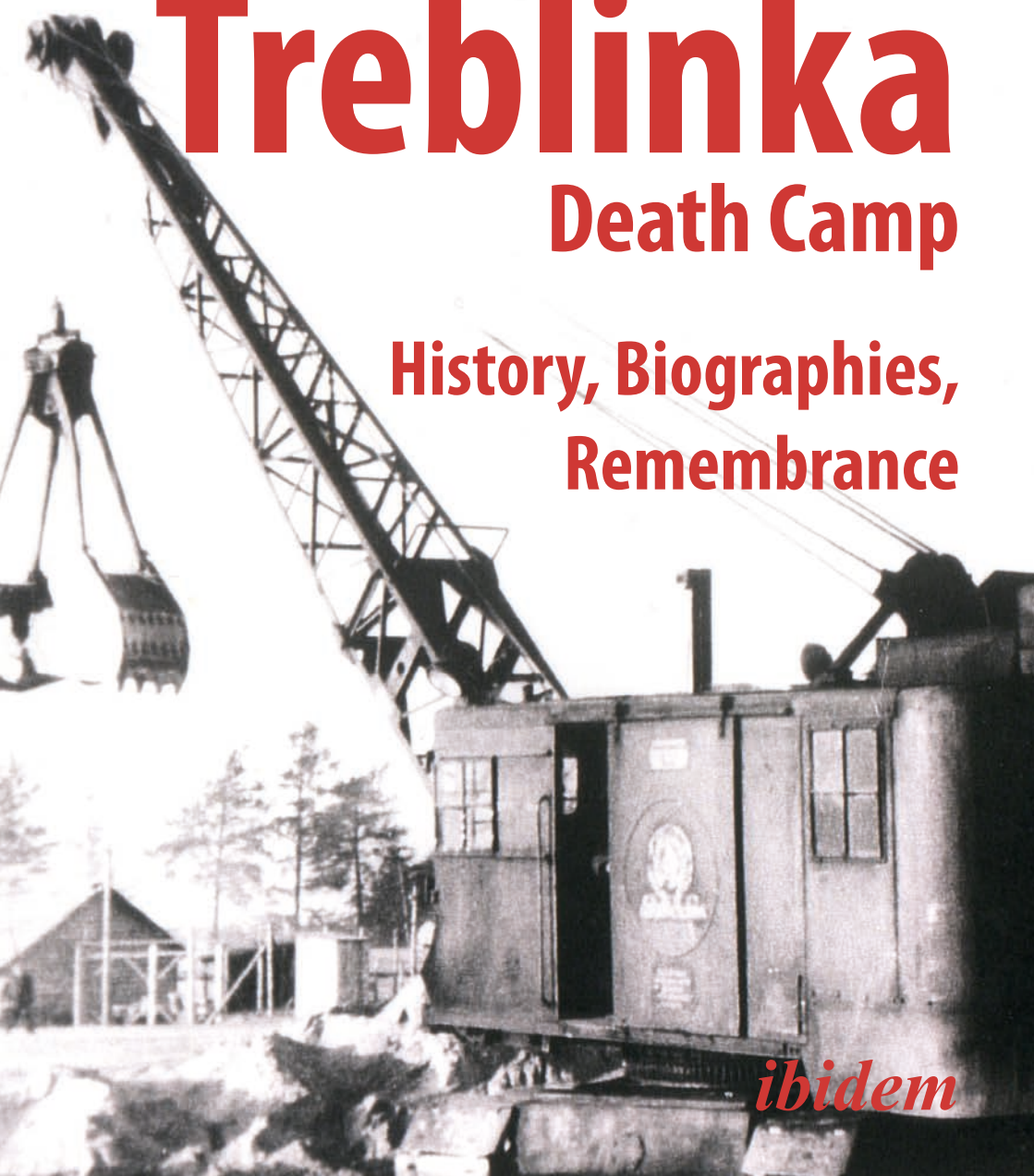


Chris Webb & Michal Chocholatý

# The Treblinka Death Camp

History, Biographies,  
Remembrance



*ibidem*

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by

Chris Webb and Michal Chocholatý



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# **THE TREBLINKA DEATH CAMP**

