The International School for Holocaust Studies
Yad Vashem, Jerusalem

The Transport of Jews from Dusseldorf to Riga
11 - 17 December 1941:

Excerpt from: “How Was It Humanly Possible” – a curricular program on perpetrators and bystanders by the International School for Holocaust Studies.

Salitter’s Report | Hilde Sherman’s testimony
---|---
### I. Preparing the Transport
The Jewish transport planned for 11 December 1941 included 1,007 Jews...
The transport was compiled of Jews of both sexes, of various ages – from babies to 65-year-olds...
On the way from the slaughterhouse yard [the designated assembly point] to the platform, a male Jew attempted to commit suicide by throwing himself in front of the streetcar. But he was caught by the streetcar’s bumper and only slightly injured. He recovered during the trip, and realized that he could not avoid sharing the fate of the evacuees. An elderly Jewish woman walked away from the platform without anyone noticing – it was raining and it was very dark – entered a neighboring house, took off her clothes and sat on a toilet. However a cleaning woman noticed her and she too was led back to the transport.  
...According to the Gestapo’s orders, we could take up to 50 Kg. of luggage and a bedroll 70 cm. long and 30 cm. wide with blankets etc. Of course, everyone tried to squeeze his best belongings into the suitcase, as no one knew how long they would have to last during this so-called ‘resettlement’. ...And so we boarded the train on the 10th [of December 1941]. I said goodbye to my parents....

My husband’s name was Kurt Winter. I was deported with his family. We arrived at Dusseldorf at dawn. We had to disembark and walk to the slaughterhouse yard, where we were gathered together. I remember that even at that point the older people were unable to carry their baggage and simply threw it on the street. I saw how the people [of the town] were watching. They did not go out on the street, they were watching from behind the windows. I saw how the curtains were moving. No one can claim that they did not see. Of course they saw us. We were over one thousand people.

We then arrived at the slaughterhouse yard [the assembly point] and stood there the entire night. Everything was deep in water. It was a terrible night. That was the beginning. It was the first time I was beaten. It was a high-ranking SS officer who stood at the entrance. There were steep stairs leading down into the yard and the people were not moving fast enough. So he pushed me and screamed: What are you waiting for, the streetcar? There will never again be a streetcar for you....

### II. Boarding the Train

Departure of the transport was planned for 9:30. The Jews were...
The next morning at dawn we were forced to

www.yadvashem.org
therefore brought to the loading ramp ready to board at 4:00 a.m. However, the Reichsbahn [The German Railway] could not have the train ready so early, allegedly due to lack of personnel. Subsequently the loading of the Jews did not begin until 9:00 a.m. The loading of the Jews into cars was carried out in great haste, as the Reichsbahn insisted that the train must depart on time. It is therefore no surprise that some cars were overloaded (60-65 persons) while others had only 35-40 passengers. This caused problems throughout the entire trip to Riga, since individual Jews repeatedly attempted to get into the less crowded cars. As much as time permitted, I allowed them, in some cases, to make changes, as there were also mothers who had been separated from their children. 

The loading of the train ended at 10:15 and the train left the Dusseldorf-Derendorf station at about 10:30. The train had not arrived. It was bitterly cold. We stood there and stood there from 4 a.m. until 9 a.m. We were then called and the trip began on 11 December 1941. Everything had been taken from us. One of the people asked one of the guards, an SS man, when the train was coming. They took out a club and beat him for so long that he remained there on the ground. He didn’t get on the transport. That was our first dead. That was the beginning...

III. The Train Moves

I realized that the car reserved for the guards had not been put in the middle, but was at the end of the train, i.e. it was car no. 21... Due to a faulty heating system, the steam pressure did not reach the last cars of the train. Because of the cold, the guard squad’s clothing did not dry. (It rained during the entire transport). Thus, I had to deal with guards who could not stand duty because of illness...

The commander of the transport could not see the whole train from his position. Whenever the train stopped, the Jews tried to contact the people at the railway stations, to have their letters mailed or to ask for water. As a result I had to put two guards in one of the cars at the front...

