

The First Gassing at Auschwitz: Genesis of a Myth

Carlo Mattogno

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Introduction

The story of the Auschwitz gas chambers begins, notoriously, with the experimental gassing of approximately 850 individuals, which supposedly took place in the underground cells of Block 11 within the main camp on September 3, 1941.

Danuta Czech in *Kalendarium der Ereignisse im Konzentrationslager Auschwitz-Birkenau* (Calendar of Events in the Concentration Camp Auschwitz-Birkenau), describes it in the following way:

"3.9. [September 3] For the first time, experiments in mass murder through the use of Cyclon B [sic] gas were conducted in the concentration camp of Auschwitz.

By order of the SS, the hospital attendants brought approximately 250 sick inmates from the prison hospital to the underground cells of Block 11. Approximately 600 Russian prisoners of war were also brought there (officers and political commissars were selected from the prisoner of war camps according to the operating order [Einsatzbefehl] n.8 of 17.7.41). After they were placed in the cells of the bunker, the underground vents were covered with earth, some SS poured the Cyclon B gas and the doors were closed.

4.9.[September 4] Rapportführer Palitzsch, equipped with a gas mask, opened the cell doors of the Bunker and noticed that a few prisoners were still alive. He therefore poured an additional amount of Cyclon B gas and closed the doors.

5.9. [September 5] During the evening 20 prisoners from the punishment company (Block 5a) and hospital attendants from the prisoners' hospital were brought to the courtyard of Block 11. First they were told that they had been called for a special assignment, and that no one was to discuss what they would see under pain of death. Then they were promised that after the assignment they would receive a substantially larger food ration. In the courtyard of Block 11, there were the officers: Fritzsich, Mayer, Palitzsch, the Lagerarzt Entress [1] and others. Gas masks were given to the prisoners, and they were ordered to go to the underground cells and to bring the cadavers that had been gassed out to the courtyard. There, the uniforms were taken off the Russian prisoners of war and the cadavers were thrown onto motor carts. The cadavers of the gassed inmates wore prisoners clothing. The transportation of the cadavers to the crematorium lasted until late night. Among those that had been gassed were 10 prisoners who had been shut up in the Bunker because of the escape of prisoner Nowaczyk."[2]

This account, in support of which Danuta Czech gives no documentary proof, is nonetheless accepted with an exemplary lack of criticism by all Exterminationist historians. This is even more surprising in that the alleged gassing in Block 11 of Auschwitz would constitute the very beginning of the process that would subsequently lead to the gas chambers of the crematoria of Birkenau. The intermediate steps of that process were the mortuary chambers of Crematorium I of the Main Camp and the so-called "Bunkers" 1 and 2 of Birkenau. The Block II "gassing," then, by the canons of Exterminationism, initiated the greatest murder operation of all times.

In this necessarily brief presentation, we will examine the beginning of the myth of the gas chambers of Auschwitz-Birkenau by critically analyzing the few available sources about the history of the first gassing. At the same time, we will offer a significant example of the historiographic methodology used by the compiler of the *Kalendarium* of Auschwitz.

We will begin with the exposition of these sources.

I. The Sources

1. The Sources from the War Period (1941-1942)

The first reference to the initial gassing at Auschwitz is found in a note of October 24, 1941:

"At Oswiecim (Auschwitz), at the beginning of October, 850 Russian officers and non-commissioned officers (prisoners of war) who were brought there have been subjected to die by gas in order to experiment with a new type of war gas that is to be used on the Eastern Front [jako probe nowego typu gazu bojowego, który ma być użyty na froncie wschodnim]."[3]

Until the middle of 1942, in the sources, the account of the first gassing does not appear to fall under a systematic extermination plan, but constitutes a simple scientific experiment among many others.

In one account compiled by a Czech teacher fleeing the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia in May of 1942, one reads:

"The worst reputation is enjoyed by the concentration camp at Oswiecim near Cracow. Not only are the victims of German cruelty tortured and mishandled in the usual German fashion, but the efficacy of German poison gases is even tried on them and other experiments are made with them."[4]

On July 1, the *Polish Fortnightly Review* published a more detailed account of the first gassing, with not insignificant discrepancies in detail when compared to the note of October 24, 1941, but always in accordance with the theme of experimentation with toxic gases on the prisoners:

"Among the other experiments being tried on the prisoners is the use of poison gas. It is generally known that during the night of September 5th to 6th last year about a thousand people were driven down to the underground shelter in Oswiecim, among them seven hundred Bolshevik prisoners of war and three hundred Poles. As the shelter was too small to hold this large number, the living bodies were simply forced in, regardless of broken bodies. When the shelter was full, gas was injected into it, and the prisoners died during the night. All night the rest of the camp was kept awake by the groans and howls coming from the shelter. Next day other prisoners had to carry out the bodies, a task which took all day. One hand-cart on which the bodies were being removed broke down under the weight."[5]

2. The Sources from the Postwar Period

Four witnesses, as far as we can determine, have confirmed the reality of the first gassing by giving specific descriptions: Josef Vacek, eye-witness; Rudolf Höß, indirect witness; Zenon Rozanski, eye-witness; Wojciech Barcz, eye-witness. To these is added the report of inquiry by the Polish Commission of Investigation on German crimes at Auschwitz.

A. THE WITNESS JOSEF VACEK

On the 8th of May, 1945, the former Auschwitz inmate Josef Vacek (detention number 15514) declared at Buchenwald the following:

"At the beginning of September, Russian prisoners of war were brought to the camp. There were more than 500. In addition to them were 196 sick inmates selected by the SS Doctor Jungen, [6] who were gassed along with the Russian prisoners of war in the gas chambers [7] of Block 11. We hospital attendants who brought them there were told that they were going to be taken away by transport and that they were going to be brought there only momentarily until the train would leave. The following night, when everyone already was sleeping and no one was allowed to leave the Block area, I was called, along with 30 hospital attendants, and for 3 nights we transported the bodies to the crematoriums."[8]

B. THE WITNESS RUDOLF HÖSS.

While he remained under British arrest, Rudolf Höß ignored the first gassing. In his sworn testimony of March 14, 1946, the most detailed of this period, although he mentions the gassing in the old crematorium as relating to the Soviet war prisoners, he says only:

"At the same time transports of Russian POWs arrived from the area of the Gestapo Leitstellen Breslau, Troppau and Kattowitz, who, by Himmler's written order to the local Gestapo leaders, had to be exterminated."[9]

Only after his extradition to Poland did he speak about the first gassing. In fact, in the "Autobiographical Notes" of Cracow, Rudolf Höß wrote in this regard:

"Even before the mass extermination of Jews began, the Russian politruks and political commissars were liquidated

in almost all of the concentration camps, in the years 1941 and 1942. According to a secret order by the Führer, in all the prisoners of war camps, special Gestapo units selected the Russian politruks and political commissary who were sent to the nearest concentration camp to be liquidated. This measure was explained by saying that the Russians immediately killed every German soldier who belonged to the Party or was a member of a Party organization, particularly the SS, and that the political functionaries of the Red Army had the duty, in the event of being taken prisoners of war, to create disorders in the prisoner of war camps, and other places of work, in any possible way, and to sabotage even work itself.

At Auschwitz too, these Red Army political functionaries arrived destined for extermination. The first groups, if not too large, were killed by firing squads.

