

Destruction Through Work: Lodz Jews in the Büssing Truck Factory in Braunschweig, 1944-1945¹

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By early 1944, the influx of foreign civilian workers into the Third Reich economy had slowed to a trickle. Facing the prospect of a severe labor shortage, German firms turned their attention to SS concentration camps, in which a huge reservoir of a potential labor force was incarcerated. From the spring of 1944, the number of labor camps that functioned as branches of concentration camps grew by leaps and bounds in Germany and the occupied territories. The list of German economic enterprises actively involved in establishing such sub-camps lengthened and included numerous well-known firms.

Requests for allocations of camp prisoners as a labor force were submitted directly by the firms to the SS Economic Administration Main Office (*Wirtschafts- und Verwaltungshauptamt, WVHA*), to the head of Department D II – Prisoner Employment (*Arbeitseinsatz der Häftlinge*), SS-*Sturmbannführer* Gerhard Maurer. In individual cases these requests landed on the desk of Maurer's superior, SS-*Brigadeführer* Richard Glücks, or, if the applicant enjoyed particularly good relations with the SS, on the desk of the head of the WVHA, SS-*Gruppenführer* Oswald Pohl. Occasionally, representatives of German firms contacted camp commandants directly with requests for prisoner labor-force allocation – in violation of standing procedures.

After the allocation of a prisoner labor force was approved, the WVHA and the camp commandant involved jointly took steps to establish a special camp for prisoner workers. Security was the overriding concern; for example, proper fencing, restrictions on contact with civilian workers, etc. Once the required security conditions were met, the camp was ordered to allocate a set number

¹ See lecture by Shmuel Krakowski, "Destruction Through Work in the Third Reich and the Involvement of German Firms," December 12, 1997, in Berlin; appeared in print in *Yalkut Moreshet* 66 (October 1998), pp. 61-67. See also Karl Liedke and Elke Zacharias, *Das KL-Aussenlager Schillstrasse. Der Arbeitseinsatz der KL-Häftlinge bei der Fa.Büssing* (Braunschweig: Arbeitskreis Andere Geschichte, 1995). This was the first study of the forced labor of Lodz Jews in the Büssing plant in Braunschweig; it remains incomplete.

of prisoners. For their part, the firms were required to select camp prisoners best fit for work. Until the end of 1944, the WVHA placed some 600,000 prisoners at the disposal of German firms.²

Among others, the Büssing-Automobilwerke truck plant, which belonged to the Büssing-NAG concern, strove to secure prisoner allocations from the WVHA. Established in 1903, the plant began producing subsidized military equipment, such as the so-called “subvention car,” as early as 1908. The army administration paid bonuses to the purchasers of trucks from Büssing on the condition that, within five years from the day of purchase, the vehicles would be placed at the army’s disposal in case of mobilization. During World War I Büssing shifted its entire production to military needs, which turned out to be immensely profitable.

In 1928-1930, Büssing conducted tests on new all-terrain automobiles at the secret Reichswehr testing range near Kazan on the Volga River. In 1935, it established a sister firm, Niedersächsische Motorenwerke (NIEMO), which turned out aircraft engines until the end of the war under license of Daimler-Benz. From 1939 until 1945, Büssing manufactured, among other things, about 15,000 trucks for the army.

In 1944, Büssing and NIEMO employed a total of 7,250 foreign civilian workers (including some 1,500 Poles) and war prisoners; together, these two categories comprised about 55 percent of the total work force of these two firms. Foreign workers and war prisoners were quartered in barracks in several large camps within the city limits: Kralenriede, Rühmeberg, Schunter-Siedlung, Mascherode, Schützenplatz, and Dietrich-Klagges-Stadt.³ The size of the work force employed by Büssing, however, turned out to be inadequate for its assigned tasks.

Having secured WVHA approval for a prisoner work-force allocation, Büssing, in coordination with the SS, began construction of a camp in Braunschweig on Schillstrasse, near the building of the Wehrmacht’s supply department.⁴ The

² Testimony of WVHA employee, Karl Sommer, October 4, 1946, before the Allied investigating officer, quoted in Fritz Blaich, *Wirtschaft und Rüstung im “Dritten Reich”* (Düsseldorf: Schwann, 1987), p. 116. However, exploitation of concentration-camp prisoners in the German private sector economy began earlier.

³ Karl Liedke, *Gesichter der Zwangsarbeit – Polen in Braunschweig 1939-1945* (Braunschweig: Arbeitskreis Andere Geschichte, 1997), p. 63.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

Baukolonne (construction group) was brought in on August 17, 1944, from the main camp, Neuengamme near Hamburg, of which KL *Aussenlager Schillstrasse* was an affiliate, in order to construct the camp. The *Baukolonne* crew was comprised of 126 men, all camp prisoners. Among them were seventy-four Frenchmen, members of the resistance who had been arrested in the spring of 1944, in the south of France, and brought in July to Neuengamme; forty-two Russians, Latvians, and Estonians; eight Germans; and two Poles.⁵ German prisoners, who had all been sentenced for criminal activities, were appointed *kapos* of the camp.⁶

Until the end of October 1944, the construction crew was billeted in the Mascherode camp for civilian workers. On November 5, 1944, the camp at Schillstrasse was ready: four barracks, built either from hollow clay blocks or from concrete plates, measuring about 2,100 square meters; in other words, lodgings for 312 persons, by the housing standards for foreign workers. Housing barracks for the SS-Wachmannschaft were constructed at a separate location; the initial contingent of twenty-five guards grew to fifty.⁷

SS-*Hauptscharführer* Max Kirstein⁸ was appointed camp commandant. Kirstein had gained experience in supervising camp prisoners in labor camps: from November 1942 until August 1944, he served as *Kommandoführer* in the cellulose plant in Wittenberge, Brandenburg, and, later, in the Drägerwerk firm

⁵ Georges Salan, *Prisons de France et bagnes allemandes* (Nîmes: Imprimerie L'Ouvrière, 1946), p. 131. This book was the first indication that French prisoners were at Schillstrasse, since no pertinent documents had been preserved.

⁶ Four of them are known by name: Edwin Franz (German Gypsy), Rudolf Knabke, Hermann Giesen (former boxer), and Hans Wittling. See statement of former prisoner Michał Guminer, December 7, 1945, before the police in Braunschweig, Niedersächsisches Staatsarchiv Wolfenbüttel (Nds. StA Wf), 62 Nds Fb2, no. 445. Michał Guminer, born 1920, worked in the ghetto post office. His fluency in German enabled him to observe camp life at Schillstrasse closely.

⁷ Nds. StA Wf, 131, N Fb2, Nr. 13086, 13103.

⁸ Max Kirstein was born on November 7, 1890, in Bernburg/Saale. The son of a railroad messenger, he spent eight years in elementary school, then three years learning the merchant trade. He worked as a salesman and decorator. He was drafted in 1912, was involved in an accident in 1913, as a result of which he was declared unfit for army service. He volunteered for service in World War I, and was decorated with the Iron Cross 2nd class for participation in battles on the western front. He married in 1921, and became an independent farmer; he lived with wife and child in Meklemburg. On May 1, 1937, he joined the NSDAP, and the Waffen-SS on August 31, 1939. He was promoted to SS-*Scharführer* on November 1, 1939, and to SS-*Hauptscharführer* on July 1, 1943; Berlin Document Center (at present Bundesarchiv Berlin), SS-Stammakte "Kirstein Max."

in Hamburg.⁹ His assistant in the camp's *Schreibstube* (registry) was non-commissioned officer Rolfs.¹⁰ Besides him, the following are known by name as members of the SS-Wachmannschaft: H. Sebrandke – Kirstein's deputy in *Unterkommando Vechelde*; *Feldwebel* Nordmann – in charge of provisions; Backer; H. Schier; P. Braszeszewitz, and Aug. Sonntag.¹¹

Selection for Work

In the middle of August 1944, parallel with the commencement of construction work at the camp, two Büssing representatives - engineer Pfänder and economist Scholmeyer - traveled to Auschwitz to select 1,000 – 1,200 prisoners fit for work. The prisoners had come from the Lodz ghetto, which had been liquidated in August. The exact procedure of selecting prisoners for Büssing is not known, since no pertinent documents have been preserved.

Former prisoners, whom the author interviewed in May-June 1999, in Israel, recall that in Auschwitz there was talk about emissaries of the Büssing firm who were looking for “metal workers.” Among those who came from the Lodz ghetto, however, there were relatively few qualified workers in this profession.¹² Nevertheless, the prisoners employed all kinds of stratagems, vying for inclusion in the labor contingent to Germany, since – from their point of view – it offered a chance of survival.

