

Excerpts from Czech, Danuta. *Auschwitz Chronicle 1939-1945: From the Archives of the Auschwitz Memorial and the German Federal Archives. 1989.*

1944

In May 1944, SS Lieutenant Colonel Rudolf Höss returns to Auschwitz after his appointment by SS Commander in Chief Himmler to oversee the extermination of the Hungarian Jews. The reason for Höss's transfer back – as he explained during the trial conducted against him in 1947 by the Supreme People's Court in Warsaw – are the complaints by the RSHA to the Head of Branch D of the WVHA, by Glücks, about Commandant Liebehenschel of Auschwitz I: Through the destruction of the informer network in the camp, he has helped the prison resistance movement and given it the means for further development. The same is said to make the Commandant Hartjenstein of Auschwitz II unsuitable for his job. There are no complaints against the Commandant of Auschwitz III.

During the same period, the Director of Section IV-B4 of the RSHA, SS Major Adolf Eichmann, who begins to implement the program for the destruction of the Hungarian Jews, identifies a number of “deficiencies,” during a visit to Auschwitz, among them: the shutting down of Incineration Facility V used to incinerate corpses outdoors, i.e., the pits near old Bunker 2, and the delay in the construction of a three-track railway spur from the unloading ramp to Auschwitz II. Eichmann also offers his opinion to the RSHA that he is for the appointment of Höss as director for the operation of destroying the Hungarian Jews. At the same time Höss is given responsibility for training the new Commandants, SS Technical Sergeant Richard Baer, who is taking over from Liebehenschel, and SS Captain Josef Kramer, who replaces Hartjenstein as Commandant of Auschwitz.

Eichmann plans to send four transports of Hungarian Jews per day to their destruction in Auschwitz. Despite the expansion of all the facilities, it turns out that in practice the extermination facilities do not suffice for the killing of so many people. For this reason Höss goes to Budapest, where he reaches an agreement with railway officials that on alternate days two trains of deportees, then three trains, should be dispatched. The agreement with railway officials in Budapest provides for a total of 111 such trains.

Simultaneously with the arrival of the first transports of deported Hungarian Jews, Eichmann arrives for an inspection of the extermination facilities in Auschwitz, because Himmler is demanding an acceleration of the so-called Hungary Operation, whose eager executor Höss becomes – he gives these measures the name Operation Höss.

To conceal the steadily growing number of prisoners who are selected from the transports for destruction, the SS introduces two new series of numerals for Jewish prisoners beginning with A-1, one each for men and women, and later a series beginning with B-1, for men only.

In mid-May 1944, when the mass transports of Hungarian Jews start arriving in Auschwitz, the young, healthy, and strong Jews of both genders are dispersed for a time as so-called depot prisoners to various barracks at Birkenau, but are not recorded in the camp registers. They are accommodated in Camp B-IIIc, where young, able-bodied female Jews are kept; in the recently vacated Gypsy Family Camp B-IIe, where young, able-bodied male and female Jewish prisoners are accommodated who eventually are taken to the other camps; in Camp B-IIb, which is empty since the liquidation of the Theresienstadt Family Camp; and finally, in Section B-III, still under construction, known as "Mexico" to the prisoners and also intended for female Jews. The Jews temporarily located in Birkenau receive no I.D. numbers and are not tattooed. Selections are conducted at specific intervals: When the camp administration has a need for laborers, it sends some prisoners from these camps to specific auxiliary camps or to the labor squads. Then they are registered and given numbers. Under the direction of the WVHA, others are transferred to armaments plants in the interior of the Reich.

March 13

The Degesch Company submits an invoice for 1,050 RM for the delivery of 462 pounds of the gas Zyklon B to Auschwitz March 8.

Schnabel, *Power Without Morality*, p. 356, Document 134.

