

Introduction

The policy of Nazi Germany toward the Jews in the years 1933–1945—which has been termed in the historiography of the period “the Final Solution of the Jewish Question in Europe”—was overtly aimed at exterminating the Jewish people. This policy was rooted in the racist Nazi ideology espoused and promulgated by Germany during the rule of Hitler.

In this Nazi ideology, the Aryan race is the superior race, the “master race,” and the German nation, which embodies this race, fulfills the role of “master nation”; everything beautiful and useful in the world is the product of this race. On the opposite end of the racial continuum are the Jews, the root of all evil. All that is destructive and ugly in the world was introduced by them and from within them, and they embody all that is totally negative in humanity. The Jew is a sub-human, a germ that attempts to infect the pure German blood. An unending struggle transpires between these two races, and the outcome is to determine the fate of the world and humanity, for this is an uncompromising struggle for life or death. Only the destruction of the Jewish people can ensure the victory of Nazi Germany in this battle for the future. This ideology led to the death camps of Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka.

Within this ideology, which propped up the anti-Jewish policy of Nazi Germany, and in its subsequent implementation, various stages can be discerned, but the general process constantly moved in the direction of growing extremism. From the time the Nazis came to power, on January 30, 1933, until the outbreak of World War II, their conscious policy was to force the Jews to leave Germany, to confiscate their property and award it to Aryans. In the course of implementing this policy, the Germans ostracized the Jews from German society, cut them off from the economy, rescinded their rights as citizens, and discriminated against them in all areas of life. A series of anti-Jewish laws, culminating in the “Nuremberg Laws,” which were promulgated on September 15, 1935, provided the legal basis for these anti-Jewish acts. This policy reached its peak on the night of November 9/10, 1938, *Kristallnacht*. On this night, the Nazis waged a pogrom on the Jews of Germany. Hundreds of synagogues, businesses, and Jewish institutions were set on fire; windows were smashed by the thousands. About one hundred Jews were killed, and thirty thousand were arrested and interned in concentration camps. In the aftermath, thousands of German and Austrian Jews left their homes in search of a refuge some-

where in the world. But the nations of the world did not open their gates to the German Jews, and many were forced to remain where they were, becoming increasingly subject to torture at the hands of the Nazis and to the ultimate fate that Hitler planned for them.

Hitler was not satisfied with emigration, for his true aims were far more extreme. He was simply biding his time for the proper opportunity. On January 30, 1939, in a speech to the Reichstag, he announced:

Today I will once more be a prophet: If the international Jewish financiers in and outside Europe should succeed in plunging the nations once more into a world war, then the result will not be the Bolshevization of the earth and thus the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe!

Indeed, World War II provided Hitler with the opportunity to implement his plan. With the outbreak of war, on September 1, 1939, a new phase in the Nazi anti-Jewish policy began. The war and the resulting freedom from the constraints of peace and international obligations enabled Nazi Germany to take an extreme stand against the Jews. On September 21, 1939, three weeks after the outbreak of war with Poland, SS *Obergruppenführer* Reinhard Heydrich, in charge of the Reich Security Main Office, issued to the *Einsatzgruppen* commanders of the security police in the occupied areas of Poland an order in which he directed the concentration of the Jews in ghettos "in cities that are railroad crossways or at least near railroad tracks." This concentration of the Jews was, according to Heydrich, the "first condition to realizing the final aim," which was to be kept a "total secret." Heydrich did not clarify in this order the meaning of "the final aim," but noted that its implementation "demanded more time." There was no specific mention in the order of physical annihilation, but there was a clear emphasis that the concentration in the ghettos was a transitory phase toward "realizing the final aim," which most certainly would be more extreme.

The period between the outbreak of war and the German invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, was the transition from a policy of forced emigration to one of physical annihilation. At the beginning of this period, Germany occupied large sections of Poland, in which about two million Jews lived, as well as most of the western, southern, and northern European countries, in which millions more Jews lived. The Jews of Poland were subjected to pogroms, were forced to wear a yellow patch or white band, and were put to work at forced labor. Their property was confiscated and they were interned in ghettos, in which they were held under starvation conditions and in which disease and epidemics claimed thousands of victims. There was no end to the torture and persecution. Many were sent to labor and concentration camps, and, for the slightest infractions, hundreds were put to death. The Jews in the other European countries occupied by the

Nazis or in satellite states were also subject to similar discrimination and persecution.

Along with the preparations for the German invasion of the Soviet Union in the spring of 1941, the leaders of Nazi Germany began to devise a new policy toward the Jews. The aim was to bring the "final solution" to its last, final stage: the extermination of the entire Jewish people. It has not yet been determined whether this policy initially referred to all the Jews of Europe or at first was targeted on the Jews of the Soviet Union and, after the invasion, was enlarged to include the rest of European Jewry. As a result of this changed orientation—to destroy all the Jews in the areas of the Soviet Union that were about to be occupied—four *Einsatzgruppen* were formed under the command of Heydrich, to whom this mission of murder was committed. The attack on the Soviet Union therefore ushered in a new phase in the Nazi policy toward the Jews—the phase of physical annihilation—the result of which was six million victims who were murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators throughout Europe.

— P A R T O N E

**THE
EXTERMINATION
MACHINE**

The "Final Solution": From Shooting to Gas

The mass extermination of the Jews of occupied Europe by Nazi Germany began with the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. Four special SS formations called *Einsatzgruppen*, which were subordinate to Reinhard Heydrich, head of the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA), advanced with the forward units of the German army. Their specific task was to murder Jews and officials of the Communist Party and political commissars in the Red Army. With the help of local collaborators, the *Einsatzgruppen* rounded up the Jews in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union—men, women, children, and the elderly—drove them from their homes to locations in the vicinity of their towns and villages, and shot them dead.

The locations selected for these killings were either natural ravines, antitank ditches, or pits specially dug for the purpose. The Jews were concentrated at assembly points and taken in groups to the killing sites. As a rule, the men were taken first, then the women, and finally the children. The victims were lined up either inside the ditch or at its edge; then they were shot. After one group had been killed, the next was brought over. In cities with a large Jewish population, the killing sometimes went on for days or even weeks.

The commander of *Einsatzkommando 3*, which carried out the murder operation of Jews in Lithuania, wrote in his report:

The implementation of such *Aktionen* was first of all an organizational problem. The decision to clear systematically each sub-district of Jews called for thorough preparation for each *Aktion* and the study of local conditions. The Jews had to be concentrated in one or more localities, and, in accordance with their numbers, a site had to be selected and pits dug. The marching distance from the concentration points to the pits averaged 4 to 5 kms. The Jews were brought to the place of execution in groups of 500, with a distance of at least 2 kms between groups. . . .

The *Einsatzgruppen* left behind over one million victims in mass-murder valleys in Ponar near Vilna, Fort IX at Kovno, Rumboli near Riga, Babi Yar at Kiev, Drobizki Valley near Kharkov, in the Crimea, and at numerous other sites in the occupied areas of the Soviet Union.

However, this method of mass murder—shooting the victims in the vicinity of their homes—raised problems for the Nazi authorities. The shooting of thousands of people was a slow process, and large numbers of SS men were required for each killing operation. The executions were carried out simultaneously in hundreds, even thousands of different locations, rendering it almost impossible to keep them secret from the local population and prospective victims. Instances of last-minute flight and even resistance were recorded by the Germans. It was also evident that what could be done in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union and near the front lines could not be accomplished so openly in most other European countries, where negative reactions were to be expected from sections of the local population. Furthermore, the prolonged exposure of members of the *Einsatzgruppen* to the murder of women, children, and the elderly produced a cumulative psychological effect upon some of them and even caused mental breakdowns.

Himmler was aware of these difficulties. An eyewitness describes what happened during Himmler's visit to Minsk in late summer 1941, while watching the killing of a group of one hundred Jews:

As the firing started, Himmler became more and more nervous. At each volley, he looked down at the ground. . . . The other witness was *Obergruppenführer* von dem Bach-Zelewski. . . . Von dem Bach addressed Himmler: "*Reichsführer*, those were only a hundred. . . . Look at the eyes of the men in this commando, how deeply shaken they are. These men are finished [*fertig*] for the rest of their lives. What kind of followers are we training here? Either neurotics or savages."²

As a result of these drawbacks, the SS authorities, who were in charge of the Nazi extermination machine, began looking for additional methods and improved technical means that would enable them to carry out the killings more efficiently, more quickly, and with less effort. Rudolf Höss, the commander of Auschwitz, wrote in his evidence:

In the summer of 1941, I cannot remember the exact date, I was suddenly summoned to the *Reichsführer* SS Himmler, who received me without his adjutant being present. Himmler said: "The *Führer* has ordered that the Jewish question be solved once and for all and that we, the SS, are to implement that order. The existing extermination centers in the East are not in a position to carry out the large *Aktionen* which are anticipated. . . ."

Shortly afterward, Eichmann came to Auschwitz and disclosed to me the plans for the operations as they affected the various countries concerned. We discussed ways and means of carrying out the ex-

termination. It could be done only by gassing, as it would have been absolutely impossible to dispose, by shooting, of the large numbers of people that were expected, and it would have placed too heavy a burden on the SS men who had to carry it out, especially because of the women and children among the victims. . . .³

The first time gas had been used in Nazi Germany for murdering people was for the "euthanasia program." Over seventy thousand mentally or otherwise "hopelessly" ill Germans—not Jews—were killed between September 1939 and late summer 1941.⁴ For this operation, Hitler had established a secret organization known as T4 (a reference to the organization's headquarters at 4 Tiergartenstrasse in Berlin) subordinate to Hitler's Chief of Chancellery, *Reichsleiter* Philipp Bouhler.

At the beginning of World War II, Hitler signed the following order: "*Reichsleiter* Bouhler and Dr. [Karl] Brandt [Hitler's personal physician] are charged with the responsibility for expanding the authority of individual physicians, with a view to enable them, after the most critical examination in the realm of human knowledge, to administer to incurably sick persons a mercy death."⁵

The man who was directly in charge of the euthanasia operation was Viktor Brack, a high official in the Chancellery of the *Führer* and subordinate to Bouhler. The T4 organization established several institutions throughout Germany. The mentally ill destined for elimination were placed in hermetically sealed rooms into which carbon monoxide was introduced; they died within a short time. Some victims were killed by injections of poison. All the bodies were cremated.