History, Biographies, Remembrance

*ibidem*-Verlag  
Stuttgart

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For Artur Hojan

Dedicated to the memory of  
Kalman Teigman and Richard Glazar



## FOREWORD

The Holocaust was a set of events that engulfed an entire continent. The Nazi occupation of Europe pursued Jews from Greece to the Soviet Union. The survivors have been scattered around the globe. In recent years the memory of these events has become a global discourse—there is a UN mandated remembrance day and the Holocaust has become a kind of moral touchstone which is held up as the central event of the twentieth century. As a consequence whenever one thinks of the Holocaust one inevitably thinks in terms of scale—of six million dead, of journeys of thousands of miles. The rhetoric of Holocaust studies—as attempts to understand the Holocaust have become defined—also emphasize the enormity of the events with which we are grappling, we are constantly reminded of the idea that the Holocaust is both unrepresentable and unimaginable. Part of this rhetoric is the idea that the Final Solution operated on an industrial scale, and that the concentration camps need to be understood as factories of death. Within this epic memory it is the camp at Auschwitz that provides much of the iconography both through contemporary images (the unmistakable tower at the entrance of Auschwitz-Birkenau for example) and the images bequeathed by the memorial museum, the apparently endless stacks of human hair, or the piles of shoes and suitcases.

Reading Chris Webb's book on Treblinka one is somewhat paradoxically struck by the essential truth of that epic memory, but at the same time of some of its inherent distortions—by the degree to which Treblinka in some ways conforms and in some ways denies this epic memory. In Treblinka a meticulously constructed factory of death did emerge, where killing ultimately was the only function of the facility. This factory consumed, according to the numbers collected here, some 885 thousand lives. Such an observation is scarcely credible and one is tempted to simply throw up one's arms in despair and declare such events unimaginable.



Yet the detail brought together here, some of it for the first time in the English language, also provides a timely warning about surrendering to such rhetoric. This is not an unrepresentable or more precisely unimaginable horror. As Alan Confino argues in his recent *Foundational Pasts*, the Final Solution was and is imaginable—precisely because it was imagined by its perpetrators. Chris Webb's reconstruction of Treblinka reminds us of this over and over again. This was a camp in which the technology of death was continuously refined and made more efficient. While the end result might have been a cleaner process, it was not one in which the perpetrators were distanced from their crimes because the means of carrying out those crimes had been considered, reconsidered; imagined and re-imagined, over and over again.

One is also reminded in Webb's book of another, at times neglected reality of the Holocaust. Despite the implications of the epic memory I described, the Final Solution did not take place on another planet. Despite the desires of the perpetrators to keep their crimes secret—the building of an imaginary train station at Treblinka being the most obvious indicator of that—they were not. Although the reality of what was occurring in the death camps might have been obscured, these places were public spaces with which local populations engaged in a variety of ways—some of which are testified to here.

And despite the scale of the death toll, one is also reminded by Webb's book just how small places like Treblinka were and as such that the seismic events of the Holocaust were in many ways rather intimate too. Covering just a few hundred square meters, and with a largely identifiable staff, Treblinka was a place in which victims and perpetrators confronted one another repeatedly. This intimacy is reconstructed here and as such Treblinka emerges as very much representable. These are epic events, but they took place in spaces that are only too conceivable in the human imagination.

And it was of course because Treblinka was constructed on a small scale that in the aftermath of *Aktion Reinhardt* the camp could be dismantled and disguised. One of the consequences of this is that

to visit Treblinka today is to visit a space in which there are no visible remains from the camp itself. Treblinka therefore stands, perhaps more than any other place, as representative of the void which the Final Solution represents.

Yet it is thanks to works like Webb's and the scholarship that he represents here that we can know something of what happened there. We can hear the voices of surviving victims, and of course of the perpetrators themselves. We can in that sense win a small victory over the Nazis' efforts to destroy and to expunge Jews and Judaism from this world, and of course to expunge the memory of their own destructiveness. We can, thanks to collections of material like this, continue to proclaim that, in the words of Primo Levi, it has been. We can, however imperfectly, see into the void.

