

Sereny

1943

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stealing and causing mayhem for both the Germans they hated and the Allies they did not trust, until finally tempted into the refuge of the UNRRA DP camps. And this also applied to yet another deeply angry category of pre-adolescent boys for whom UNRRA became responsible. According to surviving German documents, there were between 10,000 and 50,000 of them, twelve to fourteen years old. They had been selected in Poland – according to the record on Albert Speer's orders (though he denied responsibility to me) – in the spring and summer of 1944, to be brought to Germany to work on the land – it was called the 'Hay Action'.

Although there were Jewish children in Germany at the end of the war, compared to other groups, they were not many. Historically, no Jewish child is known to have survived the four specific extermination camps of Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka. But a considerable number, mostly between twelve and fifteen years old, did, strangely enough, manage to survive the concentration and labour camps to which – caught in their hiding-places in gentile homes, or where they lived, wild, in the forests – they had been sent if they were strong and of working age (ten years old for Jews and Slavs), to work on exhausting and exacting armament and industrial tasks which required good eyes, small hands and nimble fingers. ('Extermination by work', it was called, and it applied not only to children or Jews, but to countless slave workers. 'If 10,000 Russian women die of exhaustion in digging an anti-tank ditch, this is of no interest to me except to the extent to which the ditch is readied for Germany,' said Heinrich Himmler on 4 October 1943 in Posen. 'We Germans, who are the only people in the world who have a correct attitude towards animals, also have a correct attitude toward these animal human beings.') These prematurely aged bitter youngsters, mostly boys, who for Himmler's SS as 'Jew-children' had been at the very bottom of the scale of 'animal human beings', for months refused all well-meant assistance, absconding from any shelter they were offered. More often than not, they vagabonded, again in gangs, around the Western zones of the country, spreading alarm wherever they went, and no one – UNRRA, the Western military, not to speak, of course, of the Germans – dared lay a hand on them. Presumed to be orphans after a traumatic childhood, they were as if hallowed by their recent fate: punishing them for misdeeds was taboo,

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her own question. I then told them that thousands of Eastern European parents were looking for missing children. 'East?' said the grandfather and, repeating it, virtually spat out the hated word, 'EAST! Our children have nothing to do with "East": they are German; German orphans. You need only look at them.'

And there it was: 'You need only look at them.'

At the end of 1939 by which time Hitler had conquered Poland in a two-week campaign, thereby winning the first of the six 'lightning wars' which in twenty-two months would give him control over virtually all of Western Europe and the Balkans, Himmler delivered a speech to a restricted audience of SS in which he announced the Nazis' plans for Poland.

'In the course of the next ten years,' he said, 'the population [of occupied Poland] will become a permanently inferior race which will be available to us for slave labour. A fundamental question is the racial screening and sifting of the young. It is obvious that in this mixture of people some very good racial types will appear from time to time.*'

The country had immediately been cut up into three parts, the most eastern part going to Germany's then Soviet allies; central Poland, dubbed the 'General Government' and containing the country's three main cities, Warsaw, Cracow and Lublin, with a population of 11 million, was occupied and run primarily as a supply area of human stock for Germany's labour requirements. The north-western rich agricultural part, which before the First World War had been mostly part of Germany and included West Prussia, Posen, a part of Silesia (awarded to the Poles by the Treaty of Versailles) and the port of Danzig (the possession of which had been Hitler's pretext for starting the war), was named the 'Warthegau' and reincorporated into the 'Reich'. Programmed to be cleared within a few short months of Poles (and, of course, all Jews), with the Polish language prohibited, street signs changed into German, and settled with 200,000 ethnic Germans, it would by the summer of 1941 be unrecognizable as ever having been a part of Poland. All children of 'Nordic appearance' found in orphanages or foster care would be presumed to be German and,

* *Denkschrift Himmler's über die Behandlung der Freundvölkischen im Osten*, quoted in Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism*.

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with or without surviving families' agreement, would eventually be evacuated to re-educational institutions in Germany.

Between November 1939 and mid 1941, both Himmler and the Nazi Office for Race and Resettlement (RuSHA), which was to supervise the measures about to be undertaken, would time and again take up the theme of 'racially valuable' Warthegau and Polish children. The first condition for the management of 'racially valuable children...', announced RuSHA in a secret paper, 'is a complete ban on all links with their Polish relatives. The children will be given German names of Teutonic origin. Their birth and heredity certificates will be kept (filed) in a special department.'

'We have faith above all in this our own blood which has flowed into a foreign nationality through the vicissitudes of German history,' Himmler added in May 1940. 'We are convinced that our own philosophy and ideals will reverberate in the spirit of these children who racially belong to us.'

Eventually, he wrote a month later to Arthur Greise, Gauleiter of Danzig, an annual examination of *all* Polish children between two and twelve years old would segregate them into 'racially valuable or worthless'. Children found immediately to be racially worthless would either be sent home or, if old enough and capable, be sent to Germany to work. Those with racial potential would be taken to one of three centres to be set up in the Warthegau, where further tests would be carried out. Children between six and ten found there to be of racial value would be sent to suitable institutions in Germany to be Germanized, a process which was thought to be impracticable for any older than ten; those between two and six, who would eventually be given to childless or deserving German families for adoption, would first be sent for a period of observation to a *Lebensborn* home.

By 9.30 that night I knew the family's story. It wasn't the death of their son in 1942 that had led them to apply to be put on a list of potential foster or adoptive parents. It was the accidental death four years earlier - in 1938, in a motor accident - of their younger child, a daughter, then aged fifteen. Irmi was her name, and a photo was brought out to show me, a fine-looking young girl proudly in BDM uniform (*Bund Deutscher Mädel* - the girls' equivalent of the Hitler Youth). She had been on an outing in a BDM holiday camp that

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Johann particularly took to the grandfather, who almost immediately took him along on his chores. 'Still do,' the old man growled. I asked again whether they spoke a lot and she said that Marie, yes, spoke 'like a baby, you know, but Johann . . .' Again the grandfather interrupted. 'Silly question. He talks like a watermill now,' he said, firmly. 'What does it matter how they talked when they came from the orphanage?'

The grandfather was right, the younger woman then said, then was then and now was now. 'And you know now, don't you, Fräulein, that they are ours? That they were given to us?' Yes, I told them, I believed the children had been given to them. 'And that they are German,' the farmer said. They could be, I said. I'd be glad with them if they were. We would find out. But it was likely to take a long time and I hoped they could just go on being happy together.

Following that, a wooden plate with sliced rye bread, some rough country cheese, glasses and a bottle (precious I was sure) of red country wine had been produced and, more important, the farmer's wife had taken me to see the children asleep next to each other under their big featherbed. They were happy, loved and happy, and I felt vaguely ashamed when she handed me a photograph of them I asked for, taken just days after they had arrived, at Christmas 1942, with the family. I knew she thought I wanted it to remember the children who were so pretty.

It was the only time I saw these farmers. The photograph was sent to Arolson, where it was discovered that three families in different parts of Poland were searching for two- and three-year-old twins who had been taken from them. The photo was copied and sent to them. The ones who recognized the children as theirs - young farmers in a small village not far from Lodz - were able, as was required, to prove their identification, by a small birthmark Marie had on the inside of her right arm. (Bitterly ironic: had that tiny mole been any bigger, Marie would not have been thought worthy of Germanization.)

Happily for me, I had been transferred away from the area by then and it was someone else's painful task four months later, after verifying that Marie was this little girl who had the birthmark, to take the children away.

This task was, for whoever had to carry it out, never anything but traumatic. I only had to do it once, and I will never forget the

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to issue official birth certificates with (invented) places and dates of birth and (false) names, and – the ultimate control – of acting as the stolen children's legal guardian.

The procedure, carried out in stages, was identical in all countries where children were abducted, but it was in Poland that the largest number (estimated at 200,000) was taken. In the Warthegau, the programme was applied as soon as all Poles had been ejected. The children – always the majority of them boys – were largely taken from institutions, and from ethnic German parents who refused to sign a document of allegiance; in the 'General Government', where it began somewhat later, most of the children were taken directly from their families.

It was the SS and the 'Brown Sisters' who made the first decision and it was very simply arrived at: on secretly designated, always varying days, children were picked up off the streets, in playgrounds, in schools and homes. Unless the child (including babies) was pretty, healthy and well built, and had blonde or light-brown hair and blue eyes, it was eliminated from the selection. If chosen in this first stage, parents were told that children would be returned home after physical and IQ examinations which would decide their future schooling. Children were then taken by train to one of five children's homes in the Warthegau (this now 'German' territory being well out of reach of parents), which had been specially installed for Germanization. Children who in the course of testing there came to be considered below the required IQ for Germanization, would either, if young, be returned home, or, if older and fit, sent to Germany to work. (If, although of the right colouring and build, they were found to be physically unfit or racially 'tainted', they would end up in what to all intents and purposes was a children's concentration camp in Lodz (renamed Litzmanstadt), about which little documentation exists except some harrowing photographs, but where it is said most of them died.) For those 'qualified' by about six weeks of tests, new birth certificates with German names were issued – frequently, no one knows why, close translations of their Polish names – and their parents were notified that they were being sent to Germany for their health; subsequent inquiries were not answered. While small children were then placed in *Lebensborn* homes in Germany until they were

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Their main memory was of having 'good food' but being cold, especially at night, when – manifestly new to these Polish country children – the bedroom windows were always open; in Kalisz, they remembered four beds to a room, except for two dormitories with ten beds each, 'for bigger boys'. The 'Brown Sisters' took care of them. Were they nice to them, I asked. 'Except when they were horrid,' one of them said; he remembered getting a beating with a switch on his bare bottom because he and a friend had sung a Polish ditty after lights out. During those first weeks, they had German, history and geography lessons for several hours every day, but, except for mealtimes, when 'quite soon', they said, they had to speak German or be silent, outside the schoolrooms they could speak Polish. There were 'lots of doctors in white coats but also in uniforms' and they had 'lots' of medical examinations.

Was that frightening?

'No, it was silly,' one of them said. 'We had to be all bare and they kept measuring every bit of us.'

What was it they measured?

'Oh, everything, they just went on and on.' (The decisive characteristics for being placed in the top racial categories, aside from the colour of hair and eyes, were the shape of nose and lips, hairline, toes and fingernails, and the condition of genitalia. What counted too were reactions to neurological tests and personal habits: persistent uncleanliness and bedwetting and farting, nailbiting and masturbation – which older boys were told on arrival was forbidden – were, if repeatedly observed, automatic disqualifications from top classification.)

Did they hurt them in any way?

'Hurt? No, they didn't hurt me; why should they hurt me?' – there was quite a lot of defensiveness in these Germanized children and many of their memories, particularly of the years in the manifestly pleasant *Lebensborn* homes and schools in Germany and Austria which followed this first initiation, were joyful. 'We did lots of climbing and obstacle courses and we learned to march; we sang around campfires; yes, it was strict but the [German] boys were nice . . .'

Had they been homesick?

They looked at each other, almost puzzled . . . it was so long ago.