According to testimonies of eyewitnesses, the criteria for the selection of workers for Büssing were far from uniform. In many cases the recruiters took on faith a prisoner's assertion as to his professional qualifications without contesting it with expert questions. Often the good physical shape of the candidate (appropriate height, absence of symptoms of malnutrition or

⁹ Public Record Office (PRO), Kew/Richmond, WO 309/375, no. 55638, list of German war criminals imprisoned in 1946-1948, in camp 101.C.I.C. Esterwegen.

¹⁰ Testimony of the director of the firm “Gebr. Koch,” Hugo Probst, before German police in 1946. The firm was located near the camp. On Probst's request and with Kirstein's approval, prisoners helped with transportation work in the firm from time to time. See Nds. StA Wf, 62, Nds, Fb2 No. 445.

¹¹ Findings of the police clerk, Knigge in Vechelde, *ibid*.

¹² A different opinion was voiced by a former prisoner in the Schillstrasse camp, Adolf Diamant (a German Jew from Chemnitz who was deported to the Lodz ghetto, and subsequently to Auschwitz). On September 21, 1999, the *Frankfurter Rundschau* published his letter, in which Diamant wrote that the Jews in the employ of the Büssing firm were “first-class specialists,” who worked mostly in the Lodz ghetto departments of metal machining.

starvation) turned out to be a deciding factor, whereas younger prisoners could ensure inclusion in the labor contingent by sheer cunning.

Those included in the “Braunschweig transport” recall the circumstances of their being declared eligible:

I thought constantly about escape from selection and the crematorium chimneys ... I heard with great relief that skilled workers were being recruited for work in [an] automobile factory in Braunschweig, especially welders. Once, in the Lodz ghetto, I came across a German brochure about welding. Due to the lack of other written material I read it several times. Now I decided I would volunteer for work. Replying to questions asked by the civilian, who tested us, I said I was a mechanics student, that I used to work for my father as an apprentice, and that I welded metal sheets up to 24 mm thick. What do you mean “sheets,” asked the second civilian. Sheets, replied the first, up to 24 mm., are sheets, and above that [they are called] plates. One more question or two, to which I replied without hesitation and ... presto! I passed the exam. At that point I felt as if someone whispered in my ear and I said: “I have a brother here, we had worked together.” And so it happened that my brother Martin passed too.¹³

The block chief announced recruitment of metal workers. I was never a metal worker, my whole education was a matriculation exam. But the block chief told me I should report as [a] metal worker all the same, or, even better, as [a] precision mechanic. All the candidates were lined up in a row, then each was approached individually and asked: “What’s your trade, and what did you do?” I said I was [a] precision mechanic and was pronounced qualified.¹⁴

[I heard] over the grapevine that they were looking for metal smiths. Some civilian asked me whether I knew about metal-work, but he didn’t ask any specific questions. Good appearance was all that mattered.¹⁵

I don’t remember who represented “Büssing” during [the] selection for the Braunschweig camp ... I do know that children and youth from block 23 were also included in one of the selections. I was one of them. They tattooed numbers on our left arms, and we were lined up for inspection. Next to the selection table a bar was put up to measure the height of the prisoners. Those not tall enough were rejected from the transport; I was among them. We were sent back to the block, and the tattooed numbers were replaced with a new tattoo – dots. I have them on my left

¹³ Recollections of Bolesław Ołomucki, to the author, Ashkelon, May 24, 1999.

¹⁴ Mordechai Folman, conversation with the author, Haifa, May 28, 1999.

¹⁵ Zvi Bergman, conversation with the author, May 25, 1999, Jerusalem.

hand to this day ... I managed to escape from a transport to the crematorium ... Block chief Otto from block 12 sheltered me and two other escapees for nearly two weeks, without sending us to roll-calls. The next selection for Braunschweig was carried out without a bar. I found myself in a transport headed for Germany.¹⁶

I overheard *kapos* talking among themselves; they said that those due to travel to Braunschweig should be taken to the coat storage room. Well, if coats were being handed out, it was a good sign...I tried to get into this transport. There was a commission, doctors. I was chased out of the line. Then I saw a line for registration, I stood in it, but they chased me out of this one too. Then there was a third line, after the registration. Somehow I squeezed in and got a coat. Together with others I got on the train car, and after several days we reached Braunschweig.¹⁷

I remember that in Auschwitz they looked for electricians for work in Germany. I called in, they told me to draw a diagram of some electrical circuit, I did it wrong and was disqualified. Then they looked for carpenters, and I volunteered again. They asked me about the height of a chair, I gave a wrong answer I think, because they didn't take me in. Next, they wanted metal workers for Braunschweig. I called in and was included in the group, no questions were asked this time.¹⁸

Selections for work were going on constantly. For example, when we were asked, who was an electrician by profession, I called in, even though it wasn't my trade. I used to work in a power station, but not as an electrician. No one asked specific questions.¹⁹

Jews were selected for work. Then I heard the words: "Transport Braunschweig, step forward." I didn't pass the selection because I was too small ... Then I heard that people were being called out by name. I heard "Gliksman Bolesław." Bolek and I went to the same school in Lodz. We were classmates. I knew him well, his family, and his father. And now I heard his name called out. Nobody responded. I thought to myself, if they call out his name once again, I would say I was Bolesław Gliksman. At the next call "Bolesław Gliksman" I stepped forward...At that moment I knew I belonged to the transport, and that my name was Bolesław Gliksman.²⁰

In the ghetto I used to work at a "punch" where I made shoe nails. In Auschwitz I stepped forward, when they called out for metal workers. They took me in, and put a stamp on my forehead as a proof ... My

¹⁶ Roman Bojmelgrin (lives in Canada), letter to the author, September 13, 1999. Sara Zyskind writes extensively on selection under the bar in: *Światło w dolinie łez* (Lodz: Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, 1994), pp. 166-169. The book is a biography of her husband, Eliezer Zyskind, who was a prisoner in the camp at Schillstrasse. In a conversation with the author, Mr. Zyskind confirmed the veracity of his wife's account of the selections.

¹⁷ David Brin, conversation with the author, Tel Aviv, May 30, 1999. Brin, too, escaped the bar selection.

¹⁸ Karol Fuks, conversation with the author, Haifa, May 29, 1999.

¹⁹ Hirsch Hecht, conversation with the author, Tel Aviv, May 31, 1999.

²⁰ Izydor Huberman, conversation with the author, Tel Aviv, June 2, 1999. Hersz Singer, then fourteen, got himself on the transport in a similar fashion; he said his name was Henryk Wagner; interview with Hersz Singer (undated) [1945?], Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, 301/325.

father was selected for gas, but his release was arranged in exchange for two loaves of bread; he, too, ended up in Braunschweig.²¹

I was asked about my profession, and I said “student.” One of those who asked questions hit me and said I was an idiot and should have said I was a precision mechanic. I got smarter after this lesson and ultimately ended up in the transport.²²

“Büssing” representative, engineer Pfänder, who participated in selections of workers, testified after the war that a Jewish doctor, Menzel, also took part in them. Dr. Menzel put together two groups of prisoners without regard for their actual skills. The first group was comprised of prisoners fit for work, whereas the second was made up of unfit prisoners. When putting together these groups, efforts were made not to separate fathers from their teenage sons.²³ This appears to explain the presence of a relatively large number of underage boys in the camp at Schillstrasse, even though not all of them had fathers in the group of prisoners declared fit for work.

The first batch of some 350 prisoners who had passed selection, departed for Braunschweig in the middle of September 1944.²⁴ This group consisted almost exclusively of Polish Jews from the Lodz ghetto. An analysis of a well-preserved prisoner list indicates that they received numbers of the main camp Neuengamme from about 50,000 to 50,900.²⁵ Since the camp at Schillstrasse had not yet been completed, about 100 men from this transport were assigned to the Mascherode camp, which housed the construction crew. The remaining

²¹ Abraham Selig, conversation with the author, Jerusalem, May 25, 1999.

²² Chaim Tyller, conversation with the author, Haifa, May 28, 1999. After the war Tyller met with this member of the selection commission. The man was a Pole, but Tyller could not recall his name. Nor could he explain his presence at the selection.

²³ Record of interrogation by German police in 1946, in Nds. StA WF, 62 Nds Fb 2, no. 445. Not one of the witnesses interviewed by the author recalls “Jewish physician Menzel.” According to the Ravensbrück transport list (see footnote 25), Felix Menzel was a Hungarian Jew, born in 1900, in Budapest. Deported to Auschwitz on June 29, 1944, he arrived in Braunschweig in the third transport in early November 1944, prisoner number 66079.

