Oberscharführer Peter Voss. Although he sometimes shoots those sentenced to death himself, he is civil towards the members of the Sonderkommando, and sometimes he talks and jokes with them. At the same time, he enriches himself; one of the tailors must sew valuables into his uniform when he goes on leave for vacation. He, himself, is never punished for his crimes, and he dies at the age of eighty-nine as a free and probably rich man.

Forty-one-year-old David Olére joins the Sonderkommando, a Polish-French painter, shipped in two days previous in the transport from Drancy in France. Olére eventually survives the war, and immediately afterwards creates a series of paintings documenting the terrors that he lived through. During his work in the Sonderkommando, he draws pictures for the Nazis and works as an interpreter.



**Figure 121 Peter Voss on the sketch by David Olére**



**Figure 120 David Olére**

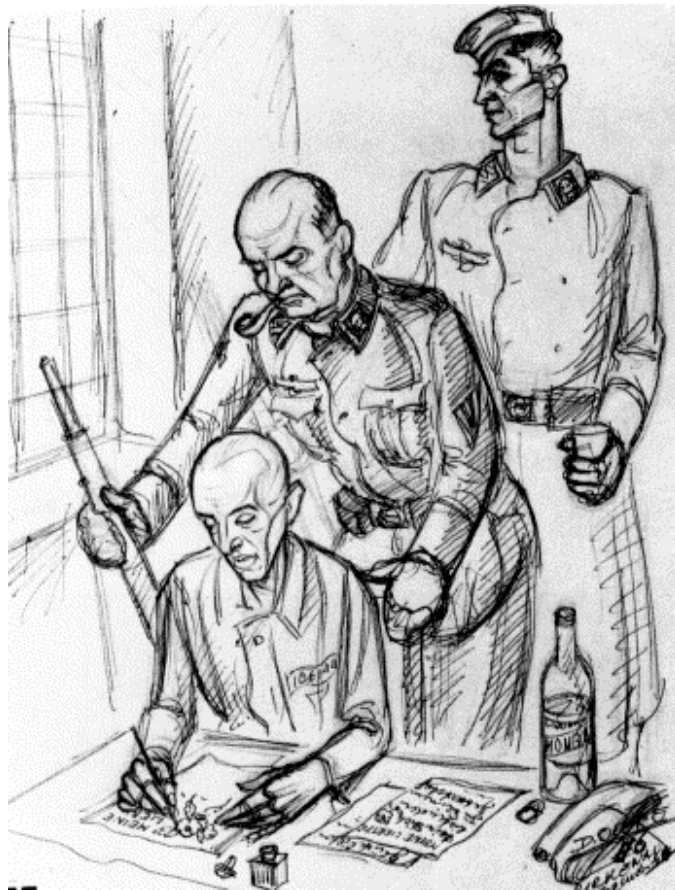
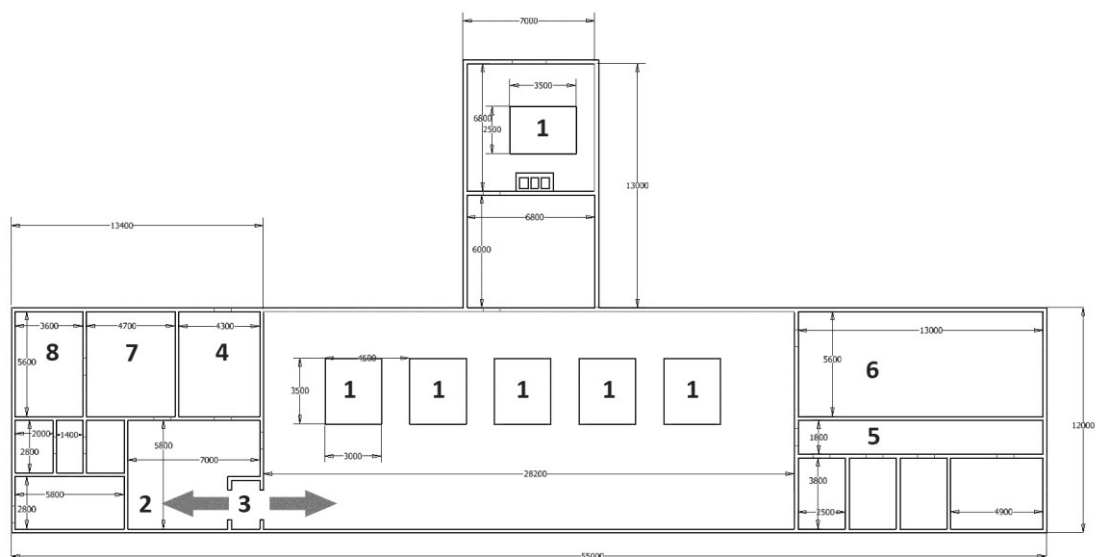


Figure 122 Prisoner making something for SS – picture by David Olère



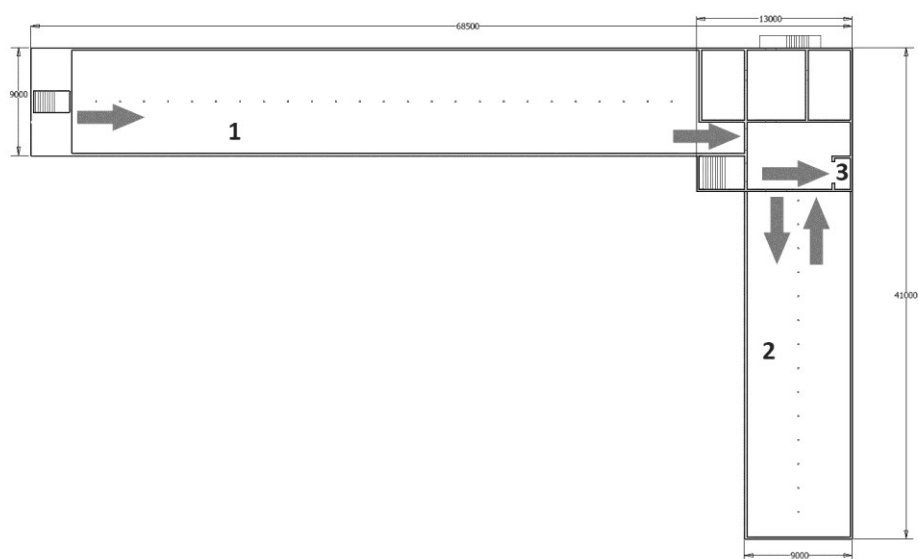
Figure 123 August Brück – man in the right – Picture by David Olère





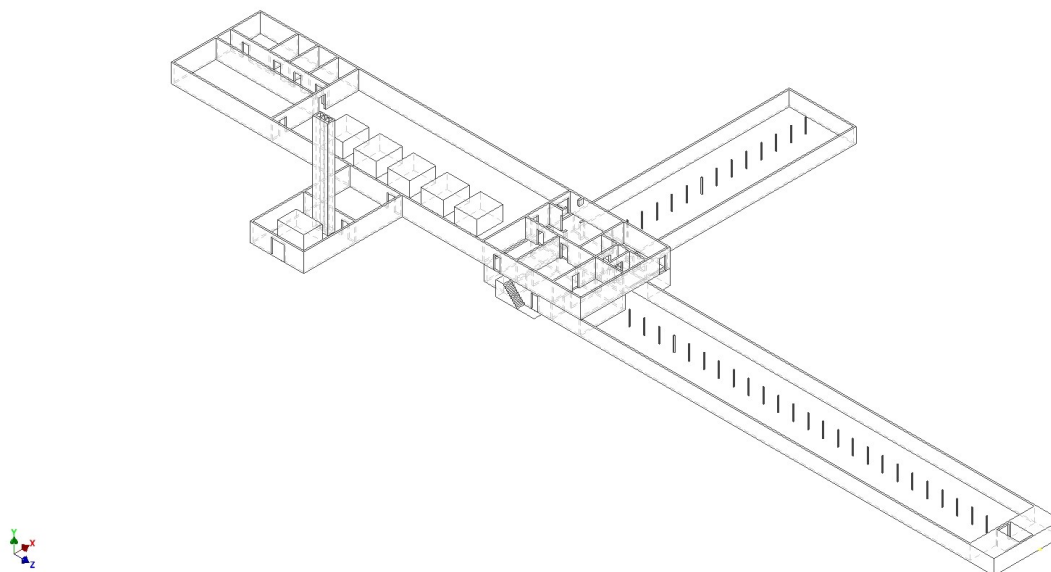
### Krematorium II / Crematorium II

1. Kremační pece / Ovens / Feuerbestattung Öfen
2. Márnice / Leichenhalle / Mortuary
3. Výtah na mrtvolu / Lift für Leichen / Lift on corpses
4. Vestibul / Vestibule / Vorhalle
5. Dozorce / Aufseher / Supervisor
6. Sklad koksu / Coke / Lager von Koks
7. Mengeleho pracovna / Mengeles Studie / Mengele's Study
8. Mengeleho pitevna / Mengeles Autopsieraum / Mengele's autopsy room



### Krematorium II / Crematorium II

1. Svlékárna / Undressing room / Auskleidraum
2. Plynová komora / Gas chambre / Gaskammer
3. Výtah na mrtvolu / Lift für Leichen / Lift on corpses



**Figure 124 Schematic pictures of Crematorium II - project of students of SSPŠ**



**Figure 125 Model of ground floor of Crematorium II. - project of students of SSPŠ**

## **5 March 1943, Friday**

A demonstration cremation of 45 male cadavers transported from Bunker II takes place in Crematorium II. The cremation occurs under the surveillance of an expert committee from Berlin. They observe everything with stopwatches in hand and regularly look into the ovens to evaluate the burning of the cadavers.

The bodies burn for about 45 minutes, which is longer than the experts expect. They eventually agree that this is caused by the insufficient drying out of the ovens. A command is made to keep the ovens heated for a week without burning any bodies.

## **9 March 1943, Tuesday**

Two prisoners in the Sonderkommando escape, one is thirty-four-year-old Bela Foeldisch and the name of the other is unknown. The unknown prisoner is shot while running, and Foeldisch is caught, tortured in Block 11 in Auschwitz I, and beaten to death on 16 May 1943.

## **13 March 1943, Saturday**

The first murders by gas take place in Crematorium II. The victims are 1,492 men, women, and children from the ghetto in Krakow. The event is again observed by experts from Berlin. This time, an exception is made and the lights are not turned off during the mass murder in the gas chamber, allowing the honoured guests to watch the dying victims through the eyelet.

Death by gassing occurs in five minutes, but the burning of their bodies takes two days.

Since the dressing room is still full of materials and construction machines, the victims are forced to undress in a temporary wooden shack in front of the crematorium. Naked, they are then driven down a staircase next to the crematorium into the underground gas chambers. They wait there until the next group undresses.

In contrast to scenes we see in the cinema, the door to the gas chamber is not slammed shut behind the naked people. Since a maximum of five hundred people can undress at once in the big dressing room in the basement of the crematorium, filling up the gas chambers takes a long time. Sometimes, it can even take an hour. The question is if the waiting naked people realise what awaits them, or if they would rather not think about it.

Benches, hooks, and the fake shower-heads are probably not installed into the dressing rooms and the gas chambers of Crematorium II until Autumn 1943. Until then, they are just empty and barren rooms that do not remind one of dressing rooms or showers at all.

In the case that only a small group of deported people of up to 200 people arrives, these people are not murdered by gas, but are shot in Crematorium II or III. First, they must undress, then they are led away and put against a wall in fives. They are shot from close proximity with a six-millimetre small-calibre revolver. The members of the Sonderkommando are forced to hold the victims during the execution. They are instructed to hold the victim and correctly tilt their heads so that the blood does not hit the executioner.

Sometimes, those who do not fit into the gas chambers are also shot. It does not matter whether they are men, women, or children.





**Figure 126 Contemporary Figure of Crematorium II. – In the middle of the picture is a makeshift hut where, in the first gassing, victims undressed - [www.yadvashem.org](http://www.yadvashem.org)**

## **20 March 1943**

Jews from Thessaloniki are gassed. The transport consists of 2,800 people, of which 417 men and 192 women are admitted to the camp. The remaining 2,191 people are designated for immediate liquidation. The ventilation mains of Crematorium II is probably damaged during the cremation of these bodies.



Figure 128 Arrival of the transport, selection – picture by David Olère



Figure 127 Arrival of the transport, selection, project of students of SSPŠ





Figure 129 Selecties by the foundry – picture by David Olère



Figure 130 Selecting people in foundry – picture by David Olère

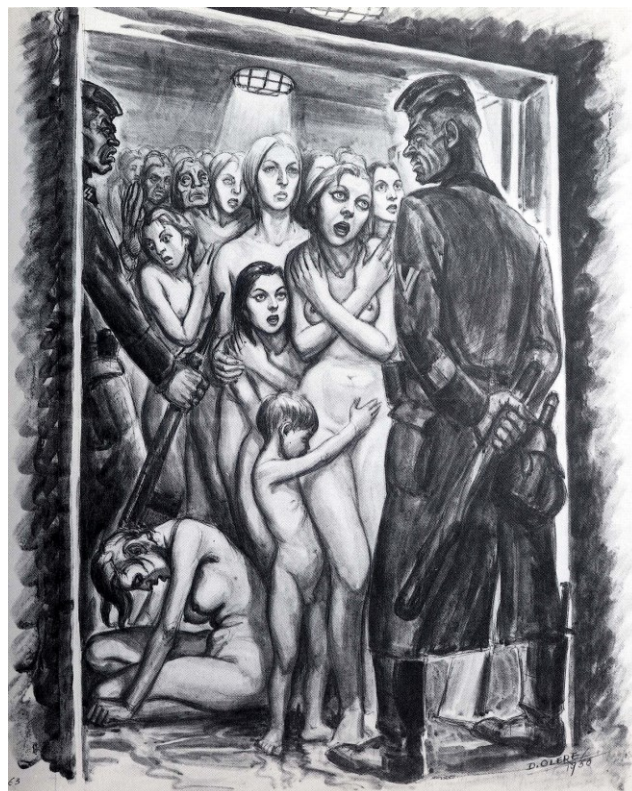


Figure 131 Filling the gas chamber – picture by David Olère





Figure 132 Dying in the gas chamber - picture by David Olère



Figure 133 Opening the door of the gas chamber a pulling out the dead – picture by David Olère



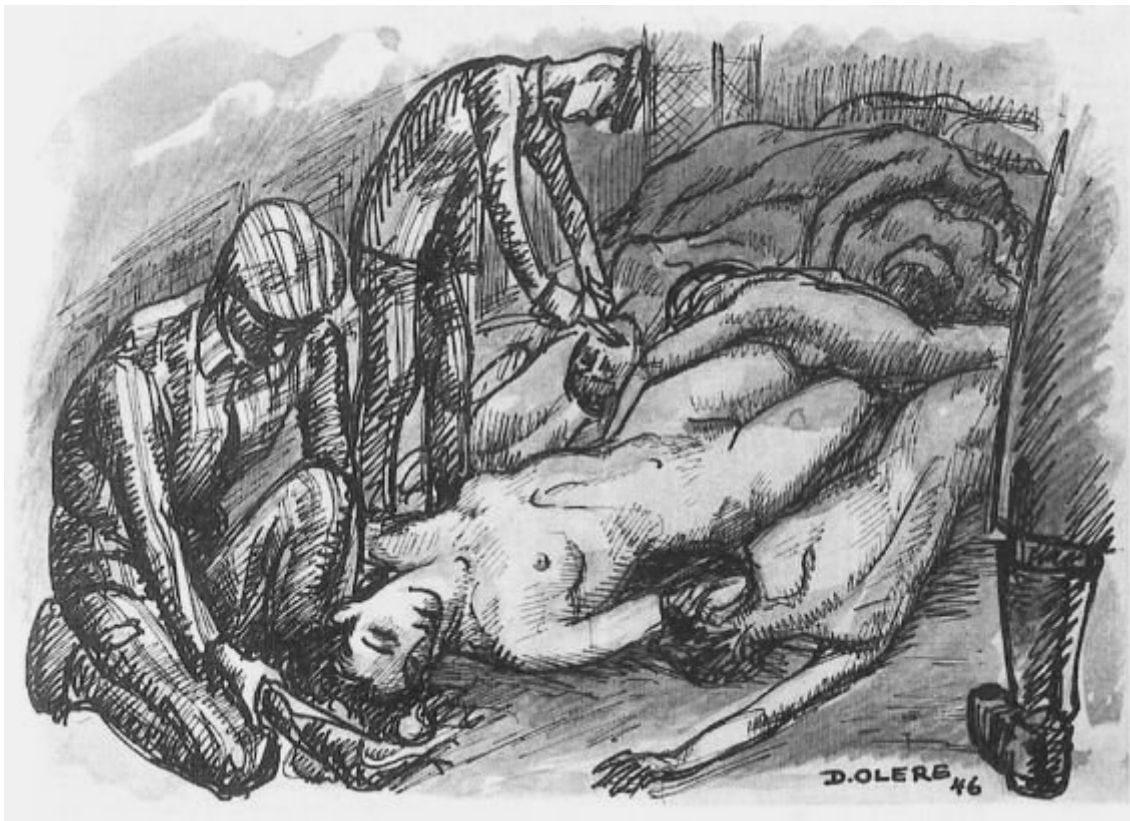


Figure 134 Stealing from the dead – picture by David Olère



Figure 135 Burning the dead – picture by David Olère



Figure 136 SS watching the burning of the dead – picture by David Olère



Figure 137 Sorting prey from the gassed people – picture by David Olère





Figure 138 Drying hair of the gassed people in the attic – picture by David Olère

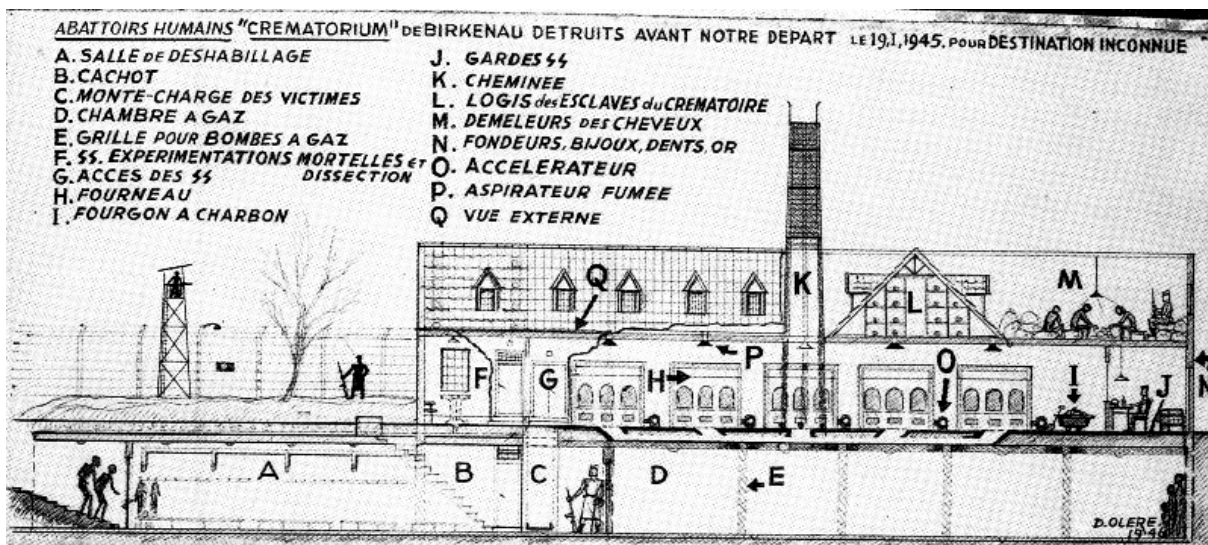
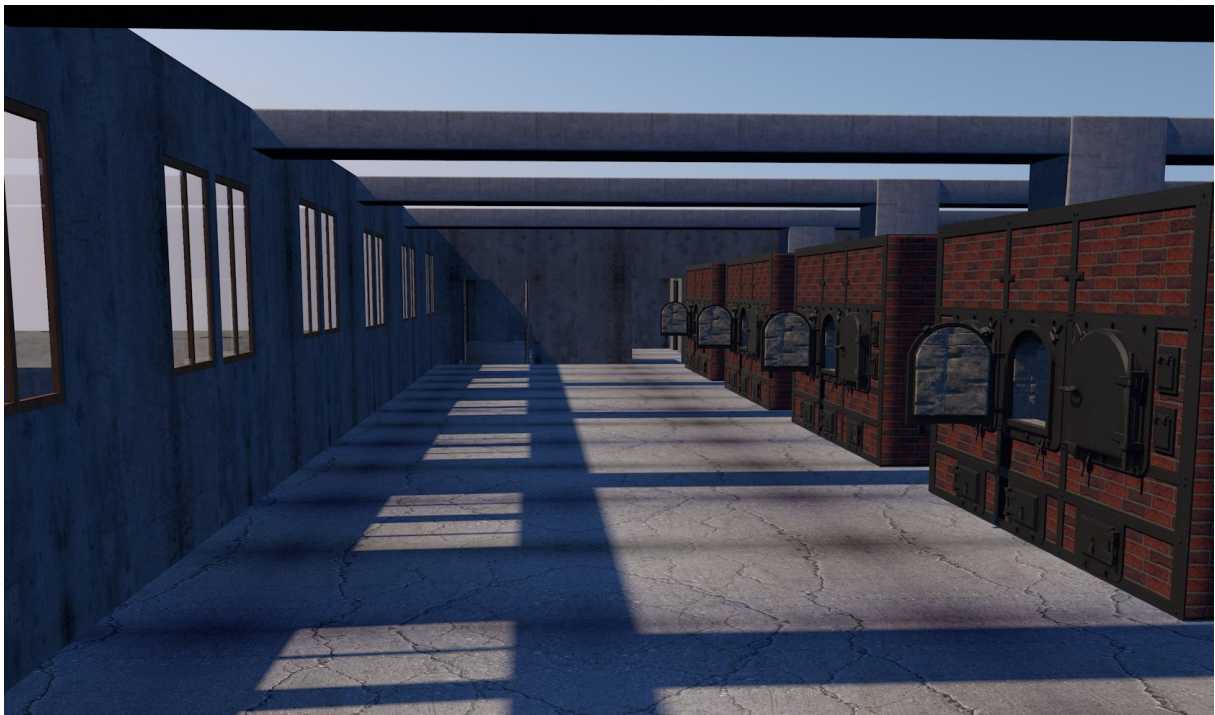


Figure 139 Cross section of the crematorium – picture by David Olère





**Figure 140 Model of Crematorium II - project of students of SSPŠ**



**Figure 141 Model of Crematorium II - project of students of SSPŠ**

## **22 March 1943, Monday**

Crematorium IV is officially handed over. After two weeks of operations, however, an oven with four double chambers bursts, and after futile attempts of fixing it, the crematorium is shut down in May 1943.