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robustness is taken into account when he is considered for these assignments.

In a few months three Hamburg courts will hear trials of sixteen members of the Einsatzkommando 1005, the most secret of all the 'Special Commands' which were active all over Eastern Europe and the Balkans. 'It would really be impossible to guess how many murders the 1005 was responsible for,' Tegge says. 'Millions anyway.' In the case he will prosecute, three men are accused of the specific individual murder of 500 Russians and Poles who, having been forced to dig up and rebury murdered Jews, were themselves killed.

'The high SS officers who headed the sections of the 1005 were almost all originally trained in the euthanasia programme,' he said. 'That was in the very beginning - in 1938-9. We know now how it worked: they would be ordered to kill all patients in certain institutions and hospitals for the insane, incurably ill or severely retarded. They would be told that "this is a difficult job, but, for the sake of Germany, and the patients themselves, it has to be done". If it turned out that they were sickened by this assignment - and many were - they would be asked on another occasion to try again, and then once more. By the third time, they had either overcome their objections and revulsion and would then be considered capable of "hard" assignments - or else they had shown themselves incapable of this sort of work and were transferred to other duties. It is certain that this was quite deliberately used as the training ground for the SS. It was considered that if these men turned out to be capable of killing sick German children and old people, they'd be capable of anything. We've had numerous euthanasia trials in West Germany and there are more to come.'

The question of duress comes up in every trial. 'There is not one single case where a member of the SS or anyone else who refused to take part in the killings, was himself hurt in any way, and quite a few did refuse. We have their names,' Oberstaatsanwalt Tegge said. 'That doesn't mean that they weren't under pressure, or that it didn't harm their careers. Their records were marked as too soft, but all that usually happened was that they'd be transferred to different duties, often back in Germany. No, the men who did the killing, although conditioned for it by training, basically were "gifted" for it and did not feel "under duress". The insistence on secrecy, however, was

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absolute. If they talked about what they had seen or done, the chances were that they'd be shot immediately. That is why so many German people may have *guessed* something of what was happening, but so few really *knew*.'

In Hamburg there are another seventy cases under investigation. Three prosecutors and four police officers are working on the Warsaw Ghetto case alone.

In Düsseldorf I spent many hours with Oberstaatsanwalt Alfred Spiess who has recently been assigned by the new Minister of Justice of North Rhine-Westphalia to the task of co-ordinating and expediting prosecution of Nazi criminals in this state.

'A people cannot separate themselves from their history. You cannot say yes to Beethoven as part of you, and no to Hitler. The men who did this are living among us. If we don't call them to account for these crimes, we condone, again passively, what they have done.'

Alfred Spiess was prosecuting attorney in the Treblinka trial, held in Düsseldorf in 1964. (And four years later in the eight months' trial of Franz Stangl, commandant of Treblinka.) After pre-trial investigations lasting four years, ten men stood before the state court for eleven months, and 153 witnesses, men and women, were brought from eight countries to give evidence.

Today 'Treblinka' in the west of Poland is a large, empty tract of land, with straggling grass, and flowers, and a few pine trees. That indeed is what it must have looked like in July 1942 when the famous 'technicians' of the SS, looking for a site for an extermination camp, found it.

It is richer land today though, richer by (the most conservative count) 700,000 bodies which were buried there. 'Buried in circumstances and rites of a depravity such as the world cannot have known before,' Herr Spiess says. Treblinka - one of four extermination camps - was an industrial installation for the killing of men, women and children, the counting and freighting of their effects, and the efficient disposal of their bodies.

The camp was administered by 35 SS and 120 Ukrainian volunteer personnel, and had a constant prisoner-worker population of 1,000.

Treblinka existed for exactly one year and one week. 700,000. They came, handed in their belongings, had their hair cut off, stripped to

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the skin, stood in line to wait their turn, and then they went. The camp's commandant, Franz Stangl, told me that it took two to three hours to process 5,000 people. No one was there longer than that minimal time between early morning and noon. There was never any need for housing nor for food.

Who were the men who ran these places? What did they look like? What produced them? And what happened to them afterwards? Are they alive? If so, how are they living with themselves?

The courts of West Germany today try to show us. The defendant, under the West German system, gets endless opportunities to explain his reasons, feelings, possible outside influences.

We now meet monsters like Kurt Franz, who commanded Treblinka for its final weeks in the autumn of 1943 after Stangl had been transferred to Trieste. Men still handsome, healthy, in the prime of life and manhood, unvanquished men, unbent and unrepentant, men who for twenty years, until finally found and arrested, lived peaceful unhampered lives, married, sired children, earned their living, entertained their friends and neighbours. Kurt Franz is tall, light blond, of muscular graceful build, with a clean pink complexion and a roundish face. The prisoners called him Lalka, Polish for doll. 'I was good to my prisoners. They liked me,' he said.

Stangl, whose place he had taken, had kept back from the unendingly arriving transports famous architects, landscape designers, gardeners, sculptors. Treblinka was rebuilt. The barracks, the German quarters, watchtowers and gates of Camp I were all reconstructed in the style of the Middle Ages. Lawns and flower beds, and paths covered with fine white gravel; an adjoining zoological garden, nightingales in cages, squirrels; rustic benches, fountains and artistic sculpture.

Franz, on 3 September 1965, was convicted of murder in 35 cases involving 139 people – meaning that he himself, with his own hands, murdered 139 people – and of being accessory to the murder of 700,000. He was sentenced to life imprisonment, as were three others in this trial. All of these men, and six others who received lesser sentences, had lived under their own names in their own communities until arrested a few years before the trial. There are thousands like them all over West Germany.

'We can't allow it,' Oberstaatsanwalt Spiess said. 'I admit it, I can

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women and children in seven months by shooting each in the back of the neck as they knelt awaiting the shot, and carefully kept book while doing so. Can anyone really believe that it is possible for a man to do this without knowing what he is doing? That's what I'm working on, living with, now. Those are the men we try to bring to trial.'

Richard Dietz, like many of the young lawyers working on Nazi crimes, was a boy when the war ended. From a strictly Catholic farming family, he had been in the Hitler Youth like all other German boys. There are millions of young Germans like him. The drama lies in the intimate confrontation of these average men with extraordinary circumstances and events very few other people in their country really know - or want to know - about. None of the young prosecutors I met likes being in this job. But their resentment at what they are forced to discover exceeds their resentment at having to do the job at all.

The older ones too, after all, are just ordinary men who share the doubts, the guilt feelings, indeed the whole background of this Germany. They are not crusaders; at the same time they are not out for revenge. The conclusions they have reached are conclusions of despair. Dr Rückerl and I sat together late one night. He looked drawn and tired. He had shown me everything in the building, unspeakable letters and reports phrased in unspeakable bureaucratic terms treating the death of human beings not even as cattle, but as inanimate objects - not by numbers, but by weight; the files containing hundreds of thousands of documents and microfilms.

'The day will never come,' he said, 'when we can say "it's done now, it's finished"'. There is no end to it except a biological one, when at last they will all be dead. And *then* it will only be finished if, in the meantime, we have succeeded in teaching those who come after us. The only guarantee of it never happening again lies in knowledge. We try. All of us here go out and lecture in our free time wherever we are allowed, to the young, and so do prosecutors in other places.'

Again and again, all over Germany, the point was made to me that the German people on the whole had never accepted, hardly knew, that genocide was perpetrated on other people beside the Jews. The Jews too tend towards this misinterpretation of events. 'They killed 6 million Jews - we know,' says Herr Rückerl. 'But they also killed 5 million Russian civilians, 2 million Poles - including a large part of

* D.T. In so many ⁸¹ ways like this, Hitler, had been added to their own mass.

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'Yes. I would be responsible for maintaining the maximum security provisions. But the way he put it, almost my main responsibility would be to ascertain that the protective regulations regarding the eligibility of patients would be adhered to, to the letter.'

'But the way you are telling about it, here, obviously you were not ordered to do something. You were given a choice. Your own immediate reaction - quite properly - was horror. What made you agree to go?'

'Several times during this talk he mentioned - sort of by the way - that he had heard I wasn't altogether happy in Linz. And then, he said, there was a disciplinary action pending against me. That would, of course, be suspended if I accepted a transfer. He said I could also choose either to go to an institute in Saxonia, or one in Austria. But that, if I chose to refuse the assignment, no doubt my present chief in Linz - Prohaska - would find something else for me to do.'

'And that decided you, did it?'

'The combination of things did - the way he had presented it: it was already being done by law in America and in Russia; the fact that doctors and nurses were involved; the careful examination of the patients; the concern for the feelings of the population. And then, it is true, for months I had felt myself to be in the greatest danger in Linz from Prohaska. After all I already knew since 13 March that it was simpler to be dead in Germany than anywhere else.'

'So what happened?'

'I reported to Tiergartenstrasse 4, I think to SS Oberführer Brack, who explained what my specific police duties would be. I said I'd try to do it, and that I would like to stay in Austria where I would be nearer my family.'

'Were you to wear uniform?'

'Yes, the green police uniform.' (This continued until Christmas 1942, when he became assimilated into the SS and was given the grey SS field uniform.) 'He gave me the name of a village not too far from Linz and a telephone number: I remember, it was Alkoven 913. I was to return to Linz, pack and tell nobody where I was going. I was to go to an inn on the outskirts of Linz - the Gasthaus Drei Kronen it was, on the Landstrasse - and phone that number. And I'd be given instructions.'

* Could be Heydrich's remark.

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Jewish 'work commando' of twenty-five men, and some Ukrainian guards from a nearby training camp.

'There really was nothing there, no amenities for anybody. Those first weeks we all bunked in together.'

'What do you mean "all together"? The German staff, the Ukrainian guards and the Jews?'

'At first we just used one hut, while we were working on the others: we slept on the floor in the kitchen, and the others in the loft.'

'When did you first find out what the camp was really for?'

'Two things happened: when I'd been there about three days I think, Michel came running one day and said he'd found a funny building back in the woods. "I think there is something fishy going on here," he said. "Come and see what it reminds you of."'

'What did he mean "in the woods"?'

'It was about ten - even fifteen minutes' - walk away from the railway station where we were building the main camp. It was a new brick building with three rooms of three by four metres. The moment I saw it I knew what Michel meant: it looked exactly like the gas chamber at Schloss Hartheim.'

'But, who had built this? How could you possibly not have noticed it before? Or not seen it on the plans?'

'The Poles had built it - they didn't know what it was. Neither Michel nor I had had any time yet to go for walks in the woods. We were very busy. Yes, it was on the plans, but so were lots of other buildings . . .' The sentence trailed off.

'All right, you hadn't known; but now you knew. What did you do?'

His face had gone red. I didn't know whether it was because he had been caught out in a lie, or because of what he was about to say next: it was much more usual for him to blush in advance than in retrospect.

'The second thing I mentioned happened almost simultaneously: a transport officer - a sergeant - arrived from Lublin and said, to me [he sounded angry even now] that Globocnik was dissatisfied with the progress of the camp and had said to tell me that "if these Jews don't work properly, just kill them off and we'll get others."'