²⁴ Michał Guminer statement, Nds. StA Wf, 62 Nds Fb 2, no. 445.

²⁵ This list (KL Ravensbrück list) was compiled on April 14, 1945, in KL Ravensbrück, following the arrival of the evacuation train from Watenstedt near Braunschweig. Among some 1,600 prisoners aboard the train were Jews from KL-*Aussenlager* Schillstrasse. The list contains the following information: prisoner number in Neuengamme (“Alte-no.”); prisoner number in Ravensbrück (“Neue-no.”); nationality and prisoner category (for example, political, Jew, etc.); first and last name; date and place of birth; date of first registration (in most cases Auschwitz). The original list is to be found in the Archives of the Główna Komisja Badania Zbrodni Przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu, syg. 52, k.79-92, 94-98, 100-108, 110-112, 116-118, 120-125, 128-139, 143, 150, 152-156. The list is not complete. Until now it has not been the subject of any serious study.

250 men or so were sent to Vechelde near Braunschweig,²⁶ where Büssing had transferred some of its manufacturing facilities in the summer of 1944. The group at Vechelde was subordinated to the camp at Schillstrasse as its *Unterkommando*.

In the middle of October 1944, a second transport of some 500 prisoners departed from Auschwitz; they were assigned numbers, roughly, from 64,200 to 64,700. Like its predecessor, this group, too, consisted of Polish Jews; only some ten Jews were from Germany or Hungary.²⁷ It seems that between 350 and 400 men were put up in the completed section of the camp at Schillstrasse, while the remaining 100-150 were sent to Vechelde. On November 9, 1944, a third transport of prisoners departed from Auschwitz to Braunschweig.²⁸ This group of some 350 prisoners was comprised mostly of Polish Jews, but also several dozen Hungarian Jews, as well as between ten and twenty Czech and Slovak Jews. They were assigned numbers from 67,100 to 67,700.²⁹ All of them appear to have been sent to the camp at Schillstrasse.

After arriving in Braunschweig or Vechelde, each prisoner received a tin “dog tag” with a number (*Namensmarke*) embossed on it; the tags were meant to be hung from the neck.³⁰

According to these estimates, the total number of prisoners sent from Auschwitz to work for Büssing came to about 1,200 persons. The names of 776 of these prisoners could be established on the basis of the following sources: the above-mentioned list from Ravensbrück; the list of prisoners of KL-*Aussenlager* Schillstrasse who were buried in a cemetery in Braunschweig;³¹ the list of prisoners buried in a cemetery in Jammertal near Salzgitter;³² the list of prisoners who died in Ravensbrück,³³ the list of

²⁶ Michał Guminer statement, Nds. StA Wf, 62 Nds Fb 2, no. 445.

²⁷ KL Ravensbrück list.

²⁸ Recollections of Bolesław Ołomucki to the author.

²⁹ Michał Guminer statement, Nds. StA Wf, 62 Nds Fb 2, no. 445; KL Ravensbrück list.

³⁰ Recollections of Bolesław Ołomucki to the author.

³¹ Stadt Braunschweig, Friedhofsamt, list of July 30, 1997.

³² Stadt Salzgitter, Friedhof “Jammertal,” Gräberliste für öffentlich gepflegte Gräber, March 25, 1971.

³³ Information supplied by former prisoners Josef Neuhaus of Givatayim, Israel, concerning his father Hirsch; and by Abraham Selig, in a conversation with the author, Jerusalem, May 25, 1999, concerning his brother David.

prisoners who died in Wöbbelin;³⁴ the list of former prisoners who lived in DP-Camp Bergen-Belsen after the war;³⁵ the list of former prisoners who registered themselves in the United States in the 1990s;³⁶ written transmissions found in the Yad Vashem Archives;³⁷ and information gathered through personal interviews with witnesses.³⁸

The fate of over 500 prisoners remains unknown. Some of them survived: their names were probably on the missing pages of the list of prisoners of Ravensbrück.³⁹ It appears that between ten and twenty prisoners died during the evacuation march from Braunschweig to Watenstedt, or in the evacuation train before it reached Ravensbrück.⁴⁰ There is reason to believe that some 350 prisoners who had died were buried in anonymous graves at the Jammertal cemetery.⁴¹

The largest group of prisoners whose names are known were young prisoners aged seventeen to twenty-five. There were 250 of these (32 percent of the total); thirty-two prisoners under sixteen, and twenty over fifty years of age. The oldest known prisoner was a Czech Jew, Samuel Singer, born April 26, 1879, and the youngest, a Slovak Jew, Josef Schönfeld, born March 21, 1931.⁴²

³⁴ Gemeinde Wöbbelin. Mahn- und Gedenkstätten (Bearb.): Totenverzeichnis aller Häftlinge, die nachweislich im KL Wöbbelin oder nach der Befreiung an den Folgen der Inhaftierung in den umliegenden Krankenhäusern verstarben, Januar 2000.

³⁵ PRO Kew/London, WO 309/425; WO 309/1698 – No. 1 War Investigation Team.

³⁶ *National Registry of Jewish Holocaust Survivors* (Washington: American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors in cooperation with United States Holocaust Memorial Council, 1993), pp.53-54; Benjamin and Vladka Meed, *Registry of Jewish Holocaust Survivors* (Washington: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1996), p. 85.

³⁷ Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), 039.33.33, 03.5278.

³⁸ Together with this article, the author deposited in the Yad Vashem Archives the list entitled "Liste der jüdischen Häftlinge im KZ-Aussenlager Schillstrasse, Stammlager KZ Neuengamme [Forschungsstand: 15.März 2000]," YVA, Registry Number 15528.

³⁹ While in Israel the author spoke with two persons, Zvi Bergman and Karol Fuks, whose names do not appear on the preserved section of the list (see footnotes 15 and 18). Names of other surviving prisoners, which do not appear on the list, were given to the author by other prisoners, either through correspondence or during interviews.

⁴⁰ See below on the evacuation of the camp.

⁴¹ The list of graves in this cemetery notes numbers 2051-2974 as *unbekannt* (unknown) instead of names. See below on transporting corpses from the camp at Schillstrasse to Watenstedt.

⁴² KL Ravensbrück list. Josef Schönfeld arrived in Braunschweig in the third transport, together with his father Abraham, a dentist by profession (born 1903, he died in Braunschweig, November 28, 1944), and his brother, who died during the evacuation shortly before liberation. Josef Schönfeld died in New York in 1998.

Work

The prisoners worked in two shifts: from 6 A.M. until 6 P.M., and from 6 P.M. until 6 A.M.⁴³ Workers for the day shift were awakened at 4 A.M. The time period from wake-up call until marching out to work (in Braunschweig under the escort of *SS-Wachmannschaft*),⁴⁴ or actual commencement of work (in Vechelde, the camp was located within the plant), was filled with roll-calls and various forms of harassment, including beatings for imaginary offenses.⁴⁵ In Braunschweig, the factory was located 1.2 km. from the camp; this distance could be traversed in about 20 minutes, even by prisoners in bad physical condition.⁴⁶

In the Braunschweig plant prisoners were required to punch a clock with personal cards before the start and at the end of work.⁴⁷ The Braunschweig group worked at three sites: the exchange parts division,⁴⁸ the machinery repair division,⁴⁹ and the machine-tooling of engine casings (the so-called “Diesel-Bunker”).⁵⁰

The Vechelde group worked at manufacturing rear axles for trucks.⁵¹ Most of the prisoners performed simple operations on tooling machines whose settings had been calibrated by qualified civilian workers, or they were

⁴³ According to foreman Leberkuhn (Vechelde plant), prisoners worked 11.5 hours a day from Monday to Friday and 6 hours on Saturdays; in Amtsgericht Braunschweig, Gesch.-No. 13 C 566/64.

⁴⁴ Michał Guminer statement, Nds. StA Wf, 62 Nds Fb 2, no. 445.

⁴⁵ Testimony of former prisoner Benno Fränkel before the German police in 1945, Nds. StA Wf, 62 Nds Fb 2, no. 445.

⁴⁶ Most former prisoners recall that the distance was 7 km., or that it took one hour to walk.

⁴⁷ The author has not encountered this method of supervising camp prisoners in the literature. This particular information was provided by a former prisoner of the camp at Schillstrasse, Jerzy Herszberg, now living in London, in his forty-three page manuscript, “A Survival Story of 1939-1945 War,” that he wrote in 1986, for the Imperial War Museum in London, no. 86/89/1. In 1999, Herszberg sent the author a corrected version of his account. This method of prisoner control was confirmed by Izydor Huberman, conversation with the author.

