
John Iwan Demjanjuk

John Iwan Demjanjuk was convicted by a German court, in Munich, in May 2011 of being an accomplice in 28,000 murders of Jews at the Sobibor death camp, and sentenced to five years in prison. He was not imprisoned immediately due to his health condition, and died in an elderly home on March 2012, before his appeal could be filed.

Demjanjuk was a Ukrainian born in March 1920 who served in the Red Army in World War II, was captured by the Germans at the battle of Kerch in May 1942, and then switched sides and became a *Wachmann* in various Nazi camps. He immigrated to the United States in 1952 and became a naturalized citizen in 1958, settling in Severn Hills, Ohio, a suburb of Cleveland.

In 1975 the US Department of Justice learned that Demjanjuk had collaborated with the SS and served as a guard in the Sobibor camp during the Holocaust. He was also identified by survivors from Israel as "Ivan the Terrible," a Ukrainian staff member at Treblinka who was one of the operators of the gas chambers and also murdered people with his own hands. In 1981 an Ohio court ruled that Demjanjuk had indeed been a guard at both Treblinka and Sobibor, had lied on his immigration application, and had hidden the fact that he was an SS member. His American citizenship was revoked, and Demjanjuk was extradited to Israel in 1987 for what would be only the second trial in Israel against a Nazi criminal (the first was Adolf Eichmann in 1961-62).

The trial began in Jerusalem on February 16, 1987. Demjanjuk was charged with crimes against the Jewish people, crimes against humanity, war crimes, crimes against persecuted individuals, and murder. During the course of the trial, it was demonstrated that Demjanjuk had been drafted into the Soviet army in 1940 and taken prisoner by the Germans in 1942, after which he volunteered for service at the Trawniki training camp for SS auxiliaries. Eyewitnesses who survived Treblinka helped identify him as "Ivan the Terrible", one of the two main operators of the gas chambers at Treblinka. The witnesses recalled his extreme brutality, forcing the victims into the gas chambers with whips, pipes, swords, knives, or guns. The defense claimed that this was a case of mistaken identity and that Demjanjuk had spent the entire war as a POW. In April 1988, the Israeli court found Demjanjuk

guilty and sentenced him to death. However, the ruling was overturned by the Israeli Supreme Court in 1993 on appeal, based on an identity card found that had come to light in former Soviet archives and which cast a slight doubt on Demjanjuk's identification as "Ivan the Terrible". He was set free and returned home to the United States, where his citizenship was eventually restored in 1998. However, the American Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations had in the meantime begun researching the newly opened archives in the former USSR and based on extensive documentation succeeded in bringing the case before American courts again and in having Demjanjuk's citizenship revoked a second time in 2002 based on strong evidence that he had served at Majdanek, Sobibor, and Flossenbürg. Demjanjuk was extradited to Germany in May 2009 to stand trial as an accessory to murder in Sobibor and was convicted two years later. He passed away at 91, still a free man, but a convicted war criminal.