'What did that indicate to you?'

'I went the very next day to Lublin to see Globocnik. He received me at once. I said to him, "How can this sergeant be permitted to give

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The camp was often visited
at the railway station. No
need to buy new land.

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me such a message? And anyway I am a police officer. How can I be expected to do anything like that?" Globocnik was very friendly. He said I had misunderstood; I was just overwrought. "We'd better get you some leave," he said. "You just go back for the moment and get on with the building. You are doing fine." And then he said, "Perhaps we can arrange to have your family come out for a bit." So I went back. What else could I do?

'Did you ask Globocnik about the gas chamber?'

'There was no opportunity,' he said firmly. 'I went back to Sobibor and talked it over with Michel. We decided that somehow we had to get out. But the very next day Wirth came. He told me to assemble the (German) personnel and he made a speech - just as awful, just as vulgar as his speeches had been at Hartheim. He said that any Jews who didn't work properly here would be "eliminated". "If any of you don't like that," he said to us, "you can leave. But under the earth," he added in his heavy wit, "not over it." And then he left. I went back to Lublin the next morning. *Sturmabführer* (Major) Höfle, Globocnik's aide, kept me waiting in the office all day, and again the next morning. Then he finally told me that the general would not be available for me. [Hans Höfle, deputy director of the *Einsatz Reinhard*, hanged himself while awaiting trial in the Vienna remand prison in August 1962.] I went back to Sobibor. Four days later a courier came from Lublin with a formal letter from Globocnik informing me that Wirth had been appointed Inspector of Camps and that I was to report to him at Belzec forthwith.'

Wirth had by then commanded both Chelmno, where the old-fashioned method of gas vans was found to be impractical for the huge task at hand, and Belzec, where the first large-scale gas exterminations in gas chambers were begun as early as March 1942.

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'I can't tell you what it was like,' Stangl said: he spoke slowly now, in his more formal German, his face strained and grim. He passed his hand over his eyes and rubbed his forehead. 'I went there by car. As one arrived one first reached Belzec railway station, on the left side of the road. The camp was on the same side but up a hill. The *Kommandantur* was 200 metres away, on the other side of the road. It was a one-storey building. The smell...' he said. 'Oh God, the smell. It was everywhere. Wirth wasn't in his office, they said he was

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up in the camp. I asked whether I should go up there, and they said, "I wouldn't if I were you - he's mad with fury, it isn't healthy to go near him." I asked what was the matter. The man I was talking to said that one of the pits had overflowed. They had put too many corpses in it, and putrefaction had progressed so fast that the liquid underneath had pushed the bodies on top up and over, and the corpses had rolled down the hill. I saw some of them - oh God, it was awful. A bit later Wirth came down. And that's when he told me. He said that was what Sobibor was for. And that he was putting me officially in charge. I said I couldn't do it. I simply wasn't up to it. There wasn't any argument or discussion. He just said my reply would be reported to HQ and for me to go back to Sobibor. In fact I went to Lublin, tried again to see Globocnik, again without success: he wouldn't see me. When I got back to Sobibor, Michel and I talked and talked about it. We agreed that what they were doing was a crime. We considered deserting - we discussed it for a long time. But how? Where could we go? What about our families? He stopped. He stopped now, just as he and Michel must have stopped talking about it then, because as long as there was nothing they could or dared to do, there was nothing else to say.

'But you knew that day that what was being done was wrong?'

'Yes, I knew, Michel knew. But we also knew what had happened in the past to other people who had said no. The only way out we could see was to keep trying in various and devious ways to get a transfer. The direct way was impossible. As Wirth had said, that led "under the earth". Wirth came back the next day. He ignored me; he stayed several days and organized everything. Half the workers were detailed to finish the gas chambers.'

It appears that Wirth tested their potential efficiency by, as Stangl said, 'pushing our twenty-five worker Jews in one afternoon and gassing them'.

'What were you doing?'

'I continued the construction of the camp. Michel had been put in charge of carrying out the gassings.'

'So now the exterminations had really started: it was happening right in front of you. How did you feel?'

'At Sobibor one could avoid seeing almost any of it - it all happened so far away from the camp buildings. All I could think of was that I

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wanted out. I planned and planned. I heard there was a new police unit at Mogilev. I went back to Lublin and filled out an application blank for transfer. I asked Höfle to help me get Globocnik's signature. He said he would do what he could, but I never heard of it again. Two months later – in June – my wife wrote that she had been requested to supply details about the children's ages: they were going to be granted a visit to Poland.'

'Did you want them to come there?'

'I wanted to see them, of course. But don't you see what this signified? Globocnik had said to me, months before, that I needed "leave". But they weren't going to let me go home, like other people. I was in danger, it was quite obvious. And they were making damn sure I knew about it.'

Stangl's wife and two daughters, six and four, arrived very shortly after that and they all went to stay with the construction engineer in Cholm, twenty miles from the camp.

'Were you officially on leave then or did you have to go to Sobibor during this time?'

'While we were in Cholm I was on leave.'

'Did your wife ask you what you were doing in Sobibor? What sort of camp it was?'

'Very little then: she was used to my not being able to speak to her of service matters. And we were so glad just to be together. The funny thing was, though, that I heard nothing from Lublin, or from Wirth. I didn't have any official instructions how long my leave was to be, how long the family would be allowed to stay or anything. After about three weeks I went to see Höfle and asked him. He said, "Why make waves? If nobody's said anything to you why not just keep them here for a while. Find a place to stay near by, and don't worry."'

'What did you think that meant?'

'I was so glad to have them there, you know, it was such a relief, I just decided not to think, just to enjoy it. I found rooms for us on an estate just a few kilometres from Sobibor camp, near the village.

'How far exactly was that from the camp?'

'Five kilometres.'

Sobibor survivors testified at the trial that Stangl used to ride into the camp and attend 'selections' dressed in a white riding habit.

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'How could you go to the camp in this get-up?'

'The roads were very bad,' he replied. 'Riding was really the best mode of transport.'

I tried once more. *'Yes, but to attend the unloading of these people who were about to die, in a white riding habit . . . ?'*

'It was hot,' he said.

'The people in whose house you and your family were staying - they must have known or guessed what was going on at Sobibor. However secret an operation it was, there must have been rumours. Did your wife still not know?'

'I don't think they would have dared to talk about it even if they had heard rumours. But my wife *did* find out, though not from them: one of the young officers, an *Unterscharführer* Ludwig, came by once while I was out. He had been drinking and he told her about Sobibor. When I got back she was waiting for me. She was terribly upset. She said "Ludwig has been here. He told me. My God, what are you doing in that place?" I said "Now child, this is a service matter and you know I can't discuss it. All I can tell you, and you must believe me: whatever is wrong - I have nothing to do with it."'

'Did she believe this, without further questions or arguments?'

He shrugged his shoulders. 'She spoke of it sometimes. But what else could I say to her? It did make me feel though that I wanted her away from there. I wanted them to go home. The school term was about to start for the older of the girls anyway . . .' The sentence trailed off.

'It was too difficult having them there now that she knew. Wasn't that it?'

He shrugged his shoulders again and buried his face in his hands. 'Just about then I had a message that I was to come to Warsaw to see Globocnik - by this time he had two offices, in Warsaw and Lublin. Now it seemed even more urgent to me to get the family home. I got hold of Michel and said that I entrusted my family to him: for him to get them out as quickly as possible. Then I said goodbye to my wife and children and went to Warsaw.'

'When did they leave?'

'Later I found that Michel got them out in four days. But I didn't know that at the time. And I didn't know what awaited me in Warsaw.'

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metamorphosis I had noticed first when he had begun to speak of his work in the euthanasia programme and again since whenever a really intolerable subject arose. 'I drove there, with an SS driver. We could smell it kilometres away. The road ran alongside the railway tracks. As we got nearer Treblinka but still perhaps fifteen, twenty minutes' drive away, we began to see corpses next to the rails, first just two or three, then more and as we drove into what was Treblinka station there were hundreds of them – just lying there – they'd obviously been there for days, in the heat. In the station was a train full of Jews, some dead, some still alive . . . it looked as if it had been there for days.'

'But all this was nothing new to you? You had seen these transports constantly, in Sobibor?'

'Nothing like *this*. And in Sobibor – I told you – unless one was actually working in the forest, one could live without actually seeing anybody dying or dead. Treblinka that day was the most awful thing I saw all during the Third Reich,' once again he buried his face in his hands. 'It was Dante's *Inferno*,' he said through his fingers. 'Dante come to life. When I got out of the car on the *Sortierungsplatz* I stepped knee-deep into money: I didn't know which way to turn, where to go. I waded in paper notes, currency, precious stones, jewellery and clothes. They were everywhere, strewn all over the square. The smell was indescribable: the hundreds, no, the thousands of bodies everywhere, putrefying, decomposing. Across the square in the woods, just a few hundred yards away on the other side of the barbed-wire fence, there were tents and open fires with groups of Ukrainian guards and girls – whores from Warsaw I found out later – weaving drunk, dancing, singing, playing music . . . Dr Eberl, the *Kommandant*, showed me around the camp – there was shooting everywhere . . . I asked him what was happening to the valuables, why weren't they being sent to HQ. He said – in the face of all the stuff we were wading through – he said: "The transports are ransacked before they ever leave Warsaw." I went straight back to Warsaw and told Globocnik that it was impossible: no order such as he had given me could be carried out in that place. "It's the end of the world," I said to him and told him about the thousands of rotting corpses. He said, "It's supposed to be the end of the world for them." He told me to stay in Warsaw that night, that he would call in Wirth for a meeting . . . I had heard that the new police

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chief of Warsaw was a man from my wife's home town in Austria. I went to see him as soon as I left Globocnik, and I begged him to help.'

'Did you tell him about Treblinka?'

'No, no, you don't understand: it would have been madness; the secrecy regulations were absolute.'

(This was of course ridiculous when, as he put it, 'whores from Warsaw' had congregated around the camp. But there is ample evidence in the records of these rigorous though futile security regulations.)

'But he said anyway he'd help. He'd try to get me into an anti-partisan unit. He wrote everything down - I really thought this time it would work. But it didn't. I never heard from him again either. Of course any transfer needed Globocnik's signature - without that it couldn't be done. And I know now it was stupid of me ever to hope: Globocnik could never have let me go . . .

'Wirth came the next day. We went back to Treblinka. He went into a long meeting with Eberl as soon as we arrived. I went to the mess for some coffee and talked to some of the officers. They said they had great fun: shooting was "sport"; there was more money and stuff around than one could dream of, and all there for the taking; all one had to do was go and help oneself. In the evenings, they said, Eberl had naked Jewesses dance for them, on the tables. Disgusting - it was all disgusting . . . That night at dinner, Wirth announced that Eberl and four of his staff had been recalled for an important mission and that he, Wirth, would be staying for a while. Eberl and the others left the next morning. Wirth stayed for two weeks or so and reorganized the camp. He tidied it up, I will say that for him. He rang Warsaw and stopped all transports until the place could be cleaned up.'