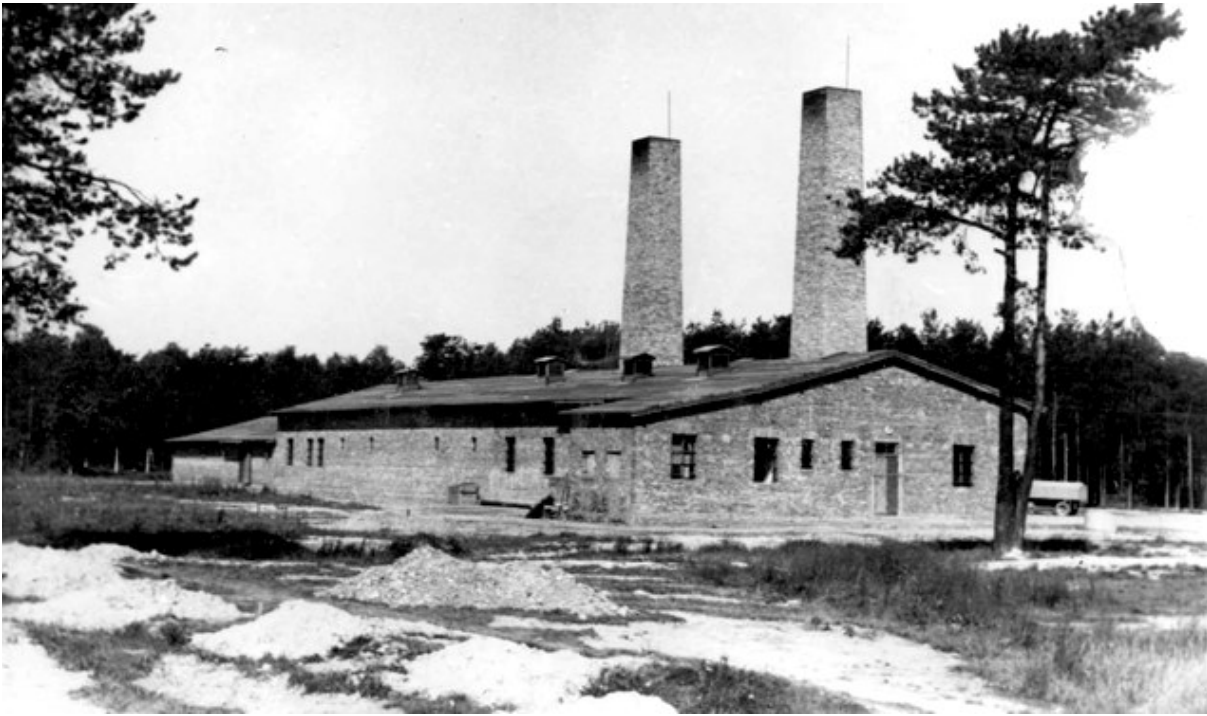


Figure 142 Vintage photo - Crematorium IV. - [www.yadvashem.org](http://www.yadvashem.org)

### **31 March 1943, Wednesday**

Crematorium II is officially handed over.

### **1 January 1943 to 31 March 1943**

In this period, a total of 105,000 Jews are deported to Auschwitz. Most of them end up in the gas chambers.

### **March to June 1943**

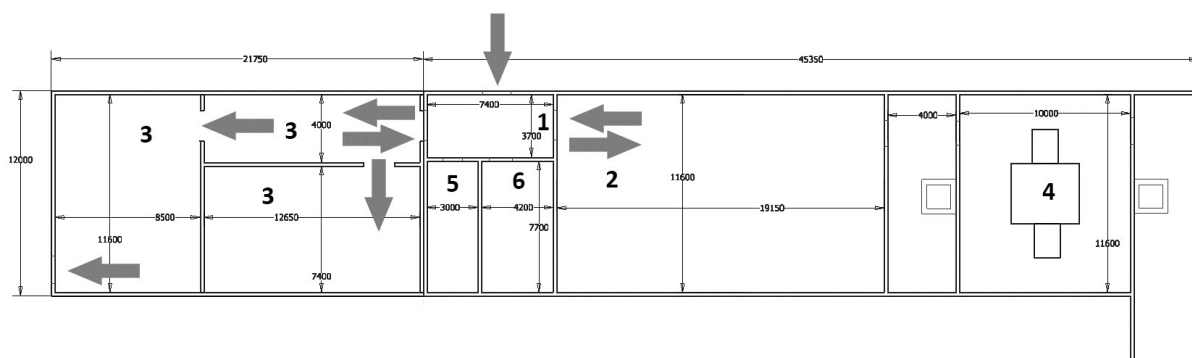
It is decided that the now useless Bunker I shall be demolished. The dressing rooms near Bunker II shall also be torn down, but the building itself shall remain idly standing. It shall, once again, make its mark in the history of wiping out the Jews, and that one year later.

About 300 members of the Sonderkommando from the Bunkers are already trained and are therefore vital for the process of mass murder; thus, they shall not be annihilated. On the contrary, they are gradually transferred to the newly opened crematoriums. They are treated much better than common inmates are, and enjoy certain privileges. But all of them know that as unwanted witnesses, they, too, shall be eventually murdered.

### **4 April 1943, Sunday**

Crematorium V is officially handed over.





#### Krematorium IV (V) / Crematorium IV (V)

1. Vestibul / Vestibule / Vorhalle
2. Svlékárna, márnice / Undressing room, mortuary / Auskleidraum, Leichenhalle
3. Plynová komora / Gas chambre / Gaskammer
4. Kremační pece / Ovens / Feuerbestattung Öfen
5. Sklad koksu / Coke / Lager von Koks
6. Kancelář dozorce / Supervisor's office / Office Supervisor

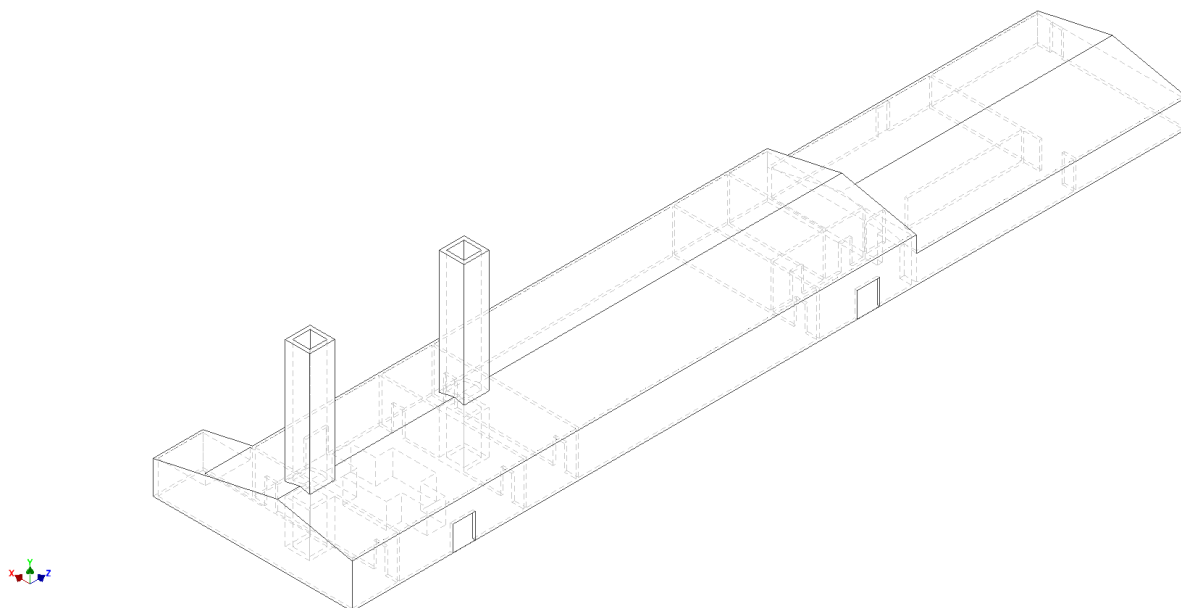
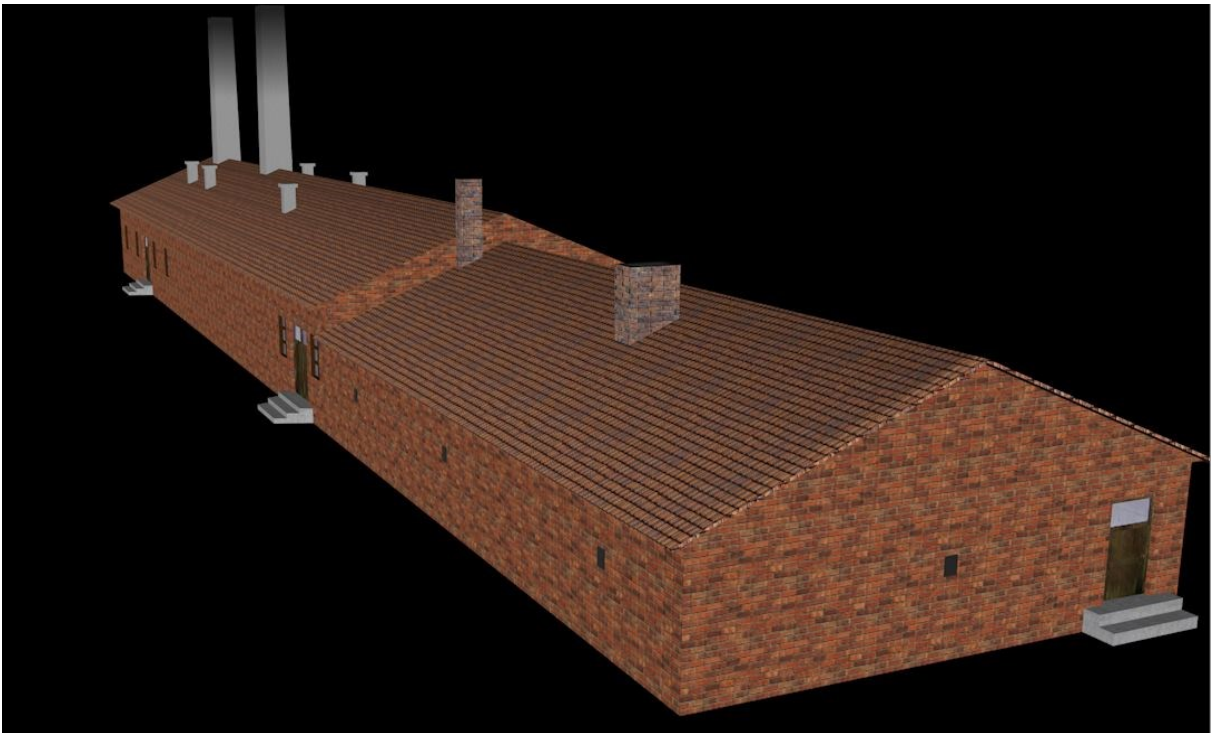


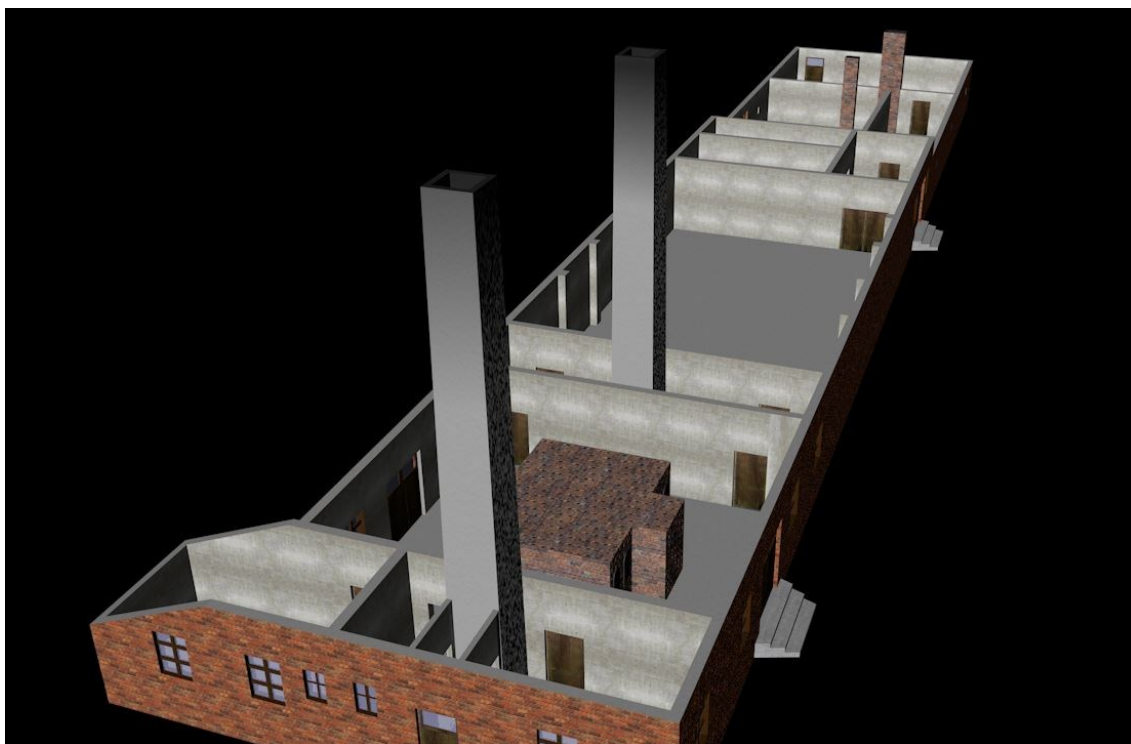
Figure 143 Schematic pictures of Crematorium V - project of students of SSPŠ



**Figure 144** Vintage photo - Crematorium V. - [www.yadvashem.org](http://www.yadvashem.org)



**Figure 145** Model of Crematorium IV - project of students of SSPŠ



**Figure 146 Model of Crematorium IV - project of students of SSPŠ**



**Figure 147 Model of Crematorium IV - project of students of SSPŠ**

## **April 1943**

The experiments in the infamous women's Block 10 in Auschwitz I begin. A well-equipped research laboratory is created there. Dr. Carl Clauberg is the first to bring his patients here, where he continues in his sterilisation experiments. He has a top-notch x-ray available, as well as four special rooms, one of which is a dark room for the development of the x-ray images. Also, there is a bedroom for up to 400 patients on the first floor.



Gradually, three wards are established in the enclosed Block 10. One belongs to Dr. Clauberg, one to Dr. Schuman and to head physician Wirths, and the third is the laboratory of the Hygienic Institute.

The windows of Block 10 that open into the courtyard between Blocks 10 and 11 are boarded up so that the interned prisoners cannot witness the shooting of those sentenced to death.



Figure 148 Courtyard between blocks 10 and 11 - Present

## 26 April 1943

Prisoner Witold Pilecki, the Polish officer that had himself interned at Auschwitz in the summer of 1940 and that is in contact with the resistance outside of the camp, decides to escape. Several of his friends were found out and killed, and the noose of the Gestapo is closing in around his own neck.

When he is assigned the night shift during the night of 26 to 27 April 1943 outside of the camp, he overpowers the guards with the help of two colleagues, disconnects the telephone line and escapes with documents that he takes from the guards.

In 1944, he joins the Warsaw Uprising, he is captured, and he spends several months in a German jail. In 1947, he collects information on the Soviet war crimes and their executions of the Poles or the internment of them in the Soviet concentration camps. He is arrested by the Communist police, and he is very brutally interrogated and repeatedly cruelly tortured. Despite of this, he does not reveal any information.

Following a staged trial, he is sentenced to death and executed on 25 May 1948. This hero that survived Auschwitz does not survive the rage of the Communists. His words from the last conversation he held with his wife before his execution are telling: ***"I cannot live. They have killed me. In comparison, Auschwitz was a mere triviality."***

## **May 1943**

The illegal organisation “Combat Group Auschwitz” is formed. Its main place of operations is the Auschwitz I camp, but its contacts reach not only to the Auschwitz II – Birkenau camp, but to the other satellite camps, as well. Polish prisoners play a significant role in this group. Gradually, they also begin to cooperate with the Jewish inmates, of which there is already a great number of at Auschwitz.

At first, there are tensions, to say the least, between the Polish and the Jewish prisoners. In addition, the Poles accept the fact that the Jews have arrived to the camp primarily to die, whereas they have hope in surviving the war. Also, many Poles hold a hostile, almost unfriendly attitude to the Jews. However, as the number of Jewish prisoners increases, they also begin to assume the positions of camp functionaries, and the Poles comprehend the need to begin cooperating with them.

## **May 1943**

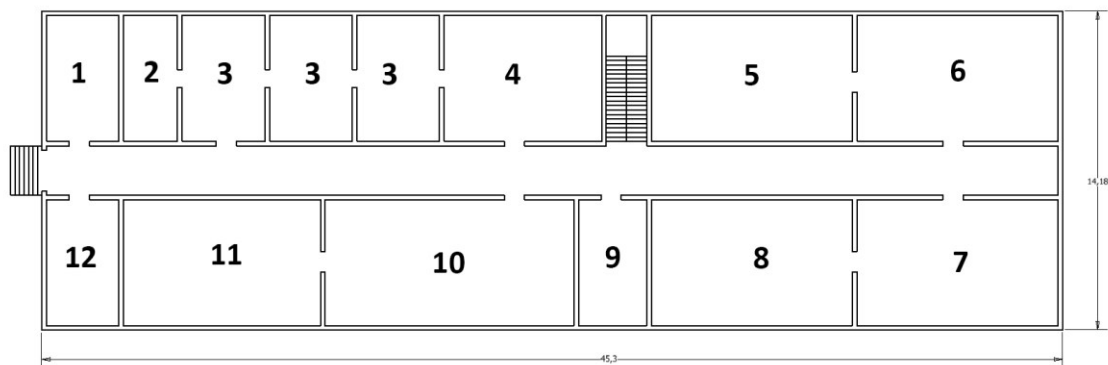
Twenty-eight-year-old German physician and bacteriologist, SS-Obersturmführer Bruno Maria Weber, becomes the head of the Hygienic Institute in Auschwitz. The Hygienic Institute has two laboratories and a room for the collection of blood located in the experimental Block 10 in Auschwitz I, as well as a detached workplace in nearby Rajsko.

Of the Block 10 workplaces, the Hygienic Institute is a place where many patients are saved, since the experiments done on them are not that dangerous. The workers of the institute, Nazi and camp physicians, contribute to the fight against typhus and other epidemics. Their research is based on special examinations and on the analyses of blood, urine, and faeces, but also new medicine based on sulfonamides is tested on the prisoners.

The workplace of the Hygienic Institute also has two very dark sides to it. The first is the large amounts of blood drawn from prisoners, which greatly weakens them and sometimes causes their deaths. There is even talk about patients bleeding to death when blood is drawn from their carotid arteries.

The second dark side is the cultivation of bacteria. At first, they use beef for this purpose, but when people start to steal it, it is decided to cultivate the bacteria in human meat. They get this by cutting off pieces from the buttocks and thighs of the executed from the adjacent courtyard, and later the human meat is transported in from Crematorium III. Testimony of this is captured by the Sonderkommando prisoner Olére in his painting.

According to eye-witness reports, Weber is polite to the Jewish doctors, and he protects them from the others. Maybe this is one of the reasons why he is acquitted at trial after the war is over.



#### Blok 10 - ground floor

- |                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| 1 - Toilet                      | 7 - Laboratory - Institute of hygiene             |
| 2 - Room on photos              | 8 - Laboratory - Institute of hygiene             |
| 3 - Clauberg department         | 9 - Typist and kapo                               |
| 4 - Wardress                    | 10 - Hospital room - intensive care after surgery |
| 5 - Hall for bedridden patients | 11 - Operating room                               |
| 6 - Quarters for workers        | 12 - Washroom                                     |

Figure 149 Project of students of SSPŠ

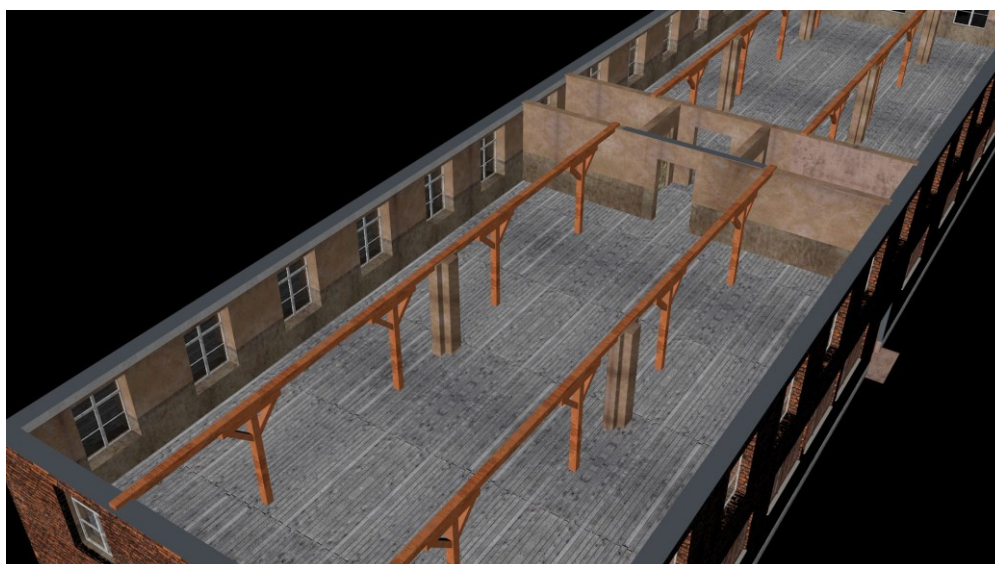


Figure 150 Model of Block 10 - project of students of SSPŠ





**Figure 151 Model of Block 10 - project of students of SSPŠ**

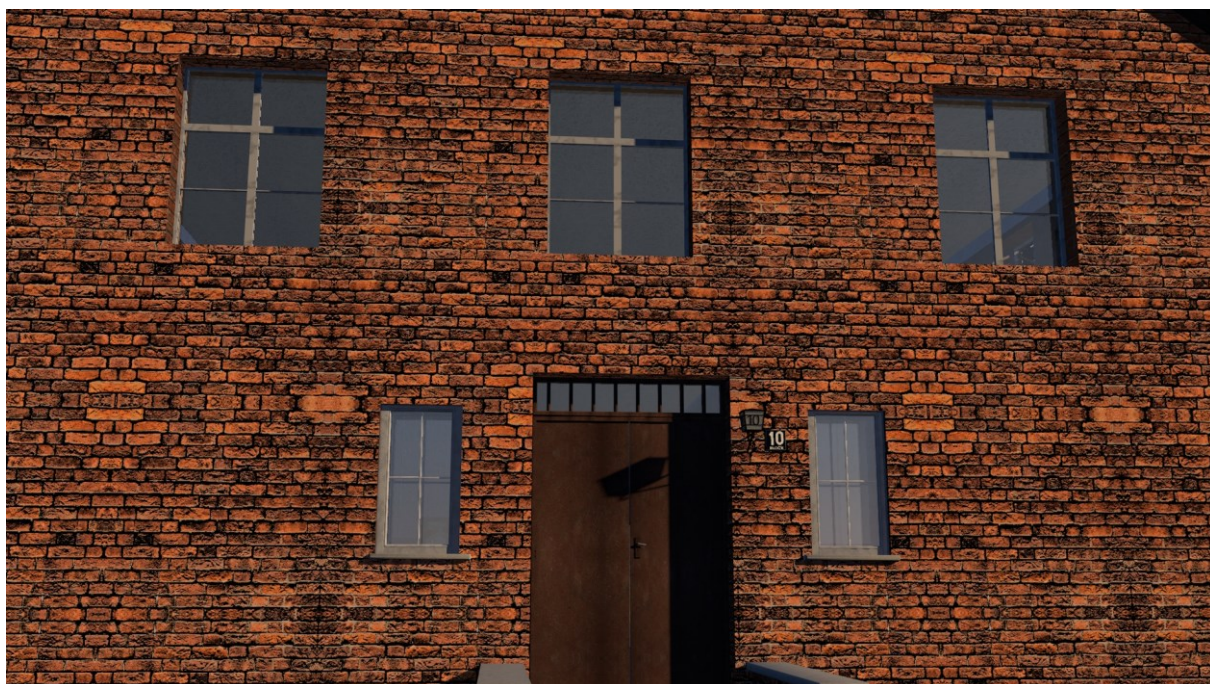


**Figure 152 Model of Block 10 first floor - project of students of SSPŠ**



**Figure 153 Model of Block 10 ground floor - project of students of SSPŠ**





**Figure 154 Model of Block 10 - project of students of SSPŠ**



**Figure 155 Cutting meat for the Hygienic Institute – picture by David Olère**

## **5 May to 10 November 1943**

According to recordings and to the testimonies of prisoners, at least 130 young men are castrated by surgeon Dering in the period from May to December 1943. At the time, he is the prisoner assistant of Dr. Schumann. Most of the castrations are related to the experiments with sterilisation by x-ray radiation.