April 7

Two prisoners escape from Auschwitz II; they are the Slovak Jews Alfred Wetzler (No. 29162), born on May 10, 1918, in Tyrnau (Trnava), and Walter Rosenberg (No. 44070), who later uses the name Rudolf Vrba, born on September 11, 1924, in Tyrnau.*

APMO, D-AuI-1/1b, p. 360; IZ-8/Gestapo Lodz/4/90/65-67.

April 25

The Special Squad that operates the four crematoriums and gas chambers totals 207 prisoners

APMO, D-AuII-3a/11a, Labor Deployment List.

May 2

Two transports arrive from Hungary, the first sent from Budapest on April 29 and containing approximately 1,800 able-bodied Jewish men and women between the ages of 16 and 50, the second sent on April 30 from Topoly and containing 2,000 able-bodied prisoners. After the selection, 486 men, given Nos. 186645-187130, and 616 women, given Nos. 76385-76459 and 80000-80540, are admitted to the camp. The remaining 2,698 men and women are killed in the gas chambers.

Randolph L. Braham, *The Destruction of Hungarian Jewry (September 1940-April 1945): A Documentary Account*, New York, 1963, p. 363.

*The motive for their escape is the desire to inform the world of the truth concerning the crimes committed by the SS in Auschwitz, and their intention to warn the Hungarian Jews of their planned destruction. After an exhausting journey of several days on foot, the two reach Slovakia. On April 25, 1944, they make contact in Sillein (Žilina) with representatives of the Jewish Council, to whom they give an oral and later written account of their stay in Auschwitz. These reports are confirmed by the next two escapees, Czesław Mordowicz and Arnost Rosin, who flee at the end of May 1944 from Auschwitz II. They are able to send translated texts of their statement to the neutral nations and to the papal legate. The complete text of the report is published in November 1944 in the U.S.A. by the War Refugee Board in Washington, D.C. (APMO, Statements, vol. 40, pp. 24-49, Account of Former Prisoner Alfred Wetzler; Wetzler went under the name Jožko Lánik after his escape and published in 1946 in Czechoslovakia a pamphlet entitled *Auschwitz, the Grave of Four Million People*.)

May 4

At a conference in Vienna, during which a travel plan is worked out for the deportation transports of Jews from Hungary—from 10 camps in the Carpathia area (Zone I) with approximately 200,000 Jews from the Siebenburgen area (Zone II), where approximately 110,000 Jews were located—it is decided that in the middle of May, four transports, each with 3,000 persons, should take place daily.† The conclusion of the deportations from these zones is foreseen for the middle of June.

Brahm, *Hungarian Jewry*, pp. 366, 370, 373.

May 8

The function of the SS Camp Senior is taken over until further notice by the Head of Office D-I in the WVHA, the former Commandant SS Lieutenant Colonel Rudolf Höss.*

APMO, D-Aul-1, Garrison Order 14/44, May 8, 1944.

May 9

In connection with the accelerated start of the destruction of the Hungarian Jews, SS Camp Senior Höss announces a series of directives. He orders that the expansion of the platform and the three-track rail connection in Birkenau be sped up; that the inactive cremation ovens in Crematorium V be put in operation; that next to this crematorium five pits (three large and two smaller ones) for the incineration of corpses be dug. Furthermore, Bunker 2 is to be put back into operation incineration trenches are to be dug next to it, barracks for use as disrobing rooms are to be built, and finally, the commander of Gleiwitz I, SS Master Sergeant Otto Moll, is promoted to Director of all crematoriums.** Höss orders that the Special Squad be enlarged, i.e. the prisoners who work in the crematoriums and in Canada, on the sorting of stolen property.***

APMO, Höss Trial, vol. 26b, pp. 168-170, Statement of Rudolph Höss, vol. 28a, pp. 123ff., 127, Testimony of former Prisoner and Members of the Special Squad Szlama Dragon; vol. 29, p. 47, Testimony of Former Prisoner and Member of the Special Squad Henryk Tauber.

† The transport route goes via Miskolc, Koszyce, Preszow, Muszyna, Tarnów, and Płaszów-Kraków to Auschwitz.