'What were you doing during this time?'

'Well, of course, I had my specific orders: to find out about the valuables and the money. I'd got a funny feeling that something fishy had been going on there between Wirth and Eberl . . .' He now spoke with the animation and interest characteristic of the dedicated police officer. 'It seemed to me the chaos - the complete breakdown in security - might almost have been deliberate so as to make control impossible and then bypass HQ in Poland and send things straight to the Führer Chancellery in Berlin.' He sounded secretive about this even now and went on, in this same secretive manner, to mention names of people,

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such as Blankenburg (Section Chief of the Führer Chancellery) whom he said he had always suspected of illegal dealings in Jewish property.

'But wasn't there a "common interest" involved here?'

'Oh, you have no idea of the rivalries and intrigues between different departments, sections, ministries and individuals. There were enormous – fantastic – sums involved: everybody wanted a piece of it and everybody wanted control.'

Stangl had moved into Eberl's quarters in the *Kommandantenbaracke* and Wirth had the guest-room next to him. One evening Wirth told him that Kurt Franz, whose reputation for ruthlessness had preceded him, was going to arrive shortly to 'get this heap moving'.

'I went back to see Globocnik,' he said, 'and told him that I believed Eberl and Wirth to have conspired about routeing the Treblinka valuables to Berlin instead of the HQ in Poland. Globocnik said "Ah, the villains" as if this had finally cleared up something that had puzzled him all along. I told him that I was prepared to see that all material as of now would be safely delivered to his office.'

(The prosecution later contended that this offer was not motivated by Stangl's desire to limit his function in the camp, but rather, having heard that Kurt Franz was about to arrive, by a wish to protect his superior position in the hierarchy. There is no doubt – Stangl confirmed this to me during our second series of conversations four weeks after the first – that as of this day Globocnik considered and treated him as 'one of his men' on whose loyalty he relied completely.)

'But this means that you actually volunteered your collaboration, doesn't it?'

'All I was doing,' he replied sharply, his face once again undergoing that now familiar change, 'was to confirm to him that I would be carrying out this assignment as a police officer under his command.'

'But you and Michel, months before, had acknowledged to yourselves that what was being committed here was a crime. How could you, in all conscience, propose – as you were doing now – even to take part in this crime?'

'It was a matter of survival – always of survival. What I had to do, while I continued my efforts to get out, was to limit my own activities to what I – in my own conscience – could answer for. At police training school they taught us that the definition of a crime must meet four

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the guards – the British were supposed to have dropped parachutists in the region and I had had to secure the camp against the outside. We had put up a second fence of steel antitank obstacles. And then I went up to the *Totenlager*.'

'What were you doing at the Totenlager at 5 a.m.?'

'It was a *round*: I went everywhere. At seven I went into breakfast. After a while I had them build our own bakery. One of the worker-Jews was a wonderful Viennese baker. He made delicious cakes, very good bread. After that we gave our army issue bread to the *Arbeitsjuden* of course.'

'Of course? Did everybody?'

'I don't know. I did. Why not – they could use it. I tried other ways to get them food too: you know the Poles had ration books which allowed them an egg a week, so much fat, so much meat. Well, it occurred to me that if everybody in Poland had the right to ration tickets – if that was the law – then our *Arbeitsjuden* were in Poland too and also had the right to ration tickets. So I told Maetzig, my bookkeeper, to go to the town council and request 1,000 ration books for our thousand worker-Jews.'

'What happened?'

He laughed. 'Well, in the surprise of the moment they gave him 1,000 rations for that week. But afterwards the Poles – the town council – complained to somebody at HQ and I was hauled over the coals for it. Still, it was a good try and we did get something out of it: they had 1,000 eggs that week.'

'Getting back to your daily routine, what did you do after breakfast?'

'At about eight I'd go to my office.'

'What time did the transports arrive?'

'Usually about that time.'

'Didn't you attend their arrival?'

'Not necessarily. Sometimes I went.'

'How many people would arrive on a transport?'

'Usually about 5,000. Sometimes more.'

'Did you ever talk to any of the people who arrived?'

'Talk? No. But I remember one occasion – they were standing there just after they'd arrived, and one Jew came up to me and said he wanted to make a complaint. So I said yes, certainly, what was it. He

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said that one of the Lithuanian guards (who were only used for transport duties) had promised to give him water if he gave him his watch. But he had taken the watch and not given him any water. Well, that wasn't right, was it? Anyway, I didn't permit pilfering. I asked the Lithuanians then and there who it was who had taken the watch, but nobody came forward. Franz – you know, Kurt Franz – whispered to me that the man involved could be one of the Lithuanian officers – they had so-called officers – and that I couldn't embarrass an officer in front of his men. "Well," I said. "I am not interested in what sort of uniform a man wears. I am only interested in what is inside a man." Don't think *that* didn't get to Warsaw in a hurry. But, what's right is right, isn't it? I made them all line up and turn out their pockets.'

'In front of the prisoners?'

'Yes, what else? Once a complaint is made it has to be investigated. Of course, we didn't find the watch – whoever it was had got rid of it.'

'What happened to the complainant?'

'Who?'

'The man who had lodged the complaint about the watch?'

'I don't know,' he said vaguely. 'Of course, as I said, usually I'd be working in my office: there was a great deal of paperwork – till about eleven. Then I made my next round, starting on top at the *Totenlager*. By that time they were well ahead with the work up there.' [*Da hat der Betrieb schon gelaufen.*]

What he meant was that by this time the 5,000 people who had arrived that morning were dead: the 'work' he referred to was the disposal of the bodies, which took most of the rest of the day. I knew this but I wanted to get him to speak more directly about the *people* and asked where the people were who had come on the transport. But his answer was still evasive: he still avoided referring to them as 'people'.

'Oh, by that time of the morning everything was pretty much finished in the lower camp. A transport was normally dealt with in two or three hours. At twelve I had lunch and after that about half an hour's rest. Then another round and more work in the office.'

'What did you do in the evenings?'

'After supper people sat around and talked. When I first came they

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'No, I don't mean to: of course thoughts came. But I forced them away. I made myself concentrate on work, work and again work.'

'Would it be true to say that you finally felt they weren't really human beings?'

'When I was on a trip once, years later in Brazil,' he said, his face deeply concentrated, and obviously reliving this experience, 'my train stopped next to a slaughterhouse. The cattle in the pens, hearing the noise of the train, trotted up to the fence and stared at the train. They were very close to my window, one crowding the other, looking at me through that fence. I thought then "look at this; this reminds me of Poland; that's just how the people looked, trustingly, just before they went into the tins . . ."'

'You said "tins"; I interrupted. 'What do you mean?'

But he went on without hearing – or answering me. '... I couldn't eat tinned meat after that. Those big eyes . . . which looked at me . . . not knowing that in no time at all they'd be dead.' He paused. His face was drawn. At this moment he looked old and worn and real – it was his moment of truth.

'So you didn't feel they were human beings?'

'Cargo,' he said tonelessly, 'they were cargo.' He raised and dropped a hand in a gesture of despair. Both our voices had dropped. It was one of the few times in those weeks of talks that he made no effort to cloak his despair, and his hopeless grief allowed an instant of sympathy.

'When do you think you began to think of them as cargo? The way you spoke earlier, of the day you first came to Treblinka – the horror you felt seeing the bodies everywhere – they weren't "cargo" to you then, were they?'

'I think it started the day I first saw the Totenlager in Treblinka. I remember Wirth standing there, next to these pits full of blue black corpses. It had nothing to do with humanity – it couldn't have: it was a mass – a mass of rotting flesh. Wirth said, "What shall we do with this garbage." I think unconsciously that started me thinking of them as cargo.'

'There were so many children – did they ever make you think of your children, of how you would feel in the position of those parents?'

'No,' he said slowly. 'I can't say I ever thought that way,' he paused.

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had become treasurer for the committee who were preparing the forthcoming Treblinka revolt, and killed himself when Kurt Franz surprised him in possession of a bag of gold.)

'But,' Stangl went on a moment later, 'with the *Arbeitsjuden* I did have contact – you know, quite friendly relations. You asked me a while ago, whether there was anything I enjoyed. Outside of my specific assignment that's what I enjoyed: human relations. Especially with people like Singer and Blau. They were both Viennese: I always tried to give as many jobs as possible to Vienna Jews. It made for a lot of talk at the time I know. But after all, I was Austrian . . . Singer I had made the chief of the *Totenjuden*. I saw a lot of him, I think he was a dentist in Vienna. Or perhaps an engineer,' he mused. 'He was killed later during the revolt – it started in the upper camp you know. Blau was the one I talked to most: him and his wife. No, I don't know what his was. Business, I think. I'd made him the cook in the lower camp. He knew I'd help wherever I could. There was one day when he knocked at the door of my office about mid-morning and stood at attention and asked permission to speak to me. He looked very worried. I said, "Of course Blau, come on in. What's your problem?"' (*Was haben Sie denn auf dem Herzen?*) He said it was his eighty-year-old father. He'd arrived on that morning's transport. Was there anything I could do? I said, "Really Blau, you must understand, it's impossible. A man of eighty . . ." He said quickly that yes, he understood, of course. But could he ask me for permission to take his father to the *Lazarett* [where the old and sick were shot] rather than the gas chambers? And could he take his father first to the kitchen and give him a meal? I said, "You go and do what you think best, Blau. Officially I don't know anything, but unofficially you can tell the Kapo I said it was all right." In the afternoon, when I came back to my office, he was waiting for me. He had tears in his eyes. He stood at attention and said, "*Herr Hauptsturmführer*, I want to thank you. I gave my father a meal. And I've just taken him to the *Lazarett* – it's all over. Thank you very much." I said, "Well Blau, there's no need to thank me, but of course if you *want* to thank me, you may."

'What happened to Blau and his wife?'

The same vagueness. 'I don't know.'

'In the midst of all this horror that surrounded you and which you

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were so aware of that you drank yourself to sleep each night, what kept you going? What was there for you to hold on to?

'I don't know. Perhaps my wife. My love for my wife.'

'How often did you see her?'

'After that first time in Poland they let me go on leave quite regularly - every three or four months.'

'Did you feel close to your wife - when so much had to be hidden between you?'

'The little time we had together we usually talked about the children and ordinary everyday things. But it is true, things changed between us after that time when Ludwig told her about Sobibor. There was tension. And I knew she was terribly worried about me. Even I only learned to understand the full extent of what had been done and how all the secrecy had been managed, much later, by listening to the testimony at my trial. Believe me, I was horrified, astounded by many things I heard there. It was . . . it gave me quite a different perspective.' He shrugged his shoulders in a gesture of helplessness.

'At the trial it was said over and over that you had the reputation of being superb at your job. The prisoners called you a "Burgherr" (Lord-of-the-Manor), a Napoleon. And in fact you received an official commendation as the "Best camp commander in Poland", didn't you? Would it not have been possible for you, in order to register some protest, if only to yourself, to do your work a little less superbly?'

