

Forty years since the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial

## Part 2—The accused: Henchmen acting under orders

Sybille Fuchs  
28 April 2004

*The following is the second in a three-part series of articles.*

Judge: Defendant Boger  
As a criminal investigator  
Didn't you know  
That a man subjected to such an interrogation  
Will say anything you want him to say?  
Accused 2: That's not the way I see it at all  
And I am referring here to our supervisory office  
If a prisoner proved stubborn  
Force was the only way to make him confess  
8th witness: Then they took me to Barrack 11  
and up to the loft  
I was hung from a pole by my hands  
Which were tied behind me  
That was called pole hanging  
They hung you up just high enough  
So that your toes touched the floor  
Boger pushed me back and forth  
And kicked me in the stomach....  
Accused 2: The purpose of the intensive interrogation  
Was achieved  
When blood ran down their pants...  
What is more in my opinion  
That even now corporal punishment  
If administered  
By juvenile courts for instance  
Would soon put a stop to a good deal of delinquent behaviour  
(*The Investigation* by Peter Weiss, Frankfurt, 1965)

While the defense attempted to defame the Auschwitz trial, depicting it as a “show trial” established by a conspiracy of former communist detainees, the accused, who represented a cross section of the camp’s personnel, remained mostly silent. They either denied any involvement in crimes or attempted to pose as individuals who simply carried out orders and held only subordinate positions. The court, however, refused to accept the claim that the accused had only been following orders, and established that anyone who had opposed these crimes would not have suffered any considerable disadvantage. Testimonies proved this beyond all doubt.

Examining magistrate Hans Dux, who helped prepare the trials, reported on the accused Oswald Kaduk, who was proven to have personally killed many people and to have carried out the selection of victims on his own authority.

“His conduct was compulsively militaristic. Every time a question was directed to him he jumped up and stood to attention (clicking his heels, thumbs on his trouser seams) giving his reply in a clipped manner. When I explained to him that he didn’t always have to stand to attention, he

jumped up again shouting ‘yes, sir!’ Apparently he had internalized militarism to such an extent that within another context he replied: ‘Yes, sir, Obersturmführer.’ After using this form of address he paused for a moment and explained that he had said it because it was an old habit. He explained that when speaking to officials he often reacts in the way—it was usual within the SS—as he had done thousands of times before. I had the impression that he had not used this form of address as a provocation but that during the examination this deeply internalized pattern of behavior involuntarily came to light.”

Kaduk’s responses to the accusations against him were significantly more revealing than those of his accomplices, who usually waffled about the events. He attempted to depict himself as a low ranking SS officer and claimed that the so-called “death selection” had been made by SS doctors and senior SS officers.

According to Kaduk, his task was simply to prevent the condemned from joining those able to work. Under camp procedures, children who had just arrived at the camp were immediately gassed, unless SS doctors selected them for medical experiments. Mothers who were fit for work but would not separate themselves from their condemned children were sent to the gas chambers along with them.

In Kaduk’s own words, the transport of Jews “ran like hot cakes”. Along with other SS members he used a heavy goods truck to drive the condemned Jews from a ramp where they arrived at the camp to the gas chambers. As Kaduk, who described himself as a “tough guy,” told the court: “I never consciously killed anyone; sometimes I just beat somebody who wanted to dodge work.”

Regarding Jozef Cyrankiewicz, who had been imprisoned in Auschwitz and later became Poland’s prime minister during the 1960s, Kaduk remarked: “If I had had the chance at the time I would have bumped him off.” This outburst clearly contradicted Kaduk’s claim that he never intended to kill anybody. His attempt to play down his role was disproved by numerous witnesses and the court sentenced him to life imprisonment for murder in 1,012 cases. [1]

Another of the accused was Robert Mulka. An adjutant for Auschwitz camp command, he gave the orders for the “liquidation” of the transports. Chemist Victor Capesius, a former IG Farben employee and head of the SS chemists group, helped select victims at the ramps.

The accused Wilhelm Boger was SS political division officer at Auschwitz and a participant in tortures and the so-called “emptying of bunkers and executions”. He invented the so-called “Boger-swing,” a torture instrument on which detainees were hung and their genitals beaten to a pulp.

A trial observer reported, “The audience was paralyzed and looked at the woman in the witness box with horrified eyes. After telling the court in a self-controlled voice how the camp’s inmates were tortured on the

notorious Boger-swing she was suddenly at a loss for words. She haltingly reported how one day 50 5- to-10-year-old children were brought to the camp on a heavy goods vehicle. 'I recall a four-year-old girl...' Then her voice breaks off, her shoulders begin to shudder and the witness breaks down in despairing tears. A paralyzing horror begins to spread..." [2]

Many of Boger's bestial crimes were revealed during the trials, among them the execution of Lili Tofler, who had passed a letter to a fellow inmate. Before she was executed Boger had made her stand in the washroom for one hour on four consecutive days while he held his pistol against her temple.

Dr. Bruno Berger, an anthropologist and high-ranking SS officer, was also put on trial. He collaborated with Professor Hirt from Strasbourg University during World War II. Hirt committed suicide at the end of the war. The two men wanted to establish a collection of skulls of "Jewish-Bolshevik commissars". Many Soviet prisoners of war were detained in Auschwitz, so this is where Berger and Hirt selected their victims, killed them, and then stored their heads in Strasbourg University.

"During the preliminary hearings the scientist, who specialized in 'Jewish-Bolshevik Skulls', sought to react with evasive explanations, although the evidence against him was unambiguous. In the main trial proceedings he was sentenced to several years of imprisonment." [3]

Hans Stark was accused of being involved in selections, gassings and executions, as were his colleagues, Pery Broad and Klaus Dylewski. Max Lustig, Gestapo head in the town of Auschwitz, carried out courts martial in the Auschwitz extermination camp. Medical corps members Josef Kehr, Hans Nierwicki and Emil Hantl were also involved in selections and killings, injecting phenol into their victims' hearts. Operative detainees Emil Bednarek and Alois Staller had killed fellow detainees.

