

SAMU Atlas

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Lviv, Belzec Camp (Poland)

Extermination of the Jews from Lviv in Belzec Camp on August 19, 1942

Report by Kurt Gerstein dated May 4, 1945 (Poliakov L., Wulf J. Das Dritte Reich und die Juden. Berlin 1955, S.103-108).

Report by former *SS-Obersturmführer* Kurt Gerstein:

The next morning [August 8, 1942], shortly before 7 a.m. someone announced to me: "In ten minutes the first transport will come!" In fact the first train arrived after some minutes, from the direction of Lemberg. 45 wagons with 6,700 people of whom 1,450 were already dead on arrival. [...] The train comes in: 200 Ukrainians fling open the doors and whip the people out of the wagons with their leather whips.

*A large loudspeaker gives the further orders: "Undress completely, also remove artificial limbs, spectacles etc." Handing over valuables at the counter, without receiving a voucher or a receipt. The shoes carefully bound together, because on the almost 25 meter high heap nobody would have been able to find the matching shoes again. Then the women and girls to the barber who, with two, three scissor strokes is cutting off all hair and collecting it in potato sacks. "That is for special purposes in the submarines, for seals or the like!" the *SS-Unterscharführer* who is on duty there says to me.*

*Then the procession starts moving. In front a very lovely young girl; so all of them go along the alley, all naked, men, women, children, without artificial limbs. I myself stand together with *Hauptmann Wirth* on top of the ramp between the gas chambers. Mothers with babies at their breast, they come onward, hesitate, enter the death chambers! At the corner a strong *SS* man stands who, with a voice like a pastor, says to the poor people: "There is not the least chance that something will happen to you! You must only take a deep breath in the chamber, that widens the lungs; this inhalation is necessary because of the illnesses and epidemics." On the question of what would happen to them he answered: "Yes, of course, the men have to work, building houses and roads but the women don't need to work. Only if they wish they can help in housekeeping or in the kitchen." [...]*

*The chambers fill. "Pack well!" - *Hauptmann Wirth* has ordered. The people stand on each other's feet. 700 - 800 on 25 square meters, in 45 cubic meters! The *SS* physically squeezes them together, as far as is possible.*

The doors close. At the same time the others are waiting outside in the open air, naked. [...] Now I finally understand why the whole installation is called the Hackenholt-Foundation. Hackenholt is the driver of the diesel engine, a little technician, also the builder of the facility.

The people are brought to death with the diesel exhaust fumes. But the diesel doesn't work! Hauptmann Wirth comes. One can see that he feels embarrassed that that happens just today, when I am here. [...] 50 minutes, 70 minutes - the diesel doesn't start! [...] Hauptmann Wirth hits the Ukrainian who is helping Unterscharführer Hackenholt 12, 13 times in the face.

After two hours and 49 minutes [...] the diesel starts. [...] Again 25 minutes pass. Right, many are dead now. One can see that through the small window in which the electric light illuminates the chambers for a moment. After 28 minutes only a few are still alive. Finally, after 32 minutes, everyone is dead!

From the other side men from the work command open the wooden doors. They have been promised - even Jews - freedom, and some one-thousandth of all valuables found, for their terrible service. [...] The corpses are thrown out, wet from sweat and urine, soiled by excrement, menstrual blood on their legs.

Children's' corpses fly through the air. There is no time. The riding crops of the Ukrainians lash down on the work commands. Two dozen dentists open mouths with hooks and look for gold. Gold to the left, without gold to the right. Other dentists break gold teeth and crowns out of jaws with pliers and hammers.

Among all this Hauptmann Wirth is running around. He is in his element. Some workers search the genitals and anus of the corpses for gold, diamonds, and valuables. Wirth calls me to him: "Lift this can full of gold teeth, that is only from yesterday and the day before yesterday!" [...]

The naked corpses were carried on wooden stretchers to pits only a few meters away, measuring 100 x 20 x 12 meters. After a few days the corpses welled up and a short time later they collapsed, so that one could throw a new layer of bodies upon them. Then ten centimeters of sand were spread over the pit, so that a few heads and arms still rose from it here and there.