It was one of the few times during those weeks that he showed anger at a question. 'Everything I did out of my own free will,' he answered sharply. 'I had to do as best I could. That is how I am.'

'But would it not have been possible to show some evidence of your inner conflict?'

'But that would have been the end. That is precisely why I was so alone.'

'Supposing for a moment it would have been the end, as you say. There were people in Germany who stood up for their principles: not many, it is true, but some. Yours was a very special position. There can't have been more than a dozen men like you in all of the Third Reich. Don't you think, if you had found that extraordinary courage, it would have had an effect on the people who served under you?'

He shook his head. 'If I had sacrificed myself,' he said slowly. 'If I

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had made public what I felt and had died . . . it would have made no difference. Not an iota. It would all have gone on just the same, as if it and I had never happened.'

'I believe that. But even so, don't you think somewhere, underneath, it would have affected the atmosphere in the camp, would have given some others courage?'

'Not even that. It would have caused a tiny ripple, for a fraction of an instant – that's all.'

'What did you think at the time was the reason for the exterminations?'

His answer came at once: 'They wanted the Jews' money.'

'You can't be serious?'

He was bewildered by my reaction of disbelief. 'But of course. Have you any idea of the fantastic sums that were involved? That's how the steel in Sweden was bought.'

'But . . . they weren't all rich; 900,000 Jews were killed in Treblinka – more than 3 million in Poland altogether. There were hundreds of thousands of them, from the ghettos, who had nothing . . .'

'Nobody had nothing. Everybody had something. That racial business was just secondary. Otherwise, how could they have had all those "honorary Aryans"? They used to say General Milch was a Jew, you know.'

'If the racial business was so secondary, why all that hate propaganda?'

'To condition those who actually had to carry out these policies: to make it possible for them to do what they did.'

'Well, you were part of this: did you hate?'

'Never. I wouldn't let anybody dictate to me who to hate. Anyway, the only people I could ever hate would be those who were out to destroy me – like Prohaska.'

'What is the difference to you between hate – and contempt, which results in considering people as cargo?'

'It has nothing to do with hate. They were so weak; they allowed everything to happen – to be done to them. They were people with whom there was no common ground, no possibility of communication – that is how contempt is born. I could never understand how they could just give in as they did. Quite recently I read a book about

lemmings, who every five or six years just wander into the sea and die: that made me think of Treblinka.'

'If you didn't feel an overriding sense of loyalty to the party or their ideas, just what did you believe in during that time in Poland?'

'Survival,' he said at once. 'In the midst of all that death – life. And what sustained me most was my fundamental faith in the existence of just retribution.'

'But you knew your own position. You were so afraid of a few men like Globocnik, Wirth, Prohaska. How is it that you were not as afraid of this "just retribution" you were certain existed and which, when it came, was bound to include you?'

'It was all part of the way I construed it for myself: I am responsible only to myself and my God. Only I know what I did of my own free will. And for that I can answer to my God. What I did without or against my free will, for that I need not answer . . . Yes, I knew that the day would come when the Nazis would go under and that I'd probably go under with them. If it did happen it just couldn't be helped.'

The long-prepared heroic Treblinka revolt took place on 2 August 1943. According to official records 500 escaped but only 52 survived the war. Some 40 of them are alive today [1971].

'When the war was over, what did you want to do?'

'All I could think of was Knut Hamsun's novel, *Growth of the Soil* (*Segen der Erde*). That was what I wanted: to start from the beginning; cleanly, quietly, only with my family who I loved around me.'

In 1945 the Americans – unaware of Stangl's connection with the *Einsatz Reinhard* – interned him in Austria as an SS officer. In the summer of 1947 he was handed over to the Austrian authorities for trial for his participation in the euthanasia programme. He escaped from remand prison in Linz on 30 May 1948.

'Originally we had intended to ask for help from the Duque di Corsini, for whom my wife had worked as a nanny. But then I heard that there was a Bishop Hulgär at the Vatican who was helping Catholic SS officers, so I went to Rome.' (Stangl had the name wrong: Dr Alois Hudal, the bishop in question, was rector of Rome's Pontifical Teutonic College; he died in 1963.)

'Was there someone who helped Protestant SS officers too?'

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'Oh yes, he sat in Rome too. Probst Heinemann.'

'Did you have money?'

'Very little. Just some my wife had saved. But it got me to Rome.'

'What did Bishop Hudal do for you?'

'Well, first he got me quarters in Rome where I was to stay till my papers came through. And he gave me a bit more money. Then, after a couple of weeks he called me in and gave me my new passport – a Red Cross passport.'

'One thing: you said you always knew that one day you would have to answer questions about that time in Poland. If you knew, why didn't you just face up to it? Why run away?'

'I am an old policeman. I know from experience that the first moments are never the right ones. But you know, in Brazil I never hid. I lived and worked there from the beginning under my own name. I registered at the Austrian Consulate. First, because my papers read that way – as Paul Franz Stangl. But later I had to get a copy of my birth certificate through them, from Austria, and my name was then altered to the correct sequence. Anybody could have found me.'

'Did people – friends you made in São Paulo know about your past?'

'It never came up.'

'But in all these years, have you never talked it out with someone? Your wife? Your priest? A special friend?'

'My wife and I talked sometimes about some of it: but not like this. I never talked to anyone like this.'

'Did your children know?'

His face went scarlet: it was the second time he showed anger at a question. 'My children believe in me.'

'The young all over the world question their parents' attitudes. Are you saying that your children knew what you had been involved in but never asked any questions?'

'They ... they ... my children believe in me,' he said again. 'My family is with me.'

'When did you first realize that people were looking for you?'

'In 1964 when my son-in-law showed me a Viennese newspaper where it said that Wiesenthal was after me.'

'So you weren't really surprised when it happened, were you? When you were caught?'

'I wasn't surprised anyway. I had always expected it.'

The awful distortion in his thinking had shown up time after time while we talked. And here now it was again, as we ended our conversations.

'Do you think that that time in Poland taught you anything?'

'Yes. That everything human has its origin in human weakness.'

'In retrospect, do you think there was any conceivable sense in this horror?'

'Yes, I am sure there was. Perhaps the Jews were meant to have this enormous jolt to pull them together; to create a people; to identify themselves with each other.'

'When you say "meant to" – are you speaking of God?'

'Yes.'

'What is God?'

'God is everything higher which I cannot understand but only believe.'

'Was God in Treblinka?'

'Yes. Otherwise how could it have happened?'

The last day I spent with Stangl was Sunday, 27 June. He'd felt unwell most of that week, but when I came back to the prison after a half-hour lunch-break on Sunday he looked elated. 'I can't tell you how wonderful I suddenly feel,' he said. 'I ate my soup and then I lay down. And I rested so deeply, somehow like never before. Oh, I feel wonderful,' he repeated.

He then told me a lot about his life in Brazil. He was fascinated by the subject of stupidity in high places. As he warmed to the subject, he went back to relating it to his own experiences and, as often before during these conversations, his personality changed brusquely and startlingly, his voice became harsher, louder, his accent more parochial and his face coarse.

'In Brazil,' he said, 'at VW (Volkswagen), the stupidity of some of the people had to be seen to be believed. It sometimes drove me wild.' He gestured with his hands. 'There were idiots among them – morons. I often opened my mouth too wide and let them have it. "My God," I'd say to them, "Euthanasia passed you by, didn't it?" and I'd tell my wife when I got home, "These morons were overlooked by the Euthanasia."'

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COLLOQUY WITH A CONSCIENCE

Towards the end of that afternoon we returned to religion and to what he had said about God in Treblinka.

'But isn't God good?' I asked.

'No,' he said slowly. 'I wouldn't say that. He is good and bad. But then, laws are made by men; and faith in God too depends on men – so that doesn't prove much of anything, does it? The only thing is, there are things which are inexplicable by science, so there must be something beyond man. Tell me, though, if a man has a goal he calls God, what can he do to achieve it? Do you know?'

'Don't you think it differs for each man? In your case, could it be to seek truth?'

'Truth?'

'Well, to face up to yourself? Perhaps as a start, just about what you have been trying to do in these past weeks?'

His response was automatic, and automatically unyielding. 'My conscience is clear about what I did, myself,' he said, in the same stiffly spoken words he had used countless times in the past weeks, and at his trial. He paused and the room remained silent. 'I have never intentionally hurt anyone, myself,' he said, with a different, less incisive emphasis, and waited again, for a long time. He gripped the table with both hands as if he was holding on to it. 'But I was there,' he said then in a curiously dry and tired tone of resignation. 'So yes, in reality I share the guilt.'

'You always give a little, progress a little, then you take back – retreat; you've done it often in the past weeks, you know.'

'Because my guilt . . . my guilt . . . only now in these talks, now that I have talked about it all for the first time . . .' Once again, as so often when he tried to come to grips with the impossibly difficult question of his guilt, the sentence trailed off. 'My guilt,' he started again, 'is that I am still here. That is my guilt.'

'Still here?'

'I should have died. That was my guilt.'

'You say that now, But then? . . .'

'That is true. I did have another twenty years – twenty good years. But believe me, now I would have preferred to die rather than this . . .' He looked around the little prison room. 'I have no more hope,' he said then in a factual way, 'and anyway, it is enough now. I want to

MEN WHO WHITEWASH HITLER

the night of its showing. I voiced misgivings about its factual errors, and tried to explain why these would be particularly difficult for the Germans to accept. Via satellite, the Hollywood producer was more than impatient with my remarks. 'Who are you?' he asked. 'What do you know compared to the experts who advised us?' The film was a kind of watershed, however. Perhaps because it was highly sentimentalized, it provided an emotional link for millions of people, with events which many of them had rejected because they were impossible to visualize.

The current argument with Mr Verrall, for example, deals with one main element in this confusion. He makes much of what he calls the 'admission' by the Institute for Contemporary History in Munich that 'no such things (as gas chambers) existed in . . . Belsen, Buchenwald and Dachau . . . etc., etc.'.

This so-called 'admission' stems from a letter which the historian Martin Broszat, now director of the institute, addressed in 1962 to the weekly *Die Zeit*. Professor Broszat remembers the letter well - 'How could I forget it? Neo-Nazi and far-right publications have used it out of context ever since . . .'

The letter was written in yet another attempt - many have been made, by many people - to set the record straight. What Broszat was trying to do, he explains

was to hammer home, once more, the persistently ignored or denied difference between concentration and extermination camps; the fundamental distinction between the methodical mass murder of millions of Jews in the *extermination* camps in occupied Poland on the one hand, and on the other the individual disposals of *concentration*-camp inmates in Germany - not necessarily, or even primarily Jews - who were no longer useful as workers.

Most of the concentration camps in Germany-proper had no gas chambers. Dachau had one which was never used. 'Mauthausen, Natzweiler, had one. Sachsenhausen, too, I think', says Broszat. 'They used them towards the end, to replace the shootings and injections of small groups of prisoners, which had become so demoralizing for the staff.'

How is it then that the myth of gassing in the camps in Germany has been so universally accepted, thereby providing the neo-Nazis with

their most treasured ammunition (the opportunity to refute what was never the case)? The explanation is both simple and infinitely complex.