But during one of my absences, my deputy, Schutzhaftlagerfahrer Fritsch, used a gas for this purpose, and to be precise, a mixture of prussic acid, Cyclon B. which was currently being used in the camp for the disinfection of parasites and which was available there in large quantities. When I returned, Fritsch related to me what he had done, and the gas was utilized also for the subsequent convoys of prisoners. The gassing took place within the detention cells of Block 11. I myself, protecting my face with a gas mask, observed the killing. Death would take place in the overloaded cells, immediately after the emission of the gas. A brief scream, soon suffocating, and everything was finished." [10]

In his written account, "The final solution to the Jewish question in Auschwitz," Rudolf Höß returned to the first gassing and gave a fuller description of its background and execution. Because his account has been elevated to the status of historical truth about Auschwitz, we will cite it at length:

"During the summer of 1941 - at the moment I cannot cite the exact date - I was suddenly called to Berlin by the Reichsführer, through his assistant. Contrary to the usual, Himmler received me without any assistants being present, and, in substance, told me the following: the Führer has ordered the final solution of the Jewish question, and we of the SS must follow these orders. The extermination centers currently in the East are absolutely not in any condition to deal with this grand projected task. I have therefore selected Auschwitz because its position is excellent from the point of view of communications, and because its area can be easily isolated and camouflaged. To this end, I had thought of appointing a high SS official; but in order to avoid difficulties due to incompetence from the very beginning, I have abandoned the idea. The task will, therefore, be assigned to you. It is a hard and difficult task requiring total personal commitment, whatever future difficulties there might be. You will receive further details from Sturmabführer Eichmann of the RSHA, whom I will send to you shortly - all officers who in one way or another will participate in this task will be informed by me in due time. You have the duty to maintain the most absolute secrecy regarding this order, even from your superiors. After your meeting with Eichmann, send the plans for all required installations to me immediately.

"The Jews are the eternal enemies of the German people, and must be exterminated. All Jews on whom we can put our hands during this war must be killed, without exception. If we are not able to destroy the biological basis for Jewry now, one day the Jews will destroy the German people. Immediately after receiving so ominous an order, I returned to Auschwitz, without even bothering to report to my superiors in Oranienburg. Soon Eichmann came to see me at Auschwitz. He laid out for me the plans for the various countries. I cannot any longer remember the sequence exactly.

"In any case, Auschwitz was going to be responsible above all for Eastern Upper Silesia and for the other areas bordering and part of the Government General. At the same time, and then subsequently, depending on the possibilities, it would be the turn of the German Jews and those from Slovakia; finally the Jews from the West, from France, Belgium and Holland. He also gave me the approximate number of transports that would arrive, but these too I am unable to recall.

"We therefore began discussing the procedures necessary to carry out the extermination plan. The method would have to be the use of gas, since it surely would be impossible to eliminate the masses that would be arriving by shooting them; and, besides that, it would be above all a very difficult and arduous task for the SS soldiers to follow through the assignment since even women and children would be present.

"Eichmann spoke to me about executing by means of vehicle exhaust, which was, until then, the method used in the East. But it was a method not suitable in Auschwitz, considering the large number of people anticipated. Killing through the use of carbon monoxide gas filtered through the showers in the bathrooms (i.e., the method to exterminate the mentally sick in certain institutions of the Reich) required an excessive number of buildings; besides, obtaining such quantities of gas, sufficient for such large numbers of people, was very problematic. On this issue, it was, therefore, not possible to arrive at a decision. Eichmann promised to inquire as to the existence of a gas which could be easily produced and did not require special installation of equipment, and that he would relate this information to me. We went to inspect the camp to identify the most suitable location and concluded that the most appropriate for this use would be the building located on the northwest corner of the future 3rd sector of buildings, Birkenau [the sector BIII of Birkenau camp-C.M.]. It was a location not easily accessible, protected from the curious by trees and hedges, and still not too far from the railroad. The cadavers could be buried in long and deep ditches on the adjacent meadow.

"At that particular moment we had not yet thought of cremation. We calculated that the large existing rooms, once modified for gassing purposes, could be used to kill up to 800 individuals at the same time, by using appropriate gas. These estimates were later confirmed by actual practice. Eichmann could not yet tell me when we could begin with this assignment in as much as everything was in the planning phase, and Himmler had not yet given the order to begin. Eichmann, therefore, returned to Berlin to refer the substance of our discussion to Himmler. A few days later, by means of a courier, I sent Himmler a detailed plan on the situation, as well as an accurate description of the installations to be used. Regarding this matter, I have never received an answer or a decision from him. Later, Eichmann told me once that he [Himmler] agreed to everything. At the end of November, a meeting of the entire Jewish affairs section was held in Eichmann's office in Berlin, at which I had been invited to participate. There Eichmann's representatives from individual countries discussed the current status of the various operations and the difficulties being encountered, such as housing for the prisoners, the allocation of transports and trains, the determination of dates, etc. When we were to begin operations was not communicated to me, nor had Eichmann yet found the appropriate gas.

"In the fall of 1941, through a secret order issued to all prisoner of war camps, the Gestapo separated all the Russian politruks, the commissars and certain other political functionaries, and sent them to the nearest concentration camp to be liquidated. Small transports of these people continually arrived at Auschwitz, then were shot in the gravel quarry near the Monopol building, or in the courtyard of Block 11.

"Due to an official absence of mine, my deputy Hauptsturmführer Fritsch, on his own initiative, used the gas in order to kill these prisoners of war; he filled the underground cells full of Russians, and, protected with gas masks, ordered the Cyclon B gas to enter the cells, which caused the immediate death of the victims. The Cyclon B gas was currently being used in Auschwitz by the firm Tesch & Stabenow for disinfection, and therefore the administration kept enough on hand. At the beginning, this poisonous gas, a prussic acid compound, was used only by Tesch & Stabenow technicians, and with strict precautions, but later, certain personnel attached to the sanitary services were instructed in its use by the same firm, so it was they who used the gas for disinfection purposes.

"On the next visit of Eichmann, I mentioned to him the use of Cyclon B and we decided that it would be the gas that we would use in the imminent mass slaughter.

"The killing of the Russian prisoners of war with Cyclon B. which I have already mentioned, continued, but no longer in Block 11 because, after the gassing, the

entire building required aeration for at least two full days. The mortuary chamber of the crematorium next to the hospital was used as a gas chamber soon as the doors were made gas-tight, and a number of openings were made on the roof to allow the gas in." [11]

C. THE WITNESS ZENON ROZANSKI

In a book published in 1948, the former prisoner of Auschwitz, Zenon Rozanski, described the first gassing in detail, as follows:

"On a September day, after we had finished work, they didn't bring us back to our Block 11; instead they brought us to the unfinished pavement of Block 5. To excuse the incomprehensible change, the Blockälteste explained it in terms of the other Block being disinfested. Since the fifth Block was in the area where the common camp was located, this change was received with general enthusiasm. Here we were safe from the appearances of the Kapos during roll-call, and besides, the lack of dividing walls allowed our comrades of the common camp to give us a little food. After a very uneventful roll-call, the Kapos, the Stubenältesten and the squad leaders formed a cordon that separated our Block from the rest of the camp; nonetheless many comrades received conspicuous amounts of 'left-over food.'