Professor Tom Lawson  
Northumbria University



## AUTHORS' INTRODUCTION

*Treblinka Death Camp—History, Biographies, Remembrance* is the culmination of many years' interest and research on the third and biggest of the three *Aktion Reinhardt* death camps in Nazi-occupied Poland, stimulated by the publication in 1967 of Jean-Francois Steiner's controversial book *Treblinka*, published in London by Weidenfeld & Nicholson and in New York by Simon & Schuster. An edition in Slovakian was published a year later by Obzor in Bratislava.

Within the pages of this book the history of the Treblinka camp is painstakingly reconstructed—from its construction in early summer 1942 to its final liquidation in the autumn of 1943. During that short period of time, no more than fifteen months, approximately 900,000 Jews were deported to the camp from the big Polish ghettos of Warsaw and Białystok, as well as from the districts of Lublin and Radom, and from as far afield as Austria, Germany, Greece, Macedonia, Salonika, a part of former Czechoslovakia (*Reichsprotektorat Böhmen/Mähren*—Bohemia and Moravia) and Vilna in the *Reichskommissariat Ostland* (Lithuania). They were gassed and their bodies cremated on open air pyres.

Of these several hundred thousand victims deported to Treblinka, very few survived. The experiences of these few are recounted here partly in their own words in post-war testimony, and uniquely in the authors' correspondence and personal interviews with the last survivors of Treblinka, Kalman Teigman, Eliahu Rosenberg, Samuel Willenberg, Pinchas Epstein, and Edi Weinstein. The debt owed to them and to their families for agreeing to meet and assist with our research, and in doing so reopening unimaginably painful memories, cannot be adequately repaid. This book is our modest attempt to honor both their courage and memory. At the time of writing (2014) only Samuel Willenberg is still alive.

There are several other people to whom we also owe a debt of thanks for their encouragement and invaluable assistance in producing this book. First on the list is Michael Tregenza, the British historian based in Lublin, Poland, who has our deep gratitude for reading and copy-editing the entire manuscript, and for making invaluable suggestions and important additions to the text. His knowledge of *Aktion Reinhardt* and its personnel is second to none. We would also like to warmly thank members of the ARC (*Aktion Reinhardt* Camps) group who visited Treblinka in 2002 and subsequently established the website [www.deathcamps.org](http://www.deathcamps.org). These include Michael Peters from Germany who undertook some sterling research on T4/ Treblinka personnel and Peter Laponder from South Africa, both of whom built models of the Treblinka death camp. Also from the ARC group, we wish to express our gratitude to Robert Kuwalek and Lukasz Biedka (Poland), Dr. Robin O'Neil (UK), and the late Billy Rutherford (UK), another talented model-maker.

A vital source of knowledge for this book has been the Holocaust Education and Archive Research Team (H.E.A.R.T.), and especially its website [www.holocaustresearchproject.org](http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org), co-founded in 2006 by Chris Webb and Carmelo Lisciotto. H.E.A.R.T. has contributed to a number of television programs concerning the Holocaust and given lectures at universities on a wide range of Holocaust-related subjects.

Our thanks also go to Dr. Matthew Feldman from Teesside University in the UK for his constant support, guidance and friendship throughout the development of this book. Also in the UK, Sir Martin Gilbert, CBE, PC, kindly donated maps from his collection to aid our research. In Poland, Edward Kopówka, responsible for the Treblinka memorial site, has our thanks for acting as our guide during various research visits to Treblinka. We are also grateful to Zvika Oren, Judy Grossman and Noam Rachmilevitch at the Ghetto Fighters' Museum in Western Galilee, and Shaul Ferrero at Yad Vashem, Jerusalem for their assistance.

Michael Grabher, author of *Irmfried Eberl—‘Euthanasie’-Arzt und Kommandant von Treblinka* (Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main 2006) has our thanks for assistance with correspondence between Eberl and his wife. Alexander Abdo at the Hessisches Hauptstaatsarchiv in Wiesbaden provided copies of this correspondence.

A number of institutions and archives must be thanked for their cooperation: the Bundesarchiv in Berlin-Lichterfelde, Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw; National Archive in Prague-Chodovec; National Archive and Records Administration (NARA), Washington, DC, National Archives at Kew (London); and the Weiner Library for the Study of the Holocaust and Genocide, also in London.