### **22 May 1943, Saturday**

The lining of the chimney in Crematorium II begins to collapse, and thus it is put out of operation for an entire month.

### **30 May 1943, Sunday**

Thirty-two-year-old Nazi physician SS-Hauptsturmführer Josef Mengele arrives at the camp. He has a five-year career in the army behind him, but he was wounded in battle and deemed as unfit for further fighting. He received medals of valour four times, including two Iron Crosses of the first and second classes.

Several years after the war, he becomes legendary by personifying the horrors of the Auschwitz inferno. His infamous legend was born with the book of his camp pathologist and with the media, yet he is not intensively searched for immediately after the war, when some of his colleagues are found guilty, sentenced to death, and executed.



**Figure 156 Josef Mengele**

### **End of May, June 1943**

Electric lifts by the Topf Company are installed in Crematorium II and III. The lift in Crematorium III has a capacity of 750 kg, and the one in Crematorium II is somewhat smaller. At least ten cadavers can be loaded into the lift, and sometimes more, depending on their bodily proportions.

### **June 1943**

Typhus again makes its presence known in the camps; most of the infected prisoners either die, or are selected and sent to their deaths.

Although there is medicine that could save them, there is desperately little of it. The camp physicians are thus placed in the terrible situation where they have to decide who they shall help and who they shall let die. Logically, privileged prisoners are favoured, as well as those with connections.



## June 1943

Thirty-two-year-old doctor Hans Wilhelm Münch starts working at the Hygienic Institute. He works in bacteriological research.



**Figure 157 Hans Wilhelm Münch**

According to witnesses, he is the only one who does not violate the Hippocratic Oath. He refuses to take part in the selections taking place on the ramp, and many of his experiments are a mere farce actually protecting the female prisoners who would have otherwise already been deemed as useless experiment subjects designated for liquidation.

According to the testimony of camp physician Louis Micheels, Münch gave him a pistol for protection before leaving Auschwitz during its evacuation.

## June 1943

The transport with prisoners from Lublin arrives. They are shut into the blocks of death, naked, and are left there waiting for gassing without food or water for two days. When they are transported to the crematoriums, many are so weak that they have to be carried to the lorries. Also, members of the Sonderkommando must later carry them to the gas chambers.



**Figure 158 Bringing the dead and half-dead to the crematorium – picture by Leo Haas**

## **7 June 1943, Monday**

Dr. Clauberg announces the results of the sterilisation of Jews by injections through the uterus into the fallopian tubes, which should glue them shut. According to his claims, several hundred to several thousand people could be sterilised every day. The sterilisation could take place with the help of one injection during a general gynaecological examination. The question is, how truthful are the claimed results of his research, and how much have they been adapted to benefit his method. According to estimates, he attempts the sterilisations on more than one thousand women in Auschwitz, and some sources cite up to several thousand women.

## **24 June 1943, Thursday**

Crematorium III is handed over. At the time of the handing over, the gas chamber already has 14 fake shower-heads installed.



Figure 159 Crematorium III – Contemporary image - [www.auschwitz.org](http://www.auschwitz.org)

## **Mid-year 1943**

Around this time, a significant change occurs. Since there is a large number of Jewish inmates in the camp and, on the contrary, not enough non-Jewish prisoners, from this point on, the Jews become the Kapos and block leaders. Some are civil towards the prisoners, and some take advantage of their function.

## **Summer 1943**

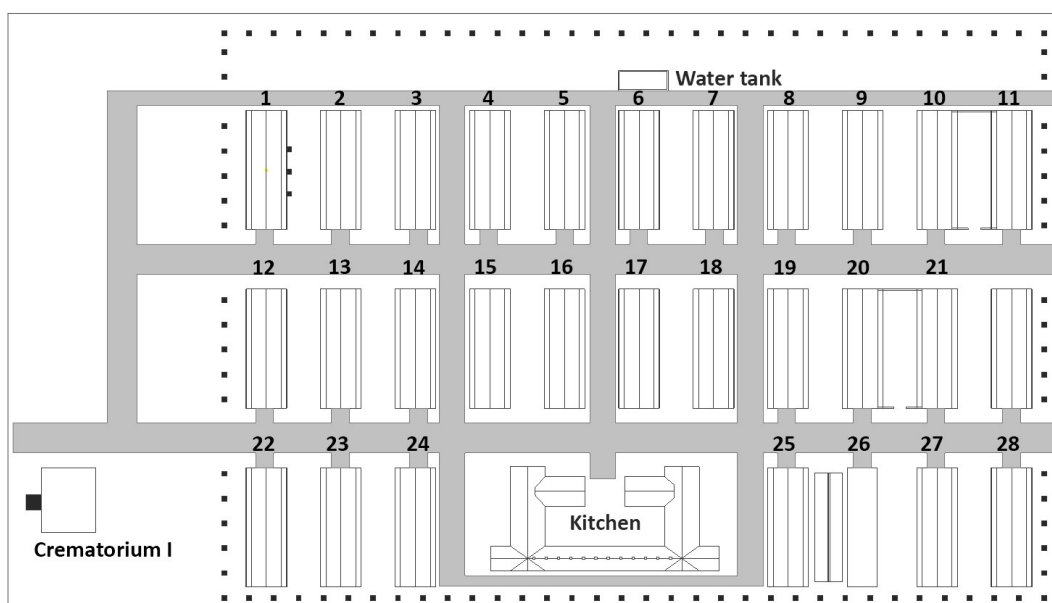
A brothel for privileged prisoners is opened in Block 24 of the Auschwitz I camp. Prisoners of German and Polish nationality are allowed in, but Jewish inmates are forbidden entry.

The difference between the privileged prisoners and the others is illustrated by another example. The first group can use the fire tank located in Auschwitz I for swimming and bathing.

The opening of the brothel should, in the eyes of the SS officers, fulfil several goals. For one, it is a certain job offer, but its establishment serves also to face the rampant homosexual affairs between the prisoners. The SS officers could not but notice that many prison functionaries use handsome boys or youths in the roles of pipels for their physical gratification. The brothel also serves a third function, and that to disclose any homosexual prisoners.

If someone is labelled as a homosexual, their life in the camp becomes hell. They are constantly bullied, usually leading up to their death.

Twelve non-Jewish prostitutes work in the brothel, predominantly Germans, Poles, and Russians; they are housed in Block 10, where their health is continuously controlled.



### Auschwitz I (1943)

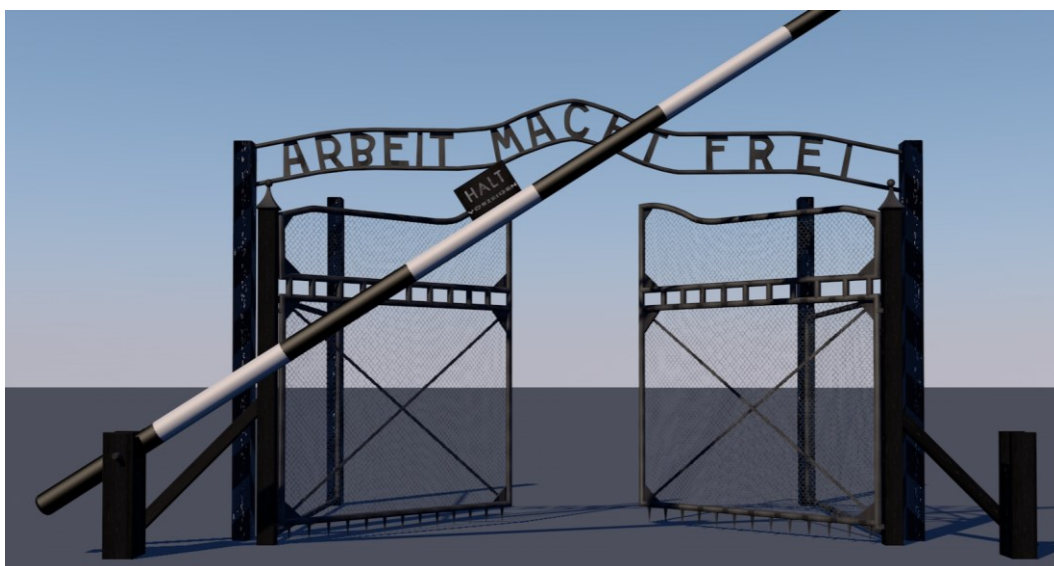
Block 28 - hospital, experimental block - men  
 Block 10 - hospital, experimental block - women  
 Block 11 - Gestapo office  
 Between blocks 10 and 11 is „Wall of death“ (executions)  
 Block 19, 20, 21 - hospital

Figure 160 Project of students of SSPŠ

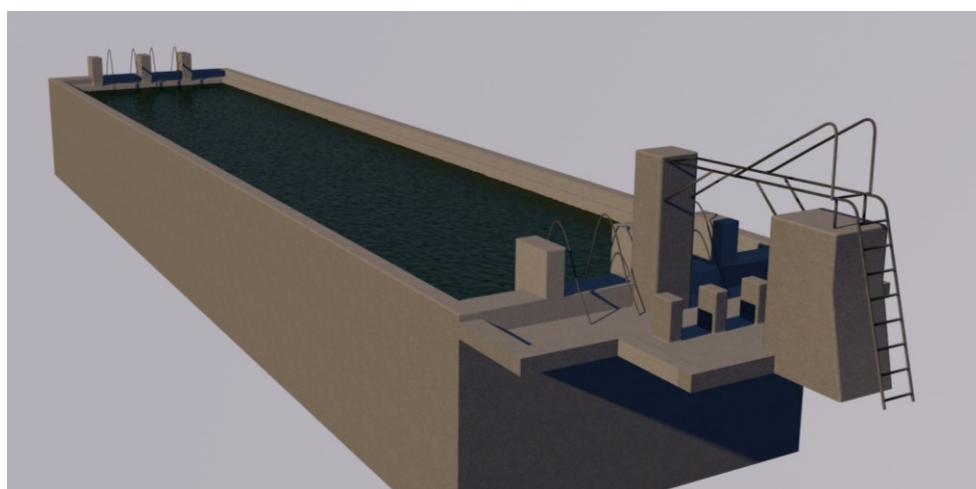




**Figure 161 Model of Auschwitz I. - project of students of SSPŠ**



**Figure 162 Model of Auschwitz I. Main gate - project of students of SSPŠ**



**Figure 163 Model of Auschwitz I – fire tank - project of students of SSPŠ**



**Figure 164 Model of Auschwitz I. - project of students of SSPŠ**



**Figure 165 Model of Auschwitz I. - project of students of SSPŠ**

## **Summer 1943**

The Sonderkommando is divided into five groups. Four are assigned to each crematorium, and the fifth removes the last remains of the murdering in Bunker II. Also, Jewish inmates are named to various functionary posts, they become Kapos, Kapo assistants, or work unit foremen.

Although the members of the Sonderkommando have a privileged status among prisoners, even they are exposed to brutal torture. Forty-three-year-old SS-Unterscharführer Johann Gorges literally thrives on this. Sometimes, the commandant of the crematoriums, Voss, must personally restrain him.





**Figure 166 Johann Gorges – sketch by David Olère**

Generally, the SS officers punish the inmates with methods such as whipping, various types of beating, rolling naked prisoners in gravel, shooting them to death, and sometimes burning them alive in the open-air pit or oven. Those who tell victims what fate awaits them are burnt alive in the oven, as well as one dentist who overlooks a golden tooth in the mouth of a dead prisoner.



**Figure 167 Chastisement of sonderkommando member – picture by David Olère**



**Figure 168 Chastisement of sonderkommando member – picture by David Olère**





Figure 169 Chastisement of sonderkommando member – picture by David Olère



Figure 170 Chastisement of sonderkommando member – picture by David Olère

## July 1943

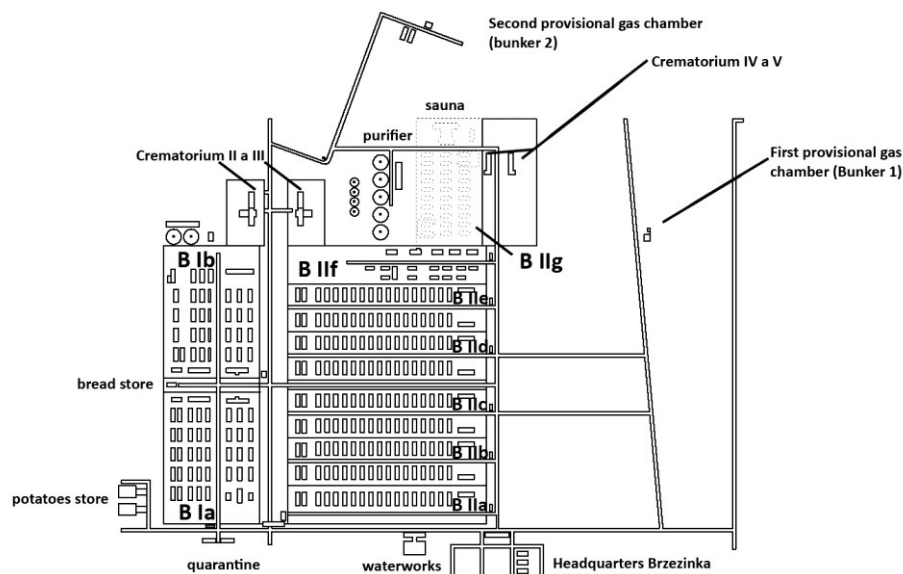
Dr. Schumann decides to do another experiment on the prisoners. He chooses twelve youths, and has surgeon Dering remove one or two of their testicles. The goal of the research is to observe how such mutilated young men change. After the war, David Szarbel, who loses his left testicle on this day yet eventually survives the suffering of the camp, provides testimony about these operations at the trial with Derin

### 12 July 1943, Monday

Prisoners in the Auschwitz II – Birkenau camp are moved about. Male prisoners from Block BIb are moved into BIId, and the women's camp is expanded to all of sector BI.

New accommodation is arranged also for the members of the Sonderkommando. They are assigned to isolated Block 13 in sector BIId. This block is surrounded by a high wall, and its entrance is guarded by a chosen prisoner from the Sonderkommando.

The accommodation blocks in sector BII consist of wooden barracks of prefabricated parts, originally meant for the stabling of 52 horses. They are 40.7 metres long, 9.5 metres wide, and 2.6 metres high. They are divided into 18 boxes. Two blocks near the entrance are reserved for scribes and for the block commandants. Three-storied bunks 2.8 metres in length, 1.8 metres in width, and 2 metres in height serve the quartered inmates. Usually, five prisoners have to cram into one bunk. Sometimes, eight hundred prisoners are housed in one such block.



#### Auschwitz II (BRZEZINKA) 1943

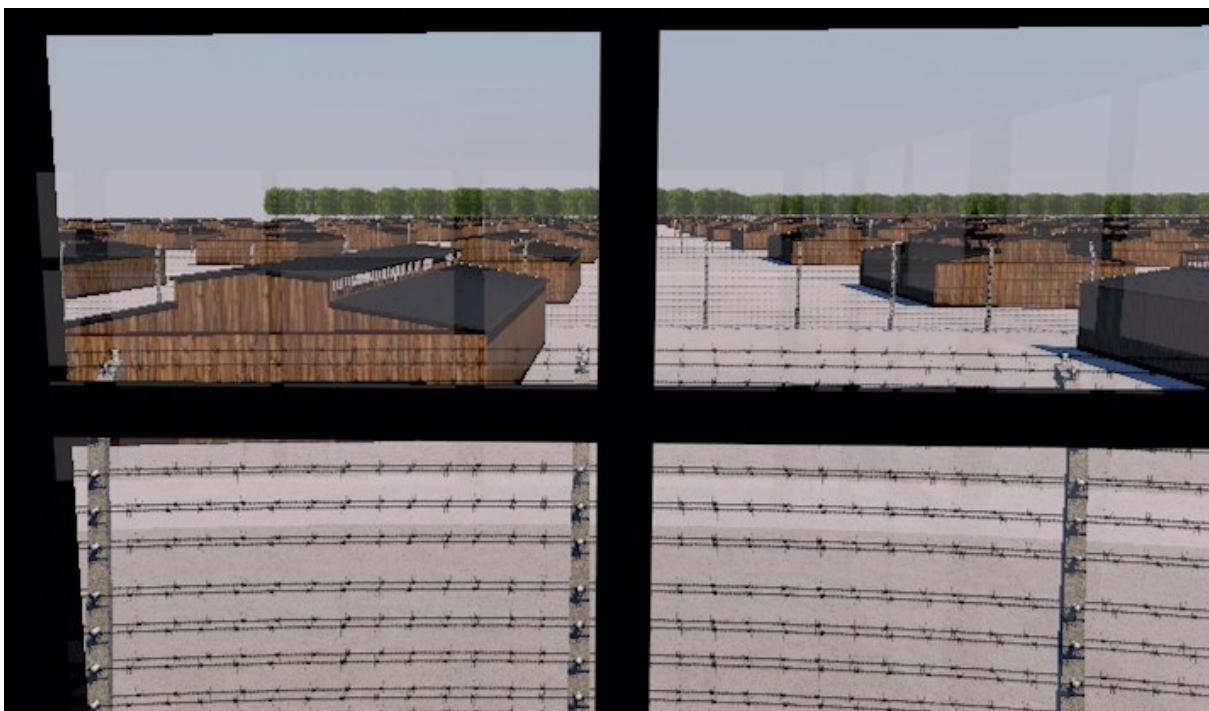
B Ia - Female camp from August 1942 to January 1945  
 B Ib - Soviet prisoners and male prisoners. Since 1943, women's  
 B IIa - Male quarantine camp since August 1943  
 B IIb - "Terezin Family Camp" since 1943-1944  
 B IIc - Camp for Jewish women. Mainly from Hungary. Since 1944  
 B IId - Men's camp. July 1943

B IIe - Gypsy camp. From February 1943 to August 1944  
 B IIg - Hospital camp for men. Since 1943 to 1945  
 B IIg - Camp uppers "Canada". Since December 1943

Figure 171 Project of students of SSPŠ



**Figure 172 Model of Auschwitz II. Birkenau - project of students of SSPŠ**



**Figure 173 Model of Auschwitz II. Birkenau - project of students of SSPŠ**

## **19 July 1943, Monday**

Crematorium I in Auschwitz I discontinues operations, and the last prisoners to serve there are transferred to the Sonderkommando in Auschwitz II – Birkenau. Two Poles and six Jewish prisoners arrive, among them is Stanislaw Jankowski.

## **19 July 1943, Monday**

The largest public execution in the Auschwitz I camp takes place. SS officers seek retaliation for the escape of three prisoners from the Sonderkommando, and hang 12 Polish prisoners from the same unit.





**Figure 174 Hanging the prisoner – picture by Jan Kowski**

## **August 1943**

Twenty-eight-year-old Wladyslaw Tomiczek, Kapo of the Sonderkommando, is arrested and then executed. The reasons for the arrest and his ensuing shooting of this Polish inmate are not clear.

## **August 1943**

Medicinal grants for carrying out experiments on prisoners are approved. Dr. Mengele is one of those who receives these grants; the first is for the study of specific protein structures, and the second is on the research of eye colour. The finances serve to construct a modern autopsy room on the ground-floor of Crematorium II.

## **August 1943**

During selection on the ramp, a thirteen-year-old boy is designated to go to the side of death. However, he refuses to stay with the elderly, women, and children, and keeps running over to the other side. In order to avoid panic, the Nazis do not beat him on the spot, but rather shut him into an ambulance containing cans of Zyklon B. The boy, however, starts to act up again, and so the SS officers pull him out and lead him into the camp.

The fate of this boy is not clear, but the testimonies of other prisoners suggest that they saw him alive long after this incident. Maybe the boy died anyway, or maybe he saved his life.

## August 1943

An exceptional event takes place during the arrival of one of the transports. The reasons for this are not quite clear, maybe the people are too desperate, or there are already suffocated people in the overheated wagons, or maybe they start to panic. In this case, the Nazis start to shoot, and they transport many dead and bullet-riddled men, women, and children to the crematorium.

