

he did not murder or beat anyone. Kleist, however, was well liked, and the more junior SS men, most of them Romanian *Volksdeutsche*, also behaved decently most of the time. The above-mentioned assistance with the Passover *seder* is one illustration of this.

Budzyń continued to function as a concentration camp and forced-labor camp until the spring of 1944. In March, the Germans (civilians and SS) began to send prisoners to other camps, and the camp was gradually liquidated during the following three months. The prisoners and staff were transferred to camps further west, such as the Heinkel factory in Mielec, the arms factories in Radom, and the camps at Wieliczka and Płaszów.⁹³

The above account of the last months of the Budzyń camp is based to a large degree on survivor testimonies. There are slight differences among these testimonies, such as the exact date of the transfer to the new camp (the night of February 6/7 or 7/8) and the exact number of people per barrack (108 or 109). However, these insignificant differences only highlight the reliability of the testimony. They also reiterate the importance of survivor testimonies in obtaining an accurate account of the events. In German documents the formal change of Budzyń to a concentration camp was on February 15, 1944, but the survivors relate that the preparations for this began two or three months earlier, and the actual change preceded the formal document by a week.⁹⁴

The Kraśnik Camps

The Kraśnik camp was in many ways perhaps the strangest of all the forced-labor camps in 1943–1944. It was a camp where life

93 Wladyslaw Friedhelm testimony, YVA, O.33/637; Freiberg, *Darkness Covered the Earth*, pp. 183–191; Laks, *I Was There*, pp. 232–233; Wyszogrod, *A Brush with Death*, pp. 173–175; Michalsen and Hantke indictment and verdict, YVA, TR.10/813, indictment, pp. 168–172, verdict, p. 42; Birmes and Gollak indictment, TR.10/815, p. 124; Mendel Korn testimony, O.3/2941; Yaakov ArieH Ender and Motl Brafman in *Sefer Kraśnik*, pp. 340, 361–362.

94 Friedhelm, *ibid.*; Freiberg, *ibid.*; *The Trial of Oswald Pohl*, Green Series, vol. IV (Washington: Government Press Office, 1948). Many of the documents cited in connection with WVHA can be found in the proceedings of this trial.

remained mostly peaceful and secure for the Jewish prisoners, who considered the commandant, *SS-Unterscharführer* Alois Gröger, a relatively decent fellow. There was a semblance of family life for some of the prisoners, and there were even a number of children. According to some accounts, the commandant's children and the Jewish children were actually permitted to play together. Yet Gröger periodically killed prisoners, and, in 1944, there was a series of escape attempts. For Globocnik and his men, the camp was a facade for a widespread Lublin SS conspiracy to reap personal profit from Jewish labor. As both Germans and Jews from the camp recall, the camp was “*Schwarz geführt*” (run “black”; i.e., as a black market), and its purpose was meant to be hidden from Himmler and the senior leaders of the SS. This unusual combination of factors kept the camp intact until the German withdrawal from the area in July 1944, and left the Jews there some room for maneuver in their struggle to survive. They had contacts with the outside, ate relatively well, were not physically debilitated, and prepared escape plans and false papers. In all but its longevity, the Kraśnik camp stood in sharp contrast to the Budzyń camp, even though both began with heavy SSPF influence.⁹⁵

During the liquidation of the Kraśnik community and several nearby communities in October 1942, *Kreishauptmann* Hans Lenk had set aside 300 Jews — craftsmen, skilled laborers, some Judenrat

95 The story and analysis of the Kraśnik and Wifo camps is based on: WAPL, SSPF 2; YVA, O.51/211; YVA, O.53/82; YVA, JM/3506; the following testimonies in YVA, TR.11/01113: Itzchak Rosenbusch, Cipora Berger, Isak Gerenreich, Chaskiel Brotman, Pinchas Stein, Chaja Rotenberg Goldbaum, Moshe Dorn, Abraham Waks, Chaim Sztejn bok, Anczel Szteinberg, Salman Lederfein, Jecheskiel Rajndel, Reuven Feferkuchen, Szmuel Brand, Nahum Rozenel, Jehoshua Kron, Asher Mandelblatt; Mischa Stahlhammer testimony, YVA, O.3/4312; Ber Twardagóra testimonies, YVA, M.49.E/1053 and 1195; Shlomo Waks testimony, YVA, M.1.E/768; Chil Hener testimony, YVA, TR.10/1291, vol. 23, pp. 4002–4007; YVA, TR.10/770; YVA, TR.10/868; Alois Gröger interrogations, YVA, TR.10/1291, vol. 47, pp. 8791–8838; Johann Offermann interrogations, *ibid.*, vol. 28, pp. 4820–4834, vol. 47, pp. 8839–8854, vol. 51, pp. 9798–9800, vol. 55, pp. 10679–10683; *Sefer Kraśnik*, testimonies of Shalom Garen, Shmuel Brand, and Yehiel Teper, pp. 317–331, 411–420, 428–430, the article by Tatiana Berenstein, pp. 293–316. Specific information and quotations will be cited from the relevant source.