"The day after, we received the news that an entire transport of Russian prisoners of war had been brought to block 11. This event was interpreted in various ways. Some said that the 'Punishment Company' would be disbanded, others knew from 'knowledgeable sources' that the Russians would be assigned to our Block, and still others put on a mysterious expression which conveyed the impression that they knew much but couldn't say anything. However, one thing was sure: that day too, we would not return to the '11.'

"The morning of the third day, Wacek, the Stubendienst, before leaving for work, with an expression of somebody who was putting on airs, ordered those prisoners who were well-built and still appeared healthy, to fall out of the ranks. I, too, found myself among the twenty that had been selected. The company went to work, but we remained in the Block. None of us knew what it was all about. After about half an hour, Wacek caught up with us.

"You'd better watch out. You have been left in the camp and will receive another "blow" [that is, another surprise-C.M.] at dinner. But you will immediately go to do a "special job." This will give you the chance to arrange something, but you have to keep your mouth shut. Understand?"

"No one, without doubt, had understood him; however, we all answered in unison: Yes, certainly!"

"We waited in line for another fifteen minutes, until Gerlach came up. This one inspected us very carefully, nodded his head and addressed himself to us as obscurely as Wacek: 'In a few minutes you will be attending to a confidential assignment. If any of you utter even one word of what you see,' - at this point Gerlach made a very expressive movement with his hand around the neck - 'Kaputt!... only a little pile of ashes at the crematorium! You will receive more food than you need ... Understand?'

"We continued not to understand. Only one thing seemed clear: the assignment given us could cost our lives. This was understood by everyone. However, the promise that we would receive additional food kept reassuring us. That was important.

"After some minutes we crossed, in double file, the door to main Block 11. In the courtyard there were Deputy Camp Commander Fritzsich; SS-Obersturmführer Mayer; Camp Rapportführer; SS-Hauptscharführer Palitzsch; the Lagerarzt, SS-Obersturmführer Entress [12]; SS-Oberscharführer Clair; SS-Unterscharführer Stark; the Kriminalassistent of the local political section, Woznica; and our two Blockführer Gerlach and Edelhardt.

"Wacek gave the prescribed order: 'Off with your hats!' and reported to Mayer: 'Twenty prisoners assembled for work detail!' He exchanged some words with the Rapportführer, and then said something to Wacek. The Stubenälteste yelled: 'Tes, sir,' and turned to address us: 'Each of you will receive a gas mask. Make sure to wear it properly and don't make it necessary for others to be called to pull you out. Understand?' - 'Yes, sir.'

"Near the wall there was a large crate with gas masks. These were distributed very quickly. After three minutes, we were ready with gas masks on. The SS-Oberscharführer Clair again made sure that everyone was wearing his gas mask properly.

"Everything took place so quickly that we didn't even have time to think. We only kept looking at each other, dumbfounded, totally ignorant of what was happening. Our men in uniform were also wearing gas masks. Wacek and Bunkerkapo Pennewitz were running very nervously back and forth several times to the Block, where they were talking with Palitzsch, who kept shaking his head irritably; the two would come back running and in this way they kept going back and forth.

"Finally, all of the SS drew their pistols out. The barrel of an automatic pistol glinted in Palitzsch's hands. 'They

want to shoot us,' was our first thought.

"We felt a knot in the throat, and our eyelids began burning. The air inside the gas mask began getting heavy, allowing you to breath only with much effort. Instinctively we all pushed toward each other. One began taking the mask off. For this, he is pistol whipped and falls on the ground. Time moves terribly slowly.

"They are not shooting us! Not yet ... maybe they won't shoot us at all? This thought reassures me; I look around. The SS are still holding their pistols ready to shoot, but they are not shooting. Palitzsch gives a hand sign to Wacek. Let's go! Let's do it!' The Stubenälteste comes up to us on the run.

"Have no fear, follow me!' He is going toward the Block. I find myself almost at the very rear of our group. The barrel of a 'firing instrument' belonging to the man behind me touches my back. I quickly step forward and walk just behind Wacek. He goes down to the stairs. For one moment we stop ... everyone ... Bunker! But the SS don't allow us time to think. At the rear of the group someone is already down on the ground. 'Hurry! Hurry!'

"Wacek stays in front of the door to the Bunker. He has an ax in his right hand: he grabs it with his left hand and with his right pulls a key from his pocket. He seems to be having difficulty finding the keyhole, because he is taking so long. From the rear of the group Palitzsch yells: 'Faster!' Finally he does it. The key is inserted.

"Wacek grabs the door handle. Instinctively I hold my breath. I wet my lips, which in the meantime have become totally dry. What will happen now? Wacek goes back. He again moves the ax to his right hand. What does all this mean? What is the purpose of the ax here? Why is he fearful? For the second time he grabs the door handle now with his left hand.

"He brings his right hand up while he is holding the ax as if he is about to give a stunning blow. I am cold and suddenly I am overtaken by fear. But this fear is something different than the one before. Now it's not fear for myself, no, now it is an uncontrollable fear of being in front of the door. My heart beats faster and faster, under the elastic band of the gas mask I feel each heart beat distinctly. Wacek pushes on the door handle, goes back a couple of feet and forcefully opens the door. The door is open and this very moment I feel my hair standing straight up. About three feet away from me there are men on top of each other, I don't know how, in a terrible state, with eyes sticking out of their sockets, scratched, stained with blood, motionless... Those leaning toward the door, bent in a singularly stiff manner, fall toward us and pile up very heavily, their faces on the cement floor, right in front of our feet. Bodies ... bodies that stand up, completely stiff. They fill the entire hallway of the Bunker. They are stacked in such a manner that they cannot fall. For a moment I don't feel well. But Wacek's voice brings me back. 'Done!' he yells through the gas mask to Palitzsch, and lets the ax fall on the floor. Very well! Let's take them out!'"

"Now I can think clearly once more, and understand everything. The bodies are wearing Red Army uniforms. Must be that load of prisoners that had been spoken about yesterday at work. They have all been pushed inside the Bunker and gassed. It is because of this that we have had to use gas masks. The mystery is now clear! Wacek grabs the first body under his arms and passes it to us.

"So! This is it!,' it dawns on me now, 'Our work is then the removal of those who have been gassed from the Bunker.'

"Fall in line!,' yells Wacek again, 'Form a chain!' The 'chain' was normally a method by which one could quickly pass bricks being unloaded from a freight car from person to person. But while I had loaded bricks, it had never dawned on me that I could load bodies in the same fashion.

"We worked until late night. After emptying the Bunker, we were ordered to completely undress the bodies and place their clothing in designated piles. The next day the clothing ended up stored in the clothing storeroom and there the quantity of clothing increased significantly. We counted 1,473 Russian uniforms and more than 190 camp uniforms. These had belonged to the patients of the Camp Hospital that had been selected by Dr. Entress as being 'unable to work' and on that 'occasion' were gassed together with the Russian prisoners ...