A request from Himmler to Bouhler in the summer of 1940 enlarged the euthanasia program to apply to sick concentration camp detainees from the camps inside Germany under SS supervision. Some of the detainees were Jews. They were removed from their camps to the euthanasia centers and were murdered there. The code name for this operation was 14F13. As a result of internal pressure within Nazi Germany, Hitler ordered the termination of the euthanasia program at the end of August 1941. However, sporadic killings of small groups of "incurable victims" continued in some euthanasia institutions after this date.⁶

On September 3, 1941, the gas Zyklon B was first used for extermination in Auschwitz on an experimental basis. Zyklon B was an alcohol acid preparation that had been used until then at Auschwitz for exterminating vermin. The group chosen for this first experiment consisted of Soviet prisoners of war. Further experiments followed shortly thereafter. Höss, the commander of Auschwitz, wrote in his testimony:

The gassing was carried out in the detention cells of Block 11. Protected by a gas mask, I watched the killing myself. In the crowded cells, death came instantaneously the moment the Zyklon B was thrown in. A short, almost smothered cry, and it was all over. . . .

I must even admit that this gassing set my mind at rest, for the mass extermination of the Jews was to start soon, and at that time neither Eichmann nor I was certain as to how these mass killings were to be carried out. It would be by gas, but we did not know which gas and how it was to be used. Now we had the gas, and we had established a procedure. . . .⁷

Concurrent to these experiments in Auschwitz, the *Einsatzgruppen* looked for additional and simpler methods for mass killings. The new facility developed and supplied to the *Einsatzgruppen* was gas vans. The idea of the gas van originated with SS *Brigadeführer* Artur Nebe, commander of *Einsatzgruppe B*, which operated in territories close to the central front and which had carried out in Belorussia large-scale shooting actions of Jews, communists, and other "social elements." Nebe, as former leader of the Reich's Criminal Police Department (Kripo), was familiar with the euthanasia program and killing by gas.

In September 1941, *Einsatzgruppe B* was faced with the task of liquidating the patients of the lunatic asylums in the cities of Minsk and Mogilev. Nebe decided to find a simpler way for his men to kill the mentally diseased, other than by shooting them. He contacted Kripo headquarters and asked for their help in carrying out the killing of the insane with either explosives or poison gas. Dr. Widmann of the Criminal Police was sent to Nebe in Minsk, but before he left, Dr. Widmann discussed with the director of the Criminal Police Technological Institute, Dr. Heess, ways of using the carbon monoxide gas from automobile exhaust for killing operations in the East, based on the experience gained from the euthanasia program. Dr. Widmann took to Minsk 400 kgs of explosive material and the metal pipes required for the gassing installations.

Nebe and Dr. Widmann carried out an experimental killing using explosives. Twenty-five mentally ill people were locked into two bunkers in a forest outside Minsk. The first explosion killed only some of them, and it took much time and trouble until the second explosion killed the rest. Explosives therefore were unsatisfactory.

A few days later an experiment with poison gas was carried out by Nebe and Dr. Widmann in Mogilev. In the local lunatic asylum, a room with twenty to thirty of the insane was closed hermetically, and two pipes were driven into the wall. A car was parked outside, and one of the metal pipes that Dr. Widmann had brought connected the exhaust of the car to the pipe in the wall. The car engine was turned on and the carbon monoxide began seeping into the room. After eight minutes, the people in the room were still alive. A second car was connected to the other pipe in the wall. The two cars were operated simultaneously, and a few minutes later all those in the room were dead.

After these experimental executions, Nebe came up with the idea of constructing a car with a hermetically sealed cabin for killing purposes. The carbon monoxide from the car's exhaust would be channeled into the sealed

cabin, in which the victims stood. Nebe discussed the technical aspects of the idea with Dr. Heess and together they brought the proposal before Heydrich, who adopted it.⁸

The Technical Department of the Reich Security Main Office, headed by SS *Obersturmbannführer* Walter Rauff, developed a special vehicle for killing purposes. This vehicle resembled an ambulance or refrigerator truck and contained a hermetically sealed rear cabin. The victims were placed in the cabin and carbon monoxide was introduced by means of a pipe. The gassing process took between fifteen and thirty minutes. During this time the van was driven from the loading site to prepared graves.

Two types of gas vans had been built: a larger one, 5.8 meters in length, and a smaller one, measuring 4.5 meters. Both were about 2.5 meters wide and 1.7 meters high. The bigger one could accommodate between 130 and 150 people, when densely packed inside, and the smaller one from 80 to 100.⁹

The first gas vans were supplied to the *Einsatzgruppen* and to the Chelmo death camps in November–December 1941. The killing in Chelmo began on December 8, 1941. By the middle of 1942, about thirty gas vans had been produced by a private car manufacturer, the Gabschat Fangewerke GMBH, Will-Walter Strasse 32–38, Berlin.¹⁰

A few weeks before the first gas vans were supplied to the *Einsatzgruppen*, in late October 1941, Dr. Alfred Wetzel of the Ministry for the Eastern Occupied Territories wrote to the *Reichskommissar* for Ostland, Hinrich Lohse, of a proposal made by Viktor Brack to set up permanent gassing facilities in Ostland for mass extermination based on the experience and help of the euthanasia program. With the cessation of the euthanasia program in Germany, its personnel were available and looking for new tasks.¹¹

The permanent gassing facilities were intended to lighten the task of Nazi authorities in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union in carrying out their killing operations. But the proposal of Dr. Wetzel and of Brack was not implemented in Ostland. The unemployed "euthanasia" personnel were assigned to another and bigger task—the erection of camps with gassing facilities, where the annihilation of the Jews in the Nazi-occupied territories of Poland would be carried out. The successful experiments in Auschwitz and the development of the gas vans had provided the solution of the technical problems involved.

The Wannsee Conference

At the same time that the extermination activities were being carried out by the *Einsatzgruppen* in the Soviet Union and the technical experiments with gassing were being conducted, the governing authorities of the Third Reich were beginning to prepare for the implementation of the "final solution" of European Jewry.

On July 31, 1941, Heydrich was assigned by Reich Marshal Hermann Göring the task of preparing a plan for the "final solution of the Jewish question" within the realm of German rule and influence in Europe. The various components of the German governing apparatus—the SS; the Nazi party; the ministries, with their bureaucratic machinery; and the army—were to play specific roles in carrying out the "final solution."

A conference was convened by Heydrich to inform the relevant authorities in Nazi Germany of the "final solution" as decided upon by Hitler and that the SS and he personally would be in charge of it. In addition, the conference was to discuss the different political and organizational aspects of the implementation of the "final solution" and the problem of the *mischlinge* (a person of mixed blood; specifically, a person with at least one Jewish grandparent).

Hans Frank, the Nazi Governor-General of the General Government, at a meeting of his top officials held in Cracow on December 16, 1941, spoke openly of the purposes of the forthcoming conference:

I want to say to you quite frankly that we shall have to finish with the Jews one way or another. The *Führer* once spoke these words: "If united Jewry should again succeed in causing another world war, the peoples who have been hounded into this war will not be the only ones to shed their blood; the Jew of Europe will also find his end. . . ."

About the Jews of Europe, I have only one point of view—the Jews have to disappear. They must go. I have begun negotiations to send them to the east. In January a big conference will be held in Berlin. Director-General Bühler will attend it. This conference will be held in the Reich Security Main Office and will be presided over by SS *Oberführer* Heydrich. A major migration is about to start. But what is to happen to the Jews? Do you think they will actually be resettled in Ostland villages? We were told in Berlin: Why all this trouble? We can't use them either, liquidate them yourselves. . . .¹²

After a postponement caused by the entrance of the United States into the war, the conference was held on January 20, 1942, at Wannsee, a suburb of Berlin. The participants of the Wannsee Conference included the director-generals (*statsssekretär*) of the relevant ministries, senior representatives of the German ruling authorities in the occupied countries, and SS senior department heads.

Dr. Josef Bühler, *Statsssekretär* of the General Government (the areas of central Poland occupied by Germany), demanded at the conference that the "final solution" be applied first to the Jews of the General Government. The conference protocol states:

Statsssekretär Dr. Bühler announced that the General Government would welcome it if the final solution of this problem would begin in the General Government, as, on the one hand, the question of transport there played no major role and consideration of labor supply

would not hinder the course of *Aktionen*. Jews must be removed as quickly as possible from the General Government, because it was there in particular that the Jew, as a carrier of epidemics, constituted a great danger, and, at the same time, caused constant disorder in the economic structure of the country by his continuous black-market dealings. Furthermore, of the approximately two and a half million Jews under consideration, the majority were in any case unfit for work.

Statsssekretär Dr. Bühler further stated that the solution of the Jewish question in the General Government was primarily the responsibility of the Chief of Security Police and the SD and that his work would have the support of the authorities of the General Government. He had only one request: that the Jewish question in this area be solved as quickly as possible.¹³

Bühler's request that the Jews of the General Government in Poland be destroyed first was in fact accepted.

The General Government included the districts of Warsaw, Cracow, Lublin, Lvov, and Radom, and its Jewish population was estimated by the German government at 2,284,000. The destruction of the Jews in the General Government would later be called "Operation Reinhard," after Reinhard Heydrich, who was shot by members of the Czech Underground on May 27, 1942, near Prague, and died several days later.

Operation Reinhard: Organization and Manpower

The preparations for the extermination of the Jews of the General Government had actually started months before the Wannsee Conference. A special organization, later called "Operation Reinhard," was established in Lublin, and the SS and Police Leader of the Lublin district, Odlio Globocnik (or "Globus," as Himmler nicknamed him), was appointed its commander.

Globocnik was an Austrian, a member of the Austrian Nazi party, and in 1933 had received a prison sentence for his part in the murder of a Jew in Vienna.¹ He had earned Himmler's high esteem for his contribution to the annexation (*Anschluss*) of Austria to Germany, and when Austria became part of the Reich, he was appointed *Gauleiter* of Vienna. In January 1939, he was accused of illegal speculation in foreign currency and was stripped of his post and all his party honors. After Globocnik's demotion to the ranks of the Waffen SS, Himmler pardoned his friend, and in November 1939 appointed him the SS and Police Leader in the Lublin district. The SS and Police Leader was the highest SS authority in the district.

Globocnik felt a personal gratitude to Himmler for his rehabilitation and became his loyal trustee. He was not an "ordinary" district SS and Police Leader. His personality and initiative and his connections with Himmler enabled him to use the Lublin district as a springboard for anti-Jewish plans from the beginning of the German occupation of Poland. The Lublin district was to be turned into a Jewish reservation (*Judenreservat*); there Jews from the Reich and its incorporated territories would be resettled. From December 1939 until February 1940, tens of thousands of Jews were deported to this district. These mass deportations, which were begun by the SS without coordination with the civilian authorities of the General Government and without preparations in the area, were stopped after Hans Frank interfered through Hermann Göring in Berlin. But the Lublin district remained in the Nazi mind a place highly suited for the "final solution of the Jewish problem," and thousands of Jews were deported there from Germany, Austria, and Slovakia during 1941 and the beginning of 1942.