members, Jewish policemen, and their families — to work for the civilian government. They were first kept in a school building, from which they could see the deportation of the other Jews. They were then transferred to the compound of the main synagogue, which had held refugee quarters and several workshops prior to the October deportation. Carpentry and upholstery workshops were quickly set up there. Pesach Kawa, the former head of the Jewish police in Kraśnik, became the *Lagerälteste* and head of the Jewish police in the camp. Initially the camp was guarded only by the Jewish police.

Approximately 200 of the Jews in the Kraśnik camp were put to work at various jobs for civilian officials, while the other 100 were sent to live and work at the Wifo camp some 2 km. down the road (see below), where they had worked prior to the October deportation. Globocnik took over the camp on November 23, and appointed Gröger commandant. Gröger's supervisor was *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Herbert Ulbrich, head of Globocnik's SSPF personnel department, who was succeeded, in September 1943, by *SS-Untersturmführer* Johann Offermann. The Kraśnik camp's official function was to make and repair school furniture for the German schools in the Lublin District, while the Wifo camp maintained a large gasoline depot and filling station for the Wehrmacht.

The Wifo camp — *Wirtschaftliche Forschungsgesellschaft* — had been operating since 1941, as *Benzinabfüllkommando* 974. The German firms Schmidt & Junk and Jucho had built a large gasoline depot and filling station there for the Wehrmacht. The initial laborers at Wifo included Jews from Kraśnik and some 300 Soviet POWs. The latter group all died within a few months. The gasoline was stored in two large tanks at a switchback on the road near the Kraśnik railroad station. When the Jews were brought here from the Kraśnik synagogue, they were moved to two barracks at the site. They worked in maintenance, construction, rail construction, and other jobs, and their food was sufficient for subsistence. A driver was sent weekly to Kraśnik with several inmates in order to buy bread. Not only were the quantities of food above starvation rations, but the Jews also maintained some contact with the outside world by means of these trips and were thus able to supplement their food supply. The Wehrmacht men at Wifo were mostly older, non-

combatant soldiers, who treated the Jews decently. However, some of the German civilians at the camp, the SS, and the Ukrainians were far less benevolent. In late summer 1943, as Budzyń received Jewish forced-laborers from other camps, Ulbrich ordered Gröger to take over responsibility for the Wifo camp as well.⁹⁶

On September 22, Offermann, Gröger and Ulbrich completed a report for Sporrenberg regarding the first period of the Kraśnik camp — “*Bericht über das Arbeitslager Krasnik*” — on the occasion of Offermann succeeding Ulbrich as the camp’s supervisor in Lublin. Globocnik had allocated 63,826 zlotys from confiscated Jewish money to set up the camp. The funds were deposited in a special account in Kraśnik in five unequal payments from December 1, 1942 to July 23, 1943. Of this, there were expenses of 24,398 zlotys by September 15, 1943, leaving a balance of 39,428 zlotys.⁹⁷ To maintain the camp and support the laborers, small workshops were set up on the side for county projects and to serve German SS and police for a fee. These workshops included tailor shops, shoemakers, watchmakers, gold-jewelers, dental technicians, furriers, metalworkers, saddlemakers, an automobile body shop, bookbinders, ropemakers, and tanners. The income from these jobs was meant to provision the camp and feed the workers. By September 15, 1943, the income reached 92,724.01 zlotys, and expenses were 83,608.02 zlotys, for a 9,116 zloty profit. There were 251 Jewish workers — 232 men and nineteen women.⁹⁸

On the surface this was a standard interim report, reflecting a small profit that could be deposited in SS coffers or used to continue to run the camp. Yet this insignificant camp, which was turning over only modest sums of money, was spared during the *Erntefest*. Unlike Budzyń, it did not even have the facade of an essential war-related

96 Trial of Mohwinkel, Gröger, Offermann, et al., YVA TR.10/770, pp. 115–123, TR.10/868, pp. 246–247, 257–263; testimonies of Isak Gerenreich, Chaskiel Brotman, Moshe Dorn, Salman Lederfein, YVA, TR.11/01113; Mischa Stahlhammer testimony, YVA, O.3/4312; Tatiana Bernstein and Yehiel Teper, in *Sefer Kraśnik*, pp. 308–313, 428–430.

97 Although the numbers itemized in the report do not add up exactly to these sums, the gap is only 2,000 zlotys and is not significant to this discussion.