"After completing the Work,' the twenty of us were brought a huge cauldron containing 50 liters of soup, and at the same time each of us received half a loaf of bread. The cauldron was returned to the Block almost full. "At Auschwitz this was the first time that gas was used to liquidate prisoners." [13]

D. THE WITNESS WOJCIECH BARCZ

The testimony that follows was given by Wojciech Barcz, internee at Auschwitz from June 16, 1940 (I.D. number 754), during a West German radio transmission on Auschwitz presumably broadcast during 1963:

"The first gassing took place during the fall of 1941, a few months after hostilities [began] against the Soviet Union.

One day we hospital attendants from the infirmary received orders to transport the very sick to the cells of the Bunker of Block 11. They were locked up in these cells. Around 10 p.m. we heard a large group being pushed by the SS toward the Bunker. We heard yelling in Russian, orders from the SS, and heavy blows.

Three days later, we hospital attendants received, in the middle of the night, the order to go to Block 11. There, we evacuated the bodies from the cells of the Bunker. Thus, we were able to see that, in these cells a large number of Russian war prisoners, along with the very sick whom we had transported, had been simply gassed. The spectacle offered to us when we opened the doors of the cells was similar to that experienced when one opens an overstuffed suitcase. The bodies fell all over us. I estimate that in a small cell there were at least 60 bodies, so crowded that, even though dead, they couldn't fall and kept standing up. One could see that they had tried to reach the exhaust vent, through which, after all, the toxic gas had been poured. One could see all the signs of a horrendous agony.

We hospital attendants had to place the bodies on trucks, by which they were removed outside the camp, and then buried. Those of us involved in this work were absolutely convinced that we would be massacred right next to the ditches or would be killed later as witnesses to the secret, as was normally the case at Auschwitz. Instead, nothing happened. Later on I learned that among the SS there were continuous surprises and incongruities." [14]

E. THE REPORT OF THE POLISH INVESTIGATION COMMISSION

In a publication issued in 1946, the Central Commission for investigation of German Crimes in Poland presented the following account of the first gassing:

"All of these methods used in killing were not enough to absorb all superfluous prisoners, and, above all, they could not resolve the problem of freeing themselves of hundreds of thousands of Jews. This method was tried out in the summer of 1941 in the coal- cellars of Block XI on about 250 patients from the hospital blocks and about 600 prisoners of war. After the victims had been put there, the windows of the cellars were covered with earth, and afterwards an SS man in a gas-mask poured the contents of a can of cyclon on the floor and locked the door. Next afternoon Palitzsch, wearing a gas-mask, opened the door and found that some of the prisoners were still alive. More cyclon was accordingly poured out, and the doors locked again, to be reopened next evening, when all the prisoners were dead." [15]

* * *

We now proceed to the critical analysis of all the sources so far mentioned, examining all that they claim concerning the date, the place, the time required, the number of victims, the evacuation of the bodies, and the technical procedures followed during the first gassing.

II. Critical Analysis of the Sources

1. The date of the first gassing.

According to the *Kalendarium* of Auschwitz, the first gassing was carried out on September 3, 1941. This date is not only unsupported by a single document, it is categorically contradictory to all the available sources - which are additionally in total contradiction to each other - and in particular to the testimony of Rudolf Höß, considered fundamental by the Auschwitz Museum and by the entire Exterminationist historiography.

An annotation of July 2, 1942 traces back the first gassing as having occurred in June 1941:

"The first (pierwsze) utilization of gas chambers took place in June 1941 (w VI. 1941 r.). A transport of 1,700 'incurably sick' was formed and sent (ostensibly) to the sanatorium of Dresda, but in reality to a building transformed into a gas chamber (do budyrdcu przebudowanego na komore gazowa)." [16]

Witness Michal Kula declared that the first gassing took place on August 15. [17] According to an article in the *Polish Fortnightly Review*, it took place during the night of September 5th to 6th"; according to witness Vacek, "beginning of September" (*Anfang September*); and witness Rozanski testifies that it was "on a day in September (*an einem Septembertage*)." The historian Filip Friedman inclines to September 15: "The first victims were gassed on September 15, 1941 in Block II [sic], in a

former munition store building. A number of Russian prisoners, 600 to 700, and several hundred Polish prisoners were used for this first experiment." [18]

According to the annotation of October 24, 1941, the first gassing occurred "on the beginning of October" (*w poszatkach pazdziernika*).

The Polish Investigation Commission generically suggests the summer, while the witness Barcz inclines toward autumn (*im Herbst*) 1941.

Lastly, the testimony of Rudolf Höß implies that the first gassing did not take place before the end of November of 1941. In effect, but the end of November," when the conference was held in Eichmann's office in Berlin, he had not yet been successful in finding "suitable gas." Only after this conference did the Lagerführer Fritzsich, on his own initiative, carry out the first gassing. It wasn't until Eichmann's later visit to Auschwitz that Höß reported to him on the experiment, and the two decided to use the Zyklon B for the projected mass slaughter.

Therefore, the date of the first gassing is absolutely indeterminate and fluctuates over a span of six months between July and December of 1941.

2. The Location of the Gassing

The *Kalendarium* entry for July 1942 declares that the first gassing occurred "in a building (*do budynku*) transformed (*przebudowanego*) into a gas chamber," therefore not in the basement of Block 11, which had not undergone any architectural modification (this is the significance of the verb "*przebudowywad*") into a gas chamber, and which, besides, according to the Auschwitz Museum, was used as such one single time. [19]

The article in the Polish Fortnightly Review mentions the "underground shelter" of Auschwitz, while the Polish Investigation Commission speaks of the "coal cellars" of Block 11.

The witnesses Rozanski and Barcz both locate the first gassing in the Bunker of Block 11, but for the one, the victims were gassed in the corridors, for the other, in the cells. Therefore, the sources examined are in reciprocal contradiction concerning the location of the first gassing; moreover, those sources which agree on the basement of Block 11, are also in reciprocal contradiction as to exactly which part of it.

3. The Duration of the Gassing

Rudolf Höß declared that, on the occasion of the first gassing accomplished by his deputy Fritzsich, the Zyklon B Provoked the immediate death" (*den sofortigen Tod*) of the victims. [20]

The article in the *Polish Fortnightly Review* reports instead that "all the prisoners died during the night. All night the rest of the camp was kept awake by the moans and screams originating from the shelter."

Finally, the Polish Investigation Commission asserts that "next afternoon" some prisoners were still alive, "therefore further cyclon was poured out and the doors again tightly closed, to be reopened the next evening, when all the prisoners were dead."

Therefore, all the victims died immediately, or during the night, or two days later.

4. The Victims of the Gassing

The *Kalendarium* entry of October 24, 1941 asserts that the victims of the first gassing were "850 Russian officers and non-commissioned officers". Rudolf Höß, too, mentions exclusively Russian prisoners of war, stating that Fritzsich "had the cells located in the cellar [of Block 11] filled with Russians." The article in the *Polish Fortnightly Review* speaks of 700 Russian prisoners of war and 300 Poles.

Some sources agree about the fact that the victims were a mixture of Russian prisoners of war and sick inmates, but are in reciprocal contradiction as to their numbers and totals which are: for witness Vacek, approximately 500 Russian prisoners of war and 196 sick inmates, totaling 696 victims; for witness Rozanski, 1,473 Russian prisoners of war and 190 sick inmates, totaling 1,663 victims; for the Polish Investigation Commission, 600 Russian prisoners of war and 250 sick inmates, totaling 850 victims.