* As a result of the negative judgments of the Commandants of Auschwitz I and II and because SS Commander in Chief Himmler does not consider them suitable for the planned destruction of a hundred thousand people, he gives Höss full authority for the destruction of the Hungarian Jews and sends him back to Auschwitz (APMO, Höss Trial, vol. 26b, pp. 166-168).

** Henryk Tauber states: "He [Moll-D.C.] was entrusted with directing all crematoriums in connection with the preparations for dealing with the Hungarian mass transports. He prepared the entire plan for the mass destruction of the people arriving in these transports. Prior to the arrival of the Hungarian transports he ordered that pits be dug next to the crematorium and put back into operation the previously inactive Bunker 2 and its pits. In the courtyard of the crematorium he had signs put up saying that those who arrived in the transports come to a camp where work awaits them, but they must first bathe and be disinfected. . . He repeated this personally in the speeches he directed to the people who arrived in the transports. These transports were very numerous and it happened that the gas chambers of Crematorium V could not handle everyone. The people for whom there was no more space in the gas chambers were mostly shot by him personally. In many cases he threw living people into the burning pits." (APMO, Höss Trial, vol. 29, p. 47).

*** For clarification Höss explained that the time required to unload a train, people and their entire baggage, was four to five hours per transport. No transport had been processed in less than this time. The people could indeed be processed in this time, but there was such a quantity of baggage that there could be no thought of enlarging the transports, even though the sorting squads had been reinforced with 1,000 additional prisoners (APMO, Höss Trial, vol. 26b, pp. 168-170).

The camp resistance movements reports to PWOK in Kraków: “On Monday, May 8, the former, since November 1943, Commandant, SS Lieutenant Colonel Liebehenschel, was removed. At the time of his departure he made a speech to the Block Seniors in which he took leave of the prisoners and expressed his satisfaction with their behavior. The former Commandant of Auschwitz, who was responsible for all the crimes committed here, Lieutenant Colonel Höss, was named ‘interim’ commander. This is a transitional phase, another is to follow him. Whether it will come to that no one knows... We do not consider it appropriate to sound an alarm in the press and the radio about Höss’s return, as long as it is officially a transition phase of correspondingly short duration and no situations occur that indicate a change of course. A premature alarm that is not based on concrete events could strengthen his position for reasons of prestige for the SS. But we do consider it absolutely necessary to sound the alarm if anything starts up here. Then one must act decisively. They fear this attention. I add that the death penalty for 15 SS leaders from Auschwitz published recently in London made a great impression on the condemned and resulted in the collapse of several of them. That is thus a very effective method.” *

APMO, Mat.RO, vol. II, p. 76, a report written by Józef Cyrankiewicz.

May 15

The number of prisoners in the Special Squad is increased by 100. 308 prisoners are now employed in the special squad.

APMO, D-AuII-3a/6a, Labor Deployment List.

May 16

The first long block arrest for prisoners is ordered in Auschwitz II. Three freight trains arrive on the track connection; they are the first RSHA transports of Hungarian Jews. ** The arriving Jews are ordered to unload their luggage; thereafter they are to stand in rows of five and are lead in the direction of the crematoriums. Smoke from this night on the chimneys of the crematoriums begin to smoke. ***

AMPO, Höss Trial, vol. 5, p. 132, Statement of Former Prisoner Dr. Wanda Szaynoch; vol. 6, p. 44, Statement of Former Prisoner Dr. Otto Wolken; Mat.RO, vol VII, p. 440.

* In the next clandestine communiqué it was stated: “We suggest that you prepare an attack on Höss and execute it soon. Get specialists ready, we are awaiting an answer and will send directions. Since May 1 all SS leave has been canceled by order of Berlin. The reason: increasing sabotage. In the last few days there has been livelier telephone communication with Berlin than ever before. Everything ‘secret.’ Continuous conferences with the leadership” (APMO, Mat. RO, vol. II, p. 77, communiqué written by Cyrankiewicz).