98 “*Bericht über das Arbeitslager Krasnik*,” WAPL, SSPF 2 (copy in YVA, O.51/211).

labor camp. An examination of records from the camp during the second half of its existence, following this report, reveals the true nature of the camp and the reasons for its longevity.

On February 22, 1944, handwritten German records showed that the camp had 24,810 zlotys in cash and 407,199 zlotys in two bank accounts. On the same day Sporrenberg ordered an additional 90,000 zlotys of profits to be deposited into the Kraśnik account.⁹⁹ These 522,000 zlotys are a truer reflection of the Kraśnik operation than Offermann's carefully crafted report on school furniture.

During the Christmas shopping period in 1943, the Kraśnik camp turned a huge profit for the SSPF conspirators. Between October 18 and December 24, 1943, Offermann forwarded 692 personal gift orders from SS personnel in and outside the Lublin District. The orders were all considered urgent, to be completed before Christmas, and, in many cases, before the particular SS client departed home for his Christmas furlough. Sporrenberg himself placed several orders during this period; he received the items gratis.¹⁰⁰ The German desire to keep this business going is what spared the Jews of Kraśnik until the end.

The Christmas orders included articles for use by SS personnel and their families, as well as items to be taken to family back home. On October 18 and November 2, Kurt Classen ordered a lamp for a children's room, a clothes' closet for the SSPF, four sewing boxes, a child's bed, kitchen buffet, radio table, and wardrobe, all for personal use. Gustav Hanelt ordered a child's bed and stuffing for a mattress (October 20). Richard Thomalla ordered a couch, a round table, and four stools (November 2). On November 22 and December 8, Sporrenberg ordered toys, two pairs of women's boots, and two pairs of children's shoes, all of which Offermann passed on as urgent and gratis. Sporrenberg also ordered twenty-two special SS rings (November 22), apparently as gifts to be given out at the SSPF Christmas party. On December 8, Offermann ordered 225 saucers for whiskey glasses and 225 plates for beer glasses for the SSPF Christmas party, along with

99 See handwritten ledgers for February 1944, and Offermann's memo to Kramme, February 28, 1944, WAPL, SSPF 2.

100 See the Christmas orders in WAPL, SSPF 2.

twelve dollhouses, twenty toy ships, fifteen toy automobiles, and many similar children's gifts to be ready by December 15. The party was scheduled for December 17, but many would be leaving on furlough before that date. Since Hermann Höfle would be leaving Lublin by the end of next week, Offermann wrote, his December 8 order for two pairs of children's slippers (sizes 29 and 31) and one pair of women's slippers (size 39) was also urgent.

Parallel to these private orders, orders for official use also continued to come in. For example, Abteilung Unterkunft (the lodgings' department) ordered a hat rack, a radio table, and a round table, while the Zentralkrankenrevier (central infirmary in Lublin) ordered 100 boxes for two sizes of medicine bottles. Streibel ordered a radio table, lamp, desk, desk chair, four Caucasian Walnut chairs, and more for his office. There were also orders for school furniture (e.g., two blackboards, on December 15), but the volume of official orders was far smaller than the rush for Christmas gifts.

So much was being ordered that there was a chance that there might not be enough raw materials in Kraśnik to meet the demand on time. Therefore, Offermann told Gröger and his staff to barter for missing raw materials for these orders. In other words, there was to be no record of purchase.¹⁰¹ Thus, children's toys and furniture, shoes, slippers, beds, decorated egg holders and beer glasses, dressers, etc., kept the Jews of Kraśnik alive through Christmas of 1943.

After Christmas, however, the orders for personal items and gifts were still kept up, as the profits continued to roll in. These profits paid for the lavish Christmas party thrown by the SSPF staff. On February 28, 1944, Offermann sent a check for 22,662.95 zlotys from the Kraśnik account to pay for the geese consumed at the Yuletide dinner.¹⁰²

October and November 1943 were a turning point for Jewish forced labor in Kraśnik — although this is not apparent from the above account regarding the Christmas gifts. For the Jews news of the *Erntefest* operation was a cause for great concern and led many

101 Ibid.

102 Offermann memo, February 28, 1944, *ibid.* Exchange rates in 1943/44 were approximately 2 zlotys = RM 1. So the geese cost approximately RM 11,331. In dollar terms (\$1=RM 2.5), this was approximately \$4,532.

in Kraśnik and Wifo to begin preparing escape plans. The *Erntefest* taught them that they could not rely on their labor to keep them alive. The SS, fearing partisan activity, tightened restrictions so as to prevent escapes and hook-ups with partisans. At the same time, with the conclusion of school-furniture production in the offing, Offermann and his colleagues sought a new facade behind which they could keep Kraśnik operating. Thus, it seems that the Kraśnik Jews' conclusions from the *Erntefest* operations may have been off the mark. Greed went a long way in Kraśnik.