Michal Chocholatý extends his personal thanks to his friend Jiří Strnad from the Czech Republic who accompanied him on some of the visits to Israel to interview Treblinka survivors and who has been his travelling partner on research trips to Austria, France, Germany, Israel, and Poland.

On a sad note, Chris Webb personally dedicates this book to his friend and colleague, Artur Hojan from Koscian, Poland, an expert on Nazi ‘euthanasia’ and the Chełmno death camp in his home district, the former Reichsgau Wartheland, who helped with some of the Polish information for this book. Artur left his home on the evening of 1 December 2013 and disappeared. His body was recovered from a nearby canal on 12 February 2014.

*He was taken from us in the prime of life and may he rest in peace.*

Chris Webb  
Heathfield,  
United Kingdom

Michal Chocholatý  
Plzeň (Pilsen),  
Czech Republic

March, 2014



# CONTENTS

FOREWORD-----	vii
AUTHORS' INTRODUCTION -----	xi
ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE FOOTNOTES -----	xviii
PREFACE	
‘Aktion Reinhardt: An Overview-----	1
 <b>PART I: The hell called Treblinka -----</b>	<b>10</b>
CHAPTER 1	
Penal labor camp: Treblinka I -----	11
CHAPTER 2	
Construction of the death camp: Treblinka II-----	19
CHAPTER 3	
Initial phase under Dr. Eberl: July–August 1942 -----	31
CHAPTER 4	
Chaos and Reorganization -----	47
CHAPTER 5	
Industrialized mass murder: September–December 1942 -----	61
CHAPTER 6	
Deceptions and diversions: Late 1942–early 1943 -----	69
CHAPTER 7	
Visit by the Reichsführer-SS: Orders to erase evidence of crimes	77



CHAPTER 8	
Jewish work brigades -----	83
CHAPTER 9	
The camp revolt: 2 August 1943 -----	99
CHAPTER 10	
The end of Treblinka and <i>Aktion Reinhardt</i> : August–November 1943-----	115
<b>PART II: Survivors, victims and perpetrators-----</b>	<b>124</b>
CHAPTER 11	
Interviews with Treblinka survivors -----	125
CHAPTER 12	
Wartime reports about the death camp-----	169
CHAPTER 13	
Transports and death toll -----	179
CHAPTER 14	
Treblinka war crimes trials -----	195
CHAPTER 15	
From Trawniki to Treblinka -----	209
CHAPTER 16	
The real ‘Ivan the Terrible’ -----	219
CHAPTER 17	
Roll of Remembrance: Jewish survivors and victims-----	231
CHAPTER 18	
The Perpetrators -----	305

## POSTSCRIPTUM

Lublin concentration camp (Majdanek). A part of <i>Aktion Reinhardt?</i> -----	355
Supplementary documents -----	361
APPENDIX 1 -----	366
APPENDIX 2 -----	367
APPENDIX 3 -----	372
Illustrations and Sources -----	374
Selected Bibliography -----	439
Acknowledgements -----	447
Index of Names -----	449

## ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE FOOTNOTES

Abt.	Abteilung (Section)
Auß.	Außenstelle (Branch Office)
Bd.	Band (Volume)
BA	Bundesarchiv (Federal Archive)
Coll.	Collection
GFH	Ghetto Fighters' House
HStA	Hauptstaatsarchiv (Main State Archive)
HStA(H)	Hauptstaatsarchiv (Hessen)—Main State Archive (Hesse)
IPN Izba	Pamięci Narodowej (Institute of National Memory)
OSI/DJ	Office for Special Investigations at the Department of Justice, Washington, DC
RG	Record Group
USHMM	United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
YVA	Yad Vashem Archive
ŻIH	Żydowski Instytut Historyczny (Jewish Historical Institute)

**PREFACE**

**‘Aktion Reinhardt’**

**An Overview**

*Aktion Reinhardt*—also known as *Einsatz Reinhardt*—was the code name for the extermination of primarily Polish Jewry from the former *Generalgouvernement* and the Białystok area. The term was used in remembrance of *SS-Obergruppenführer* Reinhard Heydrich, the coordinator of the ‘Final Solution of the Jewish Question’ (*Endlösung der Judenfrage*)—the extermination of the Jews living in the European countries occupied by German troops during the Second World War