Through Globocnik's initiative the Lublin district also became a center

of SS economic enterprises and a base for future SS colonization plans in Eastern Europe. A branch of the German company "German Supply Establishment," or DAW (*Deutsche Ausüstungswerke*), was established in Lublin in December 1940. Over five thousand Jewish prisoners, among them Jewish prisoners of war from the Polish army, were employed as slave workers in the DAW enterprises at Lipowa and Chelmska streets in Lublin and in Pulawy. In the summer of 1941, the SS clothing workshops (*Bekleidungswerke*) were established in Lublin at the old landing strip at Chelmska Street, and there, too, Jewish slave labor was employed.

In the middle of 1941, Globocnik initiated plans for extensive German colonization, including special SS settlements in the Lublin district, which would serve as a link with areas of German colonization in the newly occupied territories of the Soviet Union. On July 17, 1941, Globocnik was appointed by Himmler as his commissioner to organize the SS and Police posts in the newly acquired eastern territories as settlements for the families of the SS and Police personnel who served there. On July 20/21, 1941, Himmler visited Globocnik in Lublin, and decided to enlarge and extend the SS economic enterprises in Lublin. A concentration camp would be built for up to 50,000 prisoners who would be employed in building and operating these enterprises. This was the initial reason for the construction of the Maidanek concentration camp.²

Toward the end of 1941 it was decided that Maidanek should serve not only as a concentration camp but also as a camp for Soviet prisoners of war and be subordinated to the jurisdiction of the SS rather than to the German army.

As plans for Operation Reinhard began to take shape, Globocnik was entrusted by Himmler with the task of preparing for the extermination of the Jews in the General Government. As chief of Operation Reinhard, Globocnik was directly subordinate to Himmler and not to the SS *Obergruppenführer*, Friedrich Krüger, the Higher SS and Police Leader in the General Government. However, as SS and Police Leader of the Lublin district, Globocnik did continue to be subordinate to Krüger.

Not only were Globocnik's personality, his ties with Himmler, and the German economic enterprises there the reasons behind the selection of the Lublin district as the center for Operation Reinhard. The selection of the eastern areas of the General Government for the annihilation of the Jews was meant to serve an additional purpose. Heydrich had stated at the Wannsee Conference: "In the course of the implementation of the Final Solution, Europe is to be combed through from west to east. The evacuated Jews will be brought, group by group, to the so-called transit ghettos [*Durchgangsettos*] to be transported from there further to the East."³ The choice of the Lublin district as the center for the extermination actions could, therefore, serve as a cover for the claim that the Jews were being sent to the East. Their disappearance after their extermination in the death camps could be explained by saying that they had been sent further east, for

forced labor in the vast expanses of the Nazi-occupied areas of the Soviet Union.

The main tasks imposed on Globocnik and his staff within the framework of Operation Reinhard were:

- the overall planning of the deportations and extermination activities of the entire operation;
- building the death camps;
- coordinating the deportations of the Jews from the different districts to the death camps;
- killing the Jews in the camps; and
- seizing the assets and valuables of the victims and handing them over to the appropriate Reich authorities.

Operation Reinhard set the guidelines and directives for the deportations, and its staff was in charge of coordinating the timetable of the transports in accordance with the absorptive capacity of the camps. The specific organization and guarding of the transports of Jews from all over the General Government—and later from other European countries—to the death camps were not under the command of Globocnik's Operation Reinhard staff. These tasks were handled by the Reich Security Main Office and its branches and by Higher SS and Police Leaders in each locality (SSPF and HSSPF). Nevertheless, teams of officers and noncommissioned officers, in addition to guard units subordinated to Operation Reinhard, were sent to different localities to extend help and even to carry out the deportations to the death camps.

No written orders were given to Globocnik by Himmler regarding Operation Reinhard and the extermination of the Jews. These orders were given verbally, as were the orders given to the *Einsatzgruppen* relating to their killing operations in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union. Himmler opposed written orders and documents on the extermination of the Jews. In a speech before an audience of high-ranking SS and Police officers at Posen on October 4, 1943, he stated: "I refer to the evacuation of the Jews, the annihilation of the Jewish people. . . . In our history, this is an unwritten and never-to-be-written page of glory. . . ."⁴

For fear of the verdict of history, Himmler was careful not to issue written orders on the extermination of the Jews. Operation Reinhard was set into motion on verbal orders alone.

The German Personnel

Odllo Globocnik's first task was to organize the manpower required for the construction and operation of the killing centers. The people assigned to Operation Reinhard came from the following sources:⁵

1	SS and policemen who served under Globocnik's command in the Lublin district until Operation Reinhard	153
2	Members of the SS and Police staffs or units	205
3	Chancellery of the <i>Führer</i> —Euthanasia program	92
		a total of 450 men

The most important group of Operation Reinhard came from the euthanasia program. They brought with them knowledge and experience in setting up and operating gassing institutions for mass murder. They filled the key posts involved with the extermination methods, the planning and construction of three death camps—Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka—and the command over these camps. Viktor Brack gave evidence in his trial after the war about the transfer of the euthanasia personnel to Operation Reinhard:

In 1941, I received an order to discontinue the euthanasia program. In order to retain the personnel that had been relieved of these duties and in order to be able to start a new euthanasia program after the war, Böhler asked me—I think after a conference with Himmler—to send this personnel to Lublin and place it at the disposal of SS *Brigadeführer* Globocnik.⁶

The first group of euthanasia personnel, numbering a few dozen men, arrived at Lublin between the end of October and the end of December 1941. Among them was *Kriminalkommissar* of Police Christian Wirth, the highest-ranking officer from the euthanasia program assigned to Operation Reinhard, and *Oberscharführer* Josef Oberhauser. Additional people from the euthanasia program arrived in Lublin during the first months of 1942. Viktor Brack visited Lublin at the beginning of May 1942 and discussed with Globocnik the contribution of the euthanasia organization to the task of exterminating Jews. Globocnik asked for more euthanasia personnel to be placed under his command. His request was accepted. After this meeting Brack wrote to Himmler:

In accordance with my orders from *Reichsleiter* Böhler, I have long ago put at *Brigadeführer* Globocnik's disposal part of my manpower to aid him in carrying out his special mission. Upon his renewed request, I have now transferred to him additional personnel. Globocnik took this opportunity to explain to me his idea that the action against the Jews should be carried out with all deliberate speed, in order to avoid getting stuck [in the middle] one of these days when some sort of difficulty may force us to stop. You, yourself, *Reichsführer*, once voiced to me your opinion that the requirements of secrecy also oblige us to act as quickly as possible. Both conceptions are thus directed in principle toward the same result, and according to my experience, they are more than justified.⁷

some euthanasia personnel arrived in Lublin in May/June 1942 after having served on the eastern front in the Kursk area, in a medical unit. While serving in the front area, they all carried a red paper in their paybooks, signed by the German army headquarters, stating that they were not to be employed at the forward front line. This was to prevent any danger that some of them might be captured by the Soviet army and taken as prisoners. The secrecy of the euthanasia program had to be preserved. When a need for them arose in the rear areas, like the need for people for Operation Reinhard, they were withdrawn from the front area.⁸

The euthanasia personnel transferred to Operation Reinhard became SS members and, like the others, wore grey uniforms and held SS ranks. They were under Globocnik's operational orders, but on personal matters continued to be connected to their headquarters in Berlin and took their vacations at the euthanasia recreation center in Austria. A special courier from euthanasia headquarters came to Lublin every week and brought them additional payments and mail. Almost all of the euthanasia personnel who served in Operation Reinhard were appointed to serve in the death camps and not on staff assignments in Lublin.

SS members, including the euthanasia personnel assigned to Operation Reinhard, reported to the headquarters in Lublin and were instructed as to their duties by *Hauptsturmführer* Herman Höfle. Everyone signed the following declaration of secrecy:

I have been thoroughly informed and instructed by SS *Hauptsturmführer* Höfle, as Commander of the main department of *Einsatz Reinhard* of the SS and Police Leader in the District of Lublin:

1. that I may not under any circumstances pass on any form of information, verbally or in writing, on the progress, procedure or incidents in the evacuation of Jews to any person outside the circle of the *Einsatz Reinhard* staff;
 2. that the process of the evacuation of Jews is a subject that comes under "Secret Reich Document," in accordance with censorship regulation Versh. V. 4;
 4. that there is an absolute prohibition on photography in the camps of *Einsatz Reinhard*;
- I am familiar with the above regulations and laws and am aware of the responsibilities imposed upon me by the task with which I have been entrusted. I promise to observe them to the best of my knowledge and conscience. I am aware that the obligation to maintain secrecy continues even after I have left the Service.⁹

The organizational framework of Operation Reinhard was crystallized according to the tasks imposed upon Globocnik. The experience gained during the first three months of the extermination activities—March to May 1942—influenced the organizational structure. The Operation Reinhard organization included the three camps of Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka and the training camp in Trawniki; the SS clothing workshops, which in the

past had been subordinated to SS central authorities, were transferred to the command of Operation Reinhard in March 1942. The SS clothing workshops were located in the old airport of Lublin. In this camp the clothes and goods of the victims would be brought and treated. Operation Reinhard headquarters was located in Lublin at Pieradzkiego 11, in the former Stefan Batory college. Globocnik's headquarters, as SS and Police Leader of the Lublin district, was located separately from Operation Reinhard headquarters.¹⁰

The SS personnel under Globocnik's command were employed in all of these camps and economic enterprises. At the headquarters in Lublin, *Hauptsturmführer* Höfle had chief authority over Operation Reinhard, beside Globocnik. As head of the "Main Department" (*Hauptabteilung*), he was in charge of the organization and manpower of Operation Reinhard. It was he who coordinated the deportation of the Jews from all areas of the General Government and directed them to one of the camps. During the first months of Operation Reinhard, each of the death camps was directly subordinated to Globocnik.

Between twenty and thirty-five SS men served in each of the death camps, and, with few exceptions, they were from the euthanasia program. The camp commanders had the rank of SS *Obersturmführer* or *Hauptsturmführer*. All the other SS personnel were either *Hauptsturmführers*, *Scharführers*, or *Unterscharführers*. There were no SS privates in the camps at all.

In addition to their extermination activities, the SS men were in charge of all the personal effects and property brought and left by the victims. The SS men of Operation Reinhard were given a bonus of 18 DM (*Deutsch Mark*) a day in addition to their regular pay in accordance with their rank. They received two to three weeks home leave every three months.