### 7 September 1943, Tuesday

A family camp for Czech Jews in Auschwitz II – Birkenau is established. They arrive in a transport from Theresienstadt, carrying a total of 5,006 people. In contrast to all of the other deported, they do not undergo selection, and they are even allowed to keep their belongings and do not have their hair cut. They are placed in sector BIIB with the note that they are in a six-month quarantine period.

The reason why this camp is established is never explained. There are assumptions that the Nazis need it for propaganda reasons, showing the good conditions that the Jews have in concentration camps.

### 23 October 1943, Saturday

A transport of 1,800 people from Bergen-Belsen arrives. The Jewish families own documents for their immigration to South America and believe that they are travelling to Switzerland, from where they shall further travel on to their final destinations. However, when one group ends up in the dressing room, they realise what is about to happen, and the people start to panic and put up a fight. One very beautiful young woman grabs a pistol and wounds thirty-four-year-old SS-Oberscharführer Josef Schillinger and SS-Unterscharführer Wilhelm Emmerich. All SS officers, and there are usually four in the dressing room, successfully escape. Schillinger dies and Emmerich has life-long consequences, as he cannot bend his leg. Their other colleagues are bruised.

Then, the lights in the dressing room are turned off and the doors are blocked. The members of the Sonderkommando are bidden to leave the area. They quickly run out of the death trap. Then, automatic and machine guns come into play and a massacre ensues.

Those who survive the shooting are forced to undress and are then led to the ground floor, where they are shot in the head by the executioner Quakernack. He then walks through the devastated dressing room and shoots any of the living wounded in the head.



Figure 175 Incident in foundry – picture by Wladyslaw Siwek

## **October 1943**

The “Weichsel Union Metallwerke” Company begins operations; 2,000 prisoners work in it manufacturing igniters for artillery shells. They thus have access to gunpowder.

## **October 1943**

A smaller group within the Sonderkommando begins to contemplate plans for an uprising.

## **October 1943**

The surgeon Dering removes the ovaries from ten to twelve Greek girls aged 15 to 19 as a part of the experiments taking place in Block 10 in Auschwitz I. In the summer of 1944, Dering is released, and he leaves the camp as a free man.

## **Autumn 1943**

Conflicts between the Nazi physicians, led by Eduard Wirths, and the members of the Gestapo from Block 11 in Auschwitz I arise. But also between Wirths and some of his colleagues, amongst which is Dr. Entress.

It is questionable whether the initiation of the investigation on corruption in the camp, ordered by Himmler, is not tipped off by Wirths. He is also not pleased by the fact that inmates are murdered and their causes of death are then falsified, sometimes claiming natural causes.

In any case, the investigating judge SS-Obersturmführer Konrad Morgan arrives to the camp; his task is to reveal any corruption and enriching of SS officers. Immediately at the beginning of the investigation, he finds inappropriate items in the lockers of two guards, and he has them arrested. In other searches of lockers, he finds gold, pearls, rings, and money of various currencies.

The judge also investigates the sexual behaviour of the SS officers in the camp, or the establishment of entirely unacceptable and forbidden sexual relations with Jewish women, respectively. Even the very commandant Höss is implicated in one affair.

## **November 1943**

The commissioner of the camp Gestapo, Maximilian Grabner, is arrested. The reason for his internment is corruption, and during the investigation, the arbitrary murdering of prisoners, especially of Polish prisoners, is revealed. Perhaps in order to get rid of unwanted witnesses. Perhaps because they did not keep up their side of the bargain. Grabner goes to trial, but eventually, his case is shelved.

The executioner Bernard Palitzsch is also incriminated with enrichment and corruption, and he is transferred to Brno.



In connection with the investigations, a new camp commandant is named, and that Artur Liebenhenschel. After he begins working here, accounts say that the life of inmates slightly improves. Some of the prisoners from Block 11 are released and returned to their work units.

However, if the conditions for the inmates are improved, they are not improved for long. Soon, thirty-seven-year-old Wilhelm Boger is named as commissioner of the camp Gestapo. He was wounded on the front in 1942, and was transferred to Auschwitz nine months later. His job description is to oversee prisoners, to keep the peace in the camp, to fight against the resistance, and to lead interrogations. His brutal methods last until January 1945.

He invents the so-called “Boger Swing”, which is a torture instrument. It is a long iron rod that hangs horizontally from the ceiling. The prisoner is brought to the interrogation naked, and then they bind their wrists to their ankles and hang them from the rod. Boger places questions, at first gently, but later, he yells. The guard beats the prisoner's buttocks with a crowbar until skin hangs from the victim. Some of the interrogated die during the torture. Afterwards, pieces of skin and meat lay on the floor. Sometimes, the blow is so strong that the tortured prisoner spins around the rod. Some of the blows are aimed at the genital area.

Rudolf Höss, who must be at least minimally involved in the activities of Grabner and his companions, or is, at least, responsible for them as the camp commandant, is promoted and transferred to the Concentration Camps Inspectorate.

It is interesting that even after being recalled, Höss leaves his family in his commandant's villa on the edge of the Auschwitz I camp. Perhaps he believes that they are safer there than in Berlin, which could be targeted for bombing by the Allies.



Figure 176 Wilhelm Boger



Figure 177 Boger on picture by David Olére

## **28 November 1943, Sunday**

The last Soviet prisoners of war are gassed, and the entire transport of 334 usually ill or mutilated men goes straight to the gas chambers.

## **December 1943**

Jews from Belgian, French, and Dutch transports are gassed, as well as Italian Jews from Rijeka, Terst, and Rome. Witnesses talk of about up to 30,000 gassed people, but this number may be exaggerated.

## **12 December 1943, Sunday**

An extensive selection takes place in the women's camp in Auschwitz II – Birkenau, and 2,000 prisoners are sent to the gas chambers.



**Figure 178 Selection of women – picture by Zofia Rosenstrauch**

## **15 December 1943, Wednesday**

Fifty-five-year-old Nazi physician Fritz Klein begins working at Auschwitz II – Birkenau. He serves as a doctor in the women's camp and the Gypsy Family Camp.

He is transferred to the Neuengamme concentration camp in December 1944, and later to Bergen-Belsen.



**Figure 179 Fritz Klein**

He is known for the following quote: “The Hippocratic Oath orders us to remove gangrenous tissue from the human body, and the Jews are the gangrenous tissue of humanity. This is why we need to remove them.”

## **16 December 1943, Thursday**

The arrival of 2,491 Czech Jews from Theresienstadt to the family camp in sector BIIb in Auschwitz II – Birkenau. Again, they do not have to go through selection and they remain alive.

## **20 December 1943, Monday**

A transport brings another 2,471 Czech Jews from Theresienstadt to the Auschwitz II – Birkenau camp, and again, they are housed in sector BIIb without going through selection.

Although men and women live separately in the family camp, they are located in the same sector. The adults work in various commandos, and about five hundred children under 15 years of age are allowed to be educated. Twenty-seven-year-old teacher Fredy Hirsch establishes a school in Block 31. He stages performances with the children for the SS officers. Shortly before the first group of deported prisoners' six-month quarantine period ends.

## **24 December 1943, Friday**

During Christmas, an extensive selection takes place in Auschwitz II – Birkenau, and according to eye-witness testimonies by prisoners, a total of five lorries of selected prisoners are driven off to the gas chambers.



**Figure 180 Removal of selected people – picture by Francis Reisz**



## 27 December 1943, Monday

The head overseer of the Sonderkommando, August Brück, dies of typhus. The death of a fairly civil prison functionary calls for changes. Temporarily, thirty-three-year-old Jaakov Kaminski is appointed as the head Kapo. It is completely unprecedented that a Jew should assume such a significant post. This function always belonged to the interned Reich Germans.

Kaminski, however, makes a good impression on the SS officers. He is charming, walks like a dandy with a walking cane, and is civil towards the inmates. He also knows how to organise, maintains order, and has the respect of both SS officers and his inferiors. Although he yells frequently, he never beats anyone. Since he is able to move freely around the camp in this new job, he begins making contacts with the secret resistance movement.

## December 1943

Changes in the structures of the complex of camps in Auschwitz is made. On the orders of SS-Obergruppenführer (translated as “Senior Group Commandant”) Oswald Pohl, it is divided into three administrative units. Arthur Liebehenschel, who is also the commandant of the entire complex, heads Auschwitz I, SS-Obersturmführer Friedrich Harjenstein heads Auschwitz II – Birkenau, and Heinrich Schwarz heads Auschwitz III – Monowitz.

## December 1943

The Central Sauna in Auschwitz II – Birkenau commences operations. The goal is to aid in the cleansing and disinfection of prisoners and their clothing in order to decrease epidemics in the camp. Epidemics ravage the labour force, and the SS officers are also at risk at being infected.



Figure 182 Friedrich Harjenstein

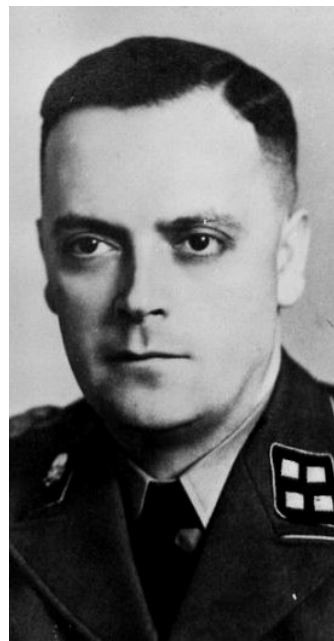
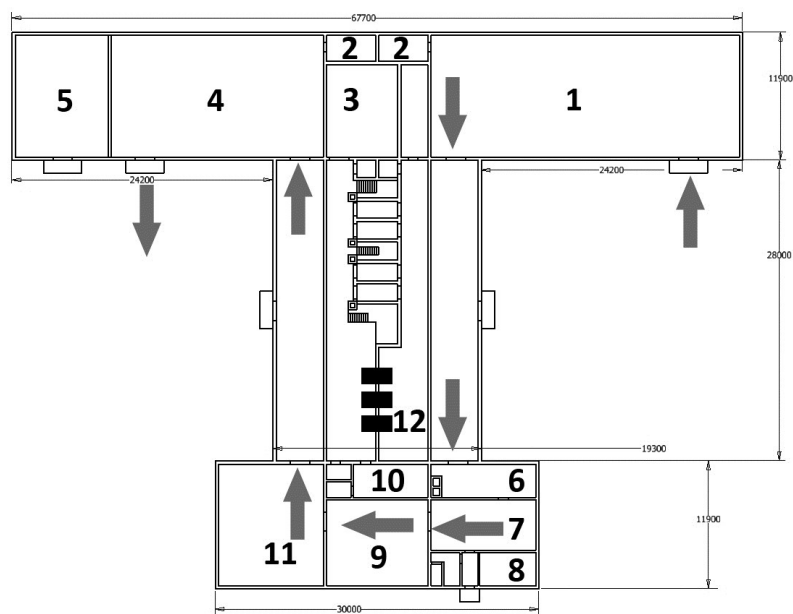


Figure 181 Artur Liebehenschel



Figure 183 Contemporary image from Central Sauna - [www.auschwitz.org](http://www.auschwitz.org)



## Sauna

1. Waiting room and undressing
2. Toilet
3. Female clothing store
4. Combing and dressing room

5. Male clothing store
6. Room for cutting hair
7. Interrogation
8. Medical room

9. Washroom
10. Boiler room
11. Drying room
12. Autoclave

Figure 184 project of students of SSPŠ



**Figure 185 Model of Central Sauna - project of students of SSPŠ**

## **End of the year 1943**

A partition is put up in the gas chamber of Crematorium II, and probably in Crematorium III, as well, so that smaller groups of victims can be gassed. The brick wall includes an airtight door constructed in the same manner as the doors already used in the gas chambers.

## **End of the year 1943**

Communication between the resistance group in Auschwitz II – Birkenau and the members of the Sonderkommando is established at the end of the year. On one side, contacts are held up by the member of the special commando, Slovakian Jew Filip Müller, and later Kapo Kaminski, as well; on the other side, workers of the locksmith workshop, forty-four-year-old Ota Kraus and thirty-two-year-old Erich Kulka communicate.

The chroniclers Lejb Langfuss, Salmen Gradowski and Salmen Lewenthal work on recording the events occurring by the crematoriums. They bury these reports in various places in the Death Zone so that they can later serve as evidence against the Nazis.

Some records are found, but most are probably destroyed after the war by “treasure hunters”, local people who scour the camp lands in the hopes that they can find any valuables hidden by the Jews on their way to death, or any buried loot of the Sonderkommando members used for trading with the Nazis



**Figure 186 Hell by crematoriums and gas chambers – picture by David Olère**



# AN APPALLING FINALE



Figure 187 Hell of gas chambers – members of sonderkommando – picture by David Olère

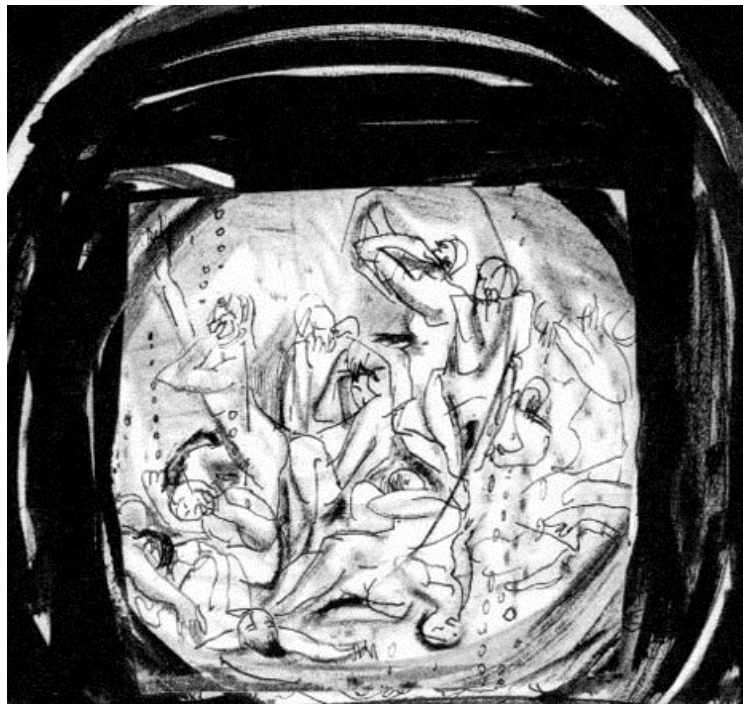


Figure 188 Eyelet into the gas chamber – picture by Janina Lakomska

## Beginning of January 1944

The thirty-five-year-old Kapo of the Sonderkommando, Daniel Obstbaum, attempts to escape. He bribes an SS officer named Dobrowolny, who promises to help him and four other prisoners escape. One of them is also Slovakian camp scribe Fero Langer. Once Dobrowolny gets his reward, either he alone or with his colleagues shoots the prisoners. Aside from the riches he gained, he also gets a bonus week-long vacation for preventing the escape of five prisoners.



Figure 189 Prisoners going around their colleagues which tried to escape - picture by David Olère

## 24 February 1944, Thursday

200 prisoners from the Sonderkommando are chosen to be sent to Majdanek, supposedly as specialists in operating crematoriums. As they learn later, however, they are immediately shot or cremated upon arrival to the new camp. Some members of the Sonderkommando believe that this is retaliation for the January escape attempt, and serves as an act of intimidation.

## 27 February 1944, Sunday

On this date, thirty-year-old Karel Zigmund Bendel, a Jewish doctor from Paris, begins serving as the physician in the Gypsy Family Camp. He has been in the camp since 1 January 1944.



## 29 February 1944, Tuesday

The camp is visited by Adolf Eichmann, who also inspects the family camp of the Jews from Theresienstadt; he has Fred Hirsch elaborate a report on the education of the children. However, as soon as 1 or 2 March 1944, he orders that all men, women, and children who have been in the camp for a half a year be murdered.

On 2 March 1944, all of those to be supposedly deported must write to their relatives. The postcards are dated 25 March 1944. They are told that they are being sent to a work camp in Heidebreck in Upper Silesia.

## 7 March 1944, Monday

People of the first transport of the Theresienstadt Jews in sector BIIB of the family camp in Auschwitz II – Birkenau are taken at night to the quarantine sector of BIIa. They are again told that they are to be deported to work in Heidebreck. Members of the resistance repeatedly warn them that they are to be murdered, but since they went to an adjacent sector and not to the gas chambers, many think that this is just a rumour.



Figure 190 Fredy Hirsch

## 8 March 1944, Tuesday

The Czech Jews from the family camp whose half-year quarantine period is over are gassed. Of the original 5,006 people, about 1,000 of them have died of illness or exhaustion and others are meant for annihilation. Despite the efforts of some Nazis to change the orders by suggesting that a selection be made, leaving those men and women able to work to live, the orders to kill all of those who arrived at the camp from Theresienstadt on 9 September 1943 are upheld. Only a small fraction of them are spared, those that are ill, work in special commandos, or are medics. As well as twins, who are taken to a special block by Dr. Mengele. Forty-one of these spared people end up surviving the war.

Those that are to be killed have been repeatedly warned in advance by the resistance and are urged to revolt. They do not believe such a scenario, as the Nazis assure them that they are to be deported. The resistance relies on the largest persona of sector BIIB, on Fredy Hirsch, who runs a school for about 500 children. However, he commits suicide the evening before the massacre by poisoning himself. This despite the fact that he had the guarantee of the Sonderkommando that in the case of an uprising, its members would join him and fight alongside him. Even sector BIID, the men's camp, is also ready to revolt.

In the end, no resistance is made. When the sentenced arrive at Crematoriums II and III, it is too late to revolt. Many believe that those sentenced to death will not fight the desperate fight with the Nazis because of their children. They are so afraid of great suffering in the case of an unleashed uprising and the ensuing violence that they would rather die with them in the gas chambers. Indeed, even Hirsch would rather kill himself than to witness his beloved children suffer and die.



The entire gassing takes a very long time. Before several groups undress, others are already waiting, naked, in the gas chambers or are still dressed in the courtyard, aware that they shall soon die. The bruised and desperate people start to sing the Czechoslovak state anthem immediately after the door of the gas chamber closes, then they also sing the Hebrew song “Hatikva”, which is the present-day anthem of Israel. They cannot finish this song, as the gas is already suffocating them.

On this night, 3,791 men, women, and children die. Other sources list a total of 3,798 victims.



**Figure 191 Still alive in the gas chamber – picture by Mikhail Tumovsky**



**Figure 192 Dead at gas chamber – picture by Mikhail Tumovsky**

## March 1943 to March 1944

It is estimated that in this period, about 160,000 Jews are sent shortly after their arrival to the gas chambers.

## Spring 1944

The women's camp is completely disinfected. Women must strip naked and go to the showers. Their heads and bodies are shaved, and their crotches and armpits are disinfected. They are then driven outside and forced to stand naked, sometimes for longer than an hour, despite of the still-cold weather.

In some cases, women receive less clothing than they handed over, and so they must come to the next roll call naked. The SS officers yell at them that they are treacherous, shameless women, and are preventively killed. Understandably, some of the women get pneumonia, which causes their death either by natural causes, or by selection.

Similar practices are carried out in the men's sector, which is disinfected from time to time, as well.

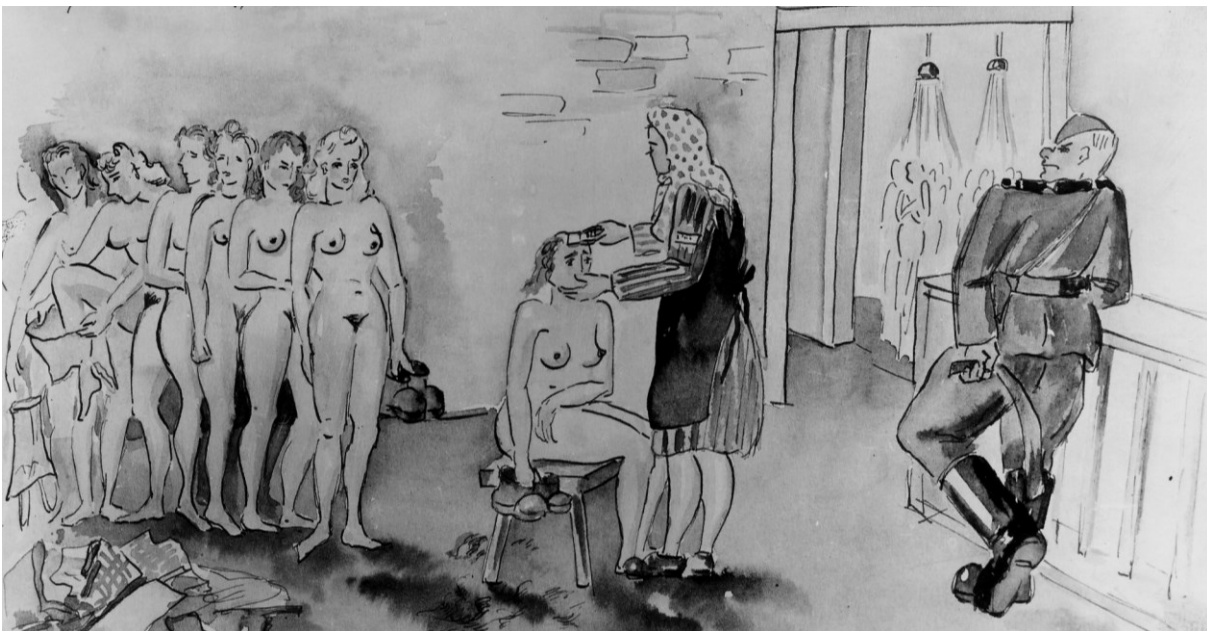


Figure 193 Prurgation of women – picture by Zofia Rosenstrauch

## Spring 1944

A new railway ramp is built, to be located inside of the Auschwitz II – Birkenau camp and which transports the victims de facto almost all of the way to the courtyard of Crematoriums II and III. The preparations of murdering a large number of Hungarian Jews are culminating. All of them are to be liquidated, and because there are more than 750 thousand, all available camp facilities meant for mass murders are to be used.