On May 27, 1942, in a suburb of Prague, Jozef Gabčík and Jan Kubiš, members of the Czech resistance, ambushed Heydrich in his car while he was en—route from his home in Panenské Březany to his office in Prague. Heydrich died from his wounds at Bulovka Hospital on 4 June 1942.<sup>1</sup>

Four days after his death, about 1,000 Jews left Prague in a single train which was designated ‘*AaH*’ (*Attentat auf Heydrich*—Assassination of Heydrich). This transport was officially destined for Ujazdów in the Lublin district, Poland, but was gassed at the Bełżec death camp in the far south-eastern corner of the Lublin District. The members of Odilo Globocnik’s resettlement staff henceforward dedicated the murder program to Heydrich’s memory under the code name *Einsatz Reinhardt*.<sup>2</sup>

The head of *Aktion Reinhardt* was *SS-Brigadeführer* Odilo Globocnik, the SS and Police Chief of the Lublin District, appointed to

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<sup>1</sup> R. Cowdery, P. Vodenka, *Reinhard Heydrich Assassination*. University of Southern Maine Press, Lakeville 1994, pp. 49, 63.

<sup>2</sup> G. Reitlinger, *The Final Solution*. Valentine, Mitchell, London 1953, pp. 105–106.

this task by *Reichsführer-SS* Heinrich Himmler. At the Führer's Headquarters in Rastenburg, East Prussia (Kętrzyn in present day Poland) on October 13, 1941, Heinrich Himmler, Friedrich-Wilhelm Krüger and Odilo Globocnik met at a conference during which Globocnik was authorized to build a death camp at Bełżec in the far south-eastern corner of the Lublin District of the *Generalgouvernement*. This was to be the first death camp constructed with static gas chambers, although the first mass extermination camp in the east, at Kulmhof in the *Reichsgau Wartheland* (to-day, Chełmno nad Nerem in Poland) used gas vans from early December 1941.<sup>3</sup>

On January 20, 1942, at a villa in the Wannsee suburb of Berlin, Heydrich organized a conference on the '*Final Solution of the Jewish Question in Europe*'. The conference had been postponed from December 8, 1941, as Heydrich wrote to one of the participants, Otto Hoffman, 'on account of events in which some of the invited gentlemen were concerned'.<sup>4</sup> This meant the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor the previous day and the entry of the United States into the war.

Those who attended the Wannsee Conference included the leading officials of the relevant ministries, senior representatives of the German authorities in the occupied countries, and senior members of the SS, including Heinrich Müller, head of the Gestapo, and Adolf Eichmann, head of Department IV B4, the sub-section of the Gestapo dealing with Jewish affairs.

\*

Odilo Lothario Globocnik was born on 21 April 1904 in Trieste, the son of an Austro-Slovene family, and a construction engineer by trade. In 1930, he joined the Nazi party in Carinthia, Austria, and after the banning of the Nazi Party in Austria in 1934, earned a reputation as one of the most radical leaders of its underground cells.

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<sup>3</sup> P. Longerich, *The Unwritten Order—Hitler's Role in the Final Solution*. Tempus, Stroud 2001, p. 85.

<sup>4</sup> Reitlinger, *The Final Solution ...*, op. cit., p. 101.

In 1933, Globocnik joined the SS, which was also a prohibited organization in Austria since 1934, and was appointed deputy Party District Leader (*Stellvertretender Gauleiter*).<sup>5</sup>

After serving several short terms of imprisonment for illegal activities on behalf of the Nazis, he emerged as a key figure in the pre-*Anschluss* plans for Austria, serving as a key liaison figure between Adolf Hitler and the leading pro-Nazi Austrians.<sup>6</sup>

After the *Anschluss* of March 1938, Globocnik's star continued to rise and on May 24 he was appointed to the coveted key position of Party District Leader (*Gauleiter*) of Vienna. His tenure was short-lived, however, and on January 30, 1939 he was dismissed from this lofty position for corruption, illegal speculation in foreign exchange and tax evasion—all on a grand scale.<sup>7</sup>

After demotion to a lowly SS rank and undergoing basic military training with an *SS-Standarte*, he took part with his unit in the invasion of Poland. Eventually pardoned by Himmler, who needed such unscrupulous characters for future 'unsavory plans', Globocnik was appointed to the post of SS and Police Leader (*SS- und Polizeiführer*) of the Lublin District in the *Generalgouvernement* on November 9, 1939.