Finally, the *Kalendarium* entry for July 2, 1942 maintains that the victims were drawn exclusively from sick inmates, and precisely "1,700 'incurably sick.'"

Therefore, the sources examined are in contradiction as to the total numbers of victims (from 696 to 1,700) and regarding their categories (only Russian prisoners of war, only sick inmates, Russian prisoners of war and sick inmates together).

5. The Selection of the Sick Inmates for Gassing

The sources which include the sick inmates among the victims are in contradiction also as to the SS doctor who ordered their selection from the hospital blocks for gassing. This doctor is Doctor Schwela, according to Danuta Czech; Doctor Jungen, according to witness Vacek; and Doctor Entress, according to witness Rozanski.

6. The Evacuation of the Gassed Cadavers

A. THE PERFORMERS OF THE EVACUATION

Witness Vacek swears to have carried out the removal of the gassed cadavers "together with 30 male hospital attendants" (*mit 30 Krankenpflegern*); witness Rozanski declares instead to have evacuated the cadavers with a group of "20 people" (*zwanzig Mann*) of the penal company.

B. THE BEGINNING OF THE REMOVAL

The removal of the cadavers of the gassed started "the next day" according to the article in the *Polish Fortnightly Review*; "the next night" (*nächste Nacht*) according to witness Vacek; "on the morning of the third day" (*am Morgen des dritten Tages*), which is at most two days after the gassing, according to witness Rozanski; and finally "three days later ... in the middle of the night" (*drei Tage später ...mitten in der Nacht*) from witness Barcz.

C. THE DURATION OF THE REMOVAL

Removing the cadavers of the gassed took "all day" according to the *Polish Fortnightly Review* article; "Three nights" (*drei Nächte lang*) according to witness Vacek, and "until late in the night" (*bis spät in der Nacht*) according to witness Rozanski.

D. THE FATE OF THE CADAVERS AFTER REMOVAL

While witness Vacek declared that the cadavers of the gassed were brought "to the crematory" (*ins Krematorium*) to be burned, witness Barcz asserts that they were brought "out of the camp" (*aus dem Lager*), where they were buried" (*vergraben*).

In conclusion, the examined sources are in reciprocal contradiction as to the numbers and the category of the performers of the corpse removal (20 persons, 30 persons; hospital attendants, inmates of punishment company); as to the start of the removal (the day after, two days after, three days after the gassing); as to the duration of the removal (an entire day, three nights); as to the fate of the cadavers (burned in the crematory, buried outside the camp). Even more serious, these sources are based essentially on the eyewitness testimonies of three former inmates who pretend to describe the same incident, in which each claims to have participated personally!

7. THE GASSING PROCEDURE

There exist neither eye-witness testimony nor documents on the actual gassing process. The description furnished by the Polish Investigation Commission is therefore false, for this reason alone. The Commission's description is also contradicted on a point by witness Barcz, who affirms that the Zyklon B was thrown into the cells of the Bunker, not from the door, but from the small windows. Finally, the description is technically absurd.

In this context, we limit ourselves to pointing out that the survival of some victims after a whole day of gassing, as asserted by the Polish Commission, is an impossibility. In fact, a concentration of 0.3 mg of cyanide to a liter of air - which is 0.3 grams per cubic meter - is fatal in a few minutes for a human being. [21] Regarding this concentration, the lethal dose would be 8 mg, according to Haber's formula. [22] This means that for a hypothetical gassing of 60 people - the number indicated by Wojciech Barcz - in one of the cells of the Bunker of Block 11 of Auschwitz, considering that the volume of air actually available was approximately 11 cubic meters, a little more than three grams of cyanide would have been sufficient to kill all the victims in a few minutes. In several minutes the heat from the bodies of the victims themselves would have enabled the liquid cyanide found in Zyklon B to vaporize to a gaseous state.

It is clear, however, that during a hypothetical experimental gassing, necessarily performed in an awkward manner, it would have been practically impossible to administer such a meager dosage of hydrocyanic acid. It is also clear that a larger amount, which would have been easier to handle, would have had lethal results even sooner.

The gas concentration normally used for disinfecting a room is 10 grams per cubic meter. This is the only actual benchmark available to the hypothetical perpetrators of the gassing. [23] It turns out that this concentration, corresponding to a total dosage of about 110 grams in a cell of the Bunker, would mean virtually instant death for a human being.

Therefore, the Polish Investigation Commission report is technically absurd. This is also admitted by the Auschwitz Museum itself, which maintains that victims' deaths occurred only 15 to 20 minutes after the emission of the Zyklon B in the gas chambers - underground, like the cells of the Bunker - of the crematoriums II and III of Birkenau. [24]

In summation, the story of the first gassing is neither supported by documents nor by direct testimony; the sources are indirect, contradictory and absurd. The only eyewitness testimonies available refer exclusively to the evacuation of the corpses, and are in contradiction as well.

In conclusion, the story of the first gassing at Auschwitz is historically groundless. This is further corroborated by the sworn testimony of a primary eyewitness, of importance both because of the position he held at Auschwitz in the second half of 1941, and because of the authority he currently possesses as director of the Auschwitz Museum: Kazimierz Smolen.

Smolen was deported to Auschwitz on July 6, 1940 (*am 6 Juli 1940*) and in July 1941 was employed as "recorder" (*Schreiber*) at the "Political Section" (*Politische Abteilung*) which is near the Gestapo office of the camp. In this position he was one of the better informed prisoners as to what was happening at Auschwitz. This is what he affirmed in sworn testimony which he gave in Cracow on 15 December 1947, regarding the fate of the Russian prisoners of war:

"At the beginning of October 1941 (*anfangs Oktober 1941*) the first (*die ersten*) transports of Russians arrived at Auschwitz. Because I was already at that time employed at the Political Section as a recorder, I had to handle, together with my companions, the admission of the new arrivals. In the course of a week there arrived 10,000 Russian prisoners of war from 'Stalag' VIII/B/Lamsdorf, and a number which I don't remember anymore from another 'Stalag', Neuhammer near Quais.

The prisoners of war arrived in camp in terrible physical condition, were half dead with hunger, full of lice, and had to undress naked outside of the camp. Although it was already very cold, the prisoners had to take a cold

disinfecting bath and were then conducted into the camp wet and naked. In the camp of Auschwitz there were 9 Blocks separated from the rest of the camp by an electrified fence and at the entrance door was posted the sign 'Labor Camp for Prisoners of War'. The camp for Russian prisoners of war consisted of the following Blocks: Block 1, Block 2, Block 3, Block 12, Block 13, Block 14, Block 22, Block 23, Block 24. The Blocks 3,23,24 had the first floor. These were designated 3a, 23.

SS-Oberscharführer Hans Stark directed the admission of prisoners of war, and I, as a recorder of prisoners, participated in that task with several inmates."

After having minutely described the procedures of incorporation, Smolet continues:

"The admission of the 10,000 prisoners of war went on for about three weeks. In the meanwhile, about 1,500 had died, and we forwarded their green cards to Berlin together with their identification badges.

In November 1941 (im November 1941) a special committee of the Gestapo came. They were from the main office of the State Police of Kattowitz and were led by Doctor Mildner. This committee was composed of the chief of the main office of the State Police, Doctor Mildner, and of three men of the Secret Services who knew Russian perfectly. The directorate of the camps assigned several inmates to interpret for the three men from the Secret Service. Another inmate and I were assigned to the Gestapo special committee by the Political Section. Consequently I had the opportunity to observe all the activity of the Special Committee."