Crematoriums II and III operate with only occasional cutbacks from the end of 1943, whereas Crematoriums IV and V are not in operation at all. As a matter of fact, Crematorium

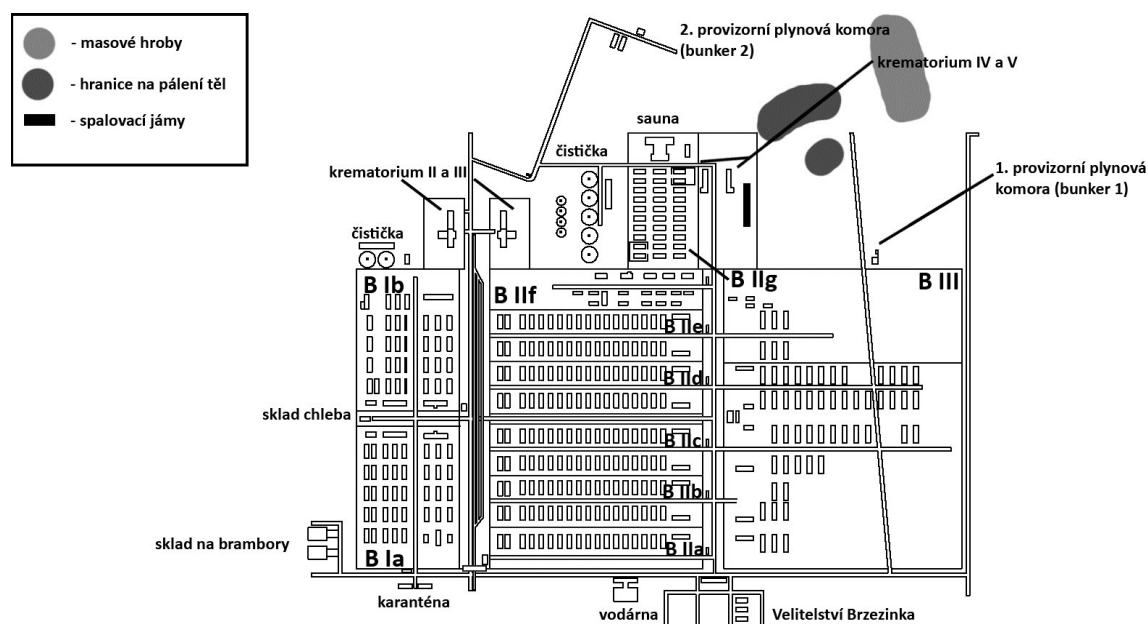
IV has been defunct basically since its launching. They are now revised and repaired, including the doors leading to the chambers by the ovens.

On this occasion, the problem of how to kill smaller groups of victims by gassing is solved, as another partition is built in Crematorium V, dividing the smallest gas chamber into two parts. Thus, a small gas chamber with an area of 12 metres squared is established, where a smaller group of people can be killed without wasting gas.

Testimonies about the operations of Crematorium IV diverge, either it launches operations for only a very short time, or it is in such bad shape that it can no longer be repaired and remains to be shut down. In any case, it serves as the quarters for some of the Sonderkommando, and thus logically does not fulfil its original purpose.

Since the ovens of Crematoriums IV and V cannot endure the high performance in the long run, and their throughput is low, open-air pits for the cremation of cadavers are dug out near Bunker II and behind Crematorium V.

Bunker II is repaired and wooden shacks for undressing victims near it are again constructed. At this point of the camp's existence, it is sometimes referred to as Bunker V. It is not clear how many wooden buildings for the undressing of victims stand by Bunker II at any given time. Testimonies diverge in the number of two or three. It is possible that in the first and second phases of the operations of Bunker II, the number of buildings differs.



### Auschwitz II (BRZEZINKA) 1942-1945

**B Ia** - Ženský tábor od srpna 1942 až leden 1945

**B Ib** - Sovětští zajatci a mužští vězni. Od roku 1943 ženský tábor

**B IIa** - Mužský karanténní tábor od srpna 1943

**B Ilb** - „Terezínský rodinný tábor“ od roku 1943 až 1944

**B Ilc** - Tábor pro židovské ženy. Převážně z Maďarska. Od roku 1944

**B IId** - Mužský tábor. Od července 1943

**B Ilf** - Romský tábor. Od února 1943 až srpen 1944

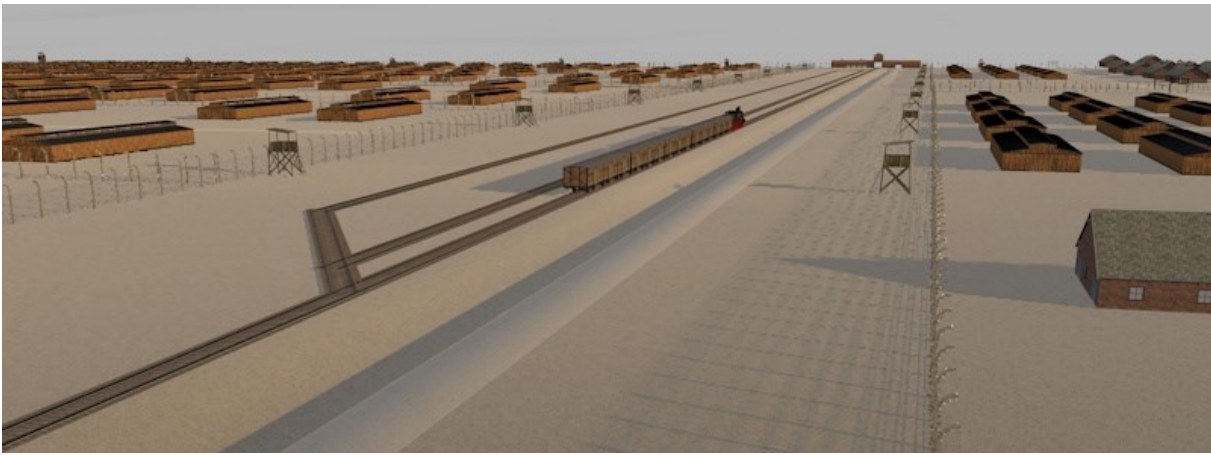
**B Ilg** - Nemocniční tábor pro muže. Od roku 1943 až 1945

**B III** - Tábor svršků „Kanada“. Od prosince 1943

**B III** - Skladištní tábor Mexiko pro židovské ženy převážně z Maďarska. Od června 1944 až říjen 1944

Figure 194 project of students of SSPŠ





**Figure 195 Model of ramp at Auschwitz II Birkenau – project of students of SSPŠ**



**Figure 196 Model of ramp at Auschwitz II Birkenau – project of students of SSPŠ**

## **5 April 1944, Wednesday**

Forty-year-old prisoner Vítězslav Izrael Lederer escapes, and he is aided by twenty-year-old SS-Rottenführer Viktor Pestek, who gets him a SS uniform and leads him out of the camp in it.

During his internment, Lederer establishes contacts with SS officer Pestek, who is in love with imprisoned Czech Jew Reneé Neumanová. It is interesting to note that Pestek also offers to help Vrba and Wetzler escape, but they are afraid of his betrayal and refuse him.

The escape is a success and Lederer survives the war. Pestek, however, decides to also help inmate Neumanová escape. He is revealed, arrested, tortured, and later is sentenced to death right in Auschwitz. However, his execution is carried out on 8 October 1944 in Miedzybrodzie Bialskie.

## **7 April 1944, Friday**

Two prisoners, scribes from the men's sector of Auschwitz II – Birkenau, escape. They are twenty-year-old Rudolf Vrba, whose real name is Walter Rosenberg, and twenty-six-year-old Alfred Wetzler. Both successfully escape and reach Slovakia, where they survive the war. Both of them carry on them much information about the events at the camp, which they carefully gathered while planning their escape. Through Filip Müller, a member of the

Sonderkommando, they even get data about the gas chambers. Later, Vrba pens the book “I Escaped from Auschwitz”.

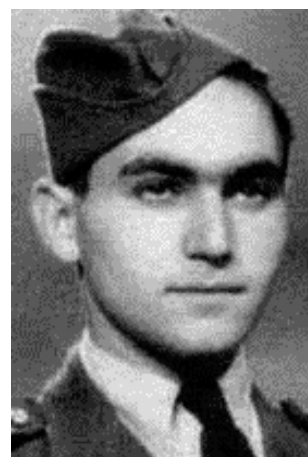
Both elaborate a report on the events of the camp and submit it to the Jewish Council in Switzerland. Then the Allies receive the report. On 18 June 1944, the BBC broadcasts some information from it, and on 23 June 1944, neutral Sweden receives a copy of the Auschwitz Protocols, and the Vatican gets one in October.

Their report is updated after the escape of two more prisoners, Czeslaw Mordowicz and Arnošt Rosin.

A positive result of these reports is the halting of the deportation and murder of Hungarian Jews. However, Jewish prisoners in Auschwitz, as well as other members of this persecuted nation that are yet to be transported there, are left to their own fates. Many thus feel betrayed by everyone and will never understand why the Allies never bombed this death factory and its access railways, on which more and more victims of the Holocaust have yet to arrive.

### **11 April 1944, Tuesday**

2,500 Greek Jews from Athens arrive, of which 320 men are chosen to work in the camp. 150 to 200 of them are then led to isolated Block 13 to strengthen the ranks of the Sonderkommando. One of them is twenty-one-year-old Shlomo Venezia and his twenty-three-year-old brother Morris. Both gradually work in various crematoriums; at one time, they cut the hair of the victims. Both survive the horrors of the camp and the war.



**Figure 197 Rudolf Vrba**

Towards the end of his life, Shlomo Venezia describes his experience in the book “Sonderkommando Auschwitz”. He dedicates the book to two families. To his pre-war family, of which his forty-four-year-old mother and two sisters aged 14 and 11 years died in the gas chambers immediately upon arriving at Auschwitz. The second family is his wife, three sons, and five grandchildren.



**Figure 198 Shlomo Venezia**

## 16 April 1944, Sunday

A new Oberkapo of the Sonderkommando, Karl Koevent, arrives from Majdanek. He also brings with him 19 Soviet prisoners of war. They confirm to the members of the Sonderkommando that their 200 colleagues deported in February 1944 were immediately shot and cremated after arriving at Majdanek.

## 29 April 1944, Saturday

The first transport of 1,800 Hungarian Jews arrives at the Auschwitz II – Birkenau camp. This is an omen of further tragic events.

## May 1944

Another pair of prisoners successfully escapes the camp, thirty-two-year-old Arnošt Rosin and twenty-three-year-old Czesław Mordowicz. They update the information on the murdering of the Jews provided by their colleagues Vrba and Wetzler.

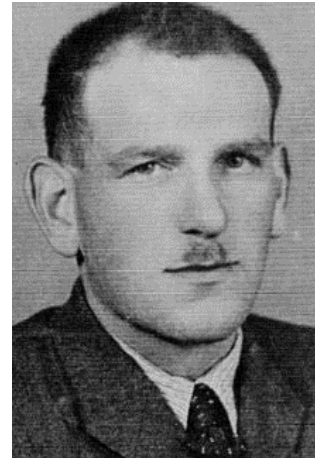


Figure 199 Arnošt Rosin

## 2 May 1944, Tuesday

Two transports of 3,800 Hungarian Jews arrive, most of them end up in the gas chambers after selection.



Figure 200 Arrival of transport – picture by Jan Komski



## 8 May 1944, Monday

Rudolf Höss returns as the head commandant of the Auschwitz camp complex, and the preparations of the murders of the Hungarian Jews are finished. The present commandant, Arthur Liebehenscheld, is reassigned as commandant of the Majdanek concentration camp.

## 9 May 1944, Tuesday

Höss names Otto Moll as the overseer of all crematoriums, and Voss remains the head of Crematoriums IV and V. Höss finds the fanatic and brutal Moll to be more appropriate for the planned, monstrous act than the more moderate Voss.

Moll immediately checks the states of all of the crematoriums and orders them to be repaired. Besides this, he also has the defunct Bunker II be again prepared for use, and the undressing shacks are again built nearby it. He orders four open-air pits for cremating be dug out behind Bunker II.

Since it is soon evident that the crematoriums cannot maintain the pace of cremating the cadavers, and because Crematorium IV is non-functioning and Crematorium V has damaged ovens and thus has a lower performance, Moll has two large open-air pits of about 50 metres in length, eight metres wide, and two metres deep dug out. He has small channels and a sump for the collection of the human fat that will be poured over the cadavers. This improvement should increase the speed of body cremation.

The bottom of the pit consists of old frets, wood, wood shavings, sawdust, and dry fir branches, and prisoners place up to 400 bodies of men, women, and children on top of this layer. The bodies are covered with another layer of flammable material. Thus, up to 1,200 cadavers can be placed into the pit. Old rags, soaking wet with flammable fluids, are stuck between the bodies. Everything is then set on fire with a torch. After the fire flares up, human fat drips into the sump, and it is used to pour over the entire pyramid. A bit later, another several hundred bodies are thrown into the fire.

In order to prevent the burning pits to be seen, a camouflage fence of weaved branches was built around it. Moll had benches and tables set up in front of Crematorium V for undressing. The dressing room inside of the building is insufficient and using it would slow down the murdering process.



Figure 201 Fence made of branches by Crematorium V – [www.auschwitz.org](http://www.auschwitz.org)

## Mid-May 1944

Around this time, a transport from Theresienstadt of 7,503 people arrives at the family camp in sector BIIB in Auschwitz II – Birkenau; one third of these are Czech Jews.

### 15 May 1944, Monday

Eichmann's campaign officially begins, the goal of which is to completely annihilate the Hungarian Jews. That day, three cattle trains arrive from Hungary, carrying about 9,000 to 10,000 people. This number of deported people becomes the norm for each of the following days.

### 16 May 1944, Tuesday

Thirty-one-year-old SS-Oberscharführer Eric Muhsfeldt arrives at the camp. He becomes the overseer of Crematoriums II and III. He becomes infamous for his brutality.

### 21 May 1944, Sunday

Two convoys with a total of six thousand people arrive, and only 2,000 people are deemed to be capable of work. Since Crematoriums II and III are under maintenance; the selected are murdered in Crematorium V and cremated in the pits behind it. It is probably on this day that the pits are first used.



Figure 202 Eric Muhsfeldt

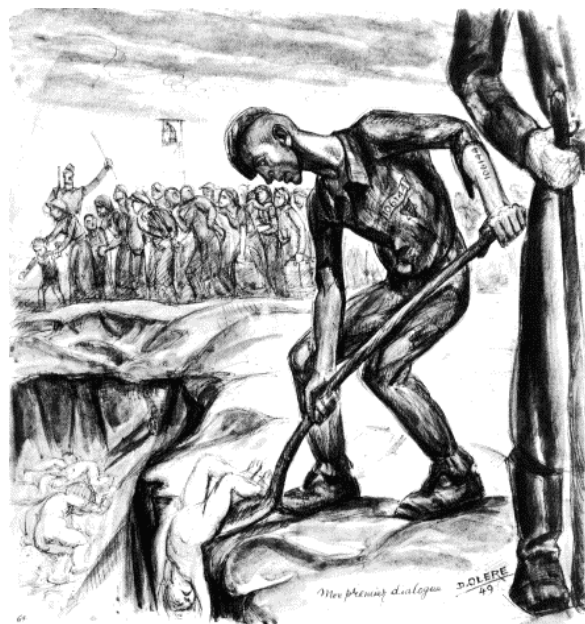


Figure 203 Burning bodies in a pit – picture by David Olère



Figure 204 Hell of Auschwitz camps – picture by David Olère

## 23 May 1944, Tuesday

250 men from the previous transport of Hungarian Jews are assigned to the Sonderkommando, which at this time already has 900 members. Its members come from seven countries, Germany, Poland, Greece, Holland, France, Slovakia, and Hungary. Some are unable to communicate with each other, as they can only speak the language of their homeland.

Some of the new members of the Sonderkommando include twenty-year-old Dov Paisikovic and his father Isaac. Both survive, and Dov is later a witness in the Auschwitz trials in Frankfurt in 1963.

The overseer of the crematoriums, Moll, not only directs the process of murdering, but he literally revels in it. He shows signs of sadism; for instance, he personally leads naked women to the pits with the burning bodies, delights in their terror, and then he shoots them with a pistol himself. He does not even hesitate to throw live children, whose mothers left them waiting outside of disinfection, i.e. the gas chambers, into the flames. He also tortures and kills members of the Sonderkommando.





Figure 205 Shooting women by the burning pit – picture by David Olère

## End of May 1944

In light of the large number of transported Hungarian Jews, the deported women are placed into the unfinished sector BIII, known as Mexico. Block BIIc, which was meant for them, could not fully accommodate them. Also, with some of the transports, a larger number of people were chosen to go to the camp, and were selected for death only later, when the number of those murdered was lower.



Figure 206 Arrival of transport and selection – May 1944 – photo by Wilhelm Brasse





**Figure 207** Arrival of transport and selection – May 1944 – photo by Wilhelm Brasse



**Figure 208** Arrival of transport and selection – May 1944 – photo by Wilhelm Brasse



**Figure 209** Arrival of transport and selection of men – May 1944 – photo by Wilhelm Brasse



**Figure 210** Arrival of transport and selection of men – May 1944 – photo by Wilhelm Brasse





**Figure 211 On the way to Crematorium V – May 1944 – photo by Wilhelm Brasse**



**Figure 212 On the way to Crematorium V – May 1944 – photo by Wilhelm Brasse**



**Figure 213 On the way to Crematorium V – May 1944 – photo by Wilhelm Brasse**



**Figure 214 Waiting for their death by Crematorium V – May 1944 – photo by Wilhelm Brasse**





**Figure 215** Waiting for their death by Crematorium V – May 1944 – photo by Wilhelm Brasse



**Figure 216** Waiting for their death by Crematorium V – May 1944 – photo by Wilhelm Brasse





**Figure 217 Waiting for their death by Crematorium V – May 1944 – photo by Wilhelm Brasse**



**Figure 218 Things after the killed people – May 1944 – photo by Wilhelm Brasse**

## **End of May 1944**

Until this time, the members of the Sonderkommando have been quartered in Block 11 and 13 in sector BIId. Since there is so much work servicing the crematoriums, Moll decides that the commandos will be accommodated directly in the crematoriums. In

Crematoriums II and III, a dormitory is constructed in the attic space, and around 200 prisoners work in each one of them. About 300 members of the Sonderkommando serving Crematorium V and the pits behind it are quartered in non-functioning Crematorium IV. The rest most probably sleep in Block 11 or 13, and they work in Bunker II. Sometime later, they, too, are moved to Crematorium IV.

Seventeen-year-old Morris Kesselman is assigned to the Sonderkommando, and he becomes the pupil of twenty-six-year-old Kapo Lemke Pliszsek. Both survive, Morris thanks to the protection of the Kapo. Later, both give significant testimony about the events near the gas chambers. Being the youngest member of the commando, Kesselman is often sent for food. He is able to coax the guard, an SS officer of Dutch descent, and sometimes, he is allowed to throw bread into the women's camp. At the time, the Sonderkommando has enough food from the transport loot.



Figure 219 Throwing food to prisoners – picture by David Olère

## 29 May 1944, Monday

Miklos Nyiszli, a forty-three-year-old Hungarian pathologist of Jewish descent arrives to the camp in a transport. He becomes the colleague of Dr. Mengele, and his book “Auschwitz: A Doctor’s Eyewitness Account” helps create the myth behind this unfeeling Nazi doctor. In the book, Nyiszli is the first to reveal the terrors of the annihilation of the Jews and of the experiments on the prisoners. Although his book has much inaccurate data, including the number of people killed, its significance lies in the fact that it provides shocking information to the public all over the world.

Nyiszli is assigned as a doctor to the Sonderkommando and is housed directly in Crematorium II, where its morgue is also located. At first, he does autopsies on a large number of people there by himself, but later has colleagues. The bodies are supplied by Dr. Mengele. Right after he arrives at the crematorium, the local Kapo holds an opulent feast in his honour. While they are feasting on the provisions of the murdered people, thousands of

other prisoners nearby are starving to death. This is one of the camp's paradoxes, some privileged prisoners have enough of everything, yet most of the common prisoners are malnourished.

Nyiszli has a strange relationship with his boss. He is allowed to meet with his wife and seventeen-year-old daughter, something completely unprecedented in the camp. Mengele brings him cigarettes, and they discuss the results of the autopsies in the midst of their smoke.

Aside from performing autopsies, the pathologist must prepare skeletons for the Anatomy Institute. Various disabled people, including dwarves, are shot, then they are boiled in a kettle so that their meat softens and is more easily removed from the bones. The cooked cadavers are then sent to the autopsy room, where they are turned into snow-white skeletons ready for transport.

An example are the fates of a father and son that are both physically handicapped; the father has a hump, and the son has a spur on his leg. Both are taken by Mengele from the transport, are forced to strip naked in the morgue, and after being examined in the autopsy room, they are shot. Their skeletons are ready for the Anatomy Institute the next day.

## **June 1944**

The first transports of prisoners to other concentration camps are sent out. Some of them even contain the recently arrived Hungarian Jews. Similar transports are put together in the next months.

## **June 1944**

French Jewish physician Karel Zigmund Bendel is assigned to the Sonderkommando. He begins working in the autopsy room of Dr. Mengele.

Bendel leaves Auschwitz in the death march on 18 January 1945, and he survives both the journey and the war.

## **June 1944**

Hungarian Jew Ema Stern arrives in a transport. She eventually survives the camp. In her testimony, she describes that shortly after being admitted to the camp, they took her and other women around a large pit containing naked children's bodies of various ages, from infants to taller preschoolers. The Nazis are just pouring flammable liquids on them in order to set fire to them. She believes that the SS officers show them these atrocities on purpose, in order to intimidate them and to arouse despair in them.





**Figure 220 Burning the dead children – picture by David Olère**

## **June 1944**

The New York Times publishes an article based on the Vrba-Wetzler report, which mentions that 1.5 and 1.75 million Jews have been gassed in Auschwitz. At this time, the Swedish king, the Pope, and the chairman of the Red Cross contact the Hungarian regent Miklós Horthy, and request that the deportation of Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz be halted.

## **June 1944**

Extensive experiments involving a mosquito begin on the prisoners in the experimental Block 28 in Auschwitz I, causing the death of many men. The Nazi doctors are testing new malaria medicine on them. If the prisoner is not infected after being bitten by the mosquito, they receive a transfusion of infected blood.

Experimental Block 28 remains closed to the common prisoners, and it is not exactly clear what sort of scientific research takes place there. Rumours talk of experiments with making prisoners hypothermic in the built-in reservoir, or of researching infectious hepatitis. Often, even healthy men are purposefully infected with it.

It is certain that there are experiments with various burns that emulate the burns caused by grenade explosions on the front. But there are also experiments meant to reveal cases of self-harm by German soldiers who want to get away from the front. They purposefully cause themselves various infections. The skin of prisoners is smeared with toxic substances, or they are injected under the skin. The men are affected by infected and dangerous wounds. There is no doubt that the prisoners selected for these experiments greatly suffer.

Block 28 has a photography studio, where pictures of the naked subjects of these experiments are taken. For some time, even Mengele has his twins driven there to be photographed.