** A train consists of 40 to 50 freight cars. In one car are approximately 100 persons. After the selection the boys and healthy individuals, without being recorded in the camp registers, are admitted to the camp as so-called depot prisoners. The remaining people are sent to the gas chambers.

*** During the trial before the Supreme People’s Court in Warsaw Höss explains that Eichmann has anticipated in his plan five trains daily, but the facilities can’t handle this volume, despite he expansion of the installations. For this reason Höss has to travel personally to Budapest, in order to cancel the arrangement. Then the thing is arranged so that on alternate days two trains, then three trains would be sent. He claims to have known that the program, arranged in conversation with the railroad authorities in Budapest, planned on a total of precisely 111 trains. As the first transports arrive in Auschwitz, Eichmann is also to arrive in order to determine whether it is possible to add trains, as SS Commander in Chief Himmler demands that the so-called Hungarian operation, be accelerated as much as possible (APMO, Höss Trial, vol. 26, pp. 166-168).

May 25

The resistance movement in the camp states in its regular report that the number of Hungarian Jews killed already amounts to over 100,000 people, and the work shifts of the SS men involved in the extermination operation is 48 uninterrupted hours, followed by an eight-hour break.

APMO, Mat.RO, vol. VII, p. 442.

The German ambassador and plenipotentiary for Hungary, SS Brigadier General Dr. Edmund Veessenmayer, informs the Foreign Ministry that as of May 25 nearly 150,000 Jews have been deported from Zone I (Carpathia) and Zone II (Siebenbürgen) in Hungary to the target area* and that the transports from Zone III, the area north of Budapest, should take place June 11-16 and should involve approximately 65,000 Jews.

Brahm, *Hungarian Jewry*, p. 386.

The camp resistance movement states in a special addition to its periodical report for the period May 5-25, 1944: "Auschwitz—Operation Höss. Since the middle of May numerous transports of Hungarian Jews. Every night eight trains arrive, every day five. The trains consist of 48 to 50 cars each, and in each car are 100 people.

APMO, Mat.RO, vol. VI, p. 440.

May 31

The management of the crematoriums in Auschwitz II orders four shovels 8x10 inches from the DAW, for shoveling coke into the generators, and five cast-steel frames including the complete wooden model for the iron shield plates.

APMO, IZ-13/89, Various Documents of the Third Reich, p. 198.

The management of the Birkenau crematoriums gives the DAW a contract to make small repairs on shovels and pokers and to weld two large and five small oven doors and an iron plate.

Ibid., p. 204, Invoice Copy for Bookkeeping.

June 3

In connection with the repeated breakouts from the crematorium buildings by Hungarian Jews the practice of turning off the current in the electric fence in the daytime is discontinued, i.e., the current is left on.**

APMO, D-AuI-1, Garrison Order 17/44, June 9, 1944.

* The repairs are done between June 20 and July 20, 1944, and cost 46.90 RM.

** In the daytime, the camp and the surrounding grounds on which the prisoners work are guarded by the so-called Outer Sentry Line. For that reason the current for the camp fence was turned off.

June 13

The Reich's plenipotentiary in Hungary, Dr. Veessenmayer, notifies the Foreign Ministry that the deportation of Jews from the areas of Carpathia and Siebenbürgen (Zones I and II) has been completed on June 7. A total of 289,357 Jews have been deported to the "target destination" in 92 trains, each of which consisted of 45 cars. The concentration of Jews from the area north of Budapest (Zone III) was completed on June 10. The transports are planned for June 11-16, and 21 trains. The anticipated total is approximately 67,000 deportees. It is planned to complete the concentration of Jews in Zone IV, east of the Donau except for Budapest, by June 24. The deportation of the nearly 45,000 Jews would take place June 25-28.

Brahm, *Destruction of Hungarian Jewry*, p. 399.