⁴⁸ Testimony of the director of the department, engineer Walter P., before German police in 1946, in Nds. StA Wf, 62 Nds Fb2, no. 445.

⁴⁹ Testimony of the foreman of this department, Albert Esch, before German police; *ibid.*

⁵⁰ Chaim Tyller conversation with the author; Hirsch Hecht conversation with the author. Most Hungarian Jews appear to have worked in this division. One of them, Tibor Hirsch, born in 1928, lived in New York after the war; he intended to make a documentary film about the camp at Schillstrasse. The actual outcome is not known to the author.

⁵¹ Testimony of Engineer Heinrich K. before German police in 1946, in Nds. StA Wf, 62 Nds Fb2., no. 445.

employed at cleaning and transport jobs. After some training, a number of prisoners could do machinery settings by themselves.⁵²

The factory management sought to raise prisoner productivity at all costs. In coordination with the SS, special bonuses were introduced – coupons worth 0.5 RM.⁵³ They were handed out by the foremen as prizes for productive work. Prisoners could exchange them for cigarettes, pickled cucumbers and beets. In practice the exchange didn't work, because the *kapos* habitually stole the products earmarked for exchange.⁵⁴ In the Vechelde plant the prisoner workers were assigned shorter timetables than those of German civilian workers. Signs were put up on machine tools with the quotas of metal parts to be completed. Production manager Gruel made personal inspections, checking whether the assigned quotas were fulfilled; "these signs were the only thing he was interested in."⁵⁵ General Manager Rudolf Egger, too, was interested solely in "pressuring [the prisoners] to do more work."⁵⁶

The prisoners suffered not only from being urged to work faster; some German foremen and workers maltreated them physically and mentally. One sick prisoner, who wanted to warm himself briefly at the electric stove in the factory hall, was beaten by a German worker. The same German hit another prisoner for the same reason, knocked him down and continued to kick him.⁵⁷ At the same time, however, some members of the German crew treated the prisoners humanely and often helped them in various ways: they relieved sick prisoners of heavy work duties, spoke to them normally, or brought them medicines and breakfast.⁵⁸

Some prisoners wore striped camp clothing from Auschwitz; others worked dressed in civilian clothes - also from Auschwitz. Civilian clothes had a striped patch sewn on the back. Factory work was a very dirty business, and the

⁵² Mordechai Folman conversation with the author; Karol Fuks conversation with the author.

⁵³ Former prisoner Eliezer Zyskind turned over to the author the original coupon with the overprint "Prämienchein über RM -50. Konzentrationslager Neuengamme." It was stamped: "Prämienkonto K.L. Neuengamme." The overprint on the lower edge of the coupon indicates it was printed in August 1944, edition of 500,000.

⁵⁴ Albert Esch, testimony, Nds. StA Wf, 62 Nds Fb 2, no. 445.

⁵⁵ Testimony of lathe operator Karl D. before German police in December 1945, *ibid.*

⁵⁶ Testimony of foreman Willi B., *ibid.*

⁵⁷ Benno Fränkel, testimony, *ibid.*

⁵⁸ Their names are known: Hermann Fricke (foreman of prisoner Mordechai Folman), Albert Esche (foreman of prisoner Bolesław Ołomucki), Weber (foreman of prisoner Izydor Huberman), Hammer (foreman of prisoner Karol Fuks), and Basse (foreman of prisoner Benno Fränkel).

prisoners' clothing looked accordingly; machine oil soon rendered the stripes all but invisible. Yet the prisoners were not issued a change of clothing; they went to work and slept in the same clothes from their arrival in Braunschweig until liberation. Similarly, their footwear was in very bad condition.⁵⁹

During each shift the prisoners were given a 30-minute break for hot soup. The meal was prepared in the so-called "Russian kitchen" (*Russenküche*), run by Büssing, where soup was cooked for Soviet workers and prisoners of war. Other foreigners and German workers employed in the factory received much better meals from another kitchen; in terms of quantity and caloric value, however, even these meals differed in accordance with nationality.⁶⁰ In Vechelde the specified time for the break - thirty minutes - was to suffice for distributing and consuming the soup by some 200 prisoners (one shift). A prisoner who did not finish eating within thirty minutes had his soup bowl knocked out of his hands.⁶¹

The Camp

Former prisoner Jerzy Herszberg described the living conditions in the camp as follows:

Braunschweig was the worst camp I stayed in. I am not a boastful man but I cannot resist including here perhaps my only claim to fame. The rumours were that the Kapo in charge of the camp had been previously a hangman in Dachau and his chief assistant Kapo had been sentenced to camps in connection with a famous murder case in pre-war Germany known at the time as the "Vampire of Düsseldorf" case. This is a rare distinction even by camp standards. There were other German Kapos and one Gypsy, but not quite of such reputation and I can now recall at least six, memorable for their sadism. They all had been perviously in Dachau where they obtained excellent training for their new functions.⁶² They never seemed to tire of torturing and humiliating us and in this I sadly admit that they were helped by Jewish Kapos.⁶³

⁵⁹ Testimony of Karl D., Nds. StA WF, 62 Nds Fb 2, no. 445.

⁶⁰ Testimony of the German cook, Walter S., before German police in December 1945, *ibid*.

⁶¹ Testimony of Benno Fränkel, *ibid*.

⁶² The arrival of thirty German prisoners with a "green triangle" to the camp at Schillstrasse is corroborated by Dr. Georges Salan in *Prisons*, p. 144.

⁶³ One of them was Nathan J. Jerzy Herszberg and another former prisoner, Abraham Selig, claim that Nathan J. "was willing to beat up a prisoner for an extra bowl of soup," something which he did quite often. Another former prisoner, however, Izydor Huberman, claims that Nathan J. hit fellow Jewish prisoners in order to protect them from beatings by German

The commandant of the camp never hit us, but made us wait for our soup on Sundays which we had in the camp, not in the factory. He seemed somehow very sadistic. It may be of interest to mention that it was a small camp and to only one in my experience where the commandant came occasionally to inspect the roll-calls personally. It was during the winter and the cold was an additional hardship. And when our hair grew slightly after being shaven completely in Auschwitz, we had some removed with clippers across our heads with some very short growth on both sides. The bald patch was called by the Kapos, in a joke, “Läuse Strasse” – street for lice. This highly individualistic hair style made any escape even more difficult.

After a few days I abandoned any effort to keep clean, wore the same clothes day and night, had lice, and did not wash at all. However, we had bunks, alternately used by day and night shifts and the dirt and stench in the barracks must have been dreadful, though, somehow, this was not one of my chief worries. Perhaps our faculties were more than a little numbed as the result of severe malnutrition and exhaustion. The state of the barracks may also explain why the SS-men hardly ever entered them. We would be hit when driven out of the barracks by the Kapos.

Some experts on concentration camps on hearing this part of my story assured me that in spite of it all, I must have retained a very strong will to live. Simply because I did not die, I have some difficulty in proving them wrong. Such experts have studied psychology or related subjects and profess to know how I felt. In spite of their knowledge I feel that their theory of a strong will to live is utter nonsense – I was at my lowest then. Most survivors who express their opinions publicly claim that they throughout maintained a certain degree of cleanliness, and that was an essential part of one’s survival. I am definitely a counter-example and the other prisoners in my block were in the same category

kapos, in which case they would have been killed. British documents indicate that Nathan J. was suspected of brutal treatment of Hungarian Jews. After liberation, a number of Schillstrasse survivors ended up in the DP-camp in Bergen-Belsen, including Hungarian Jews and several dozen Lodz Jews. Hungarian Jews told the British command of the DP-camp that Nathan J. was there. An investigation was launched, but no documents exist about its conclusion; PRO Kew, WO 309/425, XC 6178. In 1969, the Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen in Ludwigsburg received a letter from Marian Pollan in the USA, which contained the following information: Nathan J., born in 1915, in Wieluń, Poland, was a Jewish policeman in the Wieluń ghetto, and was responsible for deporting many Jews to extermination camps. In September 1942, following the liquidation of the Wieluń ghetto, he was deported to the Lodz ghetto, and, in the summer of 1944, to Auschwitz, where he worked as a *kapo*. Nathan J. went on to KL-*Aussenlager* at Schillstrasse in Braunschweig. He was recognized in the DP-camp in Bergen-Belsen, put on trial, and served a prison sentence in England. In 1949, he left for the United States. Pollan’s letter lists names of thirty-four Jews residing in the United States, who, according to him, could authenticate the facts as presented in the letter. A copy of the letter is in Nds. StA Wf, 62 Nds Fb 2, no. 445. This author could not discover any documents either corroborating or disproving the facts as presented in Pollan’s letter.

as myself. I do not know what proportion of them survived. The appalling standard of hygiene I can illustrate by another example. We had our soup in tin bowls. When we finished, the bowls were left unwashed for the other shift. During our whole stay in the camp the bowls were not washed or rinsed even once...