Among the high-ranking staff of Operation Reinhard were many Austrians—Globocnik and Höfle, who commanded the operation, and three of the six SS officers commanding the camps, Dr. Imfried Eberl, Franz Reichleitner, and Franz Strangl.

The manpower structure of Operation Reinhard took its final shape during the first months of killing. The heads of Operation Reinhard saw that they would not be able to base their manpower and organizational needs on the experience of existing concentration camps, which were integral to Himmler's realm of terror. The death camps—Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka—were to be unique, as their purpose was different. The conceptual model for their operation and manpower needs became crystallized from the experience gained during the first stage of implementation of the extermination process in all three camps.

The Ukrainian Auxiliaries

The SS unit assigned to each of the camps was too small to meet all its requirements: security, guard duties in and around the camp, and ensuring

the smooth extermination of the thousands of victims brought in each transport. An additional security force was necessary for these tasks. Such a unit, composed mostly of Ukrainian nationalist collaborators, was formed.

Friendly ties between Ukrainian nationalists and Nazi Germany had existed for years. Nationalist Ukrainian emigrants who had found refuge in Germany after World War I and Ukrainian legal and illegal organizations active in the Polish West Ukraine hoped to obtain Nazi Germany's help in establishing their own independent state in Polish and Soviet Ukraine. Nazi Germany used these organizations for subversive activity when they attacked Poland at the beginning of World War II.

Nazi Germany's preparations to attack the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941 raised hopes among the Ukrainian nationalists. Two Ukrainian military battalions, the "Nightingale" and "Roland," were organized by the German *Abwehr* (army intelligence) to render assistance once the invasion began. Underground ties were maintained with Ukrainian clandestine organizations and groups in Soviet Ukraine.

On June 22, 1941, with the German invasion of the Soviet Union, the nationalist Ukrainians in West Galicia staged an anti-Soviet revolt. In the city of Lvov a rally of Ukrainian nationalist leaders proclaimed an independent Ukrainian state and government on June 30, 1941, the day the city was captured by the Germans. The invading German troops were welcomed to the Ukraine by large segments of the local population, who staged extensive anti-Jewish pogroms. But Nazi Germany did not intend to grant the Ukrainians any form of self-rule or independence. The fertile Ukraine was slated as an area for German colonization.

In the beginning of July, the Ukrainian government was dissolved and its leaders were arrested. In spite of this, collaboration of Ukrainians with Germany continued. Tens of thousands of Ukrainians enlisted in the local police and volunteered for the German security forces. The majority of these Ukrainians were former soldiers of the Red Army who had fallen into German captivity. Nazi Germany encouraged Ukrainian prisoners of war, as well as Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians, and others, to join their ranks, and thousands responded to the call. Some of them did it to escape the horrible conditions in which Soviet prisoners of war were kept, others for nationalistic reasons, hoping to receive some kind of Ukrainian independence within the framework of Nazi Europe as a reward for their services. Many joined the ranks of the Nazis for reasons of anti-Semitism, which was quite common among the Ukrainians and other East European nations, or for economic profit. Other Ukrainians who joined the German security forces were local people, most of them inhabitants of Polish West Ukraine. The Ukrainians served in special units of the German army, the SS, and the police. A special unit was organized in Operation Reinhard.

In addition to the Ukrainians, this unit also included *Volksdeutsche* who lived in the Ukraine. These *Volksdeutsche* were descendants of Germans who had come to Russia in the second half of the eighteenth century.

They numbered about 400,000 on the eve of World War II. Their knowledge of the German and Ukrainian languages, and their German identity and identification made them the most suitable element to serve in such units where they made up the low command staff. Most of these *Volksdeutsche* were also former Red Army soldiers and were removed from the prisoner of war camps.

Those Soviet war prisoners or local Ukrainians from West Ukraine who volunteered for Operation Reinhard were sent to the SS training camp at Trawniki. In October 1941, SS *Sturmabfuhrer* Karl Streibel was appointed commander of this camp. He toured the Soviet prisoner of war camps in the Lublin district and in the Kiev area and traveled to the Galicia district to find Ukrainian and *Volksdeutsche* volunteers for Trawniki.¹¹

Fedor Fedorenko, a Ukrainian and former Soviet prisoner of war, testified in an American court about how he had enlisted in the German service, trained in Trawniki, and was sent to Treblinka as a guard. According to the court's protocol:

Evidence as to Defendant's conduct, 1941-1949.
Defendant was mobilized on June 23, 1941, almost immediately after the invasion of the Soviet Union by Nazi Germany. He was a truck driver, and the truck he drove was also mobilized. He had no previous military training, and in the next two or three weeks his group was encircled twice by the German army. He escaped the first time, but was captured three days later by the Germans.

The Germans transported several truckloads of prisoners to Zhitomir, a former Soviet training camp, and defendant described the conditions as very bad and with little water or food. The camp housed about 50-100,000 prisoners, with no barracks available for them. After two to three weeks he was transferred to Rovno. Next he was transferred to Chelm, Poland, a camp surrounded by barbed-wire rolls. . . . Defendant estimated the population at Chelm at about 80,000 prisoners. Defendant described the conditions at Chelm as so bad that if you became ill you rarely recovered. He also indicated that food was at a minimum and that approximately 40,000 prisoners of war died over the winter of 1941/42.

One day at Chelm the Germans assembled the Soviet prisoners and walked down the line selecting 200 to 300 who were sent to Trawniki. . . . At Trawniki most of the guards were *Volksdeutsche*. Defendant is not a *Volksdeutsche* but Ukrainian. . . . In the spring of 1942 the Germans gave black uniforms to all of the prisoners. *Volksdeutsche* also wore black uniforms, but theirs were well tailored and of better material. After the barracks had been constructed at Trawniki, the Germans gave instruction in the firing of rifles, such as field stripping, and in marching. . . . In the spring of 1942 defendant was sent to Lublin where at first the prisoners guarded their own camp and then were sent to the Jewish ghetto. . . . At Lublin the Soviet prisoners guarded houses, furniture—whatever was left. They were issued rifles which were not fired. The Soviet prisoners were converted from work-

ers to guards at Lublin. From Lublin defendant was sent to Warsaw along with about 80 to 100 others. . . . Defendant was transported to Treblinka as prisoner guard in approximately September 1942.¹²

These volunteer units were called by a variety of names by the local population—"Ukrainians," "Trawniki men," or "Askaries." The Germans called them *Hilfswillige* (auxiliaries), or "Hitwis" for short, and the volunteers themselves *Wachmänner* (guardsmen). In Trawniki the "guardsmen" received abbreviated military training and exercises, including tactics for the deportation of Jews. One of these guardsmen, Engelhand, testified about such tactical training in the village of Trawniki.

The first action against Jews that I participated in took place after my arrival in Trawniki. . . . We were told that this was a tactical exercise. We surrounded the whole village, and were told by the translator that Jews were living there. He told us to go there [in groups of] two men and tell them to get dressed, take with them whatever they can. . . . Soon the car will come and take all of them to Lublin.¹³

About 2,000 to 3,000 guardmen passed through the training camp of Trawniki during the two and a half years of its activity. Some of them were organized into two battalions with four companies each, about 1,000 men altogether. The size of a company was 100 to 200 men. One of the companies was a training company for squad (*Zug*) commanders. One or two companies were stationed permanently in the city of Lublin for security duties there. Other units carried out guard duties in institutions, enterprises, and labor camps in the Lublin district. They constituted the main mobile force, which, in addition to the local police units, carried out the deportations from the ghettos and the mass executions of Jews. To each Operation Reinhard death camp—Belzec, Sobbor, and Treblinka—was allotted a company-size unit, which numbered 90 to 130 men. Most of their squad commanders (*Zugwächsmänner*) were *Volksdeutsche* from among them who spoke German and Ukrainian. Some of the squad commanders were Ukrainians. SS men from the German staff in the death camps were appointed platoon and company commanders. In spite of their subordination to the death camp commanders and staff, the guardsmen kept organizational ties with, and received military supplies, uniforms, and wages from, the Trawniki training camp. Those who were not suitable for service in the death camps, for health or discipline reasons (e.g., drunkards, etc.), were sent back to Trawniki and were replaced by others.¹⁴

3

Belzec: Construction and Experiments

The leaders of Operation Reinhard, who at the end of October 1941 initiated the preparations for the extermination of the Jews in the General Government, did not foresee how many death camps would have to be constructed and operated for this purpose. Up to that time, no death camp operated in Nazi Germany or in the occupied countries and there was therefore no model on which the Operation Reinhard planners could base their plans. However, some guidelines did exist for selecting the sites on which to build the death camps. The camps would have to be near the main concentration of Jews in the General Government and near the railways, to facilitate the transports and deportations. The location of the camps had to be desolate places, as far as possible from inhabited areas, to maintain secrecy and to keep the knowledge of what was transpiring within them from the local population. And, third, the camps had to be in the vicinity of the occupied territories of the Soviet Union so as to encourage the belief that the Jews who had disappeared had eventually reached labor camps in the vast areas of the East.

But no previous experience could be used to determine the optimal extermination technique to be employed or to estimate the annihilation capacity of a gas chamber or a death camp. Such information could be gained only through experimentation. Then, based on early results, decisions regarding the size and structure of each camp and the number of camps required for Operation Reinhard could be made. Belzec was to be the camp where these experiments would be initiated, and additional camps would be planned and constructed according to the results obtained there.

Belzec was a small town in the southeast of the Lublin district, located on the Lublin-Zamosc-Rava Ruskaya-Lvov railway line. At the beginning of 1940, the Germans established in Belzec a labor camp for Jews. Thousands of Jews from the Lublin district were sent there as slave-workers to build fortifications on the Soviet-German line of demarcation, which was close to Belzec. This labor camp was liquidated in the autumn of 1940.¹ In August 1941, five weeks after the German attack on the Soviet

Union, formerly Polish East Galicia, with a population of over half a million Jews, was annexed to the General Government. Consequently, Belzec became the center of a large Jewish population in the General Government—that of the Lublin, Cracow, and Lvov districts. Belzec's location, as well as the fact that it was on an efficient railway line, would facilitate the transportation of Jews to a camp there.

The exact location selected for the death camp was about half a kilometer from the Belzec railway station, along a railway spur. The area included antitank trenches that had been part of the border fortifications built there in 1940. This was a further advantage, as the trenches could be used as burial pits for the victims.