German concentration camps, set up at first as SS-controlled detention centres for political, criminal and religious dissidents, and for sexual deviants and Jews, were neither then nor later *primarily* used for the imprisonment of Jews.

After 1940, as the need arose for an immense workforce for the war industries, the small penal camps, until then used only for Germans, Austrians and Czechs (including Jews from those countries) grew into huge installations with many hundreds of thousands of Russians, Poles and 'undesirables' from occupied Western Europe making up a vast slave-labour population.

Harshness of treatment varied between categories of prisoners. The German criminals were usually at the top of the camp hierarchy. 'Politicals' were in the middle, followed by religious and sexual deviants; with the Poles, the Russians and the Jews – in that order – at the bottom.

Millions of people died in these concentration-plus-labour camps: some – the most publicized – by torture, brutality or hideous medical experiments. But far more of them died from sickness and disease.

These were the camps that all Germans knew about and dreaded. *These* were the corpses found by the horrified Allied armies as they entered Germany. *These* made the photos and films we have principally seen. These emaciated skeletons, some still somehow upright, some lying on bunks in stupor, still others piled in naked, tumbled heaps ready for burning – these are the images that haunt us.

These people died by the million, but they were not 'exterminated' in the sense that the Nazis made uniquely their own. These camps had gas-oven crematoria, to dispose of the bodies. The chimneys belched out the smell of burning flesh, and the guards, in threat or mockery, told the prisoners: 'The only way you'll get out of here is through the chimneys.'

'Gassing' had been a part of the vocabulary in central Europe, and particularly in Germany proper, since the Nazis' destruction by gas of 80,000 physically and mentally handicapped people (children and adults) between 1939 and 1941. Thus, when sick or disabled prisoners in the German camps disappeared, when the chimneys smoked, and

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prisoner-workers reported that those missing had 'gone into the gas' – this was among men and women living in constant, deadly fear – it was not hard for 'gassing' to become a general term, used without much distinction.

The Allied troops who entered the camps had no idea what 'gassing' really was. All they knew was what they saw or heard about: the skeletons, some gas chambers, and hundreds of thousands of agonized tales and memories. As a welfare officer with UNRRA in 1945–6, I saw many of those sights, heard many of those tales, and tried to visualize those fearsome memories.

And then there was Auschwitz, and later Majdanek: the two, the *only* two, where the Nazis combined enormous labour installations and nearby facilities for extermination. Auschwitz, because so many people survived it, has added most to our knowledge, but also most to our confusion as between the two types of camps. What exactly was Auschwitz, which has become for many people the symbol-word for the whole Nazi horror?

It was, above all, by 1943, the largest slave-labour camp the Nazis had, with a population of 100,000 workers who were treated worse than animals, and whose expectation of life varied between ten days – if they were Jews or Russians – and a few weeks or months. Until the spring of 1942 it was just a small work camp, with only the most rudimentary gassing installation. Then, I. G. Farben began to build a synthetic fuel and rubber factory – the *Bunawerke* – on the adjacent marches, and ever-larger numbers of slave-labourers were dragged in, to build and then to operate it.

It was under the cover of constructing the *Bunawerke* that the Nazis made the slaves build the gas chambers at Birkenau, in a wooded area three miles from the main camp, called Camp II. It was here that, mainly in 1943, the 'selected' – mostly Jews, and some Russians – were brought from the railway sidings several miles away, and from the main camp. Also from Camp I, uniquely, came thousands of sick and feeble – the Muselmanner, not primarily Jews at all – not, for some mysterious reason, to die at once, but to be kept in utter squalor, virtually without rations, until they finally slipped away.

By the autumn of 1944, just over 700,000 Jews (including 400,000 Hungarians) had died in the gas chambers at *Birkenau* (Camp II), and

20,000 Russians had been killed, but not gassed (that method was reserved for Jews). And by the time of liberation, 146,200 more Jews and several hundred thousand others had died of overwork and disease in Camp I. The final figure for Auschwitz is now 1,100,00 dead.

Richard Verrall, busy with his vile numbers game, asserts that the confessions of Rudolf Höss, commandant of Auschwitz, were obtained 'under torture' in Poland, were 'nonsense' and are thus 'proof positive' of a hoax.

Whatever may be said about Höss, his role and his later manic pretensions, what really counts is that his statements to the American psychiatrist Dr G. M. Gilbert at Nuremberg were made *before* he was handed over to Poland, and that he said at Nuremberg almost exactly what he said in Poland – including two sets of estimates for the dead at Auschwitz. The second figure he cited each time, a total of about 1.3 million dead, comes very close to Gerald Reitlinger's most careful estimate in his book *The Final Solution: 700,000 Jews gassed in Camp II, and 500,000 prisoners (including 146,000 Jews) dead from exhaustion and disease in Camp I.*

But this is in a sense beside the point, because Verrall and Butz, while trying to discredit Höss, cite him whenever they hope to make a point. As they totally deny the existence of the other extermination camps in occupied Poland, Auschwitz is something of a beam in their eye. But it is important for those of us interested in the truth to recall that Auschwitz, despite its emblematic name, was *not* primarily an extermination camp for Jews, and is not the central case through which to study extermination policy.

The first mass murders occurred while Auschwitz was still a penal labour camp: they followed the 'Commissar Order' of March and July 1941, which commanded the liquidation of Soviet political commissars, gypsies, racial inferiors, 'asocials' and Jews. These killings – and none of the neo-Nazis has much to say about them – were presented as paramilitary operations. The hundreds of thousands of naked men, women and children who were shot on the edge of mass graves were described, even to their murderers, the *Einsatzgruppen*, as 'partisans' and 'bandits'.

But the *Einsatzgruppen* actions showed the Nazis that this pseudo-military method could not work for the great masses of Jews yet to be

dealt with. As we know from many soldiers' letters found over the last years, and hundreds of statements by German witnesses in the *Einsatzgruppen* trials in West Germany, the killings put an intolerable strain on personnel – despite liberal supplies of alcohol and sex – and provoked protests from the *Wehrmacht*.

However, the Nazis had a tested solution at hand. Of the 80,000 unwanted people killed in the 'euthanasia *Aktion*' some (but only small children) had been killed by injections in special hospital wards. Most had died in gas chambers in the euthanasia institutes. Over 400 men and women – police, medical and administrative staff, under the direct authority of the Führer-Chancellery, in Department T-4 – had done these murders.

Here was a technique, and a staff to operate it. The 'specialists' who had been prepared to kill helpless Germans and Austrians could safely be entrusted with the slaughter of millions of Jews and thousands of gypsies: eradicating, as Hitler put it, 'the bacilli on the body politic of the German race'.

Mr Verrall complains that among the vast documentation surviving 'there is not a single order . . . etc. for a "gas chamber"'. Typically, neo-Nazi diatribes claim that there is no record of the vast transportation arrangements which would have been required to carry out an extermination programme.

Few of those who read this rubbish have an opportunity to examine the record themselves. But anyone who has actually worked in the archives is familiar with the hundreds of railway signals which survive, describing with horrible monotony the destination and contents of the trains to Sobibor and Treblinka.

And all researchers are only too familiar with the countless documents, 'orders, invoices, plans', and indeed 'blueprints' concerning precisely the construction of gas chambers.

One of the documents (NO 365), the earliest I know of concerning gassing camps (and significantly linking them to T-4), is dated 25 October 1941, and states that 'Victor Brack (Chief of Section II of T-4) is ready to collaborate in the installation of the necessary buildings and gassing machinery . . .' The longish letter, which concerns camps to be erected in Riga and Minsk, is quite explicit in the use to which the equipment is to be put.

Thus between December 1941 and April 1942, ninety-six of Brack's T-4 men were posted to Occupied Poland and the *Aktion Reinhard*. They were assigned to the four specialized extermination camps, which were Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka. These had been built under the command of the SS chief in Lublin, Odilo Globocnik.

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months

These were not concentration or labour camps. The facilities provided housing for just a few German Waffen-SS, less than 100 Baltic or Ukrainian SS overseers, and a constantly changing group of between 300 and 1,000 'work-Jews' (*Arbeitsjuden*). Although millions arrived, no one else lived long enough to eat, wash or sleep. These were meticulously planned killing-plants. The official Polish estimates (which probably err on the conservative side) are that 2 million Jews and 52,000 gypsies, at least one third of them children, were killed in these four installations between December 1941 and October 1943. Of all those who reached them, eighty-two survived.

I am able to bear some witness to these events. My knowledge comes from research I did for my book *Into That Darkness*, the story of Franz Stangl, commandant of Treblinka. I talked with Stangl for weeks in prison; I talked to others who worked under him, and to their families. I talked to people who, otherwise uninvolved, witnessed these events in Poland. And I talked to a few of those very few who survived.

Butz claims in his *Hoax* that those (hundreds) who admitted taking part in extermination were doing so as plea-bargaining, in order to get lighter sentences. But those I talked to had been tried. Many had served their sentences, and none of them had anything to gain – except shame – by what they told me. Stangl himself wanted only to talk, and then to die. And Stangl is dead. But if Verrall, Butz & Co. were really interested in the truth, Stangl's wife, and many other witnesses, are still able to testify.

The *Aktion Reinhard* camps existed for one purpose only, totally unconnected with any requirement of war, and they were totally eradicated when their purpose was served. The buildings were pulled down, and trees were planted in the earth which had become so rich. Thirty-five years later they have grown tall. A letter from Globocnik to Himmler survives, dated Trieste, 5 January 1944, and carefully phrased:

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For reasons of surveillance a small farm has been built on the site of each of the [former] camps, to be occupied by a farmer to whom an annuity must be assured in order to encourage him to maintain the farm . . .

In his own letter of commendation to Globocnik, dated 30 November 1943, Himmler used his pet name for Globocnik:

Dear Globus,

I confirm your letter of 4.11.43 and your report on the completion of the Aktion Reinhardt [sic] . . . I want to express to you my gratitude and appreciation for the great and unique services you have rendered the whole of the German people by carrying through the Aktion Reinhardt.

Heil Hitler!

Cordially yours, H. H.

Here, then, is the truth for those who desire knowledge. Within one terrible universe of oppression and death – known to us through words like Belsen, Mauthausen, Dachau – there was another universe, of methodically crazy slaughter of an unprecedented kind – the place-names being Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka. Auschwitz, the most-cited, was a complex, transitional example. There are reasons why the worst names are least cited: one, complex in its roots, is that the Third Reich tried to present its (marginally) less hideous face towards the West, and the Western armies never reached the territory of the death camps. And well-run extermination camps leave few survivors to tell their stories.

The situation therefore presents some possibilities for confusion to pseudo-historians and neo-Nazi apologists. And they are assisted further by the fact that events of such magnitude lend themselves to dramatic 'use', are therefore used, and not infrequently misused. In turn the Verralls and Butzes can allege that all such misuses are part of a 'Zionist' conspiracy.