Most of us ate our ration of bread and then, though some took it back to the bunks where it was immediately consumed... Some of the inmates in my age group (about 15) obtained a little extra food by singing to the Kapos whilst they had their meals... The camp commandant made us wait for our soup on Sundays which we had in the camp, not in the factory.⁶⁴

Weekly food rations were issued in the camp. Initially, they were prepared in the Büssing kitchen and handed out by prisoners on kitchen duty. However, as a result of efforts by Camp Commandant Kirstein, this procedure was changed: from November 1944, the *SS-Wachmannschaft* was put in charge of rationing and issuing the food. It is certain that the SS men systematically stole the food allocated for the prisoners. This is attested by the interventions on the part of the director of one of the departments with the firm's management: he complained that the prisoners in his responsibility went hungry all the time and could not work efficiently.⁶⁵ SS men from *Unterkommando Vechele* sent the food stolen in the camp to their families.⁶⁶ As the allocated food rations were completely inadequate, all the prisoners suffered from malnutrition, and hunger stalked the camp.

Partially preserved food-allocation documents indicate that during the sixty-eighth "allocation period" (*Zuteilungsperiode*), which stretched over twenty-eight days, from October 16 to November 12, 1944, the following products, among others, were allocated in Braunschweig for some 500 prisoners: 6,042.4 kg. of bread, i.e., 431.6 grams a day per person; 373.8 kg. of margarine, i.e., 26.7 grams a day per person; 99.8 kg. of pork fat, i.e., 7 grams a day per person; 247.2 kg. of "a means to spread on bread" [sic], i.e., 17.6 grams a day per person.

⁶⁴ Jerzy Herszberg, "A Survival Story." Herszberg was evacuated in January 1945, from the camp at Schillstrasse to Watenstedt.

⁶⁵ See Heinrich K. testimony, Nds. StA Wf, 62 Nds Fb 2, no. 445.

⁶⁶ This is confirmed by an investigation conducted after the war: the police succeeded in uncovering receipts for parcels of between 10 and 20 kilograms that were mailed from Vechele by SS men; *ibid*.

According to former prisoners, conditions in the barracks were much worse than in Auschwitz due to congestion, among other things. Prisoners slept on three-tiered bunks, whereas the entire camp at Schillstrasse, designed to house about 300 prisoners, at some time served as living quarters for twice as many. Mistakes in construction and finish also made staying in the barracks insufferable: ceilings, for example, were painted with oil paint so that at night the condensed breath of the sleeping prisoners accumulated there and then dripped on those on the topmost bunks and on the floor.⁶⁷

Camp Commandant Kirstein extended different treatment to different groups of prisoners: he described Jews as “3-F (*faul, frech, fett*) - Leute.”⁶⁸ In fits of anger he often resorted to violence toward Jewish prisoners who were sick, which he never did with regard to ill French or Russian prisoners.⁶⁹

In their recollections former Jewish prisoners do not dwell on the fact that, apart from the Jews, other camp prisoners - members of the construction crews (Frenchmen, Russians, Latvians, and Lithuanians) - also lived in the camp at Schillstrasse. Although these groups lived in the same, very small camp, they occupied separate barracks, worked at different locations (after completion of the camp construction, the Frenchmen worked in town, repairing damage caused by air raids), and different times of day. In practice no contact existed between them. The Frenchmen were struck only by the fact that the Jewish prisoners looked like a group of slaves resigned to their fate (“*Sklaven von Büssing*”):

Every morning I saw groups of Jewish prisoners lining up in small squares on the roll-call square. These little squares contained all the misery, all the suffering, ugliness, stench, but above all, the passivity and resignation, which I wouldn't call human, rather animal.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ All former prisoners have confirmed this in conversations with this author.

⁶⁸ Lazy, insolent, fat; Herszberg, conversation with the author, Braunschweig, May 6, 2000. Another former prisoner, Hirsch Hecht, recalls that Camp Commandant Kirstein spoke about “4F” when describing Jews: “*Wenn ein Jude zu viel frisst, dann wird er fett und faul und schliesslich auch frech*” (“When the Jew swallows too much food, he becomes fat, lazy and, in the end, brazen”); Hecht conversation with the author.

⁶⁹ Salan, *Prisons*, p. 148.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 146. Salan claims that Camp Commandant Kirstein was a sadist and a criminal.

Prisoners received neither soap nor washing articles. As a result, the camp was infested with lice, so that, within a short time, most prisoners were covered with sores or suffered from skin diseases.⁷¹

Medical care in the camp was the responsibility of the SS. In one of the barracks, a room was assigned for the infirmary. A hospital orderly was put in charge on behalf of the SS (*SDG/Sanitatsdienstgrad*). According to his own testimony, the in-house physician of Bussing, Dr. Erich Junge, served only as an advisor and approved the purchase of medical drugs in the list compiled by the orderly on duty.⁷² Not all the drugs and other medical supplies that had been ordered or purchased reached the camp; the SS turned them into a source of income.⁷³ In practice, the sick were attended by prisoners with medical degrees: Dr. Georges Salan (a Frenchman from Nimes, who had arrived together with the construction crew from Neuengamme), and three prisoners who had arrived from Auschwitz - Dr. Maximilian Wachtel (a Jew from Vienna), Dr. Alexander Pasternak (a Jew from Budapest), and Dr. Hei (a Jew from Budapest who was not a physician, but his doctorate in natural sciences helped him to be included in the physicians' group). Their assistant was a hospital orderly, Ivan Konstantinovich, a Soviet prisoner of war, who had arrived as part of the construction crew.⁷⁴ There were also two Polish-Jewish physicians in the camp at Schillstrasse: Dr. Isak Ser from Lodz; and Dr. Wahrhaft from Brzeziny.⁷⁵ Dr. Salan, however, does not mention them as working in the infirmary.

The physicians in the camp could not offer proper medical care due to the shortage of medical drugs and instruments. According to Dr. Salan:

In December 1944, conditions became intolerable ... At that time there were 18 three-tiered bunks in the infirmary, in other words 54 beds. Since some bunks were occupied by two patients, the infirmary held 60 bed-ridden patients with diarrhea and other diseases. We had no containers for urine or excrement. Every morning we had to clean up with a bucket and a small shovel, since the patients could not go to the toilet on their own, and relieved themselves at night in the spaces

⁷¹ Michał Guminer Statement, Nds. StA Wf, 62 Nds Fb 2, no. 445.

⁷² Testimonies before the German police in 1946, *ibid*.

⁷³ Benno Frankel, testimony, *ibid*.

⁷⁴ Salan, *Prisons*, pp. 160, 167.

⁷⁵ Their names were provided by former prisoners Izydor Huberman and Eliezer Zyskind.

between the beds. This cleaning job amounted to removal of fecal matter. Every morning our infirmary resembled a pigsty.⁷⁶

Prisoners were in very bad condition already upon their arrival in Braunschweig or Vechelde. Dr. Salan recalls that the Jews from Auschwitz arrived emaciated and starving.⁷⁷ Mortality in the camp was very high due to malnutrition, lack of any means of sanitation, lack of suitable clothing and footwear, awful conditions in the barracks, lack of medicines, and brutal treatment of the prisoners. At the end of 1944, eight to ten prisoners were dying every day in the camp. The main direct causes of death were, first, exhaustion, and, later, diarrhea, typhoid fever, and tuberculosis.⁷⁸

In accordance with SS directives, the dead had to be completely undressed. Gold teeth were knocked out and handed over to the SDG duty orderly, who, in turn, forwarded them to Neuengamme. In the end, the camp number was inscribed on the dead prisoner's body with a chemical pencil.⁷⁹

Dead bodies were kept for several days in one of the barracks at Schillstrasse. Every Monday, prisoners loaded them onto a truck belonging to Büssing; they did so, however, only when the occasion presented itself, since the truck was actually transporting parts for machining processing at Vechelde and bringing back manufactured rear axles. The corpses were packed into paper bags, which, as a rule, were soaked through after several days. Later, wooden boxes were provided for transportation of the bodies; one box was able to hold ten corpses.