The construction of the death camp began on November 1, 1941, by the SS Central Building Administration (*SS Zentralbauverwaltung*) in the Lublin district. SS *Oberscharführer* Josef Oberhauser, a former euthanasia man, was placed in charge of building the camp. In the second half of December 1941, SS *Hauptsturmführer* Christian Wirth was appointed commander of Belzec and Oberhauser became his adjutant.²

SS *Scharführer* Erich Fuchs, who was engaged in the euthanasia institution at Bernburg, testified about Wirth and his arrival to Belzec:

Polizeihauptmann [police captain] Christian Wirth conducted the *Aktionen* in Bernburg. Subordinate to him were the burners, disinfectors, and drivers. He also supervised the transportation of the mentally ill and of the corpses. One day in the winter of 1941 Wirth arranged a transport [of euthanasia personnel] to Poland. I was picked together with about eight or ten other men and transferred to Belzec. . . . I don't remember the names of the others. Upon our arrival in Belzec, we met Friedel Schwarz and the other SS men, whose names I cannot remember. They supervised the construction of barracks that would serve as a gas chamber. Wirth told us that in Belzec "all the Jews will be struck down." For this purpose barracks were built as gas chambers. I installed shower heads in the gas chambers. The nozzles were not connected to any water pipes; they would serve as canno-flages for the gas chamber. For the Jews who were gassed it would seem as if they were being taken to baths and for disinfection.³

Before coming to Belzec, Wirth became acquainted with the gas vans in operation in Chelmo and in the eastern occupied territories of the Soviet Union and learned their advantages and disadvantages. This experience in euthanasia, where permanent gas chambers had existed, and with the gas vans inspired his solution. He decided to combine in Belzec the permanent gas chamber with the internal combustion car engine as gas supplier. Wirth objected to the bottles of carbon monoxide gas that had been used in euthanasia institutions. The bottles, which were produced in private factories and which would be supplied to Belzec in large quantities, could arouse suspicion. In addition, the factories were located at great distances from Belzec and the steady supply of the bottles might cause a logistical problem.

Wirth preferred to set up a self-contained extermination system, based on an ordinary car engine and easily available gasoline and not dependent on supply by outside factors.⁴

Stanislaw Kozak, a Pole who participated in the building of Belzec, describes the first stages of construction:

In October 1941, three SS men came to Belzec and requested from the municipality twenty men for work. The municipality allotted twenty workers, residents of Belzec, and I was among them. . . . We began the work on November 1, 1941. We built barracks close to the side track of the railway. One barrack, which was close to the railway section, was 50 meters long and 12.5 meters wide. . . . The second barrack, 25 meters long and 12.5 meters wide, was for the Jews destined for the "baths." Not far from this barrack we built a third barrack, 12 meters long and 8 meters wide. This barrack was divided into three chambers by a wooden wall, so that each chamber was 4 meters wide and 8 meters long. It was 2 meters high. The inside walls of this barrack were of double boards with a vacant space between them filled by us with sand. The walls inside the barracks were covered with pap. In addition, the ground and walls up to 1.10 meters were covered by sheet-metal. . . . From the second to the third barrack led a closed corridor, 2 meters wide, 2 meters high, and 10 meters long. This corridor led to a corridor in the third barrack where the doors to its three chambers were located. Each chamber of this barrack had on its northern side a door 1.80 meters high and 1.10 meters wide. These doors, like those in the corridor, were covered with rubber. All the doors in this barrack could be opened from the outside only. These doors were built with strong boards 7.5 cm in diameter and were secured from the outside with a wooden bar held by two iron hooks against pressure from inside the barrack.

In each of the three chambers of this barrack a water pipe was installed 10 cm above the floor. In addition, on the western wall in each chamber in the corner, was a water pipe 1 meter above the ground, with an open joint, turned toward the center of the room. These pipes with the joint were connected through the wall to a pipe that ran under the floor. In each of the three chambers of this barrack was installed an oven weighing 250 kg. It was expected that the pipe joint would later be connected with the oven. The oven was 1.10 meters high, 55 cm wide and 55 cm long. . . . During the time that we Poles built the barracks, the "Blacks" [Ukrainians] erected the fences of the extermination camp, which were made of dense barbed wire. After we Poles had completed building the three above-mentioned barracks, the Germans dismissed us, on December 22, 1941. . . .⁵

When the Polish workers had finished their work and left, a group of Jews from ghettos in the vicinity of Belzec, mainly from Lubycze-Krolewska and Male-Mosty, were brought to the camp. Some of these Jews were skilled workers—carpenters, smiths, and builders. They continued the construction of the camp.⁶

The installations and buildings required to begin the mass killings were ready by the end of February 1942. The first transports of Jews were used for experimental killings, to check the efficiency and capacity of the gas chambers and the technique of the extermination process. There were two or three such experimental transports of four to six freight cars with 100 to 250 Jews in each of them. These experimental killings lasted a few days and the last group to be murdered were the Jewish prisoners who had been engaged in building the camp.

Mieczyslaw Kudyba, a Pole who lived in Belzec, testified about these experimental killings:

The Germans took out a group of Jews from Lubycze-Krolewska and brought them by car to the Belzec camp. One Jew from that group told me that he had been in the camp some time cutting pine trees. One day all the Jews were driven into a barrack. This Jew was able to hide and later to escape. While in hiding, he heard long screams from the barrack in which the Jews had been locked and then silence. This was the first experimental killing in Belzec. I heard that this Jew who escaped was later caught by the Germans and killed.⁷

When these experimental killings were carried out, the system that would supply the gas was not yet ready. Therefore, the gas used for these killings was bottled carbon monoxide. Shortly afterwards, however, a self-contained monoxide gas system was developed, and an armored car engine of 250 horsepower was installed in a shed outside the gas chamber. From it, a pipe channeled the gas inside.

Adolf Eichmann, who visited Belzec at that time and saw the gas chambers, wrote:

... at the turn of the year 1941/42, the chief of the Security Police and SD Heydrich told me . . . "I come from the *Reichsführer*; the *Führer* has now ordered the physical extermination of the Jews." He informed me further that the *Reichsführer* had instructed Globocnik, the SS and Police Leader of Lublin, to use the Soviet antitank ditches for the mass annihilation of the Jews. I myself should travel there and submit to him a report about the implementation of the operation. . . . I traveled in the direction of Lublin; I don't know what the place is called. A *Hauptsturmführer* accompanied me. I met there a *Hauptmann* of the Order Police [Wirth]. I expressed astonishment that the small house, completely secluded, was built, and he told me: "Here the Jews are being gassed now."⁸

Wirth carried out experiments to determine the most efficient method of handling the transports of Jews from the time of their arrival at the camp until their murder and burial. He developed some basic concepts for the process of extermination and for camp structure. The basic structure of the camp and the various actions the victims were made to do as soon as they

left the train were intended to ensure that they would not grasp the fact that they had been brought for extermination. The aim was to give the victims the impression that they had arrived at a labor camp or a transit camp from where they would be sent to a labor camp. The deportees were to believe this until they were closed into the gas chambers camouflaged as baths.

The second principle of the extermination process was that everything should be carried out with the utmost speed. The victims should be rushed, made to run, so that they had no time to look round, to reflect, or to understand what was going on. This also supported the basic principle of deceiving the victims. They should be shocked, and their reactions paralyzed in order to prevent escape or resistance. The speed of the extermination process served yet an additional purpose: it increased the killing capacity of the camp. More transports could be brought and annihilated in one day.

According to Wirth's annihilation scheme, the Jews themselves should carry out all physical work involved in the extermination process of a transport. A group of a few dozen or even a few hundred young, strong Jews were selected from among the victims after they disembarked the train. It was their duty to remove the corpses from the gas chambers and bury them. They also collected and arranged the clothes, suitcases, and other goods left behind by the murdered Jews. These Jews were kept working for a day or so, then they were murdered and were replaced by others who would be taken from the arriving transports.

Another group of Jews, among them tailors, shoemakers, carpenters, and other skilled workers, had to be kept in each camp to carry out services for the German and Ukrainian staff. This group, which numbered a few dozen Jewish prisoners, were called "court Jews" (*Hoffuden*). They had to be kept entirely separate from the Jews selected from the arriving transports and engaged in the extermination process. They were kept for longer periods, but even from among them people were sent frequently to the gas chambers and were replaced by others.

The entire camp occupied a relatively small, almost square area; the north, west, and east sides each measured 275 meters, and the south side 265 meters. It was surrounded by a high fence of wire netting, topped by barbed wire and camouflaged with branches. Young trees were also planted around it to prevent observation from outside. Three watchtowers were placed in the corners of the camp, two on the east side, the third on the southwest corner. An additional watchtower was in the center of the camp close to the gas chamber. A railway spur, about 500 meters in length, ran from the station in Belzec and led through the gate on the north side of the camp. The southern and eastern sides were bordered by a pine forest.

As construction continued, Belzec was divided into two sub-camps. Camp I, in the northern and western part, was the reception and administration area; Camp II, on the eastern part, was the extermination area. The reception area included the railway ramp, which could accommodate twenty railway cars, the assembly square for the arriving deportees, and two

barracks, one for undressing and the second to store the clothes and goods the victims had brought with them. The administration area included two dwelling barracks for the Jewish prisoners, their laundry, kitchen, and store barracks, and the roll-call square (*Appellplatz*). Close to the entrance gate, which was on the north side of the camp, was the guardhouse, permanently attended by SS men and Ukrainians. On the left of the entrance gate was the Ukrainians' area, separated from the other parts of the camp by barbed wire. It included three barracks: living quarters, a kitchen, and a barrack for their clinic, dentist, and barber.

Camp II, the extermination area, included the gas chambers and the burial ditches, which were in the east and northeast sections of the camp. The gas chambers were surrounded by trees, and a camouflage net was stretched over the roof to prevent aerial observation. At a later stage two barracks were erected in this area: living quarters and the kitchen of the Jewish prisoners who worked in this part of the camp. Camp II was fenced off from the other parts of the camp with a specially guarded entrance gate. A narrow passageway, 2 meters wide and a few dozen meters long, called "the tube" (*der Schlauch*), was enclosed on both sides by barbed wire and partly by a wooden fence. It connected the undressing barrack in Camp I to the gas chambers in Camp II.

Construction in Belzec continued for months, even as the entire extermination procedure was being carried out.