Conditions of daily life in the Kraśnik and Wifo camps were remarkably livable in comparison to other forced-labor camps. Not only was there sufficient food and few beatings, but, in December 1942, Gröger informed the Jews that they could bring their families into the camp. This followed the killing of a Jewish policeman, in December 1942, by Ulbrich and Gröger, based on a mistaken impression that he was trying to escape. In fact, he had been going to get his wife, who was hiding nearby. Few Jews in the Kraśnik camp had any surviving family, but some whose family members were hiding in the vicinity acted on Gröger's offer. When other prisoners saw that these family members were integrated into the camp's operation, they decided to try to bring in their family members as well. For example, Itzhak Rosenbusch brought in his eleven-year-old daughter, who had been hiding with Poles. Nine-year-old Chaja Rotenberg was evicted by the Polish woman who had been hiding her in Kraśnik and who eventually turned her in to the Polish police. Chaja escaped and sneaked into the carpentry shop, where she was hidden together with two children whose fathers worked there. Eventually, because she said she was Pesach Kawa's niece, she was "legalized" and put to work in the camp kitchen.¹⁰³ There were eleven children in Kraśnik by the spring of 1943.

There was sufficient food in both camps. In February 1944, the

103 Itzhak Rosenbusch testimony, YVA, TR.11/01113; Chaja Rotenberg Goldbaum testimony, *ibid.*; Chaim Sztejn bok testimony, *ibid.*; Abraham Waks testimony, *ibid.*; Mordechai Süßberg testimony, *ibid.*; Salman Lederfein testimony, *ibid.*; Shlomo Waks testimony, YVA, M.1.E/768; Shalom Garen testimony, *Sefer Kraśnik*, p. 321; Alois Gröger interrogation, YVA, TR.1291, pp. 8801–8804; TR.10/868, pp. 263–266.

prisoners in Kraśnik received 350 grams of bread daily, 49 grams of meat, 400 grams of fresh vegetables, and more.¹⁰⁴ Jews from both camps were given some degree of freedom of movement both inside the camp and out. They used this privilege to visit other camps. And when Gröger would send Jews on missions outside the camp — albeit guarded by Ukrainians — they could maintain contacts and trade with the local population.

There were also occasional theater performances in Kraśnik and Wifo, as well as small concerts and lectures. The performers would appear in both camps in the evenings, with the open approval of Gröger and his men. The prisoners were permitted to hold a Passover *seder* in April 1943, and to hold Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services in October. The prisoners worked during the day on the holidays, but on Yom Kippur a number of them fasted until nightfall.¹⁰⁵ Both the fact that the *seder* and the services were held and the fact that at least some Jews felt strong enough to fast reflect the conditions in the camp.

Nevertheless, there were also deadly incidents that served to remind the Jews of where they were and limit any illusions they might have harbored. Such were the cases of the Jewish policeman who went to get his wife and of Mosze Schiff, whose May 1943 shooting has been discussed above. Shortly after the latter incident, Gröger shot his horse groomer, Mosze Graf, who was Schiff's close friend. Gröger became angry with Graf for poor work and marched him toward the Great Synagogue. Gröger then pulled out his pistol and shot Graf in the stomach, wounding him badly. Before Dr. Schapiro could treat Graf, the Ukrainian guard Vassili came over and shot Graf in the head.¹⁰⁶ There were several similar instances of

104 Receipt for delivery of food to Kraśnik to feed the prisoners of Kraśnik and Wifo, signed by Offermann, February 1, 1944, WAPL, SSPF 2. See also Shalom Garen testimony, *Sefer Kraśnik*, p. 323.

105 Nahum Rozenel testimony, YVA, TR.11/01113; Ber Twardagóra testimony, YVA, M.49.E/1053 and 1195; Shalom Garen testimony, *Sefer Kraśnik*, p. 323; Shmuel Brand testimony, *ibid.*, pp. 419–420.

106 Itzhak Rosenbusch testimony, YVA, TR.11/01113; Salman Lederfein testimony, *ibid.*; Nahum Rozenel testimony, *ibid.*; Asher Mandelblatt testimony, *ibid.*; YVA, TR.10/868, pp. 310–320; Gröger interrogation, TR.10/1291, p. 8822.

killings or beatings, reminding the Jews of the volatility of their SS guards, even the calmest among them, and of the fragility of their situation. Still, in general, the Jews in Kraśnik and Wifo did their work, ate sufficiently to avoid starvation, saw that the few children who were still alive were left alone and fed, and lived in overall security.