## 6 June 1944, Tuesday

Allies land in Normandy. The Red Army is located only several hundred kilometres from Budapest.

## 13 June, perhaps until July 1944

The women's experimental Block 10 in Auschwitz I is moved to Block 1 in the newly built-up area not far from base camp. These barracks are located in the protected zone, about a five-minute walk from Auschwitz I. Block 1 was previously personally chosen by Dr. Clauberg for the continuation of his experiments on women.

## 18 June 1944, Sunday

The last convoy of Hungarian Jews before a pause in gassing arrives, and the next does not arrive until 28 June 1944.



Figure 221 Photo of Mengeles twins –  
[www.yadvashem.org](http://www.yadvashem.org)



Figure 222 Hell by gas chambers – picture by David Olère

## 22 June 1944, Thursday

The Soviets launch Operation Bagration against the Nazi soldiers, which is a massive offensive on Army Group Centre in Belarus.

## 26 June 1944, Monday

An Air Force plane takes photographs of the entire Auschwitz complex. At the time, the crematoriums are not in operation, and no smoke is rising out of them. This is grist to the mill for those who doubt the Holocaust and the murders in the gas chambers. The truth of the matter is that the last transport arrived on 18 June, and the next will not arrive for two days more. The images were thus taken when there was a pause in the mass murders.



Figure 223 Aerial photo of Auschwitz complex – 26 June 1944

## 28 June 1944, Wednesday

Another transport of Hungarian Jews arrives.





**Figure 224** Arrival of the selected to Crematorium III – picture by David Olère

## **29 June 1944, Thursday**

Dr. Mengele sends the decapitated head of a twelve-year-old boy to the Anatomy Institute, and also sends a photograph of four Romani that he has castrated. Aside from various internal organs and serums made out of them or the gauged out eyes of Romanis, Mengele also sends the skeletons of dwarves or of the handicapped from the camp.

It is Dr. Mengele who takes substantial advantage of the transports of Hungarian Jews, choosing them as subjects for his research. He walks among the selected, pulling aside twins from the crowd, as well as the physically deformed, and dwarves. He establishes a special block for them, where he gathers them. The interned themselves call the quarters a freak show.

As for the expertise of Dr. Mengele, he is probably not even a brilliant scientist as is later portrayed in many films and books, but is, at most, an average scientist. He probably is not even a sadist, just a completely unscrupulous physician who values the Jewish prisoners in the same manner as laboratory rats. Jewish doctors are the exception, as he partially considers them to be colleagues. In fact, he sometimes organises something like a conference that the Jewish prison physicians take part of and where they discuss medical issues with him.

Most of his experiments can be considered to be nonsensical and do not bring any significant findings, only the suffering of victims. Whether it is an attempt to change eye colour, standing on one's head for extensive periods of time, constricting limbs, piercing needles into spines, shining sharp lighting directly into eyes, and so on.

As for the twins, Mengele only kills them exceptionally and usually only when one of them dies of natural causes due to sickness. According to statistics, about 15% of the twins he studies die, which, in terms of the enormous death rate of the camp, is a very solid number.

The children themselves, especially those in the Gypsy Family Camp, like him and call him “uncle Pepe”, and he gives them chocolate and candy. Unfortunately, he also takes them for his various beastly experiments. According to the testimonies of those twins who survived, the children know that if not for Mengele, they would have been already dead. They did not go straight to the gas chambers upon arrival only thanks to the fact that he wants to study them. This is the price they pay for letting him do his experiments on them. The children understand that only his experiments and his interest in them and nothing else keeps them alive. For them, he is both a protector and destroyer in one person.

On his orders, the twins are privileged prisoners and no one is allowed to touch them. Some children take advantage of this and say *“I’ll tell uncle and you’ll get it!”*. This is a compelling argument, since the doctor ranked as a SS captain is a God in the camp and can literally do anything. It is only the Nazi doctors that can decide who shall live for time still or who is now meant to die.

Mengele does not often join in the sterilisation experiments, and if he does, only marginally. Some testimony suggests that in one case, he removes the testicles of an eight-year-old boy, as it is thought that he wishes to observe and compare him with his twin.

An event with two Romani twin boys is quite telling, however. The prison doctors say that on the basis of x-rays, the boys do not have tuberculosis. Mengele is of a different opinion. A few days later, he approaches them and confesses to the bad diagnosis. When they show their uncertainty, he answers: *“Of course I performed autopsies on them.”* This is especially sad considering that the eight-year-old boys were not only the favourites of the prison physicians, but also of Mengele himself. All of them literally spoilt them.



Figure 225 Gypsy children – photo by prisoner Wilhelm Brasse

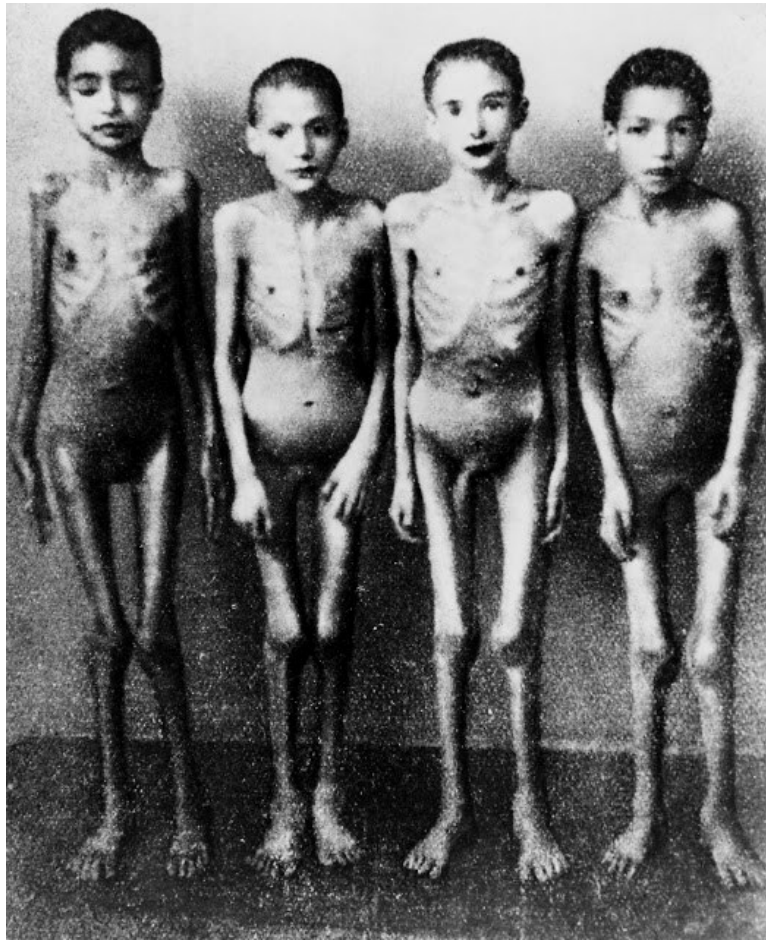


Figure 226 Gypsy children – photo by prisoner Wilhelm Brasse

## Mid 1944

The international resistance organisation in the camp called “Combat Group Auschwitz” sets up the “Auschwitz Military Council”, which is to prepare an armed revolt. People are worried that the Nazis will want to kill all of the prisoners and cover their tracks before the Soviet army arrives.

Another reason for the increased activity is the supposed plan of Otto Moll, who suggests that all prisoners be murdered, the crematoriums be destroyed, and then all of Auschwitz II – Birkenau be obliterated by bombing. It is not certain whether Moll suggested this or not, but the information still spreads among the prisoners.

The resistance members even contact the Sonderkommando, which has a great number of strong and determined young men who are aware that in any case, they shall be killed themselves as unwanted witnesses.

Representing the Sonderkommando in these contacts with the resistance is Kapo Kaminski, who pushes for launching the uprising as soon as possible. He is afraid that soon, the ranks of the Sonderkommando will be reduced, i.e. that its members will be murdered. The resistance protests that the conditions are not yet ideal for the escape of a larger number of prisoners, and that the Nazis could then literally hunt the refugees down. The Soviet army is still far away and the SS officers have the opportunity of calling for reinforcements.



## 9 July 1944, Sunday

On this day, the representative of Hungary, Admiral Miklos Horthy, decides to halt the deportation of Jews. The reason is the pressure of his own family, as well as international coercion, as every day, he is bombarded with telegrams. This is the only time that diplomatic intervention is able to brake the Holocaust. However, at this time, probably half of the almost 440 thousand already deported Jews are dead.

It is undoubted that the liquidation of the Hungarian Jews is the darkest and bloodiest period in the history of the concentration camp. At the same time, the data on exactly how many Hungarian Jews ended up at Auschwitz and how many of them were killed there differs greatly. The deniers of the Holocaust point out some of the exaggerated numbers in the testimonies, such as 25 thousand gassed and cremated victims in a 24 hour period, as well as the technical impossibility in the given conditions to kill such a large amount of people and get rid of the bodies in one day.

The witnesses themselves are probably so astonished by the mass murders in these months that they are not able to properly estimate the correct number of dead. This only puts grist to the mill of the Holocaust deniers, as do the exaggerated numbers given by the Soviets immediately after the war, who announce a total of 4 million murdered at Auschwitz. Today, historians agree on the realistic numbers of 1.1 to 1.3 million executed or tortured people.

In the period from the beginning of May to the beginning of July 1944, probably 361,661 people are deported from Hungary directly to Auschwitz, as some sources state. Many of those chosen for labour, usually up to 30% of the transport, are then sent to work in other camps. Some that are designated for liquidation are temporarily quartered in the camp and wait for their time to come, that is for when those already murdered are cremated in the crematoriums or in the huge pits behind Crematorium V. The sad, real record is the gassing of 9 thousand people in one day.

According to Nazi records, 437,402 Jews are sent to death from Hungary. How many of them actually die in Auschwitz is not exactly clear, the smallest estimates speak of 150 thousand gassed and cremated immediately upon arriving, other sources cite 200 to 250 thousand. The highest number cited is 320 thousand immediately gassed, but this number seems to be exaggerated, and murdering this amount of people in such a short time is technically difficult to do. Some of the victims counted may have not been murdered upon arrival, but probably die while being incarcerated in Auschwitz, or after being deported to other camps.

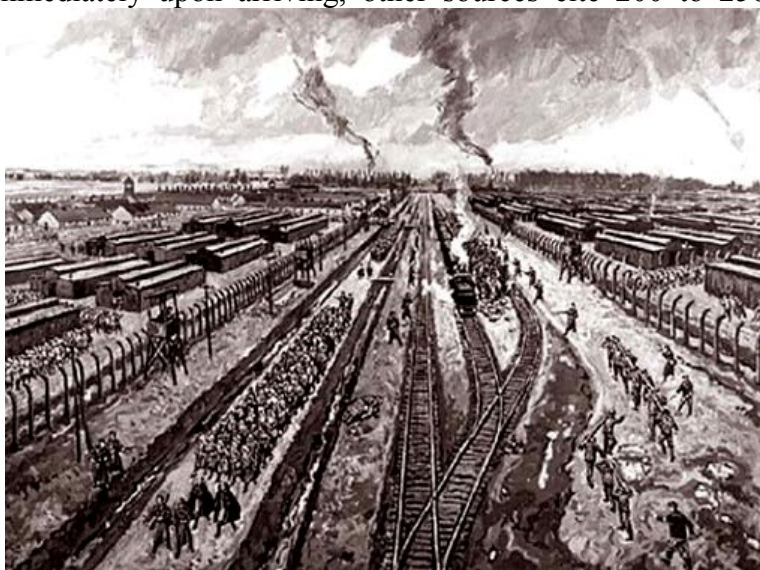


Figure 227 Ramp at Auschwitz II – Birkenau – picture by Mieczysław Koscielniak

## 12 July 1944, Wednesday

After a mass murder in March 1944 of almost four thousand Czech Jews deported from Theresienstadt in October 1943, their colleagues live in the family camp in sector BIIB with the knowledge that their time of six months before being killed is running out. Many apathetically state that they still have two months, then one, then a fortnight before they go up in smoke.

Perhaps because the Nazis are afraid of an uprising, the liquidation of the camp on 20 June 1944 does not occur. On the contrary, the SS officers start choosing men and women capable of working, a total of about 3,500, who are sent to other camps to the west. There, about two-thirds of them later die. At first, these chosen prisoners are wary that being chosen is a manoeuvre to camouflage the fact that they are going to the gas chamber, but eventually, they are relieved to be really travelling in trains heading for other camps. Several tens of strong boys aged 14 to 16 are chosen to work. Twins are, again, led away by Dr. Mengele.

Thus, only the weaker individuals, i.e. older men, women, and children, are left in the family camp. It is also necessary to count several tens of strong women who refuse to be transported in order to stay with their children. So, the Germans let them stay with their daughters and sons. These women probably know what awaits them, but they would rather share the fates of their children than to save their own lives and let their children die alone.

On 12 July 1944, the killing of the remaining six and a half thousand people from sector BIIB, which means the definite liquidation of the family camp made up of the Jews coming from Theresienstadt, takes place. All of the remaining men, women, and children die in the gas chambers of Auschwitz II. – Birkenau.



Picture 228 Mother with her child – picture by David Olère

## **13 July 1944, Thursday**

Edmund Veessenmeyer, the German agent in Hungary, sends a report to Berlin stating that a total of 437,402 Jews were deported. A total of 147 transports were sent out, each carrying a total of about 3,000 people.

## **28 July 1944, Friday**

The Sonderkommando prepares a very carefully planned uprising. The prisoners should kill the guards in the crematorium around 4:00 p.m. and then wait for the next shift of SS officers, kill them and take their weapons. After being so armed, they shall start liberating the adjacent sectors of the camp and so unleash a large-scale escape. Everything is ruined by the arrival of 837 prisoners from Majdanek, since they are accompanied by a strong SS officer commando and by the Wehrmacht, who guard them near the crematorium by the Central Sauna, where they are being deloused.

It is clear that the presence of so many armed soldiers means that the entire act is jeopardised, and so Kaminski calls off the entire uprising at the last minute. Those men of the Sonderkommando that were ready to die in battle with the Nazis become apathetic.

## **29 July 1944, Saturday**

Rudolf Höss leaves the post of camp commandant for the second time. He is awarded the "War Merit Cross (with Swords) First and Second Class" for murdering the Hungarian Jews.

## **31 July and 1 August 1944, Monday and Tuesday (some sources cite 2 August)**

After liquidating the camp of the Czech Jews, it is decided to also liquidate the Gypsy Family Camp. Over two thousand people capable of working have already been transported to other camps, and several thousand have died of natural causes due to horrible hygienic conditions. Others, mostly children, are sometimes purposefully and quietly killed by physicians, which is also designated as death by natural causes. Thus, the number of those to be killed in the final act is decreased. Even so, there are still probably 2,897 men, women, and children who remain in the camp. Some sources, however, cite up to 4 thousand or even 4,500. A total of 23 thousand Romanis go through sector BIIe of Auschwitz II - Birkenau, of which about 2 thousand survive being interned here.

Up until the last minute, Dr. Mengele attempts to save the Gypsy camp, as he has one of his experimental workplaces here; he even personally goes to Berlin because of this. He is not able to prevent the liquidation of the camp, however. So, he helps liquidate it with the same diligence he showed as he tried to save it.

Since the Romanis suspect what is to happen to them, they desperately fight with SS officers and members of the Sonderkommando by the gas chambers, during which they use whatever weapons they can find, such as utensils. Their ferocious fight is futile, however.



Fourteen Romani twins avoid death in the gas chambers, and some sources talk of 12 pairs of twins. Dr. Mengele has them interned in the workplace next to his morgue in Crematorium II. After the gassing is finished, that very night, the children are individually led into the morgue. Here, they have to undress and lie down on the autopsy table. First, they receive an injection into the arm of the tranquilliser evipan, and then a fatal injection of chloroform into the heart. The injections are personally applied by Dr. Mengele, and the autopsies of the twins gradually taken to the morgue are carried out by the pathologists.

These are the very same children that Dr. Mengele himself gave food, candy, and toys to in the camp. And they joyfully welcomed him, ran towards him, every time this nice “uncle” showed up.

## **2 August 1944, Wednesday**

SS officer Moll shoots the Kapo of the Sonderkommando, Jaakov Kaminski, probably due to being turned in by Kapo Morawa. Kaminski had told him about the plans for the uprising several days prior, and Morawa did not agree with them. This information is not confirmed, however, and the Jewish Kapo could have been turned in by anybody else.

## **August 1944**

A member of the Sonderkommando about twenty years old is caught with a stolen valuable, and Moll decides to punish him exemplarily. On his orders, SS officers cram the naked man into the chamber of an oven not in use, and then they pour petrol into the ash-pan and light it on fire. When they open the doors again, the screaming, burning youth jumps out, runs to the courtyard and runs about so long until Moll shoots him.

## **August 1944**

During the gassing of a transport in Crematorium II, a mother with her twelve-year-old son manage to hide in the tall grass. They are found the next morning. Both must descend into the room before the gas chamber and undress. The SS officer shoots the son in front of the mother, and then he shoots her.

## **August 1944**

The overseer of Crematoriums II and III, thirty-one-year-old SS-Oberscharführer Eric Muhlsfeldt, is transferred to the front. His activities in Auschwitz II – Birkenau are finished.



**Figure 229 Killing the victims – picture by David Olère**

## August to September 1944

The combat group, represented by the “Auschwitz Military Council”, begins preparing the plans for a large uprising, counting on the help of the Sonderkommando.

Ultimately, the uprising never takes place, since for some time now, prisoners are being moved further west, further away from the Soviet army. It turns out that not all prisoners are to be killed, and thus they have a better chance of living to see the end of the war in another camp than in a surely bloody uprising, the positive outcome of which cannot be guaranteed in advance.

## August 1944

An agreement is made between the resistance and the women working in the factory of the “Weischel Union Metallwerke” Company, which manufactures igniters for artillery shells. At least six women, namely Roza Robot, Ester Wajclbjum, Regina Safirsztajn, Ala Gertner, Marta Cigé and Chaya Koin, participate in the smuggling of gunpowder from the factory into the camp. There, the prisoners make hand grenades using it, which they hand over to Sonderkommando member Jukel Wrobel in the clothing storage. Sometimes, twenty-eight-year-old Eliezer Welbel accepts the material.

The grenades are made out of tin cans, and consist of gunpowder, nails, and shards. Shlomo Dragon hides about 30 such grenades in Block 13. Later, he moves them to Crematorium IV.

### 7 August 1944, Monday

On this day, American bombers bomb the oil refinery in Trzebin, lying not even 20 km from Auschwitz. The rising smoke from the hit buildings can be seen. The prisoners, however, wait in vain for the planes to also bomb the camp. Fifteen-year-old Hugo Gryn summarises his feelings into one sentence: *“The most painful aspect about life in the camp was the feeling that everyone forgot all about us.”*

## August, September 1944

At this time, it is decided that the ghetto in Łódź will be liquidated, containing about 70,000 people. Their fates are to be fulfilled in Auschwitz. As always, when the transport arrives at Auschwitz II – Birkenau, selection takes place and the majority of the delivered people are gassed. On some days, two trains with the deported arrive.

### 15 August 1944, Tuesday

The first transport of Jews from the Łódź Ghetto arrives. The period of clearing out the ghettos in Łódź and Plaszow begins.

## 20 August 1944, Sunday

Americans bomb the factory complex in Auschwitz III - Monowitz. The prisoners of Auschwitz II – Birkenau again desperately look towards the heavens and pray that the bombs also hit their camp and the factory of death. Their prayers are in vain. According to their testimonies after the war, most of them at that moment feel totally abandoned and that absolutely no one cares. And nothing about this feeling changes until the end of the existence of the murdering machinery known as Auschwitz.

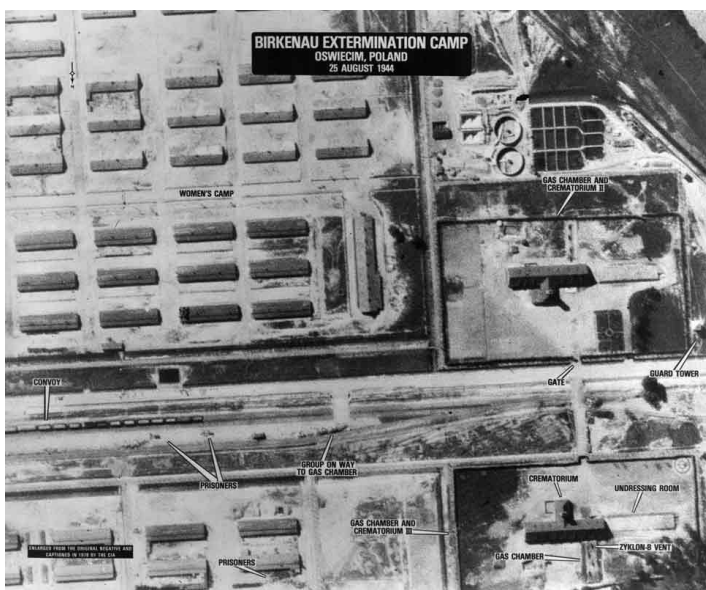
In fact, the Americans bomb the camp environs four more times, on 13 September, on 18 and 26 December, and on 19 January 1945. They have detailed plans of the camp from Vrba and Wetzler, as well as photographs from their own reconnaissance, no later than July 1944. Despite this, they decide to not bomb the camp.

The inmates do not accept the explanation that the Americans are scared the bombs will hit the prisoners. They are sentenced to death either way, and they have more hope in the bombing. Not only in destroying the gas chambers, but also of the railways that more victims are brought in on, and also in the chaos that would ensue, in which they could have a chance to escape.

The Allies certainly have justified concerns that if the camp were to be hit, someone like Goebels could point out the charred cadavers in their propaganda. Presumably even David Ben Gurion, the future founder of the state of Israel, dissuades the Allies from bombing. He fears many dead prisoners, as well as the revenge of the Nazis on those who survive.

When experts later deal with these issues and rationally evaluate the situation without emotions, they come to the conclusion that the bombing at the end of the summer of 1944 would not have changed the course of the Holocaust. It probably would not have even saved any of the interned, but would have rather killed more of them.

## 22 August 1944, Tuesday



The deportation of Jews from Plaszow and Łódź continues. On this day, 40 wagons from Plaszow arrive; a smaller amount of Jews are admitted to the camp and the rest are gassed.

Figure 230 Auschwitz II. Birkenau – aerial photo from 15 August 1944





**Figure 231 Auschwitz I – aerial photo from 25 August 1944**

## **End of August 1944**

Alberto Errera, who was an officer with the Greek army before the war and is now a member of the Sonderkommando, secretly takes four photographs from Crematorium V, where the undressing of victims before entering the gas chambers is shown, as well as the burning of their dead bodies in the pits. These photographs are smuggled out of the camp on Monday, 4 September 1944, and get into the hands of the Committee for Helping Concentration Camp Prisoners based in Krakow. This committee is part of the Polish resistance.