It is vital for them to believe that anyone who is involved with this question must be Jewish, and thus unreliable. This to begin with, is nonsense: (a) many of the leading authorities on the Third Reich are not Jewish, and (b) many of those who are, are as objective as anyone can be. (In their anti-semitic outpourings, these individuals never refer to 'Jews', but almost invariably to 'Zionists'. They know that thirty-five

years after Hitler many people will not accept the attack on 'Jews' but may be persuaded by the more 'political' label 'Zionist'. Of course, many Jews are not Zionists.)

But it is true that, along with many authentic works, there have been books or films which were only partly true, or even were partly faked. And unfortunately, even reputable historians are not infallible. For instance Martin Gilbert (biographer of Churchill) offers in *Final Journey* what is in many ways an admirably presented résumé of what happened to the European Jews.

But by quoting supposed 'eyewitnesses' who in fact are repeating hearsay, Gilbert perpetuates errors which – because they are so easily disproved – provide revisionists' opportunities. For instance, from his chapter 'The Treblinka Deathcamp': none of the 'Nazis in the camp . . . lived in the camp together with their families' as he says; SS Hauptsturmführer von Eupen was never commandant of Treblinka, but of the nearby training-camp Trawniki; the 'cries of the victims and the weeping of the children' could *not* be heard in the neighbouring villages, for with good reason the murderers ensured there were no villages within miles; and the Germans did *not* bring 'the most famous musicians in the world from the Warsaw ghetto' to 'play when the transports arrived'. There *were* such orchestras, for instance at Auschwitz, which played when the slave-labourers marched to and from work. But there was no need for such a thing at any pure extermination camp.

David Irving's *Hitler's War* falls into a special category. It had some interesting historical material, but sold (admirably) both here and overseas because of its bold and spurious claim that Hitler himself was largely unaware of the 'Final Solution'. Such books do better than, for example, Helen Fein's scholarly socio-history *Accounting for Genocide*, which is surely essential for any serious researcher. But this is an area in which anything but the truth can have terrible long-term consequences.

'Personal' accounts, such as the recently published *Dora*, can be valuable (I later quoted passages from it in *Albert Speer, His Battle with Truth*). Jean Michel was a labourer at the terrible slave-camp in the Harz Mountains where the V-2 rockets were built, and the story of *Dora* is appalling. The problem with books like this is that they

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THE HITLER WAVE

Kafka. The devotion of so many Germans for Hitler, says Professor Stern, thus had its origin in German society's traditional conformity, concentration on self and passivity towards individual liberty.

'The explanation can *not* be sought,' said Dr Mitscherlich, 'in a pseudo-objective consideration of Hitler's person and deeds: that approach is dangerously persuasive for our young – as we can see from Joachim Fest's film.'

Hitler, A Career, the documentary with Joachim Fest's text and Josef Goebbels's films, with its deliberate attempt to portray Hitler as Germans saw him from 1918 to 1945, has unleashed a storm of controversy. In a poll conducted recently by *Der Spiegel*, 60 per cent of all young Germans between sixteen and twenty-four said they expected to see, or had already seen it. I took three groups to the film and talked with each for hours afterwards. Hundreds of thousands of words – analysis and criticism – have been written about it in the German papers, but none of them, I thought, was as significant as the reactions of the young – slowly changing and evolving – when they were given a chance to think together.

Florian, aged sixteen, said he really thought it was pretty good, pretty much what he had expected. 'If I saw a film announced, say, of Frank Sinatra's "Career", I wouldn't expect a moral essay,' he said, 'I'd just expect to see a portrait of his life.' 'There was an awful lot I hadn't known,' said eighteen-year-old Herbert. 'All that pomp, those fantastic rallies – it was really theatre, wasn't it? Art. Beautiful.' 'For the first time,' said Norbert, aged seventeen, 'I could understand my grandparents.' 'Yes,' said Karl Heinz, 'it was exactly the way my parents' fifty- and sixty-year-old friends talked about it.'

'It really got to me,' Dorothea said – she was sixteen. 'That model they showed of Speer's post-war Berlin. So impressive.' 'Yes,' said Gaby, 'and when they said it was planned that every year deputations of slaves from the East were to march through the streets, I could just see it happen – fantastic...'

'But when they showed the beginning of the war,' said Traude, aged eighteen – by now they had been talking for two hours, with very little help aside from an occasional nudge from me – 'and the commentator said that the Germans were just helping the German minorities in Danzig. That wasn't true, was it? Wasn't there something about

German convicts dressed up as Poles being used to fake an attack, and then all being killed by "defending" Germans? Is that not how they started the war?"*

It was remarkable to watch how, once they began to question what they had seen and felt, both their knowledge, and moral sense emerged: 'He says Hitler was incorruptible,' said Norbert (the 'he' always refers to Fest, the writer), 'that Hitler only accepted money from industrialists if given without strings. But surely that wasn't so? In those circumstances, conditions wouldn't have had to be spelled out: they would have been implicit. And of course there had to be strings. But if the speaker actually says Hitler was incorruptible - that's sort of impressive, isn't it?'

'Nor did he mention *Mein Kampf*,' said Traude. 'And the concentration camps just once, for five seconds . . .' 'Yes,' said Florian, 'and what *about* the Jews? They came in three times: first when he talks about Hitler at eighteen, in Vienna, when they show film of bearded dirty-looking men with funny braids, and a couple of pretty girls and say how shocked Hitler was by the racial defilement of Austrian girls . . .' 'Yes,' said Gaby, 'and I thought, my God, they *do* look pretty awful. Just think: that's what it made *me* feel . . .' 'The second time the Jews were mentioned was when he said Jews began to leave, and showed photos of Einstein, Thomas Mann - *was* he a Jew? - Reinhardt and some actors. And then, do you remember, he had the gall to say, "They left, and left the country to provincialism." My God, as if they left by choice!'

'And then,' said Herbert, 'there was that bit where they showed people being shot in a pit - the only time, incidentally, they showed people being killed except by Allied bombs - and they said it was in Russia and they were partisans and Jews, thereby linking the Jews with partisans: as if they'd killed Jews because they were partisans. And then he said, do you remember, "90,000 Russians were killed here," and not more than two minutes later, "91,000 Germans were taken prisoner by the Soviets; only 5,000 returned." Herbert was angry

* She was almost right: the SS faked several incidents, and left bodies of a dozen German convicts dressed in Polish uniforms, first fatally injected then shot several times, as evidence of 'Polish' attacks. (See Nuremberg Affidavit, Naujock, 2,751-PS.)

the usual sense of the term but *talking* with some of them. If there is anything I have learned, it is that these people cannot be looked at as a group, a category, but only as individuals, with very individual experiences and very individual and personal needs.

With this I do not mean to convey approval or even acceptance of the many exaggerations or untruths I have heard: I am unhappy when it happens; I reject what I hear and no longer quite trust such a person. But I always know that I have not lived through what they suffered; I have not seen what they saw, nor have I done what in many cases they had to do in order to stay alive. The most telling example for me of this was, strangely enough, something that happened to perhaps the most remarkable survivor I worked with when preparing *Into That Darkness*, Richard Glazar, a Czech who survived Treblinka.

Richard, twenty-two when he arrived at Treblinka, was not only one of the most intelligent but also one of the most honest men I met. He settled in Switzerland after the war and it was sitting in his living room in a village near Bern late one night in 1972 that – I think because we had talked for many hours and he was tired – he told me something truly quite terrible. It was about the month of March in 1943 when the transports to Treblinka had dried up. They had killed most of the Jews they were going to kill there, and for the so-called ‘work-Jews’ (*Arbeitsjuden*), strong young men like Richard (and a few girls, too), it meant that once they had finished packing up and sending off to Germany all the things collected from the victims, ‘clothes, watches, spectacles, shoes, walking sticks, cooking pots, linen, not to speak of food’, there would be no work for them. ‘Everything went and one day there was nothing left,’ he said. ‘You can’t imagine what we felt when there was nothing there. You see, the *things* were our justification for being alive. If there were no *things* to administer, why would they let us stay alive?’ he said. One day towards the end of March, when they had reached the lowest ebb in their morale, Kurt Franz, the deputy commandant, walked into their barracks, a wide grin on his face. “‘As of tomorrow,” he said, “transports will be rolling in again.” And do you know what we did?’ Richard asked. ‘We shouted, “Hurrah, hurrah.”’ It seems impossible now. Every time I think of it, I die a small death; but it’s the truth. That is what we did; that is where we had got to . . .’

It was one of the most terrible truths anyone had ever told me. But

story, as a diary 'covered in finest leather': he and a number of 'trust-worthy others' he said, had handled and read it and had no doubt of its authenticity. The other, really more important to this story, was the *Denkschrift* (Notes) Professor Jäckel had seen in Fritz Stiefel's house which, 'bound in dark blue embossed cardboard' and titled on the cover 'Year Book of the Party', covered, in Hitler's handwriting, the first six months of 1935. The 'Notebook' and possibly others like it had at some point been in the hands of one or more of this group and became the models for their project.

Years later, after Hitler's second senior secretary Christa Schröder had died, an intelligent and admirably objective editor friend of hers, Anton Joachimsthaler, published in 1985 with her authorization her notes and recollections *Er War Mein Chef*, a book which deserved a far greater public than it ever had. From it, I finally understood that the purloining of the 'Yearbook' and probably that of at least one other, had quite probably happened in the last week of April 1945, when Hitler had sent Julius Schaub, his most trusted personal aide, to the Chancellery, to his Munich flat and then to the Berghof to burn all letters, documents or anything else private or bearing his signature. Christa Schröder describes the scene on page 213 of *Er War Mein Chef*. She herself, she says, seeing the half-burned papers, succumbed to temptation (less for reasons of nostalgia than, she says frankly, with realistic estimation of their potential value), and took a 'bundle' of Hitler's architectural sketches (Speer had a hundred of them which Hitler had given him – or indeed made for him – over the years), and a letter to Hitler from his niece Geli Raubal, with whom he had been in love and who had killed herself when he forbade her to marry. But Schröder also describes a *Denkschrift* she saw and says she wished she had had the courage to take it. Although it was manifestly not the one the four men eventually had in their possession, her description of it tallies precisely with the format of the sixty-two 'diaries'. It was 'something like an old-fashioned account book,' she said, 'size A4 with hard covers and a white label on which was typed: "Concept for the Construction of the Greater German Reich" (*Idee und Aufbau des Grossdeutschen Reiches*).'

This is particularly significant in view of the veritable chorus of claims both from Hitler contemporaries and present-day historians

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FAKES AND HOAXES: THE HITLER DIARIES

that 'Hitler NEVER wrote'. It is, of course, an established fact that in his last two years he was increasingly handicapped by Parkinson's disease. It is true, too, that while his war was going well and he began dreaming of retirement, he often told his senior secretaries, Johanna Wolf and Christa Schröder, that he would need them then to work on his memoirs. In these posthumously published memoirs, Frau Schröder mentions taking dictation from Hitler many times, but says nothing about the many 'notes' (*aide-mémoires*) he wrote, many of them in bed after retiring, which were copied and shredded the next day. The only one who has talked to me about this night-time writing (and reading) was Rochus Misch, chief of Hitler's personal telephone switchboard and one of the most truthful witnesses I spoke to, who, while frequently on night duty at his board just outside Hitler's private rooms, remembered him writing and reading for hours every night 'often till 4 or 5 am when I saw his light at last go out'.