During the autumn of 1943, these relatively liberal living conditions for Jews in the Kraśnik area camps began to raise security concerns for the SS. On October 12, KdS Müller ordered the Budzyń and Kraśnik camps to return prisoners from work before nightfall for security reasons.¹⁰⁷ On November 1, Offermann rebuked Gröger for lax security for an incident that had occurred on October 28. A SS-*Wachmann* from the Wifo camp escorted a Jewish camp inmate to Lublin to get materials; the prisoner was found to be carrying seven letters from Jews and 1,952 zlotys. Schupo complaints at the time indicate that such events were not unusual.¹⁰⁸

Yet this relative worsening of conditions for the Jews was not absolute. This was reflected in the Kraśnik SS request to Offermann, on November 11, 1943, for winter clothing for the Kraśnik and Wifo Jews. They asked for clothing from the *Sonderbehandlung* Jews and in order to prevent epidemics. Offermann was asked to raise the matter with Sporrenberg.

This, too, was an indication of SSPF intentions to leave the Kraśnik camps intact, as was the move to attach Kraśnik to Budzyń in labor as well as jurisdiction. Offermann wrote to Sporrenberg, on November 13, regarding a plan he had worked out the day before with the Heinkel Werke directors. With the completion of the school-furniture orders expected in January, Kraśnik would begin to get urgent Wehrmacht jobs so that production would be ensured.¹⁰⁹

107 Müller order to Budzyń and Kraśnik, October 12, 1943, WAPL, SSPF 2.

108 Offermann to Gröger, November 1, 1943, *ibid.*; see also a series of correspondence regarding such security breaches, October 28–November 10, 1943, *ibid.*

109 Kraśnik camp to Offermann, November 11, 1943, WAPL, SSPF 2; Offermann to Sporrenberg, November 13, 1943. See also Kraśnik camp to Offermann, November 4, 1943, regarding materials needed to complete school-furniture orders, and Offermann's November 17 letter to the Kraków supply offices, *ibid.*

Since the work at Budzyń had not been efficient or vigorous until this time, it would seem that the staffs of the two camps were now collaborating to hide the true nature of their enterprise.

At the same time, with the Jews of Trawniki murdered, Streibel formally transferred responsibility for the Kraśnik camp to Sporrenberg; that is, from the office of *Reichskommissar für die Festigung des deutschen Volkstums* to the SSPF. Streibel transferred a 116,569.77 złoty surplus for deposit in the Kraśnik special account. Much of the machinery connected to the Trawniki forced-labor camp was distributed to other camps in mid-November. Kraśnik received a sausage-making machine, which was soon sold for a profit, and other equipment and vehicles.¹¹⁰ Clearly Kraśnik was not yet slated for liquidation, and Sporrenberg was a party to this.

In February and March 1944, there was a series of attempts and plots for escape from both Kraśnik and Wifo. During this period forty-one Jews actually did escape, of whom four were caught and shot or hanged; another ninety-four or ninety-five were shot as punishment for the escapes of others or for planning an escape.

Pesach Kawa and many others feared that all the Jews in Kraśnik would eventually be killed. These fears were heightened by Budzyń's transformation into a concentration camp. Thus, they began to plan an escape, hiding money and preparing false identification documents acquired through a Jew who had sneaked into the camp from Poniatowa when that camp was liquidated in November. One of the conspirators was the baker Shamaï Greenwald, who had been in contact with a Polish woman in order to arrange a hiding place after the escape. The woman's husband revealed the plan to the IVB4 office in Kraśnik, who then arrested and interrogated Shamaï. The local SS learned of the escape plan from other informers as well. Seven other Jews were arrested on February 13, and interrogated, and the informers' information was corroborated. When the Gestapo searched the rooms of Kawa and others, they found twelve false Polish identification documents and 21,490 złoty. As punishment,

110 Übergabeprotokoll, signed by Bartetzko, Offermann, and Klein, November 15, 1943, *ibid.*; Offermann to Sporrenberg, November 13, *ibid.*; Offermann memo to Kraśnik camp, November 27, 1943, *ibid.*; Offermann memo, "Notiz für das Arbeitslager Krasnik," December 6, 1943, *ibid.*

forty-four Jews (four from Wifo), including Kawa, were shot in two groups, on February 14 and 18. During the interrogations of the conspirators, two escaped — Jankel Ehrlich (February 14) and Chil Rolnik (February 16).¹¹¹

While these investigations and punishments were under way, eighteen Jews fled the Wifo camp on February 17, at 4:00 P.M. (approximately sunset). Upon their return from work, they crawled through a corner of the perimeter fence. The Ukrainian guard Kiplok notified Gröger by telephone an hour later, and Gröger then notified Offermann by telephone. Offermann called the commander of the Kraśnik KdS post, Hans Augustin, who then took a SS unit to the Kraśnik camp. Gröger accompanied Augustin and his men to Wifo, where all the Jews were forced out of the barracks in whatever clothing they were wearing — some were barefoot — and a selection was conducted right there and then. A group of twenty close relatives of the escapees was selected and marched out in the direction of the fuel tanks. They were forced to lie down in the snow under the light of bright spotlights, and Gestapo troops and Ukrainian guards shot them in the nape of the neck.