In Lublin, Globocnik surrounded himself with a number of his fellow Austrians, SS-officers like Herman Julius Höfle, born in Salzburg on June 19, 1911. Höfle became Globocnik's deputy in *Aktion Reinhardt*, responsible for personnel and the organization of Jewish deportations, the extermination camps and the re-utilization of the victim's possessions and valuables. Höfle was later to play a significant role in mass deportation *Aktionen* in Warsaw and Białystok. Ernst Lerch from Klagenfurt became Globocnik's closest confidante and adjutant. Georg Michalsen, a Silesian from Oppeln, was another adjutant and he, too, participated with Höfle in the deportation of Jews from the ghettos in Warsaw and Białystok. Another, early

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<sup>5</sup> J. Poprzeczny, *Hitler's Man in the East—Odilo Globocnik*. McFarland, Jefferson 2004, p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Reitlinger, *The Final Solution ...*, op. cit., p. 262.

<sup>7</sup> Poprzeczny, *Hitler's Man ...*, op. cit., p. 76.

member of this group was Amon Göth who cleared the Kraków, Tarnów, and Zamość ghettos, and later became notorious as Commandant of the Płaszów labor camp near Kraków.<sup>8</sup>

The headquarters of *Aktion Reinhardt* was located in the 'Julius Schreck Barracks' (*Julius-Schreck-Kaserne*) at *Litauer-Straße 11*, a former Polish school close to the city center in Lublin, where Höfle not only worked but also lived in a small apartment. Also located in Lublin were the buildings in which the belongings and valuables seized from the Jews were stored: the former Catholic Action (*Katholische Aktion*) building on Chopin-Straße, and in prewar aircraft hangers on the Old Airfield (*Alter Flugplatz*) on the south-eastern outskirts of Lublin.<sup>9</sup>

The most notorious member of *Aktion Reinhardt* was *SS-Obersturmführer/Kriminalinspektor* Christian Wirth, the first commandant of the Bełżec death camp and later Inspector of the SS-Sonderkommandos of *Aktion Reinhardt*. Before his transfer to Poland, Wirth had been a leading figure in 'Aktion T4,' the extermination of the mentally and physically disabled in six so-called 'euthanasia' killing centers in the Reich.

The role of the 'T4' euthanasia program was fundamental to the execution of *Aktion Reinhardt* because the great majority of the staff in the death camps served their 'apprenticeships' in mass murder at the euthanasia institutes of Bernburg, Brandenburg, Grafeneck, Hadamar, Hartheim and Pirna-Sonnenstein where the victims had been murdered in gas chambers using CO gas from steel cylinders. The senior officers in both *Aktion T4* and *Aktion Reinhardt* were all police officers with equivalent SS ranks, and with Himmler's approval SS-NCO's had emptied the gas chambers and cremated the bodies of the victims in portable furnaces. The SS-men performed this work wearing civilian clothes because Himmler did not want the possibility to arise of the public becoming aware of the participation of the SS in the killing.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>9</sup> Reitlinger, *The Final Solution ...*, op. cit., p. 314.

During *Aktion Reinhardt* the SS authorities also supplemented the forces guarding the death camps by employing former Red Army troops who had been captured or had surrendered to the Germans, mostly ethnic Germans (*Volksdeutsche*) from the Ukraine, the Baltic States and the Volga region of Russia who were trained in an SS camp in the village of Trawniki, 25 km south-east of Lublin. The majority were already anti-Semitic (equating Bolsheviks with Jews) and were ideally suited to the persecution and extermination of Jews.