So far Smolen.

The Gestapo special committee was in charge of interrogating, one by one, all the Russian prisoners of war and of classifying them into three groups:

1. "politically intolerable," a group including the subdivision "fanatical Communist";
2. "politically not suspicious";
3. "fit for reconstruction" (*Wiederaufbau*).

1. Smolen goes on:

"300 prisoners of war were selected as particularly important commissars and political functionaries and received the notation "fanatical communist." These prisoners were taken immediately to the interrogation room of Block 24a, which had been converted to a Bunker. In the Bunker they were received by Oberscharführer Stark, who removed their old prisoners numbers, substituting new numbers for the old ones. These new numbers ranged from "Aul" to "Au300." The prisoners with "Au" numbers got their numbers tattooed on the left side of the chest and were kept completely isolated from the other prisoners of the Russian camp.

The activity of the special committee finished after one month (nach einem Monat), and as far as I remember, the distribution of the prisoners among the above-mentioned groups was the following:

- Group Au300 prisoners
- Category A700 prisoners
- Category B8,000 prisoners
- Category C30 prisoners

By virtue of my activity at the Political Section, I know that the 300 prisoners labeled "Au" were executed (exekutiert wurden) in quite small groups (in kleineren Gruppen). The conditions of the Russian camp were so bad that on the average 250 prisoners died each day. About 8,000 had perished or had been executed (exekutiert) up to February 1942. The rest, 1,500 prisoners of war, were transferred to the camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau. Thus, an external camp rose at the camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau; this external camp was enlarged by small transports which, however, altogether did not add up to more than 2,000 prisoners. In the middle of 1942, all of the Russian prisoners of war, except 150, had died or had been executed."

At the end of his sworn statement, Kazimierz Smolet summarizes the crimes perpetrated by the Nazis in Auschwitz against the Russian prisoners of war:

"Recapitulating, I declare: the conditions of life in the camp were, for the Russian prisoners of war at Auschwitz, substantially worse than the conditions in the concentration camps. The Russian prisoners of war received less and worse food, above all less bread, and they could neither write nor use the room with wash boards [sic]. It is

therefore understandable that in less than two months the camp was deserted. In addition to this, there is the fact that often selections were carried out in which those unable to work were executed in groups of hundreds. Both the inmates classified as "Au" and the others who were to be put to death were either killed with a shot in the neck, or gassed (vergast) in Block 11 (im Block 11)." [25]

This is the only allusion by Kazimierz Smolet to the gassing in Block 11, which allusion, among other things extremely vague and laconic, clearly betrays its character: rumor reported by the witness only because of an obligation to report the latest gossip. In fact, two points in Smolen's testimony demonstrate incontestably the historical groundlessness of the report of the first gassing set forth by Danuta Czech in the *Kalendarium* of Auschwitz.

First of all, if the gassing in question had really happened, Kazimierz Smolen could not have been in the dark about it, because of the duty in the political section of Auschwitz with which he had been charged at the time, and in particular owing to his assignment to the special committee presided over by Mildner. Smolen, on the contrary, could have talked about it with a wealth of details, in view of the fact that he devoted a whole page of his sworn statement to such an irrelevant subject as the formalities of matriculation of Russian prisoners of war.

This witness's ignorance appears even more incredible considering that, according to the Polish examining magistrate Jan Sehn, the first gassing was performed only in accord with the decisions of the special committee:

"In November 1941, a special committee composed of three Gestapo officers arrived at Oswiecim [Auschwitz] from Kattowitz. This committee interrogated the prisoners and divided them into four groups in compliance with an order from the chief of the RSHA (Central Security Office of the Reich) dated July 17, 1941. They were classified according to the secret files containing information about Soviet militants in administration and the [Communist] party. This committee itself decided as to the classification. We add that the fact of being recorded in the first two groups meant a death sentence. The first group - about 300 prisoners - were all shot either in the gravel pits or in the courtyard of Block 11. The order of execution was given by the second Lagerführer at the time, SS-Obersturmführer Seidler.

On the initiative of the first Lagerführer, SS- Hauptsturmführer Karl Fritzsch, the prisoners assigned to the second group (about 900) and those who were chosen from the subsequent convoys were killed with the gas Zyklon B. Fritzsch filled the underground of Block 11 with prisoners, and then, after having put on a gas mask, threw the poison inside. The Block then had to be aired for two days." [26]

The fact that Kazimierz Smolen, even at the end of 1947 knew nothing about the gassing in the Bunker of Block 11 demonstrates, therefore, that this gassing never happened.

Questioned by this writer about this point, Kazimierz Smolen, through a spokesman, declared:

"As regards the testimony given by the former inmate of the KL Auschwitz Kazimierz Smolen at the Nuremberg trial, as you certainly know, he answered the concrete questions asked by the Tribunal (odpowiadal On na konkretne, przez Sad postawione pytania), so he could not report in detail and exhaustively all the events that he had observed." [27]

This justification is definitely unsustainable. In fact, in the above-mentioned sworn statement, Smolen did not answer "concrete questions," as is usual during an interrogation, but freely expatiated on the theme of the fate of the Russian prisoners of war in Auschwitz in the years 1941-1942, dwelling, in particular, upon the crimes committed against them. His claim not to have described the first gassing because he had not been asked that specific question is, therefore, clearly captious, as confirmed by his fleeting mention of the prisoners "gassed in Block 11." With regard to this, either he did answer a concrete question, and thus did not know anything about the first gassing, or he did not answer a concrete question, and thus his answer is false.

In the second place, because the "first transports of Russians" arrived at Auschwitz *at the beginning of October 1941* [emphasis added], it is false that 600 Russian prisoners of war could have been gassed there on September 3.

Moreover, the first gassing was an execution of men condemned to death selected by the committee presided by Mildner, which arrived at Auschwitz "in November 1941" and concluded its work "after one month." Consequently, the first gassing could in no way have occurred before December.

Furthermore, since the number of prisoners of war selected by this committee and, until December 1941, assigned to the "Au" group of the condemned was 300, it is therefore *a fortiori* false that 600 were gassed on September 3.

Finally, the historical absurdity of the first gassing in Block 11 is indirectly confirmed by three researchers of the Auschwitz Museum, in their long study devoted to the register of the Bunker of Block 11, which appeared in Number one of the *Hefte von Auschwitz* (1959). This register, the *Bunkerbuch*, contains the names of all of the inmates imprisoned in the Bunker between January 9, 1941 and February 1, 1944. It is clear that if the first gassing had actually happened, the register should have preserved some trace of it. Now, these three scholars limit themselves to a fleeting two-line allusion to the alleged gassing (p.10), and, while publishing fifty-one pages from the *Bunkerbuch*, on pages 46-68, they in fact refrain from reproducing the page regarding the records of the beginning of September. This fact demonstrates that that page - requested in vain from the Auschwitz Museum by this writer - either contains no trace of the first gassing, or even contains elements that contradict it, such as, for instance, records of admissions of inmates to the Bunker between September 3 and September 7, that is, between the beginning of the gassing and the end of the ventilation of the Bunker.