While this was happening, a Schupo unit was dispatched from Kraśnik to check on the security needs of the Kraśnik camps and, if necessary, to reinforce them. A unit of five Schupo and fifteen SS arrived at Gröger's home just after 11:00 P.M., to find him in the midst of a party with seven guests. According to the Schupo commander, Gröger told him that everything was fine, no additional security was needed, and that the Schupo and SS unit should return to base quietly. However, the unit proceeded to Wifo, where three SS men told them that their forces were insufficient to guard the Jews and the various parts of the camp. The commander stayed the night at Wifo, supplementing the guard. He ordered the dead buried the next morning and left his men with Gröger to help guard the

111 Report by Wenk, IVB4, Kraśnik, to IVB4 Lublin, February 19, 1944, and memo from Liska, IVB4 Lublin to Sporrenberg, February 28, 1944, together with Wenk's report, WAPL, SSPF 2 (copies in YVA, O.51/211, O.53/82); Cipora Berger testimony, YVA, TR.11/01113; Ber Twardagóra testimonies, YVA, M.49.E/1053 and 1195; YVA, TR.10/868, pp. 321–330; Shalom Garen testimony, *Sefer Kraśnik*, pp. 328–330.

two camps. The commander concluded that the Kraśnik camp was chaotic and needed change immediately.¹¹²

Four of the escapees were caught and killed by the SS in the following days. Seventeen-year-old Moshe Dorn was spurned and harassed by the local farmers from whom he sought food and shelter. Two days after escaping he turned himself in at the Wifo camp and was locked up in the Kraśnik prison. There he learned that his father and brother had been among those shot in retaliation for his escape. The other prisoner in the cell was another escapee, Kuchczyk, who had developed a foot infection that hobbled him, and, consequently, the Gestapo had caught up with him. Gröger ordered both hanged, but the Wehrmacht men at Wifo were fond of Dorn and convinced Gröger to spare him. Two other escapees, Powroznik and Himmelblau, were captured on February 23, and hanged.¹¹³

It is noteworthy that very soon after suffering two serious security breaches and participating in the killing of twenty people at point-blank range, Gröger, the generally “decent” commandant, went on to party with friends and did not feel a need for added security. He and the camp were in the process of breaking down, and Offermann reacted by appointing the proven murderer of Bełżec and Trawniki notoriety, Franz Bartetzko, to take over command. Nevertheless, this change in command did not bring with it the liquidation of the camp, as might have been expected after such serious breaches. Moreover, the change did not result in any significant security modifications either. There were subsequent escapes and security breaches, as well as other lapses of discipline among the SS and the Ukrainians in the camp. Yet the Kraśnik camp kept operating right to the end, lining the pockets of the local SS.

Two Kraśnik prisoners escaped on March 28, and another

112 YVA, TR.10/868, pp. 333–338; Report by Schupo Zugwachtmeister (equivalent to sergeant) Menzel, Kraśnik, to Schupo Lublin, WAPL, GDL 153 (copies in YVA, O.51/211, O.51/82, JM/3506); Moshe Dorn testimony, YVA, TR.11/01113; Mordechai Süßberg testimony, *ibid.*; Avraham Waks testimony, *ibid.*; Yehiel Teper testimony, *Sefer Kraśnik*, p. 428.

113 YVA, TR.10/868, pp. 355–361; testimonies of Moshe Dorn, Mordechai Süßberg, and Avraham Waks, TR.11/01113.

sixteen two days later, after secretly making a copy of the key to the gate. On the evening of March 30, a sentry noticed that the gate was open and called the guard (the camp was guarded by three sentries and three guards at the gate). Police and SS forces began searching the area. The escape was reported to Offermann by phone on March 31, and in writing in an April 6 memo (by Gröger). A search of the camp on March 31, the day after the escape, uncovered \$110 in paper money, gold dollars and rubles, and assorted jewelry. Twenty-eight Jews were arrested that day; they were shot on April 1 as punishment for those who had escaped.¹¹⁴

There were also individual escapes or captures during this period. On March 16, 1944, Bartetzko sent two guards and the Jewish prisoner Shmuel Hartbrot to the village of Owczarnia for supplies. At around 1:00 P.M. they were abducted by partisans. The local German police commander recorded the statement of village head Józef Wojtaszek with regard to the incident. Bartetzko went to the village himself to investigate when the three did not return, and he found the recorded testimony of the village head at the police office. Sporrenberg reprimanded Bartetzko for sending such a light unit on a mission. Yet on March 27, the Wifo camp's labor chief sent *Wachmann* Josef Scharen and two Jews to town to buy supplies. They came to the home of the Pole Jan Kozak and tried to buy personal things. While Scharen negotiated, one of the Jews escaped. The next day Bartetzko sent his report to Offermann, indicating that he now forbade the Wifo people to send Jews on purchase missions.¹¹⁵ Despite these repeated security lapses, the camps were maintained.