On November 1, 1941, construction of the first *Aktion Reinhardt* death camp began near the village of Bełżec, 125 km south-east of Lublin, and became operational in mid-March 1942. Construction of the second camp, at Sobibór, between the cities of Włodawa and Chełm on the River Bug, north-east of Lublin, came into operation at the end of April 1942. The third and last of these camps was located near the railroad station in Treblinka,<sup>10</sup> about 100 km north-east of Warsaw. All three camps shared some common vital facts: they were all situated on or close to main railway lines for the speedy delivery of the victims to their deaths, and they were located in sparsely-populated regions. The true fate of the Jews was initially hidden from them by announcing that they were being ‘transported to the east for resettlement and work’. The *Aktion Reinhardt* death camps were very similar in layout, each camp being an improvement on its predecessor, and the ‘conveyor-belt’ extermination process developed at Bełżec by Christian Wirth was implemented, improved and refined at the other two camps.

The personnel assigned to *Aktion Reinhardt* came from a number of sources, SS and policemen who served under Globocnik's command in the Lublin district, other SS men and civilians drafted into the Aktion, and members of the ‘T4’ euthanasia program.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The nearest village to the death camp was not Treblinka village but the village of Poniatowo; not to be confused with the village and forced labor camp at Poniatowa in Lublin District.

<sup>11</sup> Y. Arad, *Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka—The Aktion Reinhardt Death Camps*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis 1987, p. 17.



Yitzhak Arad quotes in his book *Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka* that a total of 450 men were assigned to *Aktion Reinhardt*, including 92 from 'T4',<sup>12</sup> more recent research by the authors, however, has identified a slightly higher total of 98 men, of whom 56 are known to have served in Treblinka at one time or another. (See chapter 18: members of the SS-garrison).

The Old Lublin Airfield was also used throughout *Aktion Reinhardt* as a mustering center for personnel transferred from the T4 'euthanasia' institutions in the Reich, to the extermination of the Jews in the *Generalgouvernement*. The SS-men, police and civilians thus transferred were usually met at the airfield by Wirth personally, on occasions accompanied by Reichleitner from Sobibór and Stangl from Treblinka. According to witnesses, at these selections of personnel, all three officers wore *Schutzpolizei* uniforms and none of them mentioned anything about their future employment or where they would be based. At the airfield depot the newcomers received Waffen-SS uniforms, provided by the SS-Garrison Administration (*SS-Standortverwaltung*) in Lublin, but without the SS runes on the right hand collar patches. The civilian employees from 'T4', especially the male psychiatric nurses among them, were sent first to the SS training camp at Trawniki for a two week basic military training course.<sup>13</sup>

The men selected in Lublin and distributed to the three *Aktion Reinhardt* death camps were augmented by a company-sized unit of about 120 black-uniformed auxiliary guards who had also been trained at the SS training camp in Trawniki—the so-called 'Trawniki-men' (*Trawnikimänner*), usually referred to as 'Ukrainians' because they were the majority.

Those who spoke fluent German were appointed platoon or senior platoon leaders—*Zugführer* or *Oberzugführer*.<sup>14</sup> The rest were

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p. 17.

<sup>13</sup> F. Suchomel, *Christian Wirth*. Altötting 1972, (private typewritten report), Michael Tregenza Collection, Lublin, Poland.

<sup>14</sup> Arad, *Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka ...*, op. cit., p. 22.

known as *Wachmänner* (lit. guardsmen). A select few of the *Trawn-ikimänner* were given other, special duties, including the maintenance and operation of the engines that pumped their poisonous exhaust fumes into the gas chambers. Among them were the infamous Ivan Marchenko ('Ivan the Terrible') and Nikolay Shalayev at the Treblinka death camp.

\*

In the course of *Aktion Reinhardt* approximately 1.6 million Jews were murdered in the death camps at Bełżec, Sobibór and Treblinka. Jewish property to the value of 178,045,960 *Reichsmark* (RM) was seized by the SS, which represents the minimum known amount. Through the theft of large amounts of cash and valuables by *SS-Brigadeführer* Globocnik, SS-men, policemen and guards, the true total will never be known.