After unloading the parts at Vechelde, the truck pushed on with its cargo of corpses to Watenstedt, where they were unloaded on the grounds of the local satellite camp of Neuengamme. Then the empty truck would be loaded with food for prisoners in *Unterkommando* Vechelde. By January 1945, the factory truck had transported between 400 and 500 bodies of prisoners from the camp at Schillstrasse to Watenstedt.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Salan, *Prisons*, pp. 160, 167.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

⁸⁰ Testimony of a driver of the Büssing firm, Erich Meyer, who transported corpses, before German police in 1946, in Nds. StA Wf, 62 Nds Fb 2, no. 445. They were buried at the Jammertal cemetery. Information supplied by former prisoners Josef Neuhaus of Givataim

The high mortality rate in the camp at Schillstrasse appeared to have caused concern to the medical authorities in the main camp at Neuengamme, and, in early January 1945, an emissary from Neuengamme arrived in Braunschweig. He ordered that some 200 ill prisoners, who were unfit for work and who would have certainly died under the prevailing conditions in Braunschweig, be transferred to the infirmary (*Krankenrevier*) at KL-*Aussenlager* Watenstedt. Construction work also began on a new infirmary.⁸¹

Prisoners continued to die in the camp, however. From mid-January 1945 onward, corpses were no longer removed to Watenstedt, but to the crematorium at the main cemetery in Braunschweig. This task was assigned to the “Pietät” undertakers; until March 20, 1945, this firm transported eighty corpses to the crematorium.⁸²

Evacuation⁸³

Beginning in early January 1945, prisoners from the Schillstrasse and Vechelde camps were transported to Watenstedt. Initially, only ill or weakened prisoners were evacuated; having been transferred to Watenstedt, some of these prisoners were not put in a hospital but employed in manufacturing shells in Hermann-Göring- Werke.⁸⁴ In February, more prisoners were transferred following the destruction of manufacturing facilities in Büssing by Allied air raids.

Beginning on March 21, 1945, prisoners were no longer sent to work at the Büssing plant. On March 26, they left Braunschweig. The weakest among them traveled aboard a truck; others walked a distance of 20 km. to

concerning his father Hirsch, and by Abraham Selig, conversation with the author, Jerusalem, May 25, 1999, concerning his brother David.

⁸¹ Michał Guminer statement, Nds. StA Wf, 62 Nds Fb 2, no. 445. Dr. Maurycy Mittelstedt from Poland, former KL Auschwitz prisoner, was one of the physicians in *Krankenrevier* Watenstedt. Resident physician, Dr. Erich Junge, claimed after the war that, thanks to his efforts, 200 prisoners were taken off work and removed to another location for rest. He did not know, however, to which location they were brought; *ibid*.

⁸² Their ashes were interned in the Jewish cemetery in Braunschweig.

⁸³ See the map appended to the text, where the evacuation route is shown.

⁸⁴ Herszberg, “A Survival Story”; Zvi Koplowitz, testimony, YVA, 03.5278; Jacob Londner, testimony, *ibid.*, M-1.E.2524.

Watenstedt. Those who grew weak en route were transferred to a wagon pulled by designated prisoners.⁸⁵ Still others who failed to keep up with the marching column were shot to death by SS men.⁸⁶

The halt at Watenstedt did not last long: on the night of April 7-8, the prisoners were led out of the barracks. The *Krankenrevier* patients were also taken out. Those with tuberculosis, acute diarrhea, amputees, and the dying were thrown one on top of the other on the floor of the truck, which transported them to the railroad station. Open train cars awaited some 1,600 prisoners. Prisoner physicians assigned their sick comrades to various cars, whereas dead prisoners were loaded onto the last car. In the middle there was a medical car, in which Polish physician, Dr. Maurycy Mittelstedt, among others, traveled. He had spared no effort to secure adequate food allocation for the transport from the SS: bread, sausage, margarine, and canned beets. There was a shortage of water on the transport, however.

Indescribable congestion reigned on the train: fifty to sixty men, all ill to some extent, rode in each car. Many of them died on the train. The prisoners suffered from diarrhea most of all; needless to say, no restrooms were provided, so that the prisoners relieved themselves into the eating bowls, whose contents they then tried to cast over the upper edge of the open car. Their efforts were not always successful. Under these infernal conditions, some prisoners lost all human dignity: there were cases of stealing from prisoners who had just died.⁸⁷ Others, Soviet prisoners of war and the Ukrainians, who either could no longer stand the hunger, or simply became deranged, engaged in acts of cannibalism.⁸⁸

At first the train passed through Schandelah, Oebisfelde, and Bismark. On April 8, 1945, the train stopped at the Uchtsprunge station near Stendal (Sachsen-Anhalt). Sixty-six dead prisoners were removed from the cars and buried in a mass grave a short distance from the railroad tracks.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Salan, *Prisons*, pp. 185-187.

⁸⁶ Recollections of Bolesław Ołomucki to the author.

⁸⁷ Salan, *Prisons*, p. 188.

⁸⁸ A number of former prisoners mentioned this fact to the author.

⁸⁹ Salan, *Prisons*, p.191. This is corroborated by a note written in Uchtsprunge, April 9, 1945, by Dr. Behncke, a medical service official. The note reads as follows: "On Sunday, April 8, at 10 p.m., a train from the labor camp at Watenstedt pulled up at the local station. It stayed there for a long time. There were 66 corpses on the train. The transport commander, SS

Afterward the train passed through Stendal, Sandau, Havelberge, Wittenberge, Ludwigslust, and Hagenow-Land, until it pulled in at the Hamburg-Bergedorf station. The train's itinerary indicates that the prisoners were due to be transported to Neuengamme, located near the Hamburg-Bergedorf station. Only the *kapos*, however, disembarked there. The train turned back and returned to Wittenberge. From there it traveled eastward, to Neustadt, then to Friesack, near the north-east section of Berlin. From there its route passed through Paulinenaue, Kremmau, and Oranienburg. Six days later, on April 14, the train reached Ravensbrück. Prisoners from various concentration camps, who had arrived in three trains, were placed in the concentration camp that had, until recently, housed women prisoners who had since been evacuated. The new arrivals received new camp numbers.⁹⁰ The SS train escort was relieved by local units.

While in Ravensbrück the prisoners received 5-kilogram Red Cross parcels, containing canned meat and fish, powdered milk, margarine, soap, and cigarettes. Jews received two parcels per person. Some of them, starved beyond human endurance, consumed too much food - with tragic results: many people died of acute diarrhea.⁹¹

On April 24, Jewish prisoners were evacuated by train from Ravensbrück in the direction of Hamburg; they were told in the camp that, under the terms of an agreement with the Swedish Red Cross, they were due to be transferred to Sweden. As a result of mistaken Allied bombing, the train could not go on, and the prisoners were returned to Ravensbrück.

On April 27, they were transported by cars to the Wöbbelin, then under construction. French prisoners left Ravensbrück the next day under SS escort, heading for Neu-Strelitz. The only ones to remain in Ravensbrück were

Rottenführer Winkler and Dr. Mittelstedt, a Polish physician no. 3506, asked for permission to bury the corpses to prevent putrefaction. The terminal point of the transport remained unknown. The internment of the bodies took place on Monday, April 9, in a mass grave near Uchtsprunge, at the so-called Kiesberg." The note was signed also by Winkler, senior inspector Müller, and town mayor Borchert; in Archives of the Uchtsprunge Community. After the liberation the Americans ordered exhumation of the bodies. Since no name markers were found, the bodies could not be identified. According to Salan (*ibid.*), SS *Rottenführer* Winkler took the name markers with him. At present the graves – the bodies were since buried in individual graves – are tended by the Uchtsprunge Communal Council; in letter of October 4, 1999, from the Uchtsprunge mayor to the author.

⁹⁰Michał Guminer statement, Nds. StA Wf, 62 Nds Fb 2, no. 445.

⁹¹ Salan (*Prisons*, p. 208) writes that fifty-eight Jews died, noting sarcastically: "Apparently there are various methods to murder people: gas chambers and Red Cross parcels."

gravely ill prisoners and medical staff under Dr. Maurycy Mittelstedt.⁹² On May 2, 1945, the 82nd American Airborne Division liberated Wöbbelin.

Epilogue

On October 28, 1945, former Büssing employee, Ernest Kunkel, who, after the war, became a police official in Braunschweig, sent a report to the prosecutor general in Braunschweig, Dr. Staff. In his report Kunkel described the slave labor of Jews in the years 1944-1945, in the Büssing plant. Kunkel noted that the treatment of Jews both by the SS and the firm's management had been so appalling that he himself was "psychologically devastated."

In December 1945, German police, under British supervision, launched an investigation; a large number of workers, foremen, and managers of the Büssing firm were questioned. Only two former prisoners, who, after the war, settled for a brief period in Braunschweig, gave testimony.