During the last few months of their stay in the Lublin District, the SSPF personnel were busy cashing in on the loot and covering their tracks. Hundreds of thousands of zlotys were involved. During

114 Gröger to Offermann, April 6, 1944 (two memos), WAPL, SSPF 2, pp. 271–275.

115 March 16, 1944, Claasen report on recording Wojtaszek's statement; Bartetzko's report, March 17; Offermann to Sporrenberg on above, March 20; Offermann to Bartetzko, passing on Sporrenberg's reprimand; Jan Kozak's affidavit, March 28; Bartetzko's report to Offermann, March 28, WAPL, SSPF 2.

this period the Kraśnik camp also became active in providing items that might be needed for the expected German retreat from the area for the local SS and for outside units. On February 28, 1944, on the same day that Offermann was trying to improve security at Kraśnik, he began to deal with Sporrenberg's desire to renovate the officers' club in Lublin. The Kraśnik camp was to provide 300,000 zlotys for the project, toward which Offermann enclosed a check for 200,000 zlotys.¹¹⁶ This seems to be an odd decision by Sporrenberg, with the eastern front approaching and German dependants in the Lublin District returning to the Reich. Was this actually a way to launder large sums of money?

Perhaps some clues to this puzzle can be found in two developments. First, cash and valuables continued to be found among the Jews and sent for deposit in the Kraśnik account. On February 29, jewelry, four \$20 gold pieces, and \$25 in cash taken from Jews during the *Aktion* in the camp were sent for deposit. Similar finds were sent on March 31, upon completion of the investigation into the escape of the sixteen prisoners. On April 6, additional loot was sent along, as noted above.¹¹⁷ On March 20, Offermann wrote to the Kraśnik camp command that in light of the current situation their work must continue uninterrupted.¹¹⁸ What was the nature of that work that must continue? Certainly he was not referring to the renovation of the officers' club.

The necessary work referred to by Offermann was assistance to the SS in preparing for their retreat. For example, on March 20, Offermann sent a memo to Bartetzko and Gröger that he had received a telephone report that a cow and a pig had been slaughtered in the camp. While he was in full agreement, he cautioned that word of this should not get out. No meat or sausage products should be given to outsiders. As they had already discussed, they might be in great need of smoked sausage.¹¹⁹ In other words, when they would begin their retreat, they would need food that would last a long time,

116 Offermann to Kramme, February 28, 1944, *ibid.*

117 Offermann to Kramme, February 29, 1944, and Gröger to Offermann, April 6, 1944, *ibid.*

118 Offermann to Kraśnik camp command, March 20, 1944, *ibid.*

119 Offermann to Bartetzko and Gröger, March 20, 1944, *ibid.*

such as smoked sausage, since they might be on the road without a proper kitchen.

This and the subsequent orders for trunks reflect their preparations for withdrawal. Amidst all this the intake of funds continued. In late March, more than 10,000 złotys were paid to Kraśnik for a canteen at one of the Budzyń work sites.¹²⁰ On March 27, Offermann sent a 6,015 złoty check to Kraśnik as payment from Richard Thomalla, representing the proceeds from destroying the Zamość ghetto.¹²¹

Discipline had become a problem in the Kraśnik camp, as reflected in a series of complaints in June 1944, about drinking parties among the SS men there and cavorting with Polish women. On June 14, Bartetzko denied the drinking parties, claiming that if occasionally some of the men shared a drink, there was no drunkenness. The result was that Claasen ordered Bartetzko to write weekly reports.¹²² Bartetzko sent four such reports prior to the SS retreat from the area, noting the work that had been accomplished the previous week.