The *Aktion Reinhardt* extermination operation ended officially in November 1943 and Himmler ordered Globocnik, who was by then the Higher SS and Police Leader (*Höhere SS- und Polizeiführer*) for the Adriatic Coastal Region (*Adriatisches Küstenland*), based in Trieste, to produce a detailed 'Balance Sheet' for the murder program. Globocnik produced the requested financial accounts and suggested that certain SS-officers should be suitably rewarded for their 'invaluable contribution' to *Aktion Reinhardt*. Globocnik received Himmler's thanks 'for his 'services to the German people', but made no mention of medals for any of Globocnik's subordinates.<sup>15</sup>

After completion of the extermination work in the *Generalgouvernement*, most of the men who had served in *Aktion Reinhardt* were transferred to northern Italy where their headquarters was in a disused rice mill in the San Sabba suburb of the Adriatic port of Trieste (*Risiera di San Sabba*). Divided into three SS-units: R-I, R-II and R-III, they operated under the code designation 'Operation R' ('*Einsatz R*'), still under the command of *SS-Obersturmführer* Christian Wirth. Their primary task was the round-up and deportation to Auschwitz-Birkenau of the surviving Italian Jews, and confiscation

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 375.

of their property and valuables. *Einsatz R* was simply a smaller version of *Aktion Reinhardt*. Additionally, Italian-Jewish mental patients were removed from their hospitals and sent to the T4 'euthanasia' institution at Schloss Hartheim in Austria for gassing. The units not engaged in these operations were assigned to security and anti-partisan patrols on the Istrian peninsula.

Wirth turned San Sabba into an interrogation and execution center where not only Jews but also Italian and Yugoslavian partisans were tortured, beaten to death, or simply shot and their bodies cremated in a specially installed furnace in the courtyard.<sup>16</sup> The human ashes were dumped in the Adriatic Sea. There is also evidence that a gas van was used in San Sabba.

\*

The key members of *Aktion Reinhardt* mostly escaped justice. Christian Wirth and Franz Reichleitner (the second Commandant of Sobibór death camp) were killed by partisans in northern Italy in 1944. Amon Göth was tried and sentenced to death in Kraków in September 1946 for crimes committed in the forced labor camp in Płaszów (today a suburb of Kraków). Dr. Irmfried Eberl, the first Commandant of Treblinka, committed suicide in a West German prison in 1948 while awaiting trial. Only Franz Stangl (the first Commandant of Sobibór and second Commandant of Treblinka)<sup>17</sup> and Kurt Franz, the last Commandant of Treblinka, were brought to trial. Both were found guilty of crimes against humanity and sentenced to life imprisonment.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 399.

<sup>17</sup> It is a significant fact that Eberl, Reichleitner, and Stangl, as well as many other key members of *Aktion Reinhardt* were Austrian nationals.



## **PART I**

# **The hell called Treblinka**

## CHAPTER 1

### Penal labor camp: Treblinka I

The village of Treblinka is located approximately 100 km north-east of Warsaw and approximately 4 km from the important railway junction of Małkinia Górna, which is mentioned in the Baedeker *Das Generalgouvernement–Reisehandbuch* as an important rail junction and former border station with the Soviet Union.<sup>18</sup>

In the book by Vasily Grossman, *The Treblinka Hell*, the description of the countryside is very apt:

The terrain to the east of Warsaw along the Western Bug is an expanse of alternating sands and swamps, interspersed with evergreen and deciduous forests. The landscape is dreary and villages are rare. The narrow sandy roads where wheels sink up to the axle and walking is difficult are something for the traveler to avoid.

In the midst of this desolate country stands the small out-of-the-way station of Treblinka on the Siedlce railroad branch line. It is some one hundred kilometers from Warsaw and not far from Małkinia station where tracks from Warsaw, Białystok, Siedlce and Łomża meet.

Many of those who were brought to Treblinka in 1942 may have had occasion to travel this way before the war. Staring out over the desolate landscape of pines, sand, more sand and again pines, scrubland, heather, unattractive station buildings and railroad crossings, the pre-war passenger might have allowed his bored gaze to pause for a moment on a single-track spur running from the station into the forest to disappear amid the dense pines. The spur led to a gravel pit where white sand was extracted for industrial purposes.<sup>19</sup>

In preparation for the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941 the German authorities took over the gravel pit, and used the raw

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<sup>18</sup> K. Baedeker, *Das Generalgouvernement—Reisehandbuch*. Verlag Karl Baedeker, Leipzig 1943, p. 102.

<sup>19</sup> V. Grossman, *The Treblinka Hell*. Gershon Aharoni, Tel Aviv 1984, p. 13.