IV. The Journey

At 11:10 [on 12 December] Konitz was reached. [Salitter wanted to rearrange the train so that the guards’ car would be in the center of the train]. This was agreed upon at first, but then the station master declared that... it would not be possible...he told me that the I remember we were suffering from terrible thirst. We had taken bread with us, but the thirst was terrible. Everyone in the car was running a fever because of the terrible heat. We arrived at Insterburg, right at the border, in what had been Poland. There the train stopped. The doors were opened and we were allowed to

www.yadvashem.org
train would have to leave right away. A rearrangement of the train would be impossible... \[...\] The conduct of the stationmaster seemed strange to me, and I informed him that I would take the matter up with his superiors. He responded that I would be unable to reach his superior. He had his orders. The train would have to leave, as there were two other trains en route.

He suggested that I remove the Jews from the center car and put them in the guards’ second-class car. Then I could move my guards to the empty car. I think someone from the upper echelons should see to it that this railway man is informed that members of the German police are to be treated differently than the Jews. I have the impression that this is a man who still speaks of ‘those poor Jews’ and for whom the term ‘Jew’ is totally unknown....

...At Tilsit: There...the car of the guards was put in the front of the train and they finally got some heating. The guards appreciated the warmth very much...as their uniforms were soaked and they could finally dry them.... Normally, the train ride from this point to Riga would take 14 hours, but since there was only one track and our train had only a secondary priority, the trip was often delayed for long periods of time....

IV. Journey’s End

...We arrived in Riga at 21:50. The train was kept at the station for one and a half hours.... The train stood there without heat. The temperature outside was minus 12 centigrade.... At 1:45 a.m., we relinquished responsibility for the train over and six Latvian guards were charged with watching it. Because it was past midnight, dark and the platform was covered with a thick layer of ice, it was decided to transfer the Jews to the Sarnel ghetto only on Sunday morning....

...Riga has a population of about 360,000. Among them were approximately 35,000 Jews. As in other...
places, the Jews were very prominent in business. After the entry of the German army, their shops were closed and confiscated. The Jews were closed in a ghetto surrounded by barbed wire. At this time, there are only 2,500 male Jews who are being used for labor. The remaining Jews were used elsewhere or shot by the Latvians....The Latvians, as far as I can tell, are friendly to Germany and many of them speak German....Their hatred is directed mainly towards the Jews. Therefore, from the moment of their liberation, they have played an important part in the elimination of these parasites. However they seem to find it strange, as I have heard from the railway workers, that Germany brings the Jews to Latvia, instead of eliminating them in their own country.

Conclusions:

a) The provisions [for the guards] were good and sufficient.  
   .....  
b) the pistols and ammunition provided were sufficient....  
c) the two search lights served their purpose well....  
d) the assistance of the [German] Red Cross [to the German guards] is commendable...  
e) In order to supply the Jews with water, it is essential that the Gestapo get in touch with the Reichsbahn and coordinate one hour stops every day at a railway station in the Reich. Because of the time table, the Reichsbahn was reluctant to comply with the transport commander’s wishes. The Jews are usually on the road for 14 hours or more before the transport leaves and have used up all the drinks they had taken with them. When they are not provided with water during the trip, they try, in spite of the prohibition, to leave the train at every possible spot or ask others to get them water.

Source:  
Yad Vashem Archive 0.3/7337.

children on his arm, two small boys, and asked: Sir, is it very far to the ghetto? Instead of an answer, the officer took out a stick...and hit him in the face. He released a German shepherd, who attacked the man. The man fell to the ground, and the two children too. When he got up, his mouth was all bloody and his teeth broken. This was our first impression of Latvia, of Riga, of Shirotawa.... There was ice everywhere.... The ghetto was about 20-25 km. from Shirotawa. People threw away their bags. The Latvians were not only watching, they were looting. As soon as the train left, they stole everything that was on the ground. Then we went through a suburb and up a little hill. Then there was an iron gate. It opened and we were in the ghetto.
It is also essential that the Reichsbahn prepare the trains at least 3-4 hours ahead of departure, so that the loading of the Jews and their belongings can be conducted in an orderly fashion.

The Gestapo has to make sure that the Reichsbahn place the car for the guard detachment at the center of the train.... This is essential for the supervision of the transport....

The men in the guard squad gave me no reason to complain. With the exception of the fact that I had to prompt some of them to act more energetically against Jews who wanted to disobey my orders, they all behaved well and fulfilled their duty well. There were no incidents of disease or any other troubles.

Signed: Salitter, Hauptmann of the Schupo

Source:
Yad Vashem Archive 0.2/1145.