The Jews' labor related directly to the Germans' preparations for retreat from the area, including items that were needed for the retreat, such as trunks for packing their things, as well as personal gifts to bring to their loved ones. The items were made based on orders, as had been the case during the Christmas season. Offermann himself ordered twenty-two trunks. In his reports submitted on June 17 (for June 9–16), June 24, July 3, and July 10, Bartetzko reported on items made for various SS units, such as six field kitchens for the SS "Wiking" division and thirteen closets for trucks for a unit of Panzer Regiment 5, as well as dozens of trunks and many personal items (upholstered chairs, decorated beer glass plates; decorated egg dishes, etc.). Jews working in eighteen crafts had produced 1,896

120 See Flugzugwerk Budzyń to Siedler Wirtschaftsgemeinschaft, Budzyń branch, March 20, 1944, informing it to pay its 10,292.65 złoty bill for a canteen directly to Kraśnik, since they handled these things, WAPL, SSPF 2.

121 Offermann to Kraśnik camp, March 27, 1944, WAPL, SSPF 2.

122 See Claasen to Bartetzko, June 8, 1944, Offermann to Augustin, June 12, 1944, Bartetzko to Claasen, June 14, 1944, in WAPL, SSPF 2.

items during this month, as the camp began to be dismantled for the German retreat.¹²³

These reports, as well as other documents from the period, also note the number of Jews in the camp. Remarkably, this number increased during that month. Following the escapes and killings of February–April, there were fifty-eight Jews remaining in Wifo and 160–162 in Kraśnik, matching the numbers in Bartetzko’s June 17 report (173 men, thirty-three women, and twelve children; i.e., 218 people). On June 24, there were 180 men (225 inmates); on July 3, 190 men; and on July 10, 192 men. In other words, the inmate population included thirty-three women and twelve children until the end, and nineteen men were added between June 17 and July 10.¹²⁴ It is not clear where the additional men came from, but it would be reasonable to guess that they were workers on local farms or small projects who were now being consolidated into one camp before the German retreat. It is also possible that they were Jews who had been in hiding and now found they could no longer remain where they were. In any event the camp regime under the notorious Bartetzko received them.

And through all this, camp secrecy was maintained. On June 28, 1944, Offermann sent a memo to the camp saying that in public it should not look like it is a SSPF camp. For the benefit of all outsiders, the camp should be referred to as: “Der Beauftragter des Reichskommissars f.d.F.d.V. — Arbeitslager Kraśnik”; that is, this was a camp that served German colonization needs. The SSPF letterhead for the camp should now be used only internally, and all letters to Lublin should be sent by Bartetzko. Offermann added that he would repeat and explain this orally at the next opportunity.¹²⁵ In other words, it was not to be known that the SSPF had been operating an illegal camp. And indeed, Bartetzko’s weekly reports to Offermann were on SSPF stationery, whereas other correspondence during the last weeks was on “Beauftragter” stationery.

At Kraśnik, unlike Budzyń, Globocnik had had complete control. The camp’s SS staff were his men, as were their overseers

123 See Bartetzko’s reports of June 17, June 24, July 3, and July 10, 1944, *ibid.*

124 See Bartetzko’s reports, *ibid.*, and Goldberg’s report, May 31, 1944, *ibid.*, indicating that there were fifty-eight Jews in Wifo.

125 Offermann, Notiz, June 28, 1944, *ibid.*

in Lublin, and the Ukrainian guards were his trainees from Trawniki. The camp's growing reputation in 1943, as a place for Germans to get quality goods for low prices helped draw a wide circle of Germans into the camp's illegal activities. With so many implicated, it was unlikely that any of them would report the camp to Himmler. Thus, Globocnik succeeded both in making large sums of money and in keeping his operation going. And for the small group of Jews in the camp, his success made all the difference in the world.

In the summer of 1944, all the remaining forced-labor camps were evacuated westward, and most of the forced-laborers were put to work in new camps. For many of them this initiated a period of frequent moves from camp to camp. However, those Jews who had made it this far had entered a somewhat different phase of Nazi policy for Eastern Europe. As such they had in a sense increased their chances to survive until the end of the war. Still, we should not conclude that somehow these Jews had discovered the logic of the Nazi system and the path to survival within it.

On January 6, 1944, Szmul Zitomirski wrote to Zionist representatives in Istanbul from his hiding place in Lublin: "Every day brings new and terrible surprises...you have no idea how difficult and dangerous it is to live here...my most important goal now is to stay alive and to find out about my family. I cannot help [anyone] unfortunately."¹²⁶ Zitomirski did not survive, nor did most of those thousands of "last Jews" in the Lublin District.

Assessing Forced Labor

Did forced labor affect Jewish survival in the Lublin District in 1942–1944? This is a difficult question to answer, especially in light of the constant moving around of Jews by the Germans in deportations and mass killing operations. For the overwhelming majority of Jews in the district, there was no chance of survival. Fewer than 10 percent had been selected by the Germans to be left

126 Szmul Zitomirski, under the alias Miśław Zitomirski, to Constantinople, January 6, 1944, in Zariz, *Letters from Haluzim*, p. 211.