The living quarters of the SS men were close to the Belzec railway station, about 500 meters outside the camp. They consisted of three houses; one contained the headquarters and kitchen. The houses were fenced off, and a Ukrainian guard was posted at the entrance gate. Close to the SS living quarters were some houses where Polish civilians lived.⁹

While construction was going on and experiments were being carried out, the organizational structure was also taking shape. Christian Wirth was the commander of the camp and the dominant figure there. One of his subordinate SS men in Belzec described him:

Wirth was the absolute ruler in the Belzec camp. Every one of the camp personnel received orders from him. He was seen everywhere and supervised the execution of his orders. But even during general briefings he personally allotted us specific duties and gave us detailed orders, what we were to do or what we were to say. During his absence the orders were given by Schwartz. . . .¹⁰

SS *Oberscharführer* Gottfried Schwartz was deputy commander of the camp. SS *Oberscharführer* Josef Niemann (later promoted to the rank of *Untersturmführer*) was in charge of Camp II, the extermination area. SS *Oberscharführer* Josef Oberhauser, Wirth's adjutant, was the third in the camp's chain of command, and was in charge of construction. He organized the Ukrainian unit in Trawniki for its duties in Belzec. SS *Scharführer* Lorenz Hackenholt was in charge of operating the gas chambers, with two

Ukrainians subordinate to him. SS *Unterscharführer* Heinrich Unverhau was in charge of the storerooms where the clothes and personal belongings of the victims were kept and sorted to be sent on to Lublin. The storeroom was located outside the camp in the locomotives garage, close to Belzec station.

All the SS men were given assignments in the camp administration and were in charge of specific activities. Some of them had several duties. From time to time, there were changes in these assignments. Close to the expected arrival of a transport with Jews, the SS men were assigned specific duties in handling the liquidation of the deportees—from disembarkment to gassing of the victims and shooting those unable to be brought to the gas chambers.

The Ukrainian unit under the command of *Oberscharführer* Felks included sixty to eighty men organized in two platoons. SS *Scharführer* Fritz Jermann and, later, SS *Scharführer* Werner Dubois were in charge of their training and discipline. The platoon and squad commanders were mainly *Volksdeutsche* and, like the other members of this unit, former soldiers in the Soviet army. They had the police ranks of *Hauptwachtmeister* and *Zugwachtmeister*.

The Ukrainians manned the guard positions in the camp, at the entrance, at the four watchtowers, and with some patrols. Some of them helped in operating the gas chambers. Before the arrival of a transport with Jews, the Ukrainians took up guard positions around the railway ramp, the undressing barrack, and along the "tube" leading to the gas chambers. During the experimental killings and even the first transports, the Ukrainians were in charge of removing the bodies from the gas chambers and burying them.

The organizational structure of the camp's staff took its final shape after weeks and months of experimental operation of the camp. As Belzec was the first death camp of Operation Reinhard, its manpower and organizational needs were improved as more and more experience was attained. Toward the middle of March 1942, Belzec death camp was ready to absorb the first transports.

A map for Belzec extermination camp became available too late in the book's publication process to be placed in its proper chapter. Because of its historical significance, however, the map, with its key, is appended on pages 436–437.

Construction of Sobibor

Sobibor was the name of a small village in a wooded area on the Chelm-Wlodawa railway line, 8 km south of Wlodawa. The Bug River, the border between the General-Government and the *Reichskommissariat* of Ukraine, was 5 km east of Sobibor. The whole area was swampy, wooded, and thinly populated. The exact location for the death camp was selected by the SS Central Building Administration in the Lublin district. The camp was built alongside the railway, west of Sobibor station, and was surrounded by a sparse pine forest. Close to the railway station buildings was a spur that was included in the camp site and was used for disembarkation of the transports. In the area selected for the camp two wooden buildings existed—a former forester's house and a two-story post office. The entire camp area encompassed a rectangle 600 × 400 meters. At a later stage it was enlarged.

The construction of the Sobibor camp began in March 1942, at the same time that extermination actions were beginning in Belzec. SS *Obersturmführer* Richard Thomalla, from the SS Central Building Administration in Lublin, was put in charge of the construction of Sobibor. The workers employed at building the camp were local people from neighboring villages and towns. A group of eighty Jews from the ghettos in the vicinity of the camp was brought to Sobibor for construction work. A squad of ten Ukrainians from Trawniki arrived to guard these Jews. After completing their work, the Jews were shot.¹

By the beginning of April 1942, construction of the camp had fallen behind schedule. To speed things up, Globocnik appointed SS *Obersturmführer* Franz Stangl commander of Sobibor. Stangl was ordered by Globocnik to travel to Wirth in Belzec for guidance and to obtain experience in preparation for the operation of Sobibor. Stangl described his visit to Belzec:

I went there by car. As one arrived, one first reached Belzec railway station. . . . Oh God, the smell! It was everywhere. Wirth wasn't in his office. I remember they took me to him . . . he was

standing on a hill next to the pits . . . the pits . . . full . . . they were full. I cannot tell you; not hundreds, thousands, thousands of corpses . . . that's where Wirth told—he said that was what Sobibor was for. . . . Wirth told me that I should definitely become the commander of Sobibor. I answered that I was not qualified for such a mission. . . . I received from Globocnik the task to erect the camp. That it was not to be an ammunition camp but a camp for killing Jews I learned finally from Wirth. During the discussion with Wirth he told me if I would not do it, another would come. He would then put me back at the disposal of the *Brigadeführer* [Globocnik]. Actually, I was not relieved [of my post]. I stayed in Sobibor. Transports arrived and were liquidated. . . .²

After Stangl's arrival in Sobibor, the building of the camp was accelerated, and a second group of Jews from ghettos in the Lublin district was brought there for construction work.

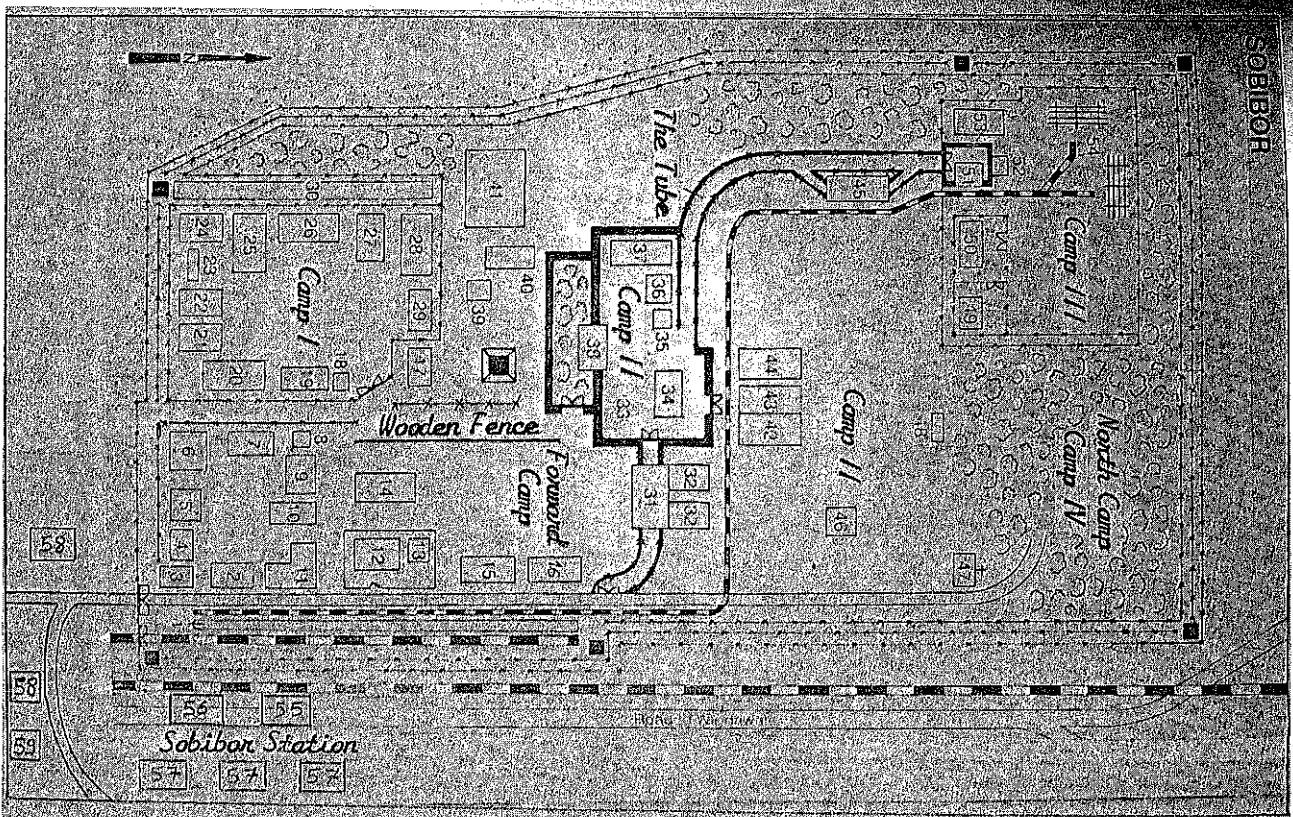
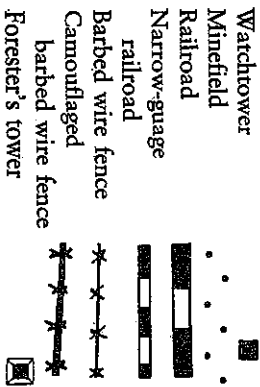
The first gas chambers erected in Sobibor were in a solid brick building with a concrete foundation. They were located in the northwest part of the camp, more isolated and distant from the other parts of the camp than in Belzec. There were three gas chambers in the building, each 4 × 4 meters. The capacity of each chamber was about two hundred people. Each gas chamber was entered through its own separate door leading from a veranda that ran along the building. On the opposite side of the building, there was a second set of doors for removing the corpses. Outside was a shed in which the engine that supplied the carbon monoxide gas was installed. Pipes conducted the gas from the engine exhaust to the gas chambers.³

In the middle of April 1942, when the building of Sobibor was close to completion, experimental killings were carried out there. About 250 Jews were brought from the Krychow labor camp, which was close to Sobibor, for this purpose.⁴ Wirth arrived in Sobibor to attend these experiments. With him came a chemist from the euthanasia program whose pseudonym was "Dr. [Karl] Blaurock." SS *Scharführer* Erich Fuchs, who served in Belzec, describes the preparations and the first experimental killing in Sobibor:

As ordered by Wirth, I drove an LKW [a car] to Lvov, fetched a gas motor and transported it to Sobibor. When I arrived at Sobibor, close to the railway station I saw a tract of land with a concrete construction and some other solid buildings. The *Sonderkommando* there were commanded by Thomalla. Other members of the SS who attended were F. B. Stangl, F. Schwartz, Kurt Bolender, and others. We unloaded the motor. It was a heavy Russian benzine engine (presumably a tank or tractor motor) at least 200 horsepower (V-motor, 8 cylinders, water cooled). We installed the engine on a concrete foundation and set up the connection between the exhaust and the tube.