Director-general of Büssing, Rudolf Egger, testified, *inter alia*: "I knew, of course, about cases of death in the camp. However, I saw no reason to take interest in these cases, since, first, cases of death in wartime are not something remarkable, and, second, I had completely different responsibilities."⁹³

On July 4, 1946, prosecutor general, Dr. Staff, addressed a question to the British occupation authorities, asking whether results of the investigation should be brought before an Allied court, or should be submitted to a German court with proper jurisdiction. The answer arrived only on March 1, 1948(!): "War Crimes Group North-West Europe decided that this case would not be brought to trial."⁹⁴

⁹² Ibid., p. 210-213.

⁹³ Nds, StA Wf, 62 Nds Fb 2, no. 445.

⁹⁴ Ibid. No documents explaining this ruling have been preserved. In the opinion of this author, one of the reasons could have been purely "practical." Rudolf Egger was an excellent organizer whose skills were sorely needed in rebuilding the factory and restarting production. Shortly after the war some 3,500 workers worked in the Büssing plant; together with their families, this group numbered over 10,000 people. In other words, providing them with work and income helped to prevent potential social conflict in the town, and made the work of administration easier for the British. Another director-general, Prof. Solms Wittig, met a different fate. Prof. Wittig ran the firm Steinöl GmbH (conversion of bituminous slates into propulsive materials); from the spring of 1944 until the end of March 1945, this firm employed other prisoners from KL Neuengamme. Two hundred (out of 800) prisoners died due to dreadful work and camp conditions. In contrast to Rudolf Egger, Prof. Wittig's services were

Investigation records were returned to the prosecutor's office in Braunschweig.

With British permission, Rudolf Egger was elected chairman of the Industry-Commerce Chamber of Braunschweig shortly after the war. In 1953, he was awarded honorary citizenship of the city of Braunschweig and honorary membership in the senate of the local Polytechnic. The government of Lower Saxony in Hanover allowed him to use a double last name - Egger-Büssing - for among other things, his services to the Büssing firm.⁹⁵

Appendix

Brief Biographies of Former Prisoners of KL-*Aussenlager* Schillstrasse in Braunschweig

Zvi Bergman was born in 1922 in Zduńska Wola and lived in Lodz from 1923. He had a brother Pinkus (b. 1916) and sister Ruth (b. 1925). He attended a vocational textile school and received an incomplete high school certificate in 1939. In the Lodz ghetto he worked as a clerk in the population registry records and supplies. He was deported to Auschwitz on August 25, 1944, and was transferred to Braunschweig in October 1944 (prisoner number unknown). As a result of a work accident in January 1945, he was declared unfit for work and was evacuated to an infirmary in Watenstedt. He was evacuated from there in April 1945, and was liberated in Wöbbelin on May 2, 1945. After being hospitalized in Ludwigslust, he returned to Poland but could not find any relatives. In October 1945, he left the country via Czechoslovakia to Lepheim on Ulm in Germany, where he lived in a DP camp. Eventually, he

not needed, since the firm Steinöl GmbH ceased to exist after the war. In 1947, the British court in Braunschweig tried Wittig and other defendants; Wittig was sentenced to death. Records of this trial are to be found in PRO Kew, WO 235/283-289, and 309/398-399.

⁹⁵ Liedke, *Gesichter*, p. 175.

arrived in Marseille and, after an unsuccessful attempt to reach Haifa aboard an illegal immigration boat, he was interned in Cyprus in a refugee camp. In February 1948, he received a permit to immigrate to Palestine as part of the quota set by the British government. After a stay in a transit camp, he found work in an armaments' factory, and completed his military service. He has been married since July 2, 1946, with two children: Ruth (b. 1951) and Benjamin (b. 1954). The family lives in Holon, Israel.

Roman Bojmelgrin was born in Lodz in 1927. His father was a baker, and his mother, a dressmaker. There were two brothers (b. 1925 and 1930) and a sister (b. 1936) in his family. In 1942, his sister was deported to the extermination camp in Chelmno from the Lodz ghetto. In Ghetto B., Roman worked in the youth dressmaking workshop. In August 1944, he was deported with his family to Auschwitz. The mother was sent to the crematorium; his father and brothers were deported to other concentration camps and did not return. He was brought to Braunschweig in early November 1944 (prisoner no. 67269) and was evacuated to Watenstedt in March 1945; he was liberated on May 2, 1945, in Wöbbelin. After returning to Poland in late May 1945, he studied economics in the university and then became a lecturer in economics. In 1969, he emigrated to Canada and began working for UNICEF. He has been married since 1950, and has a daughter and a son. The family lives in Toronto.

David Brin was born in 1930, in Lodz. His father was a merchant, and he had two brothers (the elder, Salek, was born in 1916). In the ghetto he worked in the saddling and harness-making department, then as an electrician's assistant, and as a messenger in the central meat department. The family was deported to Auschwitz in August 1944; the mother was sent to the crematorium. He was brought to Braunschweig in October 1944 (prisoner no. 64601), was evacuated in March 1945, and was liberated in Wöbbelin on May 2, 1945. He returned to Lodz, but left for Berlin in 1945, and stayed in the DP camp in Bergen-Belsen and the Youth House in Blankensee/Hamburg. He left for Palestine in April 1946, and was active in the Jewish underground. In the course of his military service, he became a commissioned officer and reached the rank of colonel. He fought in all of Israel's wars. He also completed his

studies in economics during his service and became a financial advisor in the United States and Poland, among other places. He lives in Tel Aviv, with his two sons and a daughter.

Mordechai Folman was born in 1923, in Lodz. His father died before the war, his older brother lived in Warsaw, and his sister (b. 1920) died of tuberculosis in the Lodz ghetto. From the age of twelve, he was a member of the Zionist youth movement. In 1938, he enrolled in a mathematical-physical high school and received his high-school diploma in 1940, in the Lodz ghetto (the first and last matriculation exams in the ghetto; the high-school principal was Stella Rein, mother of Folman's future wife, Wanda). After graduation, he worked as a teacher in the ghetto, until the liquidation of the schools, and then as a bakery supervisor and accountant. He married Wanda Rein on August 17, 1944, and they were deported to Auschwitz several days later. There his mother and mother-in-law were sent directly to the crematorium; his wife was sent to the women's camp. He was transferred to Braunschweig in September 1944 (prisoner no. 50841), and worked in the Vechelde subsidiary. He was evacuated in March 1945, and was liberated in Wöbbelin on May 2, 1945. After his return to Lodz, he was reunited with his wife. He then began studying chemistry in the Lodz Polytechnic, graduating in 1950. His wife Wanda studied medicine in Lodz. In June 1950, they left for Haifa, where he worked in the maritime laboratory and at the Haifa Technion. He received his Ph.D. in physical chemistry in 1955; in 1956-1958, did his post-doctorate in Cambridge; and another doctorate in 1958, in Cambridge. When he returned to Haifa, he joined the faculty at the Technion; he has been a full professor since 1967. He was chairman of the Chemistry Department in 1976-1980, and still works in the Technion. He is the author of some 130 scientific works. Wanda worked in Haifa as an ophthalmologist. The couple has a son and two daughters.

Karol Fuks was born in 1917, in Lodz. He graduated from high school before the war and was the only surviving member of his extensive family in the Lodz ghetto. In the ghetto he worked in demolishing buildings, as a carpenter and a lathe-operator assistant. He was deported to Auschwitz in August 1944, and in September 1944, was transported to Braunschweig (camp number

unknown), where he worked in the Vechelde subsidiary. He was evacuated in March 1945, and was liberated on May 2, 1945, in Wöbbelin. He then stayed in the DP-camp at Bamberg, Bavaria, and completed his medical studies in Göttingen. In 1949, he left for Haifa, and, for his army service, he worked in a military hospital in Haifa. Since 1973, he has been a lecturer in gynecology and obstetrics in Haifa University and at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He lives in Haifa with his two sons.

Hirsch Hecht was born in 1914, in Cieszyn. In 1917, the family moved to Lodz. The mother died before the war, and there were three brothers (David in Lodz, Izio and Julian in Warsaw). Hirsch attended the Schweizer High School in Lodz and the Industrial-Textile School there. After graduation, he worked as the head of the Spitzberg weaving plant. He fought in the Polish army (as a cadet in the military college), was taken prisoner, released, and returned to Lodz. In the ghetto he worked as an administrator in charge of cleaning streets and with the placement of newly-arrived transports in the ghetto, and in the power station of engineer Weinberg. His father died in the ghetto, but his brother David went into hiding and survived. He was deported to Auschwitz in August 1944, transported to Braunschweig in October 1944 (camp no. 64673), and worked in Diesel-Bunker. He was evacuated in March 1945, and liberated on May 2, 1945 in Wöbbelin. He returned to Lodz, but shortly afterward left for Liberca in Czechoslovakia, where he worked in the textile industry. In 1965, he immigrated to Israel and began working in the textile industry. He is married and has a daughter. The couple's son was killed in the Yom Kippur War. The family lives in Ramat-Gan.