Death trains began bringing Jews to the extermination camp in the spring of 1942. In that year alone 166 transports, carrying about 180,000 deportees, arrived in Auschwitz. In 1943, 174 transports carried about 220,000 and in 1944 the German Railways transported about 300,000 victims in 300 trains. They used cattle wagons.

Auschwitz researcher Werner Renz has described the murderous methods of concentration camp personnel as follows:

"The 'handling' of transports was carried out by an apparatus practiced in the art of extermination. The arrival of a transport was announced to the camp's headquarters by telegram and radio signals. The camp's commander then gave instructions to the political division, the medical section of the SS garrison, the carpool, the guard division and the department for labor service. Each division involved in 'handling' a transport had a duty rota regarding its deployment on the ramp. SS officers and soldiers on duty on the ramp had their tasks laid down: they supervised the selections on the ramp, received transport documents from the transport's officers, and divided the deported people into groups—men, women and those incapable of work (elderly people, the sick and children). They then made the scared and confused people stand in rows of five and commenced selecting them.

"After this they confirmed their taking over of the death train, giving details of the 'transport's capacity'. The so-called 'clear-up commando' was then ordered to come onto the ramp and steal the valuables of the arriving Jews. After this the condemned were taken to the gas chambers in heavy goods vehicles or had to march there in columns. Once there, the innocent and defenseless victims were deceived with mendacious speeches and ordered to undress for a 'shower'. They were then brought to the gas chambers and the doors were locked. A medical truck brought the deadly gas, Cyclon B, to the death factories. They tossed gas into the chambers and observed the agonizing process of their victims being gassed through a peephole. After this they ascertained the death of their victims, arranged that the bodies be burned in the crematoriums and supervised the pulling out of gold teeth. The hair of female corpses was shaved off and the robbery of valuables from dead bodies was supervised.

These figures were then reported by telegram to the official bookkeeper stationed in the Imperial Security Authority (Reichssicherheitshauptamt) and responsible for recording the mass murder. He logged the total number of deportees, the number of detainees brought to the camp and the number of those gassed.

"Men and women 'capable of work' were then allowed into the camp and arrangements made for them to be shaved, dressed and recorded in card files as well as being numbered. They were forced to do mostly murderous backbreaking labor that eventually exterminated the detainees. Sick and weakened camp inmates were murdered with phenol injections into the heart; the labour slaves no longer regarded as 'useful or usable' were selected and gassed. Thousands were shot at the execution wall.

"In about 900 days more than 600 death trains with over one million Jews and 20,000 Sinti and Roma arrived in Auschwitz. The SS was involved in mass extermination day after day—day and night." [4]

Even if the court was unable to successfully prove that the accused were individually involved in murder and torture, at least it could have prosecuted those charged for being accessories to these crimes.

The defense tried by every means to make the witnesses uncertain in their testimony. Many of the severely traumatized witnesses had only been able to maintain their sanity by suppressing their memory of these horrors. In court, however, they were confronted with the reality of these terrible events.

The trial investigated the murder of 119 teenage boys at Auschwitz on February 23, 1943. The boys, who were between 13 and 17 years old and from Zamosc region in Poland, were killed with phenol injections after being allowed to play ball in the Auschwitz hospital courtyard. SS officer and medical corps member Emil Hantl was one the perpetrators of this horrendous crime. He was sentenced to just three-and-a-half years and under German law was able to leave the court a free man.

In another case, one detainee had been locked up with 38 others in a 2½ by 3 meter "hunger cell". The only access to air was through a small hole in the ceiling. The next morning 20 inmates had suffocated or been trampled to death.

Trial witnesses revealed the gruesome details of gas chamber extermination to the broad public for the first time.

When the doors were opened, 20 minutes after Cyclon B had been released, detainees ordered to clear the gas chambers found up to 2,000 naked bodies wedged together. Babies, children and elderly people trampled to death lay on the ground where the gas first began to spread. Above them was a layer of female corpses, and then the strongest men at the top of the terrifying heap. In order to save money Nazi officials began using lower doses of Cyclon B. This meant that that the killing could last up to five minutes, with the weakest victims writhing on the floor in agony. The trials heard that 16 cans, each containing 500 grams, were used to eliminate 2,000 people. The price per can was 5 Reich marks. An estimated 865,000 Jews were murdered in the Auschwitz gas chambers.

*The Investigation*, a powerful drama by exiled German dramatist Peter Weiss, is based on testimony from camp survivors and the accused. He describes his play as an oratorio in 11 cantos, in reference to Dante's *Divine Comedy* and its depiction of hell. Although the artistic composition maintains a deliberate distance between the audience and the reader, one cannot avoid being gripped by the succession of images portraying the passage from the death ramp to the execution chamber. Hopefully German theaters will once again include this important work in their repertoire in commemoration of the 40-year anniversary of the Auschwitz trials.

*To be continued*

#### Notes:

1. *Zufallsprodukt Auschwitzprozess* by Hans Düx. <http://www.rav.de/infobrief90/duex.htm>
2. *Reports from the Auschwitz Trial* by Conrad Talers, cited in the *Junge Welt* <http://www.jungewelt.de/2003/12-20/032.php>

3. Düx: a.a.O

4. *Völkermord als Strafsache* by Werner Renz [http://www.fritz-bauer-institut.de/texte/essay/08-00\\_renz.htm](http://www.fritz-bauer-institut.de/texte/essay/08-00_renz.htm)



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**