I then tested the motor. It did not work. I was able to repair the ignition and the valves, and the motor finally started running. The

1. Unloading platform
 2. Dentist and jail for Ukrainian guards
 3. Guard house
 4. SS clothing store
 5. SS quarters
 6. SS quarters
 7. Laundry
 8. Well
 9. Showers and barbershop for SS
 10. Garage
 11. SS kitchen and canteen
 12. Living quarters of the camp commanders
 13. Armory
 14. Barracks for Ukrainian guards
 15. Barracks for Ukrainian guards
 16. Barracks for Ukrainian guards
 17. Bakery
- Camp I**
18. Dispensary
 19. Tailor shop for SS
 20. Shoemaker and saddler shop for SS
 21. Smithery
 22. Carpentry
 23. Latrine
 24. Painters' shop
 25. Barracks for male prisoners
 26. Barracks for male prisoners
 27. Prisoners' kitchen
 28. Barracks for female prisoners
 29. Shoemaker shop for Ukrainian guards
 30. Water ditch
- Camp II**
31. Undressing barracks where deportees deposited their clothing and luggage
 32. Barracks where luggage was sorted and stored
 33. Undressing yard
 34. Storage warehouse for food brought by the deportees
35. Electrical generator
 36. Storage of silverware
 37. Stable and barns
 38. Administration building and store room for valuables
 39. SS ironing room
 40. Shoe warehouse
 41. Garden
 42. Barracks for storing property
 43. Barracks for storing property
 44. Barracks for storing property
 45. Barracks where women's hair was cut
 46. Incinerator
 47. Former chapel
 48. Latrine
- Camp III**
49. Barracks for Camp III prisoners
 50. Barracks for Camp III prisoners' kitchen and "dentist" workshop
 51. Gas chambers
 52. Engine room for gas chambers
 53. Fenced yard
 54. Mass graves and outdoor crematoria
- Sobibor station and village**
55. Railway station building
 56. Living quarters of Polish railway workers
 57. Houses of local agriculture workers
 58. Farms of Polish peasants
 59. Living quarter of railway workers



The Sobibor Death Camp

chemist, whom I knew from Belzec, entered the gas chamber with measuring instruments to test the concentration of the gas.

Following this, a gassing experiment was carried out. If my memory serves me right, about thirty to forty women were gassed in one gas chamber. The Jewish women were forced to undress in an open place close to the gas chamber, and were driven into the gas chamber by the above-mentioned SS members and by Ukrainian auxiliaries. When the women were shut up in the gas chamber I and B [Bolender] set the motor in motion. The motor functioned first in neutral. Both of us stood by the motor and switched from "Neutral" (*Freiastpuß*) to "Cell" (*Zelle*), so that the gas was conveyed to the chamber. At the suggestion of the chemist, I fixed the motor on a definite speed so that it was unnecessary henceforth to press on the gas. About ten minutes later the thirty to forty women were dead. The chemist and the SS leader gave the sign to stop the motor. I packed my tools and saw how the corpses were removed. The transportation was done with a lorry trail that led from the gas chambers to a remote plot.⁵

After this experiment, which verified the smooth working of the gas chambers, and with the completion of some other construction work, Sobibor death camp was ready for its task. The structure of Sobibor was similar to that of Belzec and was based on the experience that had been gained there. The camp was divided into three parts: the administration area, the reception area, and the extermination area. The reception area and administration were close to the railway station. The extermination area was in the remote part of the camp.

The administration area, which was in the southeast of the camp, was divided into two sub-camps: the "Forward Camp" (*Vortlager*) and Camp I. The Forward Camp included the entrance gate, the railway ramp, and the living quarters and services of the SS men and Ukrainians. Unlike Belzec, in Sobibor all the SS men lived inside the camp. The Jewish prisoners who worked in Sobibor were kept in Camp I. This area included their living quarters and workshops, where some of them worked as shoemakers, tailors, blacksmiths, etc.

The reception area was called Camp II. The Jews who arrived with the transports were, after disembarking, driven inside this area. It included the undressing barracks of the victims and the barracks where their clothes and belongings were stored. The former forester's house, located in this area, was used for camp offices and living quarters for some of the SS men. A high wooden fence, which prevented observation, separated the main part of the forester's house from the area where the victims passed. At the northeast corner of this fence began the "tube." This "tube," which connected Camp II with the extermination area, was a narrow passageway, about 3 to 4 meters wide and 150 meters long. It was closed on both sides by barbed wire intertwined with tree branches. Through here the victims were driven into the gas chambers located at the end of the "tube." Close to the entrance of

the "tube" was a stable, a pigpen, and a poultry coop. Halfway through the "tube" was the "barber shop," a barrack where the hair of the Jewish women was cut before they entered the gas chambers.

The extermination area, called Camp III, was on the northwest side of the camp. It included the gas chambers, burial pits, a barrack for the Jewish prisoners employed there, and a guard barrack. The burial pits were 50 to 60 meters long, 10 to 15 meters wide, and 5 to 7 meters deep. For easier absorption of the corpses into the pits, the sandy sidewalls were made oblique. A narrow railway with a trolley led from the railway station up to the burial pits, bypassing the gas chambers. People who had died in the trains or those who were unable to walk from the platform to the gas chambers were taken by the trolley.

The whole camp was fenced off by barbed wire intertwined with tree branches to prevent observation from the outside. Along the fence and in the corners of the camp were watchtowers. All the sub-camps, and particularly Camp III, were fenced off from each other by dense barbed wire.⁶

While the basic installations necessary for initiating the killing operations were being completed, the organization of manpower was also taking shape. Stangl's deputy, second in command in Sobibor, was the camp *Oberscharführer*, Hermann Michel, who was replaced a few months later by *Oberscharführer* Gustav Wagner. Camp I, where the Jewish prisoners were kept, and Camp III, the extermination area, had their own commanders, subordinate to Stangl. The commander of Camp I was *Oberscharführer* Weiss, who was replaced by *Oberscharführer* Karl Frenzel. It was his duty also to supervise the Jewish prisoners when they worked in Camp II. Kurt Bolender served as commander of Camp III from April until autumn 1942. He was replaced by *Oberscharführer* Erich Bauer. Alfred Itrner was in charge of the camp administration; he was later transferred to Camp III.

The Ukrainian guard unit in Sobibor was organized in three platoons. They came from the Trawniki training camp with commanders who for the most part had served in the German police and held police ranks; Erich Lachman, a former policeman who trained the Ukrainians in Trawniki, became their commander in Sobibor. Being an "outsider" among the euthanasia members, he was replaced as commander of the Ukrainians by Kurt Bolender in autumn 1942.⁷

In Sobibor, as in Belzec, each member of the German staff in the camp was in charge of a specific function and duty. When a transport of Jews arrived, most of the SS men carried out particular duties in the process of annihilation. SS *Oberscharführer* Erich Bauer, who served in Sobibor, testified at the Sobibor trial in 1964:

Normally, inside the camp, each member of the permanent staff had a specific function (for example, commander of the Ukrainian auxiliaries, leader of a working group, excavation of pits, erection of barbed-wire fences, etc.). However, when a transport with Jews ar-

rived, there was so much "work" that the regular activity was interrupted, and everyone on the permanent staff had to participate somehow in the routine extermination process. Primarily, each member of the permanent staff took part occasionally in the unloading of the transports.⁸

Toward the end of April 1942, Sobibor death camp was ready for operation. Dov Freiberg, who was brought to Sobibor with the first transports in May 1942, describes his first impression of the camp:

The appearance of the camp was like an ordinary farm, except for the barbed-wire fences that surrounded it and some barracks. Actually, it was a farm, with all its buildings, in the midst of a beautiful green forest. . . . It seems that the camp was erected in a hurry and had few basic installations. I mean Camp I and Camp II [reception and administration areas]; about Camp III [extermination area], we did not yet know of its existence. But the area was big. . . .⁹

5

Construction of Treblinka

The construction of Treblinka death camp began after Belzec and Sobibor were already operational. The expertise gained in the building and in the killing operations in the other two camps were applied in the planning and construction of Treblinka. It became the most "perfected" death camp of Operation Reinhard.

The Treblinka death camp was located in the northeast section of the General Government, not far from Malkinia, a town and station on the main railway, Warsaw-Bialystok, and close to the railway Malkinia-Siedlce. It was built in a thinly populated area near the village of Wolka Okranglik, some 4 km from Treblinka village and train station. The site chosen for the camp was wooded and naturally concealed from both the Malkinia-Kosov road to its north and the Malkinia-Siedlce railway, which ran to its west. Near the camp's southwest boundary, a rail spur connected Treblinka station with a gravel quarry in the region that had been worked before the war. In the spring of 1941, the Germans decided to exploit the quarry for raw materials for the fortifications then being constructed on the Soviet-German line of demarcation, and in the summer of that year they established Treblinka I penal camp, to which they brought 1,000–1,200 Polish and Jewish detainees for forced labor. This camp, like the entire region, was under the authority of the Warsaw area SS and Police Leader (SSPF).

In late April or early May 1942, an SS team arrived in the Treblinka area, toured the region, and determined the site where a death camp would be erected.¹ The plan of the camp was almost identical to Sobibor, but with some improvements. The construction of the death camp began in late May/early June 1942. The contractors were the German construction firms Schönbronn of Leipzig and Schmidt-Münstermann. In charge of the construction of Treblinka was SS *Obersturmführer* Richard Thomalla, who had completed his building mission in Sobibor and had been replaced there by Stangl in April 1942. Technical assistance in the erection of the gas chambers was also made available.