Jerzy Herszberg was born in 1929, in Poznań. His father died before the war, and shortly before the war broke out, the family moved to Lodz. The mother died in the ghetto. Jerzy was transported to Braunschweig in October 1944 (camp no. 64678) and was evacuated to the infirmary in Watenstedt in January 1945, due to weakness. Nevertheless, he was required to report for work in Hermann-Goring-Werke. Evacuated in March, he was liberated on May 2, 1945, in Wöbbelin, and then was transferred to the DP-camp in Theresienstadt. On August 14, 1945, he arrived in Great Britain. He studied mathematics (specialized in algebraic geometry) and received his M.Sc in

1952, and Ph.D. in 1955. From 1955 until 1962, he was a researcher in the University of Exeter; from 1962 to 1983, a researcher and then a Reader in Mathematics, University of London, Birkbeck College. Since 1983, he is Emeritus Reader in Mathematics. He lives in London.

Izydor Huberman was born in 1929, in Lodz. His father was a hosiery maker; there were three brothers and three sisters. The mother died before the war. In January 1940, eldest brother and eldest sister left for the Lublin region (their fate remains unknown). In the ghetto he worked in the saddling and harness-making department. A sick brother was deported from the ghetto to the extermination camp in Chelmo; his sister died of typhoid fever. In August 1944, he was deported with the rest of his family to Auschwitz, where his father and sister were sent to crematorium. Another brother was deported to forced labor in Germany and did not return. He was transported to Braunschweig in October 1944 (camp no. 64603), was evacuated to Watendstedt in March, and was liberated on May 2, 1945 in Wöbbelin, where he became ill with typhoid fever. Transferred to Lübeck, he left for Sweden to convalesce. On May 26, 1946, he set out for Palestine. He lived on a kibbutz in 1948, did his army service, and graduated from high school. He has been married since 1953, has two daughters and a son and lives in Givatayim.

Josef Neuhaus was born in 1924, in Lodz. His father, Hirsch, born in 1898 in Lodz, was the owner of a little textile factory. In the Lodz ghetto, Jozef worked together with his father in the metal industry. After the liquidation of the ghetto, the Neuhaus family was deported to Auschwitz. His mother and his sister, Zofie (born in 1928) were sent to a camp for women, where he lost track of them. In September 1944 he was taken to Braunschweig together with his father, where he received the number 50888. They both worked in the Vechelde subsidiary. His father died in Ravensbrück during the evacuation of March 1945. He was liberated in Wöbbelin on May 2, 1945. In 1946 he arrived to Palestine on an illegal immigration boat. He fought in the battles of Jerusalem in the War of Independence. He joined the IDF's medical core and attended officer's school. His wife, Zofie was born in 1928, in Warsaw. They have two daughters and five grandchildren and live in Givatayim.

Bolesław Ołomucki was born in 1921, in Warsaw. He graduated from high school in 1939, moved to Lodz, and survived the ghetto. He was deported to Auschwitz on August 27, 1944, together with his mother, who was sent to the crematorium, and a younger brother. Transported to Braunschweig in November 1944 (prisoner no. 67328), he was evacuated to Watenstedt in March 1945, and liberated in Wöbbelin on May 2, 1945. He returned to Lodz, studied at the Higher School of Visual Arts in Lodz and at the Warsaw Polytechnic and, in 1951, became an engineer-architect. In 1945, he married Halina (nee Olszewska), a painter, born in 1921, in Warsaw. Between 1945 and 1950, she studied at the Higher School of Visual Arts in Lodz. Halina had been a prisoner in Auschwitz, Majdanek, Ravensbrück, and Neustadt-Gleve. In 1957, the Ołomuckis left for Paris, where Bolesław worked as architect. In 1972, they moved to Israel. Bolesław has designed schools, hospitals, and apartment buildings in Poland, France, Italy, Algeria, Senegal, the Ivory Coast, and Israel. He has also designed factories, roads, office buildings, and archives. Halina has exhibited in Poland, France, Switzerland, Great Britain, Israel, and Germany. They have a daughter Miriam (b. 1951) and live in Ashkelon.

Martin Ołomucki was born in 1923, in Warsaw. He was brought to Braunschweig in November 1944 (prisoner no. 67327) and was liberated in Wöbbelin. He studied in Paris, and received his Ph.D. in biochemistry from the Sorbonne. Since 1951, he is deputy director of the biochemistry lab at College de France. He is a Knight of Ordre National du Merite and Ordre des Palmes Academy and the author of some 100 scientific works in biochemistry. He lives in Paris.

Abraham Selig was born in 1927, in Lodz. His father, Isaak, born in 1893, in Brzeziny, was a handyman, made noodles and worked as a ritual slaughterer. His mother was born in 1895, in Lodz. He had two brothers (Shmul, b. 1916, and David, b. 1922) and a sister, Miriam (b. 1919, lives in Israel). He attended elementary school and the first grade of high school in Lodz. In the ghetto he worked in the shoe-nail workshop. In August 1944, he was deported to Auschwitz. His brother Shmul went voluntarily to the crematorium, since he refused to part from his small son. His father was also sent to the crematorium

but was ransomed. His mother and sister were sent to the women's camp and survived. Selig was brought to Braunschweig in October 1944 (camp no. 64494) together with his father and brother David. The father died as a result of injuries inflicted by a SS man at Schillstrasse. Evacuated in March to Watenstedt, his brother died en route to Ravensbrück. After being liberated on May 2, 1945, in Wöbbelin, he returned to Lodz, and was reunited with his mother and sister. In 1946, he left for Leipheim near Augsburg, Germany and worked as educator of Jewish children until 1948. He arrived in Israel on August 16, 1948, did his army service, and worked in an armaments' factory (as a metal-smith, clerk, personnel and vocational training director). He is chairman of the Federation of Lodz Jews in Israel and a member of the World Council of Lodz Jews. He lives with his wife in Jerusalem.

Chaim Tyller was born in 1924, in Lodz. His father's family owned a large construction firm there, but his father died in 1929. His sister Hanka was born in 1921. He attended elementary school and then Industrial-Textile School in Lodz. In the ghetto he worked in the construction department, first as messenger, then as construction-site manager. His mother died in the ghetto in 1942. He was deported to Auschwitz in August 1944, and was in Braunschweig from October 1944 (prisoner no. 64533), where he worked in Diesel-Bunker. After an accident at work, he was sent to the infirmary in Watenstedt, where (thanks to a Polish physician) he managed to remain until the evacuation in early April 1945. He was liberated on May 2, 1945, in Wöbbelin. Until 1946, he stayed in several DP-camps in Germany. In 1946-1948, he worked in a chemical plant in Belgium; in 1948, he arrived in Israel, did his army service, and fought in the War of Independence. From 1949 to 1989, he worked in the Haifa power plant: first as digger of pylon shafts, and, finally as director of power works in northern Israel. He is an electrical engineer by profession. Since 1948, he has been married to Sylvia, a former concentration-camp prisoner, who worked in Israel as a health-care worker. The Tyllers have a son and daughter and live in Kiryat Bialik.

Eliezer Zyskind was born in 1925, in Brzeziny. His father was a dressmaker. From the ghetto in Brzeziny, he was deported with his family to the Lodz ghetto. In August 1944, they were deported to Auschwitz. His mother

and younger sister Talka were sent to the crematorium, and his father died in the sick block. He was in Braunschweig from October 1944 (prisoner no. 64681), was evacuated in March 1945, and liberated on May 2, 1945 in Wöbbelin. He returned to Lodz, but left shortly thereafter. He was an active Zionist in France involved in moving Jews to Palestine. Before arriving in Israel in 1948, he was interned in a refugee camp in Cyprus. He fought in the War of Independence, and, shortly thereafter, married a well-known writer (the author of an autobiographical novel about the Lodz ghetto, *Stolen Years*, among others), Sara, née Plager, the daughter of industrialists from Lodz. Today he is a widower, with a son and two daughters. He is chairman of the Federation of Brzeziny Jews in Israel and lives in Tel Aviv.

Translated from the Polish by Jerzy Michałowicz

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