The historical absurdity of the first gassing has been - established; the various versions of that gassing have been shown to be not merely groundless, but mutually contradictory. The way remains to be examined, in which Danuta Czech elaborated those versions in her own version, which is supposedly definitive. In other words, it is the historiographic methodology of the compiler of the *Kalendarium* that remains to be examined in order to show, among other things, what methodological criteria have been employed for the compiling, and what scientific value is to be ascribed to this essential source of the Exterminationist historiography.

The account of the first gassing presented by Danuta Czech in the *Kalendarium* of Auschwitz is the result of the extrapolation and of the indiscriminate fusion of sources which are all in total reciprocal contradiction.

Danuta Czech derived the number and category of the victims, as well as the description of the gassing, from the report of the Polish Investigation Commission; on the other hand, she deduced the account of the evacuation of the bodies from the testimony of Zenon Rozanski, adding elements derived from other sources.

Besides, in the description of the gassing, she arbitrarily modified the text of the Polish report, changing the "coal cellars" to "underground cells" (*Kellerzellen*) and "an SS-man" into "SS-men" (*SS-Männer*).

In the description of the evacuation of the gassed corpses, Danuta Czech substituted "the evening" (*am Abend*) for "the morning" (*am Morgen*) of Rozanski's version, extrapolating that information from the report of the Polish Investigation Commission which says "next evening." The evacuators of the corpses, who according to Rozanski were only 20 inmates of the punishment company, became, in the report of Danuta Czech, 20 inmates of the punishment company "and hospital attendants" (*Pfleger*). This information was derived from the testimony of Josef Vacek, who however declared that the 30 evacuators were all hospital attendants.

Finally, Danuta Czech derived the presence of Doctor Entress at the evacuation of the bodies from the testimony of Zenon Rozanski, while in fact this officer was not yet in Auschwitz at the beginning of September. [28]

From the "Annotations" of Rudolf Höß Danuta Czech derived only the duration of the airing of the Bunker: two days. As a matter of fact, the *Kalendarium* reports that the punishment company returned to Block 11 on September the 8th after it had been cleaned and aired. In other words, the punishment company returned just after two days of airing, September 6 and 7. Thus, considering that Danuta Czech said that the gassing ended on September 5, the victims' agony consequently lasted two days, while according to Rudolf Höß they died immediately.

It is not possible to specify the sources of the report of the Polish Investigation Committee upon which is founded the description of the gassing presented by Danuta Czech. The only certain thing is that the number of the victims - 850 people, of whom 600 were Russian prisoners of war and 250 sick inmates - originated from the note dated October 24, 1941, in which they are, however, only "Russian commissioned and non-commissioned officers," without sick inmates.

The Polish Investigation Committee did not know the "Annotations" of Rudolf Höß, dated November 1946. This fact is understandable because that committee made the inquiry in 1945 and published the results the following year, presumably before Höß was extradited to Poland on May 25, 1946.

Indeed, Danuta Czech, who conducted her researches in the late fifties, did not mention the "Autobiographical Notes." This also is comprehensible, because the testimony of Höß about the first gassing strikingly contradicts the report of the Polish Investigation Committee.

The source for the date of the gassing proposed by Danuta Czech - September 3, 1941 - does not appear in any of the documents examined. The closest date is that in the article of the *Polish Fortnightly Review*: the night of 5-6 September.

Besides being arbitrary, the date proposed by Danuta Czech is also contradictory. The following record appears in the *Kalendarium* of Auschwitz a few pages after the account of the gassing; the month is November and there is no indication of the day:

"A special committee of the Gestapo of Kattowitz arrived at Auschwitz. It was composed of three persons and presided by the chief of the Gestapo of Kattowitz, Doctor Rudolf Mildner. This committee, which was operating in compliance with Einsatzbefehl no.8 of 17 July 1941, carried out a selection of the Russian prisoners of war according to the following groups:

1. Fanatic Communist about 300
2. Group A: Politically intolerable 700
3. Group B: Politically not suspicious about 8,000
4. Group C: Fit for reconstruction about 30

The inmates belonging to the groups "Fanatic Communist" or "A" were doomed to extermination. The activity of this committee went on for at least one month." [29]

The registration just mentioned is entirely derived from the sworn statement of Kazimierz Smolen previously cited. It will be remembered that in that statement Smolen maintained that "the first transports" of Russian prisoners of war arrived at Auschwitz "at the beginning of October," and that Mildner's committee arrived "in November" 1941 and concluded its work "after one month," thus in December. The victims of the first gassing can therefore be no one other than the Russian prisoners of war condemned to death by the above-mentioned committee - to be exact, according to Jan Sehn, those assigned to Group "B." Consequently, that gassing could not be happening on September 3.

Here is one more example, therefore, of indiscriminate fusion of contradictory sources and previous elimination of the contradictions in order to create among such sources an agreement completely fictitious.

One last observation. In order to be able to affirm that the first gassing took place on September 3,

Danuta Czech arbitrarily anticipated the arrival at Auschwitz of the first Russian prisoners of war. In fact, the first registration of the *Kalendarium* that concerns them dates back to July and mentions the arrival of "a few hundred Soviet prisoners," who subsequently were all murdered with small-caliber guns, with shovels, and with picks. [30] Danuta Czech did not indicate either the day of arrival, or the source of the information.

The second registration is dated September 3, and is relative to the 600 Russian prisoners gassed. Danuta Czech did not indicate the source of the information in this case either. Seven registrations follow between October 7 and November 15. [31] The one of November 15 is the last transport in 1941. The total of the Russian prisoners of war transferred to Auschwitz in that period is 9,983 people. This figure is practically identical to that indicated by Kazimierz Smole[^]. Also the date of the first transport coincides with that indicated by this witness, i.e. the beginning of October. Therefore, Russian prisoners of war did not arrive at Auschwitz before that date.

This is also confirmed by the fact that Danuta Czech reported the source regarding the transports made since October 7. That source is the file (*Kartochek*) of the Russian prisoners of war which, as a matter of fact, was initiated on October 7. However, the compiler of the *Kalendarium* was not able to indicate any source for the two previous transports, and this fact is very meaningful. Besides, considering that the first page of the "book of deaths" (*Totenbuch*), that is the death register of the Russian prisoners of war, recorded the first deaths under the date October 7, it is necessary to conclude, until one has proof to the contrary, that the first two transports recorded by Danuta Czech before October 7 are invented.

This is a meaningful example of the historiographic methodology with which the *Kalendarium* of Auschwitz has been compiled.

By now, nothing remains but to draw the conclusions.

The story of the first gassing in the cells of the Bunker of Block 11 of Auschwitz is historically groundless. It is supported neither by documents nor by eyewitness testimonies. The few eyewitness testimonies available all refer exclusively to the evacuation of the corpses from the Bunker and are all in reciprocal contradiction concerning all the essential points.

The first gassing is therefore not history, but myth. This myth was shaped by the Polish war propaganda in October 1941.

The first version of the myth, which predominated until the middle of 1942, did not yet include the first gassing in the extermination process which would bring about the creation of the gas chambers of Birkenau. Instead, according to the first version, the first gassing is still a simple scientific experiment to verify the effectiveness of a gas for future wartime use.

The essential elements of this first version are contradictory.