June 17

The German plenipotentiary in Hungary, Dr. Veessenmayer, reports in a telegram to Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop that as of June 17 nearly 340,000 Jews have been deported from Hungary to the Reich territory. This number could be doubled by the end of July, according to the current estimates, without producing great traffic congestion, and later a total of approximately 900,000 could be reached.

Ibid., p. 403.

June 26

The management of the crematoriums in Auschwitz II receives four sieves from the DAW for sifting human ashes. The sieves, ordered on June 7, will serve to sift out the unburned human bones, which were taken out of the incineration trenches near the crematoriums and ground in special mortars. The sieves cost 232 RM.

APMO, IZ-13/89, Various Documents from the Third Reich, p. 205, Invoice Copy for Bookkeeping (original in BA Koblenz).

July 10

The St. Gallen newspaper *Die Ostschweiz* (Eastern Switzerland) publishes an article with the title "People are Disappearing." The article cites as source the Foreign Ministry of the Polish Government in Exile in London, news accounts by the delegation of the Polish exile government in Poland, and reports of the Reuter news agency. It reports that so far approximately 400,000 Hungarian Jews have been deported to Poland, of whom the majority have been sent to Auschwitz. The deportations, it continues, began on May 15 when 62 cars with Jewish children arrived in Poland. Since then it has been observed that daily six trains of Jews pass the train station in Płaszów near Kraków, whereby the majority are taken to Auschwitz and the people are killed in the gas chambers. According to the Polish Interior Ministry, these gas chambers have a daily capacity of 6,000 persons. It has been determined further that two more death camps, in Treblinka and Rawa Ruska, were established in the second half of 1942, though it is

APMO, IZ-13/89, Various Documents of the Third Reich, p. 101.

uncertain whether gas chambers are also located there. Among the deported are children between two and eight years of age. The article mentions the warning of the Polish Government in Exile not to believe any of the letters sent from Auschwitz where it is claimed that the senders of these letters are well. The author of the article points out further that according to figures supplied by the Polish Assistance Committee for Jews, two million Polish Jews have died in the three concentration camps.*

July 11

The German plenipotentiary, Veessenmayer, reports in a telegram to the Foreign Minister of the Third Reich that the deportation of 55,741 Jews from Zone V (the area west of the Danube in the suburbs of Budapest) was completed on July 9. The number of Jews deported from all five zones in Hungary reaches 437,402 persons.

Brahm, *Hungarian Jewry*, p. 443.

July 15

The camp resistance organization states in its report to Kraków: "From June 13 on there was a several-day pause in the transports of Hungarian Jews. Between May 16 and June 13 over 300,000 Hungarian Jews were delivered on 113 trains; in addition there was a transport of French Jews (2,500), a transport of Italian Jews (1,500), two transports of Czech Jews (50) headed by the elder of the Czech ghetto, who was immediately gassed with his entire family. Moreover, 100 English and American citizens of Jewish descent were delivered, who were separated and destroyed in particular ways... The evacuations of Poles and Russians as the most dangerous elements of the camp continues. 4,500 prisoners, among them 2,900 Poles and 1,600 Russians,** were evacuated in June in three transports from Auschwitz I."

APMO, Mat.RO, vol. VII, p. 451.

July 29

SS Lieutenant Colonel Höss, authorized to annihilate the Hungarian Jews, leaves Auschwitz. Commandant Richard Baer of Auschwitz I becomes SS Camp Senior.

APMO, D-AuI-1/1b, Garrison Order 20/44, July 29, 1944.

873 prisoners, among them three skilled workers, work in the so-called Special Squad operating the gas chambers, the four crematoriums, and the incineration pits in day and night shifts.

APMO, D-AuII-3a/16, Labor Deployment List, vol. 11.

* The press in neutral Switzerland is very careful not to provoke the Third Reich. It is thus revealing that in the mentioned article the National Socialist German Reich is in no way criticized. It is not obvious from the text who has established the camps, who occupied Poland, and who has deported and murdered Jews.

**The Russians were delivered to Auschwitz for the most part in group transports.