Administration and Staff Living Area

1. Entrance to the camp and Seidel Street
2. Guard's room near the entrance
3. SS living quarters
4. Arms storeroom
5. Gasoline pump and storerooms
6. Garage
7. Entrance gate to Station square
8. Camp Command and Stangl's living quarters
9. Services for SS—barber, sick bay, dentist
10. Living quarters of domestic staff (Polish and Ukrainian girls)
11. Bakery
12. Foodstore and supply storeroom
13. The barrack in which "gold Jews" worked
14. Ukrainian living quarters—"Max Bialas barracks"
15. Zoo
16. Stables, chicken coop, pig pen
17. Living quarters for capos, women, tailor shop, shoe-repairs, carpentry shop, and sickroom
18. Prisoners' kitchen
19. Living quarters for men prisoners, prisoners' laundry and tool room
20. Locksmithy and smithy
21. Latrine
22. Roll-call square

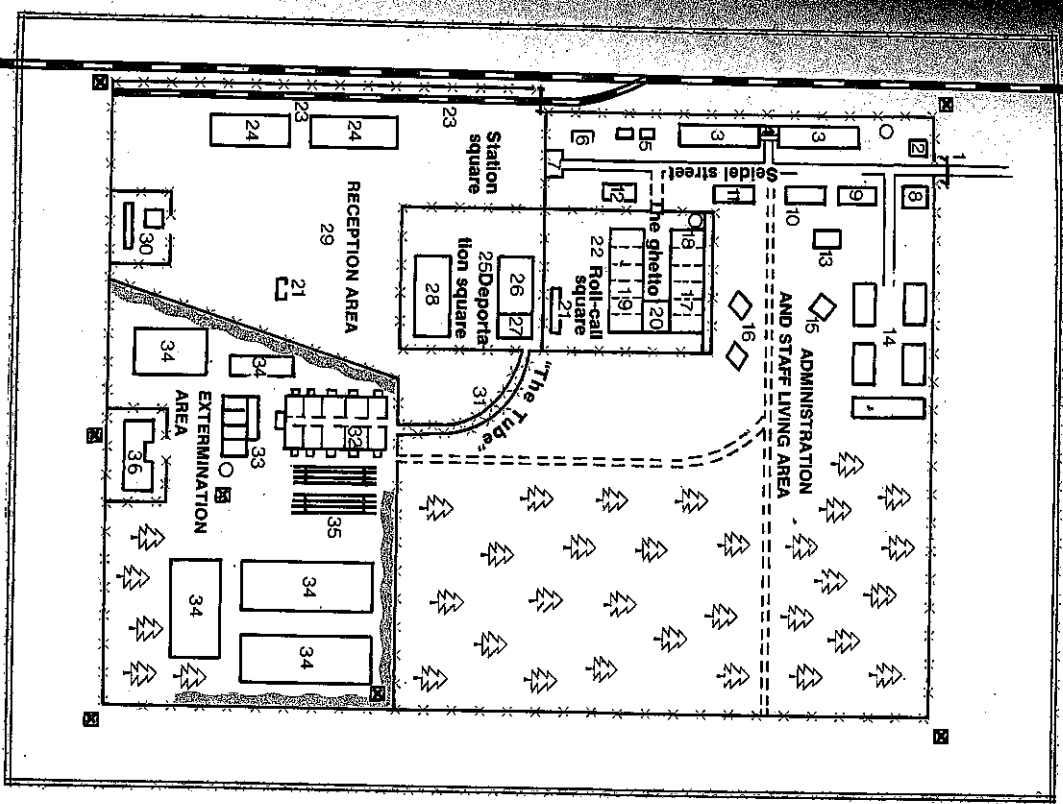
Reception Area

23. Station platform (ramp) and square
24. Storeroom for belongings taken from victims—disguised as a station
25. Deportation square
26. Barrack in which the women undressed and relinquished their valuables
27. Room in which women's hair was cut
28. Barrack in which men undressed, also used as a storeroom
29. Reception square
30. "Lazaret"—execution site
31. "The Tube"—the approach to the gas chambers

Extermination Area

32. New gas chambers (10 chambers)
33. Old gas chambers (3 chambers)
34. Burial pits
35. "The Roasts" for burning bodies
36. Prisoners' living quarters, kitchen, and latrines

TREBLINKA EXTERMINATION CAMP
(Spring 1943)



LEGEND

- Main road ———
- Minor road - - - - -
- Woods
- Well
- Watchtower
- Railway
- Barbed wire
- Anti-tank obstacles
- Earth wall

The Treblinka Death Camp

SS *Unterscharführer* Erwin Herman Lambert, a former foreman of a building team in the euthanasia program, testified:

I and Hengs [a euthanasia man] went to Treblinka by car. SS *Hauptsturmführer* Richard Thomalla was the camp commander. The Treblinka camp was still in the process of construction. I was attached to a building team there. Thomalla was there for a limited time only and conducted the construction work of the extermination camp. During that time no extermination actions were carried out. Thomalla was in Treblinka for about four to eight weeks. Then Dr. Ebert arrived as camp commander. Under his direction the extermination *Aktionen* of the Jews began.²

The SS and Police Leader of the Warsaw district was responsible for the erection of the camp. Polish and Jewish prisoners from Treblinka penal camp, as well as Jews from neighboring towns, were provided for labor. Along with the building construction—including the gas chambers, barracks, and stores—work commenced on a railroad spur running from the nearby rail line into the camp; shortly thereafter, a station platform was constructed.

None of the Jewish workers who were employed at the building of the camp survived. Jan Sulkowski, a Polish prisoner from Treblinka penal camp who was engaged in building the death camp, stated:

The Germans killed the Jews either by beating them or by shooting them. I witnessed cases where the SS-men . . . during the felling of forests, forced Jews to stand beneath the trees which were about to fall down. In both cases 4 Jews were thus killed. Besides, it often happened that the SS-men raided the huts of the Jewish workers and killed them in cold blood. . . . I was told by the SS-men that we were building a bath-house and it was after a considerable time that I realized that we were constructing gas-chambers.³

The death camp formed a rectangle, 600 × 400 meters, surrounded by two sets of fences and barbed-wire obstacles. The inner fence was 3 to 4 meters high and intertwined with tree branches that hid the camp from outside view. A second fence, some 40 to 50 meters from the first, included chains of antitank obstacles ("Spanish horses") wrapped in barbed wire. The ground between the fences was left barren—devoid of any vegetation or possible hiding place—to facilitate observation by the guards. Fences also surrounded areas within the camp. In each corner of the camp, an 8-meter-high watchtower was constructed. An additional tower was built along the southern perimeter, between the two corner towers and near the gas chambers. It was later transferred to the center of the extermination area.

The camp was divided into three zones of nearly equal size: the living area (*Wohnlager*), the reception area (*Auffanglager*); and the extermination

area (*Totenlager*). The living and reception areas were called the "Lower Camp," while the extermination area was known as the "Upper Camp."

The living area was in the northwest section of the camp. It comprised the living quarters for the German SS personnel and the Ukrainians, and other administration buildings—an office, an infirmary, stores, and workshops. Unlike Sobbor, the living quarters of the SS men were concentrated in one area. Part of this area, a square 100 × 100 meters, was set off by a barbed-wire fence. It contained three barracks forming a U, where the Jewish prisoners lived, workshops where they worked, and a roll-call square. At the far side of the square were about thirty toilets covered by a straw roof.

The reception area was in the southwest section of the camp and it was an important part of the camp that the transports of Jews first arrived. It included the main platform and the 300-meter railway spur. At the end of the railway spur was a wooden gate, wrapped with barbed wire intertwined with tree branches.

In front of the platform was a large structure where the victims' belongings were stored. Aside from the platform and the rail spur, no facilities or signs were to be seen that could identify the site as a train station. Near the platform, north of the storehouse, was "Railway Station Square," an open area, and past it a fenced-in area called "Transport Square" (*Transportplatz*) or "Undressing Square," which was entered through a gate. This gate was where the men were separated from the women and children. Transport Square was flanked by two large hut barracks. In the left-hand barrack, the women and children undressed and deposited their money and valuables. The right-hand barrack served the men for the same purpose. South of Transport Square was "Sorting Square" (*Sortierplatz*), where the victims' clothing and belongings were sorted and piled up for shipment out of the camp. At one end of Sorting Square, in the southeast corner of the camp, were large ditches for burying those victims who had died in the trains on their way to the camp.

The entrance gate to the camp was in the northwest section, near the railway. It was built of two wooden pillars, each decorated with a flower styled from metal and crowned by a small roof resting on the pillars. At night floodlights lit the entrance. Ukrainian guards and SS men were posted at the gate and at the guardhouse, which was close to it, twenty-four hours a day. The entrance gate served mainly the SS and Ukrainians; transports with Jews entered the camp by train.

The extermination area, or "Upper Camp," as it was called by the Germans, was in the southeastern section; there the mass murders were carried out. This area was completely isolated from the rest of the camp by a wire fence camouflaged with branches, which prevented observation from the outside. The entrances were hidden by a special screen. The upper camp was approximately 200 × 250 meters.

The gas chambers were located inside the extermination area, in a

massive brick building. During the camp's first months of operation, there were three gas chambers, each 4 x 4 meters and 2.6 meters high, similar to the first gas chamber constructed in Sobbor. A room attached to the building contained a diesel engine, which introduced the poisonous carbon monoxide gas through pipes into the chambers, and a generator, which supplied electricity to the entire camp.

The entrance doors to the gas chambers opened onto a wooden corridor at the front of the building. Each of these doors was 1.8 meters high and 90 cm wide. The doors could be closed hermetically and locked from the outside. Inside the gas chambers, opposite each entrance door, was another door made of thick, strong wood beams, 2.5 meters wide and 1.8 meters high. These doors, too, were hermetically sealed. Inside the chambers the walls were covered with white tiles up to a certain height, and shower heads and piping crisscrossed the ceiling—all designed to maintain the illusion of a shower room. The piping actually served to carry the poison gas into the chambers. When the doors were closed, there was no lighting in the chambers.

East of the gas chambers, and close to them, were huge ditches for burying the dead. The ditches were 50 meters long, 25 meters wide, and 10 meters deep. They were dug by an excavator brought from the quarry at Treblinka penal camp, and by the prisoners. To facilitate the transport of bodies from the gas chambers to the ditches, a narrow-gauge railway was laid, with trolleys pushed by prisoners. South of the gas chambers, a barrack was erected for prisoners employed inside the extermination area. This barrack and a small surrounding yard were fenced with barbed wire; the entrance gate faced the gas chambers. The barrack served as living quarters, and included a kitchen and toilet. A watchtower and a guardroom were built in the center of the extermination area.

Transport Square in the Lower Camp was connected to the extermination area by the "tube," or, as the Germans in Treblinka called it derisively, "the road to heaven" (*Himmelstrasse*). The "tube" was nearly 100 meters long and 4.5 to 5 meters wide. It began near the women's undressing barrack, continued east and then south to the extermination area. It was fenced on both sides with barbed wire 2 meters high and intertwined with tree branches so that it was impossible to see in or out. The "tube" crossed a thin grove of trees, which continued eastward up to the camp fence. At the entrance to the "tube," near the women's undressing hut, a sign said: "To the Showers" (*Zur Badenstalt*).⁴

Part of the building material and the equipment needed for constructing the camp were taken from the Warsaw ghetto workshops. Dr. Imfried Eberl, who was in charge of constructing Treblinka, wrote to Dr. Heinz Auerswald on June 19 and 26 and on July 7, 1942, and demanded the immediate supply of various items required for the completion of the narrow-gauge railway and electrical installations.⁵

Unterscharführer Erich Fuchs, who took part in the construction of

Treblinka, testified: "Subsequently I went to Treblinka. In this extermination camp I installed a generator which supplied electric light for the barracks. The work in Treblinka took me about three to four busy months. During my stay there transports of Jews who were gassed were coming in daily."⁶

The camp's main facilities for implementing the extermination of the Jews were completed in the middle of July 1942. The killings began on July 23, 1942, although construction work continued for months after.