**Figure 232 On the way to gas chamber – picture by Alberto Errery**



**Figure 233 Burning the bodies in the holes behind Crematorium V – picture by Alberto Errery**

## **September 1944**

Any further construction of the camp is cancelled. On the contrary, the barracks in unfinished sector BIII in Auschwitz II – Birkenau are taken apart. The materials are then sent west for further use.

## **September 1944**

Nazi physician Horst Schumann, who had as a part of Action T4 already liquidated over 1,300 patients before the war, leaves the camp for the clinic in Sonnenstein. At Auschwitz, he leaves behind him a considerable number of dead and mutilated prisoners, on which he performed his experiments most often dealing with sterilisation, but he was also interested in researching typhus.

Some of his experiments, however, border with stupidity. For instance, he attempts to cure a facial fungus on a group of prisoners, spread by using the same razor for numerous people. However, his method of treatment is truly original, as he has the faces of the patients radiated by x-rays. The result is obvious even to the layman; the victims first suffer from great pain caused by the burns and are then sent to their deaths.

## **After 4 September 1944**

Sonderkommando members Albert Errero and eighteen-year-old Hugo Venezia attempt escape. When they go to dump the ash of the cremated victims into the Visla Rivers, two SS officers accompany them. They have agreed that Albert will take care of the soldier near the hull and that Hugo will deal with the driver. Errero bisects the guard's head with a

shovel, but Venezia loses his nerve and doesn't do anything. The driver then jumps out of the vehicle and starts shooting towards an escaping Albert with a tommy-gun. Wounded, he reaches the opposite bank, but is found dead the next day, as he bled to death from his wounds.

The SS officers bring his cadaver to Crematorium V, where they cut it open and have the remaining members of the Sonderkommando march by the body. Whoever turns their eyes away is brutally beaten.

The fate of Hugo Venezia is not accurately documented, he is probably not punished for the escape of his colleague, and is killed in October 1944 in the Sonderkommando uprising.

## **12 September 1944, Tuesday**

On this day, the gassing of 300 children takes place in Crematorium V, who are brought in from Kowno.



**Figure 234 Children – picture by Zinowij Tolkaczew**





Figure 235 Victims – picture by Zinowij Tolkaczew

### **13 September 1944, Wednesday**

The surroundings of Auschwitz are bombed.

### **15 September 1944, Friday**

It is probably on this date that twenty-seven-year-old Nazi physician of Belgian descent Hans Delmotte arrives to the camp. After taking part of his first ramp selection, he breaks down. His colleagues convince him to take part in more selections, and he ends up taking part in several more selections of the deported for death. Soon after being arrested after the war, he gets a hold of a weapon and shoots himself.

### **Second Half of September 1944**

The Łódź Ghetto is liquidated, and although the number of the gassed is curtailed, it definitely does not stop completely, as the camp in Theresienstadt still exists.

## 23 September 1944, Saturday

The Nazis murder 200 members of the Sonderkommando from Crematoriums IV and V, most probably in the disinfection room Canada I. These killed prisoners were quartered in Crematorium IV, near which they are selected for alleged transport to another camp; they almost revolt during this selection, but they eventually obey the commands.

Their death is not really explained, but it seems that they most probably drank with overseer Otto Moll, who is leaving Auschwitz and who promises to take the experienced workers with him to his new place of operation. The Nazis then gas the drunk prisoners.

Then, the Nazis lock the Sonderkommando in the attic of Crematorium II and cremate the bodies of their colleagues in the ovens themselves. Supposedly they are the victims of the bombings. The dead do not burn completely, and so the next day, the prisoners find the charred cadavers in the oven chambers and recognise their murdered colleagues. The atmosphere of hopelessness and apathy only worsens in the Sonderkommando.

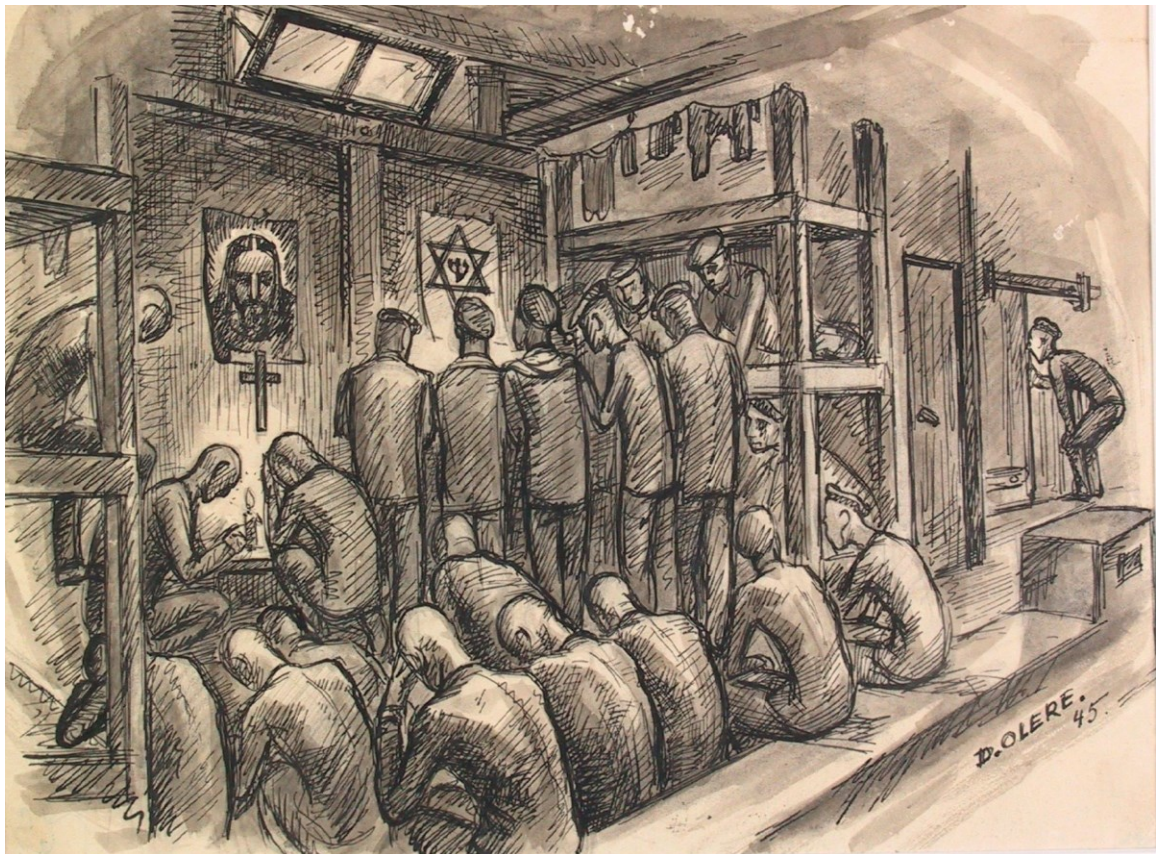


Figure 236 Secret prayers of prisoners – picture by David Olère

## After 23. September 1944

The overseer of all crematoriums Otto Moll is transferred, and Peter Voss again assumes this post.

## **28 September, Thursday to 28 October 1944, Saturday**

At this time, the transports of Jews from Theresienstadt arrive, and most of the deported people go directly to the gas chambers.

### **Beginning of October 1944**

The Jewish prison functionaries of the Sonderkommando get orders from the SS officers to make a list of 300 of their inferiors who should go into the transport. Everyone realises that they are to be murdered. According to the recollections of the surviving prisoners, the Kapos hesitate to obey the command, but eventually this list of death is put together.

The Nazis, as they had many times before, leave the responsibility of choosing those meant for death to their own leaders. This was done earlier in the ghettos, where the Nazis required lists for the transports, and they are doing it again now.

The Kapos have a dilemma. If they compile the list now, they save themselves and their favourite prisoners. If they do not obey, the Nazis shall choose who will go to the transport themselves, which could also include them. And the defeat of the Germans is approaching, a large uprising is being talked about and everyone still secretly hopes that the camp could be bombed and they will be able to escape in the chaos. They cling to the hope that they will be saved before their turn comes.

### **Beginning of October 1944**

A conflict occurs between a Russian Sonderkommando member and a SS officer. When the guard starts to beat the Russian, he attempts to run, and the SS officer wounds him with a gun. When the guard wants to whisk him away, the wounded man plunges at him. In the ensuing fight, the guard shoots him, and then complains to his colleagues about the Russians and requests their departure. The Russians hear about this and worry that they will all be deported and murdered. Although this never happens, the tensions among them rise.

### **7 October 1944, Saturday**

In the morning, the inmates of the Sonderkommando find out that 300 of its members are to be selected and deported. These are usually the inmates that are quartered in Crematorium IV.

A partial agreement, not accepted by all members, is made saying that they shall defend themselves and they shall begin the revolt in Crematorium IV. They are to set fire to their straw pallets and send smoke signals to their colleagues from the other crematoriums. Signals from Crematorium II should be then aimed at Crematorium III. However, it seems that many Kapos and some inmates do not agree with the revolt and want to wait for the large uprising of the entire camp. They are probably ready to sacrifice their three hundred colleagues. It is a difficult decision to make, and certainly not all members of the Sonderkommando are united in how to proceed. Maybe even some of them already know that they are not on the list.



At 1:25 p.m., there is a roll call for all workers in Crematorium V who are quartered in Crematorium IV. Eventually, 286 men remain in the courtyard, and the other 30 are shut in Crematorium V.

SS-Oberscharführer Hubert Busch and SS-Unterscharführer Johann Gorges try to select those inmates meant for the supposed transfer to another camp. At this time, older inmate Chaim Neuhoff pounces on them with a hammer. Others then join him, and the SS officers start shooting from their pistols and run behind the barbed wire. At the same time, they call for reinforcements.

Twenty-eight-year-old Kapo Shlomo Kirszenbaum organises the escape of about 120 prisoners into Crematorium V, where they hope to hide. Many are wounded or killed. Shlomo Dragon also hides in Crematorium V, whereas his brother Abraham remains lying wounded on the path between the crematoriums. Later, he is transported to the hospital. All of the three mentioned above end up surviving both the uprising and the war, as well.

The rest of this part of the Sonderkommando attempts to continue fighting. At this point, the Nazis are already shooting at them from a safe distance, and soon, reinforcements arrive from the barracks with machine-guns.

The prepared grenades are not available, as Shlomo Dragon refuses to hand them out before roll call, since he is waiting for orders to begin the large uprising. When the straw pallets of Crematorium IV are lit on fire, one can no longer go for the grenades due to the flames. They end up not exploding at all, and are buried under the falling roof.

The uprising is soon squelched, and all of the surviving prisoners must lie down in rows in the courtyard of Crematorium V; every third person is shot. Of the total number of 324 inmates, only 44 survive the uprising and the ensuing retaliation near the forest crematoriums. Shlomo Dragon and Filip Müller successfully avoid the executions in the courtyard, and thus do not have to play with fire to see if they will not be one of those shot.

At first, the uprising does not affect Crematoriums II and III, where it remains to be calm until 1:50 p.m. At this time, a unit of SS officers approaches the crematorium, probably just in case in order to prevent an uprising here, as well. The Russian inmates in Crematorium II panic and pounce on Oberkapo Koevent, shoving him into the oven alive. They then attempt to escape, armed only with several knives, a bayonet, and a few home-made grenades. About 100 members of this Sonderkommando escape from the grounds of the crematorium and even make it over the large ditch. Some of them are shot, but part of the group ends up at the fish pond, where they are confronted with an emergency unit on wheels. In this uneven match, all 73 of the inmates are killed, as well as 3 SS officers, who have their throats slit by the rebels. Another 12 SS officers are wounded, also thanks to the weapons of their colleagues that have been overtaken by the rebels.

There remains one small group of refugees that barricades itself in a barn in the village of Rajsko. The barn is lit on fire by SS officers, and the inmates either burn to death or are shot when they come out of the flames.

The four-member medical team of Dr. Mengele's pathologists remains in Crematorium II. They are forced to lie down along with the arrested members of the Sonderkommando in the courtyard with their foreheads to the ground. Dr. Mengele soon comes to pick them up and leads them away, but the rest of the inmates are shot in the head. Of the 171 members of the special commando servicing Crematorium II, not one survives the uprising.

Nothing is happening in Crematorium III, as Kapo Lemke Plizsko prevents his inferiors from joining the spontaneous uprising. He waits for orders from the Combat Group and denounces this wayward act of the Sonderkommando. What is tragic is that on this day, he loses his brother, who services the sewage system but joins the rebels, since he thinks that the large-scale uprising is beginning. Thus, this Kapo loses his last living relative.

All 168 inmates from Crematorium III survive the uprising, as do Mengele's pathologists from Crematorium II and 44 men from the forest crematoriums. On the other hand, 452 of their colleagues die. Three are dead on the side of the SS officers.

Already in the evening, 20 members of the Sonderkommando of Crematorium III must leave to service Crematorium II. Their fears that they are being led to their deaths increase when they are forced to undress after arriving at the opposite crematorium. In this moment, they all think that they will be executed and they begin to say farewell to life. However, the SS officers are just searching their clothing. They are then driven to the ovens, and that evening, they cremate the rest of the bodies lying in the morgues. The next day, they begin to cremate the bodies of their shot colleagues.

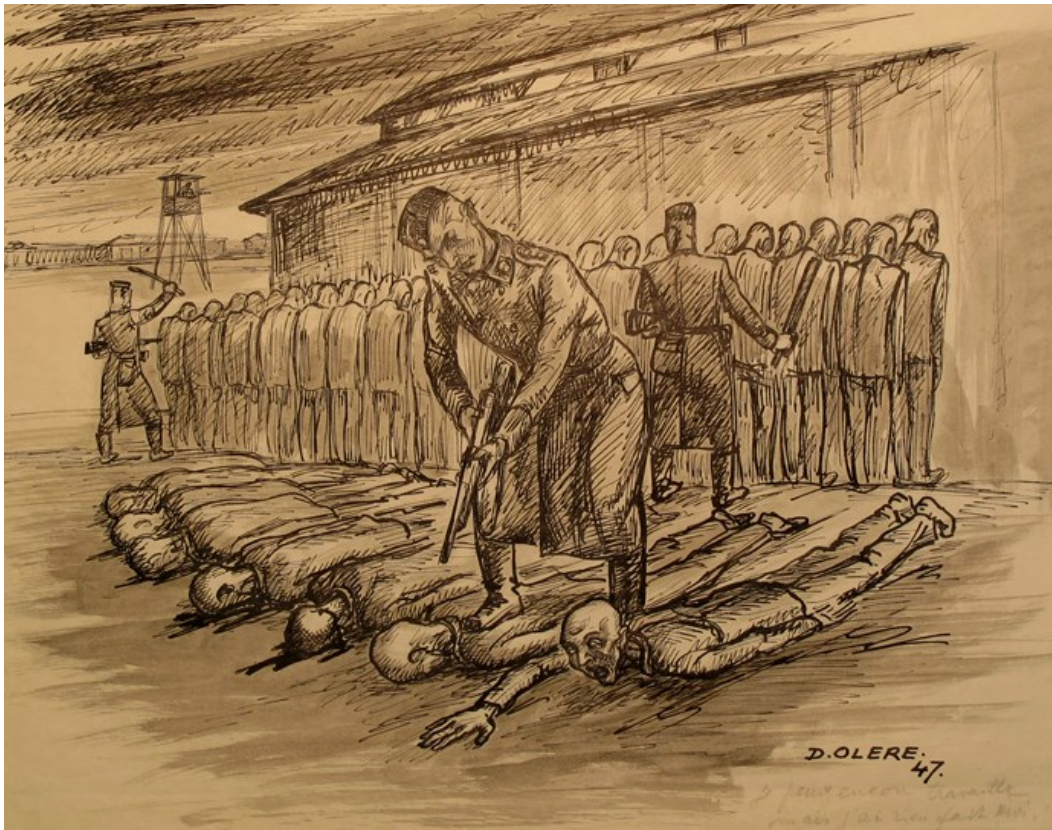


Figure 237 Execution of prisoners – picture by David Olère

## 7 October 1944, Saturday

1,229 prisoners are sent to the gas chambers following a large selection in the women's camp. Among these inmates are “teen” girls, i.e. those that are younger than eighteen. This group, however, manages to save themselves on this day. At the time that the Sonderkommando uprising is launched, they are already naked in the gas chamber of Crematorium V, but since it is impossible to go through with their murders in the burgeoning chaos, they are sent back to the camp. Some of them end up surviving the war, even though

they were already standing naked inside of the gas chambers. Then fifteen-year-old Alice Lok Cahana gives witness to the event after the war.

There is an interesting factor to her story. Although she has been in the camp for several months, she has no idea where they are leading her, even though her fellow inmates had told her about the gas chambers long ago. She believes it to be a classic delousing of clothing and cleansing. This also shows that many prisoners are only familiar with a certain part of the camp.



Figure 238 Selection – picture by Janina Tollik

## 9 October 1944, Monday

During the night of 9 to 10 October 1944, apparently several members of the Sonderkommando attempt to blast Crematorium III and are caught in the act. 14 inmates are arrested and led to Block 11 in Auschwitz I, including the five remaining Soviet prisoners of war and two significant leaders of the resistance group, Jankiel Handelsman and Jukel Wrobel.

The number of inmates in the Sonderkommando is decreased to 198. They live in the attic of Crematorium III, and about 30 of them go to work at Crematorium V, where they cremate the camp's dead.

Esther Wajcblum, who works in the Union Factory and smuggles gunpowder, is arrested. She endures torture and does not reveal anything, she is therefore released.



## **9 October to 24 October 1944**

According to estimates, about 40,000 people are murdered in the gas chambers in this period. Among them are over 14,000 prisoners from Auschwitz who are deemed unfit for transport to other concentration camps in the west. These include the ill, the weak, but also people under the age of 18. All of them are sent to their deaths. Only the strongest who are able to work are to remain alive.

### **14 October 1944, Saturday**

A group of inmates from the Sonderkommando commences to remove the remains of the burnt out Crematorium IV. The paradox of the revolt of their colleagues was that they managed to ruin the only crematorium that was not functional and that served a different purpose.

### **20 October 1944, Friday**

A command ordering that all boys in Auschwitz under the age of 18 be gassed is made. Some manage to be saved, usually thanks to the prison functionaries and usually by forging their date of birth. The order does not apply to the children that Dr. Mengele uses for his experiments.

Despite of this, the Nazis manage to gather over 600 boys aged 12 to 18. They believe that they are to be transported to work elsewhere, but when they are led to the courtyard of Crematorium III, they realise what awaits them. They have been in the camp for some time and know what purpose the building standing on the courtyard has. Despite of their passive resistance, when they refuse to undress and go towards death, they do not escape their fate. According to the testimonies of the Sonderkommando inmates, this is one of the most horrible scenes that takes place at the crematoriums.

It is probably appropriate to cite the secret records of inmate Lejb Langfuss, which were preserved.

“They were dressed in long, very threadbare striped suits, and had ragged shoes or clogs on their feet. The boys looked so handsome and well-built that not even the rags could cover it up. The boys immediately realised that they were being led to their deaths. They began to run around the courtyard in a panic, ripping their hair from their heads, not knowing how to save themselves. Many of them began to sob, and a piercing wail could be heard. The overseer of the commando and his aide severely beat the boys in order to get them to undress, so much so that they broke their club. Many boys ran in a desperate dash towards the Jews of the special commando, clinging to them and begging for their lives. We stood paralysed by their heartbreaking weeping. The SS officers stood with smug smiles on their faces, without a trace of mercy, with the proud expression of victors, and drove them with great blows into the Bunker.”



Figure 239 Hell by gas chambers – picture by David Olère

## 23 October 1944, Monday

A group of fourteen Sonderkommando members, arrested on 9 October 1944, are led to the premises of Crematorium II and shot there.

## The night from 28 to 29 October 1944, Saturday and Sunday

The last use of the gas chambers in the history of the camp occurs. The victims are selected Jews from the transport of about 2,000 people from Theresienstadt. About 15% of them are admitted to the camp.

Some sources cite that this last mass murder in the gas chambers takes place four days earlier, i.e. on Tuesday, 24 October 1944.

## **End of October 1944**

In the period from June to the end of October 1944, over 70 thousand inmates are sent from the complex of camps at Auschwitz to other concentration camps further west. They are transported on the railways.

## **From April 1944 to the end of October 1944**

In this period, a total of 585,000 Jews is deported to Auschwitz, the majority of which finds death in the gas chambers immediately upon arrival.

## **End of November 1944**

Prisoner Ala Gertner is arrested, and under torture, she names three other women who participated in the smuggling of gunpowder from the Union Factory. Esther Wajcblum, Regina Safirsztajn, and Roza Robot are arrested. All of them are brutally interrogated. They do not, however, divulged any information about any other participants.

## **November 1944**

The commando of Mengele's three pathologists and one of their assistants is transferred to Crematorium V, where they continue their work in a provisional autopsy room until 17 January 1944. A room is built for them out of boards in the dressing room of Crematorium V.

## **November 1944**

Crematoriums II and III are shut down, and inmates are variously moved about in the Auschwitz II – Birkenau camp. The dismantled barracks in sector BIII travel to the Gross Rosen camp. Interned women are moved to sector BIIf, BIIfc, and BIIfd. The transports of prisoners further west continue.

## **3 November 1944, Friday**

The news that the gassing of people has been officially halted spreads among the inmates.

## **6 November 1944, Monday**

The rest of the Sonderkommando is quartered in Block 13 of sector BIIf. Since there is no more gassing, their work consists of cremating the camp's dead, which numbers around one hundred each day. At the same time, they are expected to work on covering the tracks and on dismantling the death factories.



## **25 November 1944, Saturday**

Crematorium II starts to be dismantled. Shortly afterwards, Crematorium III is also begun to be taken apart. All members of the Sonderkommando are assigned to this task, except for the thirty of them who service Crematorium V. The work mostly consists of dismantling the technical equipment that is to be transported further west.

## **26 November 1944, Sunday**

A group of 15 members of the Sonderkommando is sent to collect the straw pallets from Crematoriums II and III. While they are working, a selection takes place in the Sonderkommando, choosing 100 people are taken to and where they are killed. Among them is also chronicler Lejb Langfuss.

According to the testimony of Henryk Tauber, his number was also called out during selection, but since he was with the work unit loading straw pallets, someone else was sent to death. This is just further proof of how the fates of people are decided by happy coincidence. Or by unhappy ones, from the point of view of the inmate that replaced him.

After this action, only 98 men of the Sonderkommando remain to be alive, and 30 of them still work at Crematorium V, and the rest are taking apart Crematoriums II and III.

## **1 December 1944, Friday**

The ranks of the demolition commando of Crematoriums II and III, comprised by the members of the Sonderkommando, is strengthened by a group of 100 women and several other inmates from the camp, mainly experts from the craftsmen units. On 5 December 1944, another 50 women will join them. This is the first time in the histories of Crematoriums II and III that women who enter the premises return from there alive.

Work moves along quickly, aside from the technical equipment, the roofs are taken apart, the ovens and chimneys are dismantled, and even the ceilings of the basements are taken apart. The aim is to cover any tracks of the mass murders.

## **18 December 1944, Monday**

The surroundings of Auschwitz are bombed.



**Figure 240 Auschwitz I. – aerial photo from 21 December 1944**

## **26 December 1944, Tuesday**

The surroundings of Auschwitz are bombed.

## **30 December 1944, Saturday**

The public hanging of five inmates who unsuccessfully attempted to escape two months ago. Three Austrians and two Poles die.

## **1 to 5 January 1945, Monday to Friday**

At this time, 270 Polish men and women convicted by court martial are shot on the premises of Crematorium V. Their bodies are immediately cremated in the ovens of the crematorium.



**Figure 241 Executions – picture by Jan Kowski**



**Figure 242 Shot prisoners – picture by Jan Komski**

5 January 1945, Friday

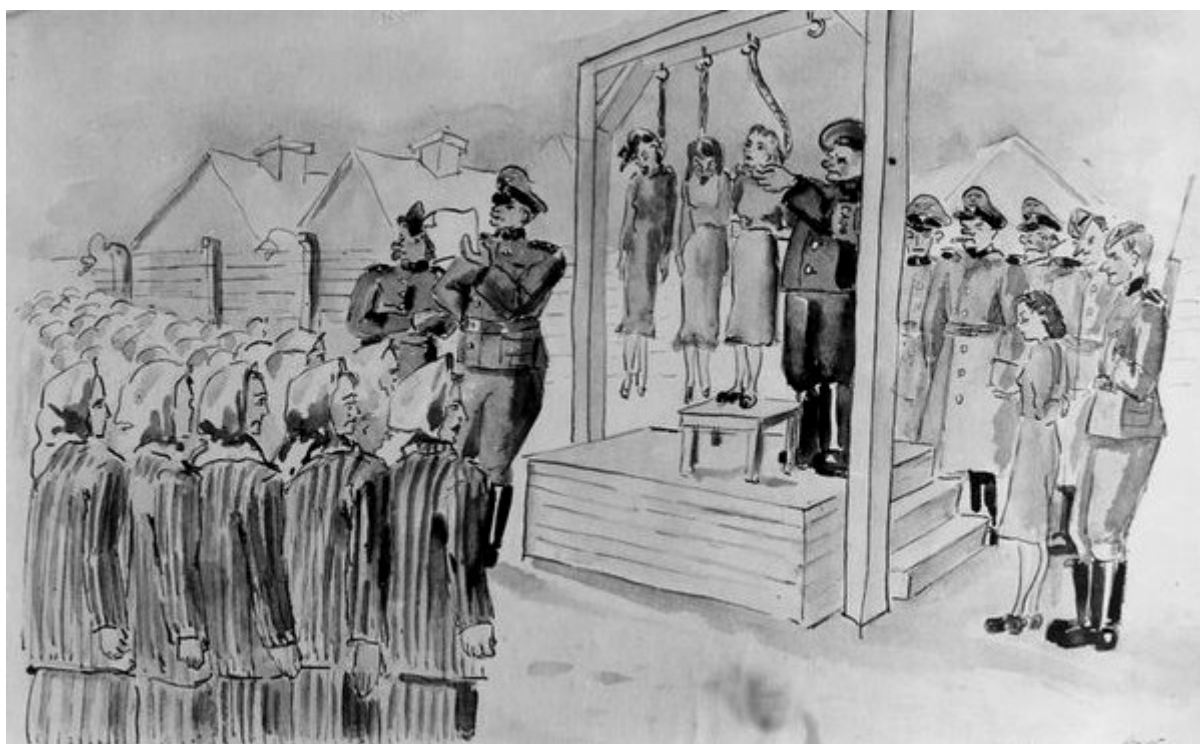
The last reduction of the Sonderkommando; the Polish stokers and Kapos are transferred to the concentration camp in Mauthausen. These are Mieczyslaw Morawa, Jósef Ilczuk, Wladislav Biskup, Wacław Lipka and Jan Agrestowski. They are most probably shot in Mauthausen as inconvenient witnesses on 3 April 1945

## **6 January 1945, Saturday**

The last execution of 70 Poles sentenced to death by the German court martial takes place. They are shot.

The women who participated in the smuggling of the gunpowder from the Union Factory are publicly hanged; Ala Gertner, Esther Wajcblum, Regina Safirsztajn, and Roza Robot die. All of them were brutally interrogated before the lynching, but none of them divulged any information about the others involved.





**Figure 243 Public hanging of female prisoners – picture by Zofia Rosenstrauch**

### **10 January 1945, Wednesday**

The death marches are being prepared. The inmates are gathered in the Auschwitz I camp. Up to this point, the prisoners were deported in trains, but now they must go by foot. However, the main convoy does not leave until eight days later.

### **After 10 January 1945**

What is left of the Sonderkommando is moved to Block 16 in sector BIId in Auschwitz II – Birkenau; this block is not isolated and they can, for the first time, move freely about the camp.

### **14 January 1945, Sunday**

This is the last day that the members of the Sonderkommando go to work on the demolition of Crematorium II and III. From this day on, they stay in the camp in their block and wait for death. They know that as unwanted witnesses they will not be kept alive. They cannot find any way to save themselves, however.

### **17 January 1945, Wednesday**

The last evening roll call of the Sonderkommando takes place, and its members are told to go to their Block 16 and to remain there. They know that once the last regular inmates leave, they will be murdered.

## 17 January 1945, Wednesday

Convoys of inmates that have not been transported by train begin to form in Auschwitz I, and they will go to the nearest railway junction by foot. A total of 58,000 prisoners remain in the Auschwitz camps.

## 17 January 1945, Wednesday

Dr. Mengele packs his bags to the sounds of artillery shelling. He then gets into his completely stuffed car and drives off. He leaves his pathologists and his twins to their fates in the camp.

## 18 January 1945, Thursday

The last phase of the evacuation of the Auschwitz camps begins. Convoys of prisoners set off from Auschwitz I and the so-called death march begins, during which those who cannot keep up are unmercifully murdered. Most often, they are shot by the commando of SS officers that is trailing the convoys and who finish off the exhausted prisoners. The ditches by the roads are full of dead men and women. The deported do not get anything to eat or drink on the way. An estimated 15,000 of the deported do not survive the cold and the exhaustion on the death march and the ensuing train journey.



Figure 244 Death march – picture by Zofia Rosenstrauch



Figure 245 Death march – picture by Jan Komski

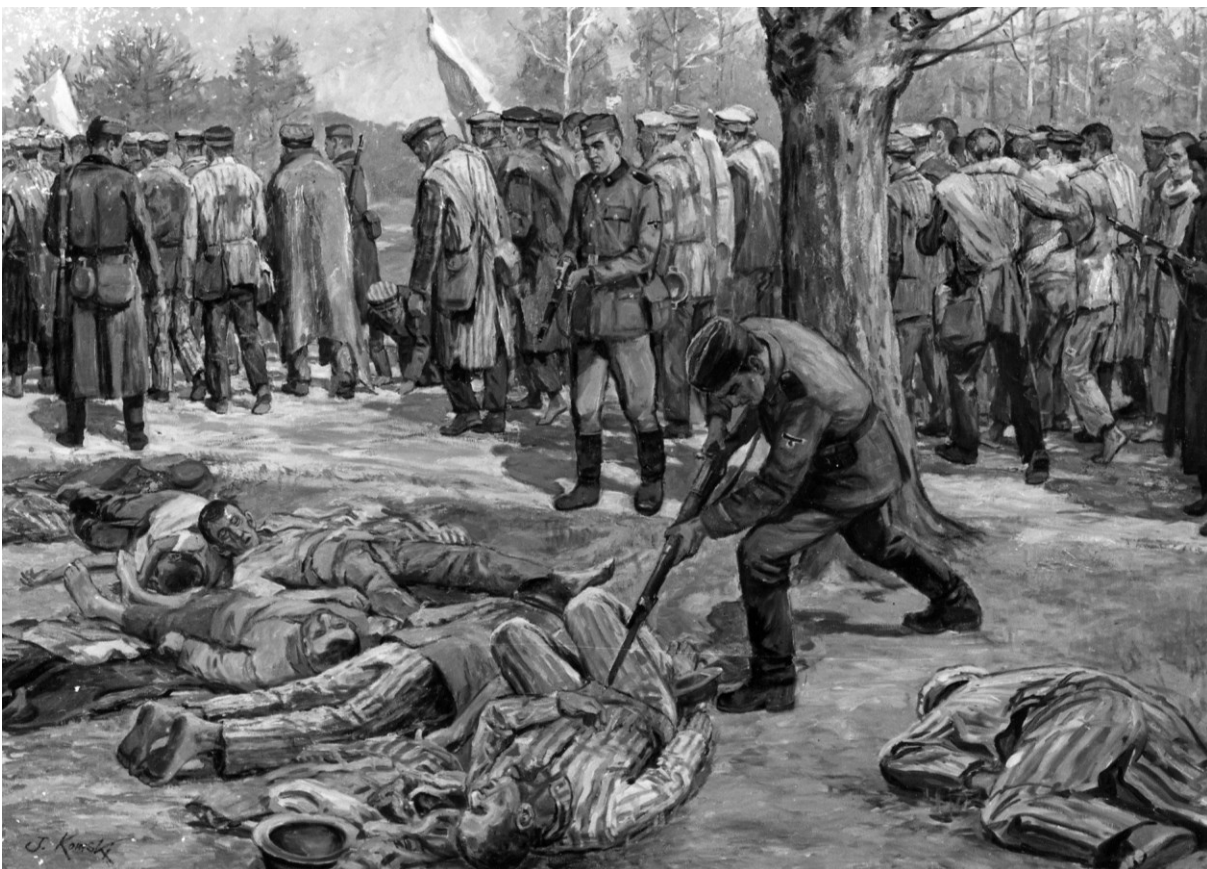


Figure 246 Death march – picture by Jan Komski



## 18 January 1945, Thursday

30 members of the Sonderkommando cremate the dead for the last time in Crematorium V, then they join their colleagues and wait for death in Block 16 of sector BIId in Auschwitz II – Birkenau.

The first queues of the remaining prisoners of about one thousand men form, and are controlled at the gate to the card files. Those leaving receive a day's worth of food, and can take a blanket with them.

Everything changes around 4:00 p.m. A rumour spreads throughout the camp that the Soviet army is approaching. The SS officers panic, encouraged by the thunder of gunfire from the nearby front that resounds through the camp. The SS officers hastily burn the remaining, untouched documents in open fires. The inmates take advantage of the chaos and pillage the material storage room.

It is at this point that the members of the Sonderkommando decide to attempt a desperate act, that is to mix in with the rest of the inmates. They know that if there will be controls of the list at the gate, they will be discovered. They are also better and differently dressed, as they have been wearing civilian clothing for some time in order to calm the victims going to their deaths. They also have better quality shoes, and are physically better off than the common inmate.

Luckily for them, the SS officers are in a hurry and merely line everyone up into convoys and do not control them according to numbers. At this point, the lists are most probably already burnt. And so the members of the Sonderkommando successfully pass by the chain of guards with dogs all the way to Auschwitz I, where the prisoners gather for another march. It is probable that during the night, the Gestapo tries to find the men from the commando servicing the crematoriums, but there is not enough time to check to immense mass of men, and the needed documents are almost certainly also missing.



Figure 247 Burning the documents – [www.auschwitz.org](http://www.auschwitz.org)

## **19 January 1945, Friday**

The base camp of Auschwitz I is evacuated, and the remaining members of the Sonderkommando find themselves in the convoys, a mere one hundred of the approximately 2,000 men who worked in the Sonderkommando during the camp's operations. The rest was murdered in the course of events. Since they are fairly well fed and are well-dressed, they survive the death march and almost all of them live to see the end of the war. About 90 men of this special commando are saved.

Nine members of the Sonderkommando successfully escape already during the death march itself, and their escape is facilitated by their good physical condition. This is how twenty-two-year-old Shlomo Dragon, twenty-seven-year-old Henryk Tauber, thirty-four-year-old Stanislav Jankowski, or twenty-four-year-old Eliezer Eisenschmidt, who is shot in the leg trying to escape but still eludes the Nazis, save themselves.

Another approximately 80 members of the Sonderkommando are liberated by the Americans at the beginning of May in Mauthausen.

It is also necessary to count the other 17 survivors who serviced the gas chambers and cadaver burning at the Bunkers in 1942, but managed to get into other commandos during the early phase of this horrible work.

## **20 January 1945, Saturday**

On this day, the remaining parts of Crematoriums II and III yet to be dismantled are blasted.

## **20 January 1945, Saturday**

Shortly after Crematoriums II and III are destroyed, the “abandoned” Mengele twins are forced to go by foot to the Auschwitz I camp, during which several younger children are shot as they cannot keep up with the tempo of the journey. Two of the twins thus forever lose their siblings and never see them again. Most of the children, however, survive the march and are interned in a new camp, where chaos now reigns.

## **20 January 1945, Saturday**

About 9,000 prisoners who were too weak for transport remain in the Auschwitz camp complex after evacuation. Their liquidation is ordered, but luckily at this time, the SS officers are more interested in their own salvation than in obeying commands.

## **20 to 25 January 1945, Saturday to Thursday**

The SS units spend most of the time outside of the Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II – Birkenau camps, the strict control of the guards and Kapos ends, and the prisoners in the camps are left to their own fates. Despite this, the SS attempt to enter the camps several times and to obey the command to kill the remaining prisoners, but they end up shooting only about 300 people. Another several hundred inmates who remained in the satellite camps are also murdered. It is estimated that a total of 700 inmates were shot in these January days. However, other people die thanks to their illnesses or to exhaustion.

## **23 January 1945, Tuesday**

Erich Kulka and his twelve-year-old son escape from the transport in Ostrava-Přivoz around midnight. They hide out until the arrival to the Soviet army, and they live to see freedom on 2 May 1945 in Zlín. Along with his fellow prisoner Ota Kraus, Eric Kulka publishes his experiences in Auschwitz in the book “The Death Factory”.

## **26 January 1945, Friday**

At 1:00 a.m., Crematorium V is blasted, the only crematorium still in a functional state up until then.

## **27 January 1945, Saturday**

At 3:00 p.m., Soviet soldiers arrive at Auschwitz, and they find 7,400 prisoners that survived here. Among the survivors are the twins of Dr. Mengele. Of the surviving prisoners, 1,200 of them are in Auschwitz I, 5,800 in Auschwitz II – Birkenau, and 600 in Auschwitz III – Monowitz.





Figure 248 project of students of SSPŠ

## AND WHAT ELSE IN THE AUSCHWITZ CASE?

### March 1945

The former members of the Sonderkommando, Shlomo Dragon, Henryk Tauber and Stanislaw Jankowski return to the camp and appear as witnesses before the Soviet investigative committee. Several weeks later, on 24 May 1945, they also testify before a Polish committee that is investigating the crimes committed in Auschwitz.

Another piece of testimony are the records of Sonderkommando member Salmen Gradowski, hidden on the site of Crematorium II probably in September 1944. They are discovered by the Soviets on 5 March 1945, when they proceed according to the instructions of Shlomo Dragon.

Gradowski came to Auschwitz on 8 December 1942, and he was chosen to be in the Sonderkommando, whereas his wife, mother, two sisters, father-in-law, brother-in-law all died in the gas chambers. He, himself, was killed in the uprising in October 1944.

### The years 1963 and 1976 and other repercussions

The four Auschwitz trials take place in Frankfurt am Main. Some members of the Sonderkommando that survived are witnesses in the trials. Simon Gotland, Milton Buki, Dov Paisikovic and Filip Müller give testimony. The public first hears that a Jewish Sonderkommando existed and what their work consisted of.

The surviving prisoners from the Sonderkommando testify that they are still haunted by the horrors they experienced in the camp. They are also embarrassed by their activities,

since they choose life instead of the immediate death that threatened them if they refused to do their task. Many doubt if their survival was the right thing to do. Despite of this, several of them decide to speak out about their experiences decades after the war had ended and wrote a book. Maybe as a way to come to terms with themselves.

Only those who went through the same hell as these surviving prisoners from Auschwitz can judge their actions. No one, albeit educated in history or law, is not and never will be competent enough.

## **DID THE HOLOCAUST TRULY END IN 1945?**

This simple question does not have a simple answer, sadly. Definitely not.

Of course, the murdering of the Jews to the extent that the Nazis did during World War II has not been repeated, but anti-Semitic sentiments still linger. Already on 4 July 1946, there is a pogrom on the Jews in Poland, in the city of Kielce, where innocent people are lynched by a mob of thousands. More than four tens are beaten to death, including an infant, and a similar number is injured. Attacks on the already decimated Jewish community also take place in other places in Poland, and more people die.

At the present, systematic attacks on the inhabitants of Israel are carried out, the representatives of neighbouring countries and of terrorist organisations in the Middle East plan to wipe Israel off the map. What they would do with its inhabitants is not hard to imagine. The Jews are also the victims of murderous attacks elsewhere, and the acts of terrorists in France and in other European countries are also well-known.

## **HISTORICAL REVIEW**

### **VICTIMS OF THE AUSCHWITZ CAMPS**

The exact number of those murdered in the inferno of Auschwitz is not known. Realistic estimations range from 1.1 to 1.3 million people. Eventually, 40,000 prisoners who went through the camps survive. Many of those who were deported from Auschwitz died in other concentration camps.

As for their ethnicity, it is assumed that at least 1,000,000 Jews, 74,000 Poles, 21,000 Romanis, and 15,000 Soviet prisoners of war are murdered, tortured to death, or starved to death. Other nationalities reach far lower numbers.

## SONDERKOMMANDO

About two thousand men go through the Sonderkommando as part of the murder process of Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II – Birkenau. About 90 members survive, of which about 80 are freed from Mauthausen, and 9 escape during the death march in January 1945.

- **Of the prison functionaries, the following Kapos survive:** Shlomo Kirszenbaum (1916 to 1970), Lemke Pliszko (1918), Eliezer Welbel (1916)
- **Of the other prisoners, survivors include:** Daniel Bennahmias (1923), Abraham Dragon (1919), Shlomo Dragon (1922 to 2001), Eliezer Eizenszmidt (1921), Morris Kesselman (1926), Filip Müller (1922), David Nencel (1916), David Olere (1902 to 1985), Dov Paisikovic (1924), Henryk Tauber (1917 to 1999), Shlomo Venezia (1923)
- **Five Polish prisoners and Kapos are shot on 3 April 1945 in Mauthausen:** Jan Agrestowski (1912 to 1945), Wladyslaw Biskup (1909 to 1945), Josef Ilczuk (1910 to 1945), Wacław Lipka (1908 to 1945) and Mieczysław Morawa (1920 to 1945)

**Pathologists** who worked in the morgue of Crematorium II: all survive, the most well-known and most conflicted of them is Dr. Miklos Nyiszli (1901 to 1956).

## SS OFFICERS WORKING IN THE CREMATORIALS

Below is a list of some of the SS officers who worked in the death zone near the crematoriums and their fates after the war.

- **Johann Gorges** (1900 to 1971), is investigated not until shortly before his death, dies during investigation
- **Otto Moll** (1915 to 1945), sentenced to death and executed  
**Erich Muhlsfeldt** (1913 to 1947), sentenced to death and executed
- **Peter Voss** (1887 to 1976), is never punished

## OTHER SS OFFICERS

Below is a list of some of the SS officers who worked in Auschwitz I or Auschwitz II – Birkenau and their fates after the war.

- **Franz Hössler** (1906 to 1945), sentenced to death and executed
- **Walter Quackernack** (1907 to 1946), sentenced to death and executed
- **Maximilian Grabner** (1905 to 1948), sentenced to death and executed
- **Hans Stark** (1921 to 1991), sentenced to 10 years for 44 proven murders in 1965
- **Bernard Palitzsch** (1913 to 1944), dies on the front
- **Wilhelm Boger** (1906 to 1977), arrested in 1959, sentenced to life in 1965
- **Johann Schwarzhuber** (1904 to 1947), sentenced to death and executed
- **Josef Kramer** (1906 to 1945), sentenced to death and executed
- **Rudolf Höss** (1900 to 1947), sentenced to death and executed



## **DOCTORS IN SS OFFICER UNIFORMS**

- Carl Clauberg (1898 to 1957), sentenced to 25 years in 1948 in the Soviet Union, released in 1955 and soon arrested and put to trial, dies of cardiac arrest before the trial begins
- Eduard Wirths (1909 to 1945), commits suicide after being arrested
- Horst Schumann (1906 to 1983), an arrest warrant is first issued in 1951, but he escapes and is arrested in 1966, released for health reasons in 1972
- Johann Paul Kremer (1883 to 1965), sentenced to death in 1947, sentence changed to life, serves 10 years
- Friedrich Charles Entress (1914 to 1947), sentenced to death and executed
- Bruno Maria Weber (1915 to 1956), arrested after the war, but acquitted at trial
- Heinz Thilo (1911 to 1945), commits suicide immediately before the end of the war
- Josef Mengele (1911 to 1979), never captured

## **EXECUTIONERS IN SS UNIFORMS WHO WERE MEDICS**

- Josef Klehr (1904 to 1988), arrested in 1960, sentenced to life in 1965, 475 cases of murder proven and accomplice to murder in 2,730 cases
- Herbert Scherpe (1907 to 1997), sentenced to 4.5 years in 1961
- Emil Hantl (1902 to 1984), sentenced to 3.5 years in 1965

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- Rudolf Vrba: Utekl jsem z Osvětimi
- Ota Kraus, Erich Kulka: Továrna na smrt
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- Eric Fiedler, Barbara Siebertová, Andrea Kilian: Svědkové z továrny na smrt
- Thomas Harding: Hanns a Rudolf, Hon na velitele Auschwitzu
- Hans-Joachim Lang: Ženy z bloku 10, Lékařské pokusy v Osvětimi

## Internet:

- [www.YadVashem.org](http://www.YadVashem.org)
- [www.Auschwitz.org](http://www.Auschwitz.org)

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