The note of 24 October 1941 speaks of 850 Russian prisoners of war gassed in Auschwitz, without specifying where, "at the beginning of October." The article of the *Polish Fortnightly Review* corrected the number of the victims and the date of the execution: approximately 1,000 persons, among whom 700 Bolshevik prisoners of war and 300 Poles "gassed" the night of 5-6 September." The location is still unspecified: the "underground shelter" of Auschwitz. The note of 2 July 1942 situated the history of the first gassing within a general extermination process by means of gas chambers, which involved the Jews deported to the camp. The first gassing was presented as a starting point of this process, but was described in an even more contradictory fashion: the date was moved back to June, the number of the victims was increased to 1,700; all sick inmates; without Russian prisoners of war; and finally the place of the execution became, anachronistically, an actual gas chamber. In this way, after having given life to the legend of the gas chamber, the myth disappeared.

The anonymous "Polish Major" is the author of one of the reports on Auschwitz published in November 1944 by the War Refugee Board. In his detailed report about the facts of 1941, while devoting a special paragraph to the Bunker of Block 11, he completely ignored the matter of the first gassing. [32] It was moreover ignored both by the witness Stanislaw Jankowski in his deposition of 13 April 1945 [33] and by the Soviet Commission of Investigation in its report of May 7. [34] As late as the end of 1947, one of the more informed witnesses, Kazimierz Smolen, did not say anything about it.

The myth reappeared suddenly on the 8th of May in the testimony of Josef Vacek. The myth was still in full literary evolution, but finally acquired a conclusive element: the location of the execution, which became Block 11. Now nothing remained but to determine the other elements, starting with the location of the gassing. At first the version prevailed that the gassing was performed in a single room which Josef Vacek anachronistically called the gas chamber of Block 11. Some months later, on July 13, Perry Broad introduced another definitive element: the cells of the Bunker. To be exact, he spoke of a single cell, in which forty Russians were gassed on an unspecified day; he did not even indicate the year. From his comment, it appears that he incontestably was talking about the first gassing: "it was the complete success of the first test for the most hateful crime planned by Hitler and his confidants, and partly carried out in a terrifying and irrevocable fashion. From that moment, the atrocious tragedy began, which victimized millions of human beings who until then had lived happily and innocently." [35] In 1959 Hans Stark, direct superior of Smolen in Auschwitz, inspired by that version, declared he had heard from the SS of Auschwitz that the first gassing of prisoners had been experimented with for the first time "in the fall of 1941 in a cell (*in einer Zelle*) of Block 11." [36].

The report of the Polish Investigation Commission which carried out its inquiry in 1945, is the first attempt at historiographical systematization of the myth, which was raised by that committee to the rank of historical antecedent and necessary presupposition of the extermination process by means of gas chambers. That Commission inserted two other definitive elements: the number of the victims - 850 - evidently inferred from the note of 24 October; and the description of the gassing, evidently invented because it is both technically absurd and not founded on any eyewitness testimony. The date instead remained still indeterminate: the summer of 1941.

In 1946, Rudolf Höß completely ignored the first gassing for as long as he was in the hands of the English. Only after his extradition to Poland did he speak about it, in the so-called "Annotations" of Cracow of November 1946 and February 1947. The version that appears in them is in total contradiction to the version proposed by the Polish Investigation Commission; however, the myth acquired one more of the missing elements: the cells of the Bunker.

In 1948, Zenon Rozanski furnished the final version of the myth with the description of the evacuation of the corpses, but this description is in total contradiction to the declaration of Vacek and Barcz.

In 1959, Jan Sehn, basing himself on the "Autobiographical Notes" of Rudolf Höß and on the sworn statement of Kazimierz Smolen, related the first gassing to the activity of the special commission presided over by Rudolf Mildner and, as a result, moved the first gassing to December 1941.

In the same year, the conclusive version of the myth appeared in the *Kalendarium* of Auschwitz; by cleverly manipulating the sources, Danuta Czech extrapolated from and indiscriminately blended testimonies in total reciprocal contradiction. Besides, Czech arbitrarily added the date September 3, careless of the contrary testimony of Kazimierz Smolet. which was otherwise utilized with abandon.

By then the myth had been concocted and was ready to be served to the Exterminationist historians, who are easily satisfied and favorably disposed to swallow, in an uncritical way, all that is offered them in the *Kalendarium* of Auschwitz, which is celebrated as the quintessence of factuality on that concentration camp!

Notes

1. According to another publication of the Auschwitz Museum, Hauptsturmführer Friedrich Karl Hermann Entress filled the position of camp physician (Lagerarzt) at Gross-Rosen from January 3 to December 10, 1941. On December 11 he was transferred to Auschwitz with the same office, which he held until October 20, 1943. Therefore, on September 5, 1941 he was not yet at Auschwitz. *Auschwitz vu par les SS*. Edition du Musee d'Etat a Oswiecim, 1974, p. 318.
 2. Hefte von Auschwitz. Wydawnictwo Panstwowego Muzeum w Oswiecimiu, 2, 1959, p. 109.
 3. *Zeszyty oswiecimskie*. Numer specjalny (1). Wydawnictwo Panstwowego Muzeum w Oswiecimiu, 1968, p.11.
 4. Foreign Office papers, FO 371/30837 5365, "Conditions in Czechoslovakia," pp. 157-158.
 5. *Polish Fortnightly Review*, London, n. 47, July 1, 1942, p. 2.
 6. According to Danuta Czech, the order to select the sick inmates was not given by Doctor Jungen, but by the SS-Hauptsturmführer Doctor Siegfried Schwela: "Schwela had probably been appointed Standortarzt after August 1941 because it is by exercising that office that I gave the orders on September 3, 1941, of selecting from the Blockhospitals n. 21 and 28 all the very sick inmates and of transferring them to the Bunkers of Block 11" (*Contribution a l'histoire du KL Auschwitz*, Edition du Musee d'Etat a Oswiecim, 1978, note 10, A- 9)
 7. The gas chamber of Block 11 never existed. The underground of this building was provided with 28 larger cells and 4 smaller ones, none of which has been declared by the Auschwitz Museum to be the gas chamber of the Block.
 8. *Der Mord an den Juden im Zweiten Weltkrieg. Entschlussbildung und Verwirklichung*. Edited by Eberhard Jfickel und Jürgen Rohwer. Stuttgart, 1985, p. 167.
 9. NA1210/D-749a, p. 2 of the English translation.
 10. *Comandante ad Auschwitz. Memoriale autobiografico di Rudolf Höß*. Einaudi, Torino, 1985, pp. 128-129.
 11. Idem, pp. 171-174. Regarding the testimony of Rudolf Höß, see: Robert Faurisson, "Comment les Britanniques ont obtenu les aveux de Rudolf Höß, commandant d'Auschwitz," in *Annales d'Histoire Revisionniste*, no. 1, Spring 1987, pp. 137-152; Carlo Mattogno, *Auschwitz: le "confessioni" di Höß*, Edizioni La Sfinge, Parma 1987.
 12. See note 1.
 13. Zenon Rozanski, *Mutzen ab ...Eine Reportage aus der Strafkompagnie des KZ. Auschwitz*. Verlag "Das andere Deutschland," Hannover 1948, pp. 40-44.
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