'How did he know that that was what Hitler was doing behind his closed door?' I asked.

Quite often, there were urgent messages for him in the night, Misch said, and the order was that if his light was on, they had to be delivered. Linge, Hitler's ever-present valet, who had to stay awake till Hitler went to sleep, would take them in and Misch many times saw papers and books on his bed and a pen in his hand when the door opened and closed.

Thirty-eight years later, the fact that the faked diaries were all written in 'old-fashioned account books' – the puzzled Hamburg police agreed with me that no one could possibly have had this idea without a model – was almost the first thing that raised doubts about their authenticity. 'Can you imagine Hitler using such cheap notebooks to write his diaries in?' colleagues asked me. It just so happened that I could, even before I realized how it had probably come about, when I read Christa Schröder's book years later. Hitler was many dreadful things, but he was not materialistic.

I met and talked repeatedly and at length with two of the four men I believed responsible for the hoax (X and Mohnke) and, although surly and angry, and even though what they said gave them away, they

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Solution'. The fact is that, except for civilians and soldiers in close proximity to the *Einsatzgruppen* in Russia, the gas-van murders of women and children in Serbia, or the death-camps in Poland, ordinary Germans and Austrians, including army staff, did not know about the extermination of the Jews. There were rumours and guesses. As of October 1943, after the horrible speech by Himmler in Posen, the German gauleiters knew. And three months later, in January 1944, he made accomplices of the generals by telling them. But until then, what would become the Nazis' greatest shame was their deepest secret.

Probably the most serious accusation against Waldheim is his alleged collaboration in the deportation of the 50,000 Jews of Salonika – in the knowledge of what was to happen to them. The precise dates of his postings have been available for some time. He was on study leave in Austria from 19 November 1942 to 31 March 1943; in Tirana from 1 April to early July; after a few days in transit at Arsakli, near Salonika, he was in Athens from 19 July to 4 October. The ghettoization and subsequent deportation of Salonika's Jews took place between February and May 1943, with one last train in August. What Waldheim knew or didn't know is impossible to prove, but he wasn't there. It is almost grotesque to reason that a young intelligence officer in the Balkans 'must have known' about this horror because a Jewish cemetery had been obliterated, and a quarter of the population of a city (Salonika) had manifestly disappeared when he returned there, two months after the sinister operation was over.

There are some very interesting thoughts, though Waldheim – who cannot now afford to 'admit' anything – will reject them too, even though they are in his favour. One is that in all probability he was an 'American asset' after the war – which would have facilitated his clearance for work at Austria's Foreign Office, and for his later election to the United Nations post. Another is that the Yugoslav 'war crime' allegation (which was never followed up, and indeed was forgotten by Tito, who years later awarded Waldheim one of his highest decorations and repeatedly entertained him for weekends on his island retreat) was a purely political move – not against Waldheim but against his then boss, Foreign Minister Karl Gruber, who was successfully lobbying the Americans and British to oppose all the territorial and financial claims which Yugoslavia was making against Austria.

Finally, there was one occasion when the twenty-four-year-old Waldheim – in an exceptional, indeed, possibly unique, initiative by a young staff officer – objected in writing to the German policy of random retaliation against civilians in Greece: '*The reprisal measures imposed in response to acts of sabotage and ambush,*' he wrote in his report to the Chief of the General Staff of Army Group E on 25 May 1944, '*have, despite their severity* [Waldheim's italics], failed to achieve any noteworthy success . . . On the contrary, exaggerated reprisal measures undertaken without a more precise examination of the objective situation have only caused embitterment and have been useful to the bands . . .' The objection, though 'not couched in moral terms', as one of his critics has said, does appear to be 'moral in inspiration'. Given the situation, no other phrasing was possible, nor would it have been in Waldheim's character to have expressed himself more boldly. The 'moral' decision was the italics.

We were now at the tail-end of a political manoeuvre that got out of hand. The truth of the Waldheim scandal, as I saw it – a truth underrated by Dr Waldheim despite his political experience – was that the real focus of bitterness was not Waldheim himself but the millions of Austrians who forty-eight years before welcomed Hitler (to his own amazement, we now know) with frenzied jubilation, and whose joy only faded with the years because he lost – not because he was evil and they had been wrong. 'I remember the first mass meeting I went to,' Waldheim told me. 'I heard screams and watched, horrified and afraid, and I said to my brother: "It's hysterical, vulgar, undignified, unnatural – it'll end badly."' No, he was not a Nazi, but had he yet to grasp that these were not the right words for what he saw?

One might have said that to a remarkable extent, 'Waldheim *was* Austria'. Like Austria he was intelligent, politically astute and ambitious in that rather special Viennese style which presupposes compromise and rejects ruthlessness. He was not imaginative, nor was he endowed with the capacity for moral excitement which is the essential prerequisite for commitment to a cause. Rather than arrogant and abrasive, as he has been described, I found him forlorn: none the less, aware that having been so close to the source of the horrors in the Balkans could affect his career, he lied, even if only marginally, for more than forty years about his war. And when one looks for signs of

ALBERT SPEER

had done or left undone. He briefly toyed with the idea of killing Hitler. 'It was only a brief impulse of despair,' he said, sounding tired, 'which nobody was supposed to hear of later. A friend gave it away to the Allies and then they asked me about it at Nuremberg.'

This may not have happened as innocently as he now claimed: Speer always knew where his interests lay. But certainly it was at great risk to himself that as of early 1945 he openly opposed Hitler's scorched-earth policy. 'If you weren't my architect,' Hitler said to him in the course of an extraordinary meeting on 27 March 1945, 'I would insist you take the consequences.'

Speer replied that he was prepared for the consequences; all that mattered now, he said, was their duty to the people. 'If you consider me unsuitable as your minister, fire me,' he said.

As for months past, Speer's instinct proved correct. Hitler ended up pleading with him to give in: to show conviction that the war could still be won. If not that, at least to show *faith*. And finally, 'If at least you could say that you *hope* we have not lost. You must surely be able to hope . . . that would satisfy me.' He was given twenty-four hours to decide.

That midnight, firmly determined to repeat his refusal, Speer says, 'I stood in front of him, saw this broken old man and – I assure you against my volition – heard myself say, "My Führer, I stand unconditionally behind you." And Hitler gave me his hand and began to cry.'

Speer's powers were restored and, travelling day and night all over the country, he used them to stop the scorched-earth measures wherever he could, until, on 24 April, he flew back to Berlin for a last goodbye. 'The gesture of a madman,' he says now.

'It was a strangely quiet talk,' he said. Hitler spoke to him gently about his planned suicide, asked his opinion, and, in a way reassured him that he was not afraid, but glad to die. 'To my own surprise, I found myself confessing to him that I had countermanded his orders. He said nothing.'*

Speer thought the hold Hitler had over him – the magic – had ended with his death. But in Spandau he dreamt constantly about him.

* This later turned out to be a lie: he had never 'confessed' to Hitler.

their past with different eyes: not, you see, for what they did, but for what – despite their religious commitment – they did *not* do.’

Brendler’s family lived in Breslau when he was a child. He recently provoked a confrontation by asking his parents what they remembered about the *Kristallnacht*. ‘My father said that the shop next door had been plundered that night and that the owners disappeared – he assumed they had emigrated. He had bought their piano for 300 marks. He added that he had told the movers to drive around the block and bring it from the opposite side so that people wouldn’t know he’d bought it from Jews. I asked him whether he knew what happened to Jews when they were removed.

“Well, they just left,” he said, implying it was all voluntary. And my mother – who had been in the habit of slipping unauthorized bread and rolls to Jews she knew – said, “No, don’t you remember that transport of Jews we saw in the Klosterstrasse, and on it were our two young doctors – the ones who looked after the children? They weren’t on it by choice.” And she started to cry. And my father made the sort of disparaging gesture I remember well from my childhood, when he regularly mocked and beat me for the sin of sensitivity. “Nonsense,” he said to my mother, just as he had always said to me. “You are quite wrong. Those doctors weren’t among those people at all – they had long been gone.” You see, even now, he couldn’t face the truth. He had to look away now just as he had looked away then.

‘I have come to ask myself whether the guilt of our parents’ generation isn’t finally much more encompassing than we thought, with those who “merely” did nothing only fractionally less guilty than those who were actively involved. But, facing that, I also have to look at myself: if my father was basically a coward, and, in his attitude towards me, his least assertive son, a bully, what am I? What – I say it deliberately, as a German – are my potentials under pressure?’

To Brendler, the taboo that parents of the Hitler generation have imposed on their children – whether actively or passively – is not due to shame or feelings of guilt. ‘More than anything else, our actions and reactions in Germany – then as now – are due to our mania for *Anständigkeit* (respectability, propriety). It both dictates and exalts conduct at the price of conscience.’

He cites as the most glaring and appalling demonstration of this

CHILDREN OF THE REICH

inverted sense of values Himmler's speech to SS leaders and gauleiters on 4 and 6 October 1943 in Posen, in which he explained in detail the reasons and methods behind the extermination of the Jews. Himmler said he had not considered it justified to exterminate men while permitting their potential avengers – women and children – to live. Logic dictated that the women and children be eliminated, too. 'I think I can say that this – the most difficult order we have been issued so far – was executed without allowing our men . . . to suffer any damage in mind or in spirit,' Himmler told his audience. 'The danger was very real: the line between the two potentials – to become cruel and heartless and to lose respect for human life, or else to turn soft and break down – is incredibly fine . . . To have persisted and at the same time . . . to have remained decent men . . . this is a page of glory in our history which has never been written and is never to be written . . . We must take this secret with us to the grave.'

'May I invite you to join us for refreshments next door,' Bormann said when Himmler had finished.

'What I cannot understand,' says Bormann's son, talking about the far-right elements now surfacing in East Germany, 'is how anyone can still defend National Socialism, when – quite aside from living witnesses – the records of these speeches exist in the archives.'

Martin Bormann is tall and thin, with close-cropped grey hair and an ascetic face which belies the humour and warmth that become quickly apparent when he is with people he trusts. The group, I found, treats him gingerly. Although most are children of high-level Nazis, the son of Hitler's closest assistant – who in addition carries his father's name – stands out. Why didn't he ever change his name? 'For two years after the war,' he replies, 'I lived under another name, Martin Bergmann. But as I learned to understand what had happened and became my own person, I decided my name was part of me, as my father and the past were part of me, and I had to live with it.'

'My father was very strict,' he continues, 'and strictest with me, because I was the oldest.' In 1940, when Martin was ten, his father heard of a notation in his son's report card from the Berchtesgaden school he attended: 'Lazy; could do better.' Bormann ordered that the boy be sent at once to Feldafing